March 2015

1. There is a substantial and growing evidence base about specific, vulnerable groups of young people who are at high risk of social exclusion and therefore social isolation and loneliness\(^1\).

1.2 Young people in care are recognised as being one of the principal groups to experience social isolation, a ‘key determinant of teenage pregnancy’\(^2\).

1.3 NSPCC consider effective interventions for reducing teenage pregnancy and for supporting young mothers to be of critical importance in any approach to tackling social isolation in young people.

About NSPCC Scotland

The NSPCC is here to end cruelty to children. We do this in three ways: Protecting children who are suffering abuse today; Preventing abuse from happening to children tomorrow; Transforming society so all children are safer in the future.

In Scotland, the NSPCC provides preventative services to help the most vulnerable children and their families. We believe that every childhood is worth fighting for and we make a difference for all children by standing up for their rights, listening to them, helping them when they need us and by making them safe.

Working with others, we are testing some of the very best models of child protection from around the world. As well as a UK-wide helpline for adults who are worried about a child or want advice, we also provide ChildLine – the UK’s free, confidential 24-hour helpline and online service dedicated to children and young people.

\(^1\) Collins \textit{et al.}, 2000).
ChildLine gives children a voice. Whatever their worry, whenever they need help, we’re listening. It means we understand the problems they face, and we make sure that tackling them is at the heart of everything we do. It’s one of the things that makes us unique as a children’s charity.

NSPCC Scotland response

Prevalence of social isolation in urban and rural settings

2.1 In a review of prevalence studies, loneliness appears to peak in adolescence and then rises again in older age. In 2013/14 loneliness or low self-esteem was number two in the top ten reasons for calling ChildLine with 80,247 calls about it. Information from the ChildLine service indicates that loneliness is a major issue for children and young people contacting the service, and is closely associated with feelings of low self-esteem and unhappiness, problems with family and friends and core mental health issues of self-harm and suicide.

2.2 Whilst there is little substantial information on prevalence in the young population, there is a substantial and growing evidence base about specific, vulnerable groups of young people who are at high risk of social exclusion and therefore social isolation and loneliness.

2.3 Vulnerable first-time mothers can experience feeling of loneliness and isolation and can struggle with the transition to parenthood. These experiences have been shown to be more adverse in the case of looked after children who become parents.

2.4 Looked-after children are more likely than others to be unemployed, have more mental health problems, be expected to be independent, have little social and economic support and may have limited experience of a healthy consensual relationship in practice. Looked-after children are exposed to greater risk factors for teenage pregnancy than many other groups. Young people in care are recognised as being one of the principal

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3 (Perlman & Landolt, 1999).
groups to experience social isolation, a ‘key determinant of teenage pregnancy’\(^9\).

**Impacts of social isolation, for instance loneliness, ill-health**

3.1 The consultation paper rightly points out that one way to combat social isolation and loneliness is to build better relationships and networks. This clearly depends on young people having the social skills that allow them to make and maintain good relationships across the life course.

3.2 Secure attachment relationships with primary caregivers are crucial for children’s social and emotional development. In recent years, extensive research based on attachment theory has established a strong evidence base. Healthy parent-child attachment is the most important predictive factor for infants and the quality of parent child interaction a strong predictor of outcomes for children, including outcomes around relationships.

3.3 Evidence from behaviour genetics research and epidemiological, correlational and experimental studies shows that parenting practices have a major influence on many different domains of children’s development.\(^10\) Specifically, the lack of a warm, positive relationship with parents, insecure attachment and inadequate supervision of and involvement with children are strongly associated with children’s increased risk for behavioral and emotional problems.\(^11\)

3.4 Conversely, when a parent interacts with a young child in ways that involve many warm, responsive, reinforcing, and stimulating exchanges, clear, calm instructions and non-harsh, consistent discipline, a positive and caring relationship between parent and child is more likely to be established, as well as socially skilled repertoires in the child.\(^12\)

3.5 Therefore, specialist preparation and support for adults who work with looked-after children is essential to promote earlier positive outcomes for children in their care. This can go some way to mitigate the enduring effects of early adversity\(^13\).

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\(^10\) (Collins *et al.*, 2000).


\(^12\) (Ainsworth, 1979; Rutter, 1979).

\(^13\) IRISS (2012) Attachment informed practice with looked after children, Insights no. 1
3.6 The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act has established a set of wellbeing indicators for children in Scotland in law. Guidance on the core child wellbeing indicator ‘included’ contains a range of outcome signifiers around social exclusion and isolation, including that the child:

- has someone they can turn to, trust or rely on
- has a secure supportive network of family members and carers or friends
- is in regular contact with significant, supportive adults who they trust

3.7 Central guidance on assessing and reporting wellbeing indicators would very usefully assist in better understanding the issue of social isolation as it affects children and young people. Currently, outcome measures used in longitudinal surveys of the child population in UK may be helpful in better understanding core issues contributing to social isolation, such as the child’s ability to form and sustain good relationships. The Millennium cohort study, for example, has a teacher reported outcome measure which includes teacher assessment of child’s ability to ‘get on with other people’.

**Best practice and ideas that could be shared across Scotland, including examples of targeted support or initiatives (including housing, health, third sector)**

4.3 Supporting teenagers who are struggling to cope with parenthood is one of the best ways to prevent child maltreatment. Intervening early gives babies the best possible chance in life and means that children need fewer support services as they get older.

4.4 High quality healthcare during pregnancy makes a crucially important contribution to the reduction of health inequalities at birth, in infancy, throughout childhood and across the whole of an individual’s life course. However, little research has been carried out on the content, quality and accessibility of antenatal classes in Scotland.

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14 The SHANARRI indicators describe eight aspects of child wellbeing in which children and young people need to progress in order to do well now and in the future. [http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/well-being](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/well-being)


4.5 Improving access to antenatal care and the quality of the care received by young mother must be seen as priority in improving outcomes for both teenage mothers and their infants. The content of antenatal classes should incorporate and reflect the distinct social, emotional, health and developmental needs of teenagers and should be accessible and non-stigmatizing. Focus on topics around antepartum and intrapartum care is valuable; however, issues of child care/child health, and postpartum events such as developing and maintaining relationships should also be addressed.

4.6 Information on sexual health and contraception is also vital as it may prevent future unintended pregnancies and give teenagers knowledge and confidence about their bodies, which can improve child/parent mental health, confidence and general wellbeing.\textsuperscript{17}

4.7 The expansion of the Family Nurse Partnership by the Scottish Government demonstrates a commitment to prioritise and invest in interventions which have sound evidence of effectiveness in improving outcomes for teenage mothers and their babies and should be welcomed. Evaluation on the FNP\textsuperscript{18} found that the programme can help young mothers to feel better supported in relation to their own mental and emotional health and well-being by linking them with appropriate community support to help them feel less isolated.

4.8 NSPCC commission, ‘Minding the Baby’ provides intensive support to young, vulnerable, first-time mothers to enable them to care appropriately for their baby. Crucially, the programme can significantly reduce rapid subsequent child bearing\textsuperscript{1} in some cases. Replicating the distinct, multi-disciplinary supervision model used in Minding the Baby within mainstream services could better support teenage parents and could contribute to a reduction in unplanned teenage pregnancy in Scotland which would go some way to address the negative consequences.

**Conclusion**

5.1 There is a substantial and growing evidence base about specific, vulnerable groups of young people who are at high risk of social exclusion and therefore social isolation and loneliness.\textsuperscript{19} Young people

\textsuperscript{17} Rozette et al, 2000
\textsuperscript{18} http://www.natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/evaluation-of-the-family-nurse-partnership-programme-in-nhs-lothian,-scotland/
\textsuperscript{19} Collins et al., 2000).
in care are recognised as being one of the principal groups to experience social isolation, a ‘key determinant of teenage pregnancy’\textsuperscript{20}.

5.3 Healthy parent-child attachment is the most important predictive factor for infants and the quality of parent child interaction a strong predictor of outcomes for children, including outcomes around relationships.

5.3 NSPCC Scotland therefore considers effective interventions for reducing teenage pregnancy and for supporting young mothers, such as NSPCC commission, ‘Minding the Baby’ to be of critical importance in any approach to tackling social isolation in young people.

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\textsuperscript{20}\url{http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/briefings/files/briefing09.pdf}