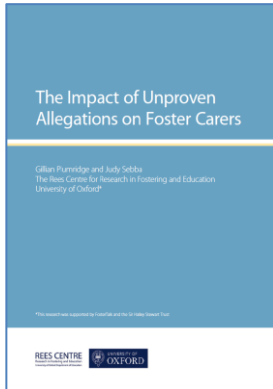


The Impact of Unproven Allegations on Foster Carers

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There were 44,625 fostering households in England on 31 March 2015. In the previous twelve months, 2,420 allegations of abuse were made against carers (58% physical, 19% emotional, 15% neglect and 8% sexual abuse).

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering in England sets out how foster carers should be treated and supported during investigations into allegations. Previous research suggested that these standards are not always met.

This research study aimed to explore the impact of unproven allegations on carers in order to improve the way that allegations are dealt with by fostering services, local authorities and the police.

Call to Action

Fostering Providers

- Offer foster carers independent support services, making clear what these services can provide.
- Ensure that foster carers complete high quality training specifically on allegations within six months of approval. This should be regularly repeated covering the situations likely to lead to allegations, the procedure when allegations occur and support for coping with the impact of allegations.
- Ensure that newly qualified social workers are trained in allegations and regularly updated.
- Work with police to ensure that social workers are informed at the same time as foster carers when police investigations have ended.

Social Workers

- Inform foster carers of the procedure, both as soon as an allegation is made and again a short while later, to ensure the procedure is understood.
- Discuss with the carer what support, if any, is needed for children in the carer's family.
- Social work managers must provide cover for key professional roles when they are unavailable.

Policy

- Provide a clearer definition of 'allegation' that is consistent within and between fostering providers and distinct from Standards of Care concerns.
- Department for Education: emphasise the need to provide specific allegations training and independent support.
- Ofsted: monitor the extent to which the training and support are being provided.

What did we do?

This research study had two parts. In Phase 1 we studied 190 records of unproven cases from 2013 and 2014 to understand the characteristics of children and carers involved in allegations, their placements, experience, training and support (190 responses from fostering providers of which 92 came from ten local authorities and 98 from nine independent fostering providers).

In Phase 2 we carried out in-depth interviews to explore the impacts of allegations and the experiences of carers (16 foster carers from eight local authorities, 14 foster carers from eight independent foster providers along with 23 supervising social workers and 13 fostering managers involved in the same cases).

What did we find out?

Characteristics of carers and children

The carers in the study were on average slightly younger and less experienced than those in the overall population of foster carers.

Independent and local authority fostering providers

The only differences between fostering for local authorities and fostering for independent services were continuity of payment by local authorities and the wider support to those fostering for the independent services.

Outcomes of allegations

84% of carers were reported to have continued fostering after the allegation was made.

Support following allegations

55% of foster carers were offered support by their fostering provider on the day the carer learnt about the allegation. 40% of responses stated that carers were not offered independent support at any time.

Training

Only 23% of carers were reported to have attended any training that was specifically about allegations and only three of these carers resigned following the allegations.

Overall impact on carers

The main impact on carers and their families of allegations closed as unproven was emotional but also financial. Most carers interviewed were upset by the allegation itself but equally by the lack of information about the allegation, the investigation process and lack of support they were offered.

Further information

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/impact-of-unproven-allegations-on-foster-carers/>

To request a free hard copy of this report, please send an email to rees.centre@education.ox.ac.uk

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