

# SOCIAL CARE CONSULTANTS

Charles Pragnell Dip. S.W. L.R.C.C  
Consultant / Director

74 Redcar Lane,  
Redcar and Cleveland.  
TS10 2JN.  
Tel: + 44 (0)1642 - 472417  
E-Mail 113440.2404@compuserve.com.uk  
Fax: + 44 (0) 1642 476766

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## CHILD ABUSE BY THE CHILD PROTECTORS

How children are suffering harm by those with a duty to protect them.

The abuse of children is a horrendous and unacceptable crime in any society and it is correct that when such acts occur, immediate protection is available for the children and appropriate action is taken in regard to the offenders.

However, what is also unacceptable is the high level of false accusation of child abuse which also has abusive effects on children and the families who are falsely accused.

In England and Wales in 1997 there were 65,000 reports of child abuse of which only 25,000 were found to have a substantive basis i.e. Over two-thirds were false and wrongful accusations. [Dept of Health Statistics].

Similar proportions of false accusations were evident during the same time period in the United States of America and in Australia.

There is evidence that false accusation of child abuse are occurring for mistaken, mischievous, and malicious reasons.

But the situation is much worse than first appears as a substantial proportion of those, where it is claimed that there is a substantive basis to the accusations, counterclaim that they have also been falsely accused but the investigations have been improperly conducted and mismanaged. There is research to support these claims in Messages From Research – DOH 1996 and in the study by Prosser and Lewis - Child Abuse Investigations (1992 and 1995).

American researchers, Wakefield and Underwager reported in 1995 that,  
“The child protection system responds to abuse allegations with much reinforcement for making an accusation but has no accountability. An allegation produces large and immediate payoffs and has no cost to the system or the accuser. This makes the child protection system very vulnerable to manipulation and distortion by troubled and distressed persons pursuing their own private purpose.”

In the last thirty years there have been over thirty formal Inquiries in the U.K. into the deaths of children whilst under the care and/or supervision of social workers e.g. Maria Colwell, Jasmine Beckford, Tyra Henry, Kimberley Carlisle, etc, each indicating that social workers were not carrying out child abuse investigations correctly. Whereas in most of these individual cases the social workers failed to intervene effectively, in other cases their intervention has been overt and unnecessary. E.g. Cleveland, The Orkneys, Rochdale, Nottingham etc.

In these latter cases, unproven medical theories e.g, Anal Dilatation Tests, Repressed Memory Syndrome, and unproven social work theories e.g. Satanic Ritual Abuse, have resulted in harmful action by social workers intervening unnecessarily and wrongly in the lives of children and their families.

In such circumstances social workers claim, “ Damned if we do, and damned if we don’t”, but such a cliché’d response has no validity when child protection investigations are conducted incompetently or negligently.

The current unproven medical theory which is resulting in many hundreds of families being wrongly accused of child abuse is Munchausen Syndrome By Proxy [MSBP], which is causing immense disruption, distress, and harm to children throughout the U.K. In these cases, physicians and social workers allege that parents (usually mothers) have fabricated or induced an illness in their child, yet on examination of such cases it can be found that the children have and are suffering serious illnesses. Groups which seem to have been particularly targeted for such accusations are families with children with Autism, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD] or Cystic Fibrosis. In other cases children have suffered adverse reactions to vaccines, or from medically prescribed drugs which have never been clinically tested on children by manufacturers, or from birth injuries.

Prosser’s research indicated that the major faults in child protection investigations are :-

- ?? The social workers perceived that abuse had occurred and the accused as guilty from the beginning of the investigation;
- ?? Thereafter the investigators only sought confirmatory evidence of their assumptions and disregarded evidence which would have cast doubt on the allegations;
- ?? Poor recording of evidence;
- ?? Inappropriate interpretations by investigators of statements or actions;
- ?? Idiosyncratic behaviour and interpretation of policies by investigators;
- ?? Investigators focusing on a single piece of evidence and ignoring contrasting sets of evidence;
- ?? Confusion over what constitutes a medical indicator of abuse and a “natural” condition [apparent in MSBP cases];
- ?? High status doctors (consultant) having substantial influence over other investigators. [apparent in MSBP cases];
- ?? Experts deviating from their areas of expertise [apparent in MSBP cases].

Prosser identified three major areas of significant concern –

- “(1) The imbalance of power within the investigating agencies;
- (2) The abandonment of professional codes of conduct and practice by some investigators; and
- (3) The failure of the system to adequately acknowledge or compensate the wrongly accused family for the trauma and losses suffered. This latter point is reflected in the statements of some child protection professionals who openly proclaim, “ Who cares if nine innocents suffer, as long as we get the guilty one!”.

Finally, Prosser declares, “ It is clear that the problem of false accusations remains endemic in both countries”. (U.K. and the U.S.A.).

What harm do children and families suffer as a consequence of false accusations of child abuse?.

The harm to children and families from false accusations of child abuse was well-documented by American researchers, Wakefield and Underwager who stated in a Paper in 1995 that :-

“ We have built a system that, while intended to protect children, often does more harm than good. From 1979 to the present every scientist who has investigated the level and type of error committed by the child protection system has concluded there is an unconscionable level of false positives, that is, saying there is abuse when there is not.”

“ Although the damage to a falsely accused person is obvious, it is not fully realised that a child is also damaged by a false allegation and a mistaken decision. If a child is involved in allegations of abuse that are ill-founded and erroneous, it is not an innocuous, neutral, or benign experience. A child involved in a

false accusation of abuse is subjected to highly destructive emotional abuse. The harm done to children when adults make a mistake.....is severe and longlasting.”.

The most extreme example of the impact on a child of false accusation was given by Smith.J.- Aftermath of False Allegation. (1991) who gave an account of a girl under pressure from her mother, and made a false accusation of abuse against her father. When she later found out that her father had been imprisoned and later committed suicide, she also killed herself.

In Wounded Innocents (1990), Wexler.R. states, “ “The war against child abuse has become a war against children” and he argues powerfully that, “the child abuse system is hurting children that it is attempting to help.”

In 1992, the San Diego County Grand Jury carried out a thorough and extensive investigation of the child protection system in San Diego County and their carefully documented review shows the damage that can be done to children by false accusations and mistaken intervention by the child protection authorities. Representatives of the Grand Jury testified before Congressional Committees regarding their findings.

The Financial Cost of False Accusations of Child Abuse.

Finally, a point which must also be considered, is that false accusations of child abuse carry a very considerable financial cost to the judicial system and particularly to Social Services Departments which are constantly claiming shortages of resources. There are costs to the police, prosecution services, pre-trial custody costs, foster care and residential care costs, social work costs, legal aid, lost wages, and expert medical examinations which take resources from overstretched health services.

Conclusion and recommendation

The harm being suffered by children in the U.K. from false allegations of child abuse and from incompetent investigations into such false allegations cannot be allowed to continue when considerably higher numbers of children are being harmed by the system designed to protect them from harm.

In the first instance the House of Commons Select Committee on Social Services should conduct a special investigation into the Child Protection Services as a matter of considerable urgency and with a view to introducing a system of accountability in law, for those who are found to have made false accusations of child abuse and for those members of the child protection services who incompetently or negligently carry out their duties and responsibilities to protect children.

Charles Pragnell.

Social Care Management Consultant.

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