Critical Child Protection Studies

Edited by
Nigel Parton

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About the Editor

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Nigel Parton is Emeritus Professor at the University of Huddersfield, England. He has been writing and researching child protection for over forty years and is the author, co-author and editor of over twenty books and over 100 articles and chapters. He has also been the Editor in Chief of 'Social Sciences', published by MDPI, for a number of years.

Editorial

Critical Child Protection Studies: An Introduction

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Until the last few years of the twentieth century, there was very little critical analysis surrounding child protection policies and practices. Child protection was seen as secondary to the question of understanding and explaining child abuse. First, you needed to understand and explain the problem (child abuse) and secondly, you needed to develop a societal response (child protection). It was what was done—or needed to be done—to prevent and stop child abuse. Child protection was in effect embedded in discussions of what to do about child abuse and had no existence or dynamic separation from discussion about child abuse. It was what constituted the technical, administrative, and legal response to the problem of child abuse.

For example, texts which state that their focus was child protection make this relationship clear. Section 1 of 'The Child Protection Handbook' (Wilson and James 2007, 3rd ed.) is headed 'Understanding Child Abuse'; the book by Liz Davies and Nora Duckett 'Proactive Child Protection and Social Work' (Davies and Duckett 2008), after an introductory chapter on 'legal safeguards and protective processes', is made up of a series of chapters with titles reflecting various forms of child abuse (emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, physical abuse). Others, although often recognising that the nature of child abuse can vary and is often difficult to detect and define, also make it clear that it is concerns about child abuse which provide the rationale and focus for child protection policies and practices (for example Munro 2019). Texts about child protection often begin with a discussion of tragic child abuse cases. For example, John Myers book, 'Child Protection in America', opens with 'every day across America, child protection agencies receive thousands of telephone calls reporting abuse and neglect' (Myers 2006, p. 3) and is followed by an outline of a number of tragic cases of children who died—Eli Creekmore, Barbara Feaster, Jamal Olivier Waggner— to underline the nature of the work involved. Similarly, the book by Jane Waldfogel 'The Future of Child Protection' (which was one of the first critiques of child protection policies and practices in the US and made suggestions for reform) had the subtitle of 'How to Break the Cycle of Abuse and Neglect'. It opened with 'Our image of child abuse and neglect, and the role of child protection services, is often drawn from the case of one particular child who has been in the headlines or the television news' (Waldfogel 1998, p. 1) and is followed by the outline of three such scandals: Lisa Steinberg, Elisa Izquierdo, and Lance Helms.

The core assumption is that it is concerns about child abuse and neglect which provide the rationale and focus for child protection policies and practices. It is not just that the two are seen to be inseparable and inherently inter-twined, but that the rationale and justification for child protection is assumed to be preventing and responding to child abuse and neglect.

However, in recent years the study of child protection has undergone something of a transformation and is seen as an important area for study in its own right. Rather than simply see concerns about child abuse as being *the* determining factor in explaining the nature and purposes of child protection, a number of studies have begun to look at the shape and effects of child protection policies and practices in a rather more critical and analytical light, including how such policies and practices came into existence. What has become increasingly evident is that child protection policies and practices cannot be

understood simply as a response to the phenomena of child abuse. They have their own dynamics and determinations to the point where, increasingly, they seem to operate quite independently of the social problem, which it is assumed, they are trying to prevent and respond to. A whole range of political, cultural, and sociological influences come to bare on the development and operation of child protection policies, practices, and systems.

The purpose of this Special Issue is to argue that we should now explicitly recognise the importance of studying, critically, child protection and that 'child protection studies' should be identified as an emerging and distinct interdisciplinary social science 'field of study'. Up until this point, such a development has been incremental with much of the work involving detailed and significant empirical work. More recently we can also detect developments of a more comparative, conceptual, and theoretical nature. Researchers from a range of academic disciplines have been involved including: anthropology, criminology, health, history, penology, politics, psychology, social policy, sociology, and socio-legal studies, but it is probably the discipline of social work which has made the most significant contribution. This is evident in the disciplinary backgrounds of the researchers and the journals where many of the papers have been published and reflects the way child protection is often operationalised institutionally and professionally in policy and practice terms. In most advanced democracies where child protection has developed over the last sixty years, it is social work which has been given the central professional and statutory responsibility for doing something about it.

In the opening paper, *Comparative Research in Critical Child Protection Studies*, I argue that two interrelated factors have played important roles in the emergence of academic analyses of child protection policies and practices: the evidence of growing strains and crises in child protection systems, particularly in Anglophone countries, over the last forty years; and the development of the development of comparative research on different systems. In addition, the paper notes the importance of recent research which draws attention to the unequal impacts of child protection on different parts of the community, particularly in terms of the most deprived children and families, and the racialised nature of such interventions is also highlighted.

The next two papers focus on the position of parents in child protection. *Ambivalence in Child Protection Proceedings: Parents Views on their Interactions with Child Protection Authorities by* Schoch and Aeby is based on research which focuses on the participation of parents in statutory child protection proceedings and the ambivalence they experience in their interactions with the Child and Adult Protection Authority in Switzerland. Establishing trust, recognizing parents' expertise, and acknowledging their needs is seen as fundamental for reducing the ambivalence and enhancing parental participation in child protection. A similar theme is addressed by Haworth, Bilson, Drayak, Mayes, and Saar-Heiman's paper, *Parental Partnership, Advocacy and Engagement: The Way Forward.* Written with parents as co-authors, the paper has two aims: first, to provide a critical view of the English child protection system based on parents' views and to locate these within contemporary child protection studies; and, secondly, to present the value of 'co-production' in the context of child protection as a form of critical scholarship and as a way of influencing policy and practice.

Although the focus of the paper by Devaney and McGregor is rather different, it also addresses the tensions at the heart of child protection practice. *Protective Support and Supportive Protection: Critical Reflections on Safe Practice and Safety in Supervision* is based on a framework which has been developed for professional practice and supervision that attempts to maximise the capacity of workers to provide support and protection simultaneously. To illustrate this framework, a case study is provided to demonstrate the complex interplay of needs for support and protection over an extended time.

An important element in all child protection systems is the provision of residential care for children and young people when it is no longer considered appropriate for them to live at home. The paper by Garcia-Melsosa and Cases, *The Subjective Well-Being of Children in Residential Care: Has it Changed in Recent Years?* reports on a study carried out in Catalonia

in Northeastern Spain which compares the subjective well-being displayed by adolescents aged 11–14 in both 2014 and 2020. However, no significant differences were identified.

Although child protection systems were originally designed for interventions into the private family, the concepts of child protection and safeguarding have increasingly broadened to address concerns external to the family and we have several papers where this is the focus. Firmin and Lloyd discuss the challenges of using a Contextual Safeguarding framework to respond to the growing concerns of actual and potential significant harm to children and young people in a range of social contexts from adults and peers who are unconnected to their care caregivers in the UK (*Green Lights and Red Flags: The (Im)Possibilities of Contextual Safeguarding Responses to Extra-Familial Harm in the UK*). The paper presents results from an embedded research project in which five local authority children's departments used the framework. Although progress was demonstrated at the local level, the project identified major problems with the national contexts and which raise fundamental questions of the statutory systems which all too often act to criminalise young people.

The paper by Wroe, *When Helping Hurts: A Zemiological Analysis of a Child Protection Intervention in Adolescence: Implications for a Critical Child Protection Studies*, discusses a study of the use of 'relocation' as a response to extra-familial harm in adolescence. Professionals and young people reported a range of harms related to the relocations whilst recognising the intervention also increased safety. The data was analysed zemiologically to understand this ambivalence, connecting micro accounts of harm with meso, institutional, and macro structures that determine child protection interventions.

Suarez-Alvarez, Vazquez-Barrio and Frutos-Torres paper, *Parental Digital Mediation According to the Age of Minors: From Restraint and Control to Active Mediation*, reports on research with 776 families in Spain which identified the parental mediation strategies with children and young people's use of the internet. The strategies varied according to the age of the child and became more dialogical and collaborative as the age of the children increased.

Mari, Quaglieri, Giannini, and Lausi's paper, *Missing Children in Italy from 2000 to 2020: A Review of the Phenomenon reported by Newspapers*, analyses the increasing reporting in newspapers of the disappearance of children and which has become a growing public issue, and which is posing a growing institutional challenge.

Our final two papers are related to safeguarding in sport. The first by Wilson and Rhind, *Tracking Progress towards the International Safeguards for Children in Sport*, provides a review of the adoption and implementation of the 'International Safeguards for Children in Sport' policies. Overall, the review concludes that it seemed that there was an increase in organisations' engagement with safeguarding but that there were also areas where this was not the case. Finally, Macpherson, Battaglia, Kerr, Wensel, McGee, Milne, Principe and Willson, in their *Evaluation of Publicly Accessible Child Protection in Sport Education and Reporting Initiatives* paper examine the extent to which the publicly accessible information provided by three sport-specific child protection organisations (The US Centre for SafeSport; the UK Child Protection in Sport Unit at the NSPCC; and Sport Integrity Australia) regarding education and reporting was aligned with the recommendations provided by researchers and athletes. The findings are interpreted and critiqued in the context of previous literature and recommendations for future research and practice and provided.

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Article

Comparative Research and Critical Child Protection Studies

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Abstract: This article argues that two interrelated factors have played important roles in the emergence of academic analyses of child protection policies and practices: the evidence of growing strains and crises in child protection systems over the last forty years; and the development of comparative research on different systems. The latter has demonstrated that child protection policies and practices vary between different countries such that the differences could not be explained by differences in the nature of child maltreatment in the different societies—other political, social, and cultural factors were at play. This paper outlines the nature of these key developments and the conceptual frameworks which have emerged to explain the differences. A significant positive outcome is that such conceptual frameworks can be drawn upon for furthering our analyses of different policies, practices and systems and their possible reform and improvement.

Keywords: child protection; comparative research; child maltreatment

1. Introduction

The last twenty-five years has seen the emergence of a new area of academic study which we might characterise as 'child protection studies'. A number of factors have contributed to the development. I will focus on just two which have been key, and they can be seen to be connected. First, the growing strains and crises in the operation of child protection over the last forty years and the continual attempts to improve its operation and impact; and, secondly, the development of comparative research on different child protection 'systems'. The latter has been focused almost exclusively on a few advanced democracies, where it became evident that relatively similar countries had developed quite different child protection policies and practices such that the differences could not simply be explained by differences in the nature of the social problem—child maltreatment— which they were, apparently, attempting to address. One of the positive outcomes of comparative research has been the development of conceptual frameworks, which help explain variations between child protection systems. These can also be drawn upon for the critical analyses of systems, policies and practices in particular countries and their possible positive reform and improvement, as I have done when developing a critical analysis of child protection in England (Parton 2014).

2. The Growing Crises in Child Protection

A major driver for the emergence of the academic study of child protection has been the view, originally in the US, that the systems and services designed to protect children were not carrying out the tasks expected of them and were, in effect, failing (see for example Kamerman and Kahn 1990). By the early 1990s, a range of concerns about the operation of child protection systems were emerging across the English-speaking countries of North America, the UK and Oceania, all of which had adopted, in part, the approach originally developed in the USA in the 1960s in response to the (re)discovery of child abuse in the form of the 'battered child syndrome'.

Henry Kempe et al.'s identification of the 'battered child syndrome' (Kempe et al. 1962) catapulted the issue of child abuse onto professional, public, and political agendas,

initially in the US (Nelson 1984) and subsequently in the UK (Parton 1985) and Australia (Scott and Swain 2002).

There was an immediate impact in the US. In 1963, the Children's Bureau issued a model reporting law, whereby certain health and welfare professionals would be required, or mandated, to report cases of actual and suspected child abuse to designated public authorities, and all 50 US states adopted such a law by 1967 (Hutchison 1993). This was followed by the first national child protection legislation, the Child Abuse and Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in 1974, which, among other things, required states to have such mandatory reporting laws in place. Most Australian states also introduced mandatory reporting from the late-1970s onwards (Ainsworth 2002).

Having established the new systems to protect children, the next 30 years witnessed a huge increase in the number of children being reported in the USA from 9563 (0.1/100,000 children) in 1984 to 3,126,000 (47.0/100,000 children) in 1996 (Lonne et al. 2009, p. 26). However, while the proportion of reported cases which were 'substantiated' as child abuse was over 60 per cent in the 1970s, the figure had dropped to well below 40 per cent by the early 1990s. Similar trends were evident in Canada (Trocme et al. 1995; Swift 1997). While the way statistics were collated varied between Australian states, the rate of growth of child abuse reports was even greater than in the USA. For example, in the state of Victoria, reports of child abuse and neglect increased more than 5000 per cent between 1977/8 and 1993/4 from 517 to 26,622 (Parton et al. 1997, p. 3).

In England, there were no comparable statistics. The only statistics available which cover the last quarter of the twentieth century relate to the numbers of children on a child protection 'register'. A child's name was placed on a register, where, following an investigation and a multidisciplinary case conference, it was felt that the child continued to be at risk of suffering abuse or neglect and should be subject to a 'child protection plan'. The numbers of children on registers in England quadrupled between 1978 and 1991 from 11,844 to 45,300.

By the mid-1990s, there were several authoritative reports which were arguing that child protection systems in the USA, England and Australia were, at best, out of balance, or, at worst, in crisis and in need of reform. For example, the US Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (US ABCAN 1990) commented that:

> The most serious shortcomings of the nation's system of intervention on behalf of children is that it depends on reporting and response processes that has punitive connotations and requires massive resources dedicated to the investigation of allegations (US ABCAN 1990, p. 80).

And 3 years later:

> The result of the current design of the child protection system is that investigation often seems to occur for its own sake, without any realistic hope of meaningful treatment to prevent the recurrence of maltreatment or to ameliorate its effects, even if the report of suspected maltreatment is validated (US ABCAN 1993, pp. 10–11).

Increasingly, it seemed that in the USA, Australia and Canada, the child protection systems had developed wide 'nets' in which were caught a whole variety of concerns about children and that certain sections of the population, particularly the poor, single parent households and certain minority ethnic and indigenous groups were at much greater risk of being caught in the nets than others (Thorpe 1994; Waldfogel 1998).

While a similar 'crisis' was developing in England, the process whereby this emerged and the context in which it happened was somewhat different. Like the USA, Canada and Australia, a major driver of policy change was a series of high-profile tragic deaths of children at the hands of their parents or immediate carers and where health and welfare professionals had failed to share information and intervene appropriately. Invariably, subsequent public inquiries into the cases argued that the tragedies had been predictable and preventable and that the professionals, particularly social workers, were culpable.

Between the publication of the public inquiry into the death of Maria Colwell in 1973 (Secretary of State for Social Services 1974) and 1985, there were 30 inquiries into the deaths of children as a result of abuse (Corby et al. 1998).

The intense media and political interest reached a new peak in the mid/late-1980s following a series of public inquiries into the tragic deaths of three children who had been under the care or supervision of the statutory authorities in three London Boroughs (London Borough of Brent 1985; London Borough of Lambeth 1987; London Borough of Greenwich 1987). It seemed that the state was intervening 'too little and too late' and failing to protect children from serious abuse. However, the public inquiry into events in Cleveland, in the North East of England, in the summer of 1988—where 121 children had been removed from home on 'place of safety orders' as a result of apparently dubious allegations of sexual abuse—suggested that the state was also intervening (at the same time) 'too early and too much'.

The passage of the Children Act 1989 was thus centrally concerned with trying to establish a new set of balances between the state and the family in the care and protection of children. It was, perhaps, the first attempt in the Anglophone world to carry out a serious appraisal of the impact of the child protection system(s) which had developed since the mid-1960s. It attempted to keep to a minimum the situations where social workers would rely upon a policing and investigatory approach dominated by a focus upon a narrowly defined forensic concern, and aimed to put in its place an emphasis, wherever possible, of providing help and support with the agreement of parents and children.

The attempt to 'refocus' children's services was reinforced a few years later with the publication of an Audit Commission (1994) and the launch by the Department of Health of Child Protection: Messages from Research (Department of Health 1995). Both documents argued that the 1989 Children Act had not been successful in trying to 'refocus' children's services away from a narrow forensic concern with child protection to an approach which also aimed to provide services to 'children in need' on a voluntary basis and before situations were of crisis proportions (Parton 1997).

In the US, the Harvard Executive Session on Child Protective Services was convened in 1994 to consider ways forward for the USA. It was felt that there were five major problems with the US child protection system—and all could be seen to apply to the other Anglophone systems as well (Waldfogel 1998, 2008). The first problem identified was over-inclusion, whereby some children and families who were at low risk were subjected to an unnecessary adversarial and forensic investigation. At the same time, and second, there was the problem of under-inclusion, where some children and families who should have been included in the child protection system were not. This may have been because they were missed and not reported, or because families asked for voluntary assistance at an earlier stage of difficulty but did not meet the threshold for inclusion. The third problem, which both reflected and arose from the first two, was capacity. The number of reports had increased so dramatically over the previous 30 years that the number of children and families involved far exceeded the capacity of the system to serve them.

The fourth problem was, what Waldfogel called, service delivery, for even if children and families did manage to cross the threshold for inclusion, many did not receive the right sort of service, or, in many cases, any service at all. The fifth problem was to do with service orientation. For, in being so concerned to investigate cases of child abuse, there was a failure to engage with children and families and try to address their particular needs. Such an approach was not only stigmatising and antagonistic to those it confronted, it also acted to discourage others—both families and professionals—from approaching the service when they may need help and support. It seemed that the child protection system was failing on numerous fronts and Waldfogel and her colleagues argued that what was needed was a 'paradigm shift'.

By the late-1990s, therefore, clear evidence was emerging in all the Anglophone countries that there were significant problems with their child protection systems. Public inquiries, authoritative official reports and research were all pointing to significant chal-

lenges which needed to be addressed. It is in this context of increased concerns about child protection systems that researchers and policy makers in the USA, Canada, the UK and Australia began to look elsewhere to see if other countries approached these issues differently and whether they had any more success. The development of attempts to compare systems in different jurisdictions provided a second driver for academic interest in child protection.

3. Differing Child Protection Orientations

This link between the emerging crisis in child protection in the Anglophone countries and the beginnings of comparative research was made very clear at the beginning of the first book published comparing child protection systems by Andrew Cooper and his colleagues (Cooper et al. 1995), which compared the child protection systems in England and France. The researchers talked with child protection workers in both countries and studied the respective histories and operation of their child protection systems. They became very aware that there were major cultural differences between the two countries and that this could be seen to permeate all areas of law, policy, and practice. While the French system seemed to be infused with both an optimism and trust of both families and social workers' abilities to look after children, this was not the case in England where pessimism and distrust seemed to dominate. As the title of the book suggested, Positive Child Protection: A View from Abroad (Cooper et al. 1995), the main purpose was to encourage a 'positive' approach to child protection in England by looking at how things operated in France.

This overall purpose became even more evident with the publication of a further study by the same research team two years later (Hetherington et al. 1997). Not only were the researchers reporting on a much bigger study—comparing child protection systems in the Belgium Flemish community, the Belgium Francophone community, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, England and Scotland—but their political and policy aims were even more explicit. The focus was what they called 'a particular and important moment in the history of child care and protection work in England and Wales' (Hetherington et al. 1997, p. 4). The book was written 'first and foremost' as a contribution to the process of change, particularly in relation to 'the continuing struggle to implement the radical vision of the Children Act 1989' (p. 4) and 'the importance of recovering an ability to think new, creative and even dangerous thoughts in pursuit of change and reinvigoration in child protection work' (pp. 4–5). In examining seven other European child protection systems, Hetherington et al. argued that they were holding up 'seven mirrors to the English system, and each time seen new things reflected back' (p. 111). The aim of the research was twofold: first, to learn about the child protection system in the 'other country' in terms of how it worked for those directly involved in operating it; and second, to elicit the views of social workers in one country about the practice and system of another.

At the same time as Cooper et al. were carrying out their research, another project was being led by Neil Gilbert (1997) in the USA. While the policy and practice concerns driving the research were rather different and the methodology adopted was much more focused on policy analysis, the research very much complimented that by Cooper et al. Combatting Child Abuse: International Perspectives and Trends (Gilbert 1997) was prompted primarily by the rapid increase in reports of child maltreatment in the USA and the growing strains on its child welfare systems between 1980 and 1993. While similar trends could be identified in other countries it seemed that it was in the USA where the trends were the most extreme and conspicuous and it had witnessed a vigorous debate about how best to organise responses and services. Academic researchers were recruited to analyse the child protection systems in Belgium, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the USA. It was thought that a major reason for the upsurge in reports in the USA and the subsequent strains in the system arose from the mandatory reporting system and the vague definitions of child abuse evident. Comparing the USA system with systems elsewhere would provide one way of testing out these assumptions.

However, the key finding proved to be that there were important and more wide-ranging variations between the countries concerning the extent to which systems emphasised a child protection or family service orientation, and these did not depend on whether there was a mandatory reporting system in place. The two orientations were distinguished along four dimensions:

The first, and perhaps the most significant, dimension was the way the problem of child abuse was framed. In some systems abuse was conceived as an act which demanded the protection of children from harm by 'degenerative relatives'; whereas in other systems abuse was conceived as a problem of family conflict or dysfunction which arose from social and psychological difficulties, but which responded to help and support.

Secondly, and depending on how child abuse was framed, the response operated either as a mechanism for investigating deviance in a highly legalistic way, or as a service responding to a family's needs. As a result, thirdly, the child welfare professionals functioned either, in the child protection orientation, in a highly adversarial way, or, in the family service orientation, in a spirit of partnership—particularly with parents. Finally, while there seemed to be a high rate of voluntary arrangements with parents in making out-of-home placements with the family service orientation, in the child protection orientation most out-of-home placements was compelled through the coercive powers of the state, usually in the form of court orders. However, the use of mandatory reporting laws did not appear to be linked to either the child protection or family service orientations.

The countries were grouped into three broad categories:

1. Child Protection United States, Canada, England.
2. Family Service—Mandatory Reporting Denmark, Sweden, Finland.
3. Family Service—Non-Mandatory Reporting Belgium, Netherlands, Germany.

What the research suggested was that there did seem to be important differences in the way Anglo-American child welfare services were organised and the way they responded to concerns about child abuse, when compared to northern European and Nordic countries. The researchers argued that while the details of different programmes and policies were important, the way different systems operated were crucially influenced by the wider overall culture of the system and the social and political contexts in which it operated.

Bringing these various studies together, a clear picture began to emerge about how these two approaches differed and how the different countries studied might be differentiated. This can be summarised in the following Table 1:

Research carried out in the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada attempted to build on this work (Freymond and Cameron 2006; Cameron et al. 2007) but rather than just two orientations, it was argued that three generic systems of child and family welfare could be identified in 'developed relatively affluent' countries: child protection, family service, and community caring. While the first two—child protection and family service—were very similar to those found in Gilbert (1997), the third was rather different.

The third system took its inspiration from many Aboriginal communities around the world and was called, by Freymond and Cameron, Community Care Systems. Here:

> Ties to extended family, community, place, history, and spirit are considered integral to healthy individual identities: ideally, community caring relies on consultations with parents, extended family, and the local community about the protection and care of children. Because of the devastating effects on Indigenous Peoples of colonialism, residential care, and child protection systems, a strong connection is made between caring for children and fostering a healing process for whole communities. A strong value is given to keeping children within their families, and communities. Respect for traditional Aboriginal values and procedures is integral to community care processes (Freymond and Cameron 2006, p. 6).

Table 1. Difference between Child Protection (Anglo/American) and Family Service (Northern European) Systems.

Broad Type of System	Child Protection Anglo/American	Family Service Northern European
Countries	Australia, Canada, England, US	Belgium, Sweden, Germany, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands
Type of welfare state	Tendency to residual and selective provision	Tendency to comprehension and universal provision
Place of child protection services	Separated from family support services	Embedded within and normalised by broad child welfare or public health services
Type of child protection system	Legal, bureaucratic, investigative, adversarial	Voluntary, flexible, solution-focused, collaborative
Orientation to children and families	Emphasis on individual children's rights. Professionals' primary responsibility for child's welfare	Emphasis on family unit. Professionals usually work with the family as a whole
Basis of the service	Investigating risk in order to formulate child safety plan	Supportive or therapeutic responses to meeting needs or resolving problems
Coverage	Resources are concentrated on families where risks of (re)abuse are immediate and high	Resources are available to more families at an earlier stage

Developed from Parton (2017).

One of the few people who have argued consistently against the overall preference of researchers for the family service orientation is Keith Pringle. While critical of the child protection orientation (Harder and Pringle 1997), he has raised a number of major concerns about the ability of the family services to protect children, particularly in relation to child sexual abuse. In a critical overview of different responses to child sexual abuse across different European countries (Pringle 1998), he argued there was evidence that many western and northern European family service-oriented systems responded to child sexual abuse far less effectively than the more forensic child protection-oriented English approach.

Part of his explanation was that there was a strong reliance on family systems thinking in western and northern European countries in a way which was not so evident in England. As a consequence, there was a failure to address the power dynamics related to issues of gender and other social divisions, which he argues underpin sexual abuse and other forms of child abuse (Pringle 2005). He connected this greater adherence to family systems thinking to more general difficulties arising from broader cultural and social patterns. He suggested there was a connection between the family service orientations and the more soli-daristic/collectivist discourses and traditions that tended to permeate the social institutions in western and northern European countries—compared to the far more individualistic ethos evident in England, and, by implication, the USA and Canada (Pringle 1998; Pringle and Harder 1999).

He argued that Nordic welfare systems were primarily concerned with addressing problems associated with poverty and work, including those associated with the home, for example day care provision, and parental leave. They were much less concerned with addressing dimensions of marginalisation associated with 'bodily integrity or citizenship' (Pringle 2005, 2010). Included in the latter concept were forms of exclusion associated with, for example, violence to women, violence to children, ageism (in relation to younger as well as older age), racism, heterosexist/homophobia, and disablism. While perhaps dealing poorly with problems related to poverty and the labour market, Pringle therefore argued that when it comes to issues such as racism, disablism, and gendered violence—all of which are key to child sexual abuse and child abuse more generally—that England could be seen to perform better than the Nordic and other western European countries (Pringle 2010).

These arguments clearly provide an important counterweight to what became almost the dominant perspectives and assumptions which have underpinned much comparative child protection research. What the arguments do not do, however, is detract from the analytic frameworks and orientations which have been identified, particularly in terms of the differentiation between the child protection and family service orientations. The argument is much more about what the orientations overlook and, in particular, how (normatively) positive we should be about the orientations in practice and their implications for the children, young people, men and women who are affected by them. It does seem, however, that up until about 2010, there was considerable agreement about the validity and usefulness about using these two orientations as broad frameworks for comparing and analysing different child protection systems.

More recently, the Gilbert research (Gilbert 1997) has been updated by comparing ten countries—the same countries as before plus Norway. The overall conclusion (Gilbert et al. 2011b) was that while the two original orientations—child protection and family service—were still relevant, they needed to be revised in light of the developments in the various countries during the intervening 15 years up to 2008/9.

The findings suggested that approaches to protecting children had become much more complex. Countries previously identified with the child protection orientation, for example England and the USA, had taken on some of the elements of the family service orientation. At the same time, there was also evidence that those countries which had previously operated according to a family service orientation had made efforts to respond to increasing concerns about harm to children. This seemed to be the case in all the Nordic countries, with the possible exception of Sweden, and all the north European countries studied.

It was also possible to discern the emergence of a new approach—a child-focused orientation (Gilbert et al. 2011a). This orientation concentrated its focus on the child as an individual with an independent relation to the state. It was not restricted to narrow concerns about harm and abuse; rather the object of concern was the child's overall development and well-being. The programs aimed to go beyond protecting children from risk to promoting children's welfare. In this context, concerns about harm and abuse were relevant as just one set of factors that might affect a child's development and well-being. If for any reason there was concern about a child's development, the state sought to intervene to offer support or more authoritative intervention if this was required. With a child-focused orientation, the state takes on a growing role for itself particularly in terms of taking the lead with early intervention and preventive.

While this orientation can be seen to borrow elements from both the child protection and family service orientation, Gilbert et al. (2011a) suggest that it has a rather different character, which is shaped by two major and somewhat contrasting lines of influence. On the one hand, it has been influenced by ideas related to 'the social investment state' and, on the other hand, it has been influenced by a growing priority allotted to the processes of 'individualisation' as these apply to children and emphasises children's rights. However, these two lines of influence do not sit easily together and can lead to tensions, which signifies that the child-focused orientation can take different forms in different jurisdictions.

The idea of 'social investment' emerged in the 1990s as an ideal promoted by the OECD and the EU, among others. According to this view, investment in children takes on a strategic significance for a state keen to equip its citizens to respond and adapt to global economic change in order to enhance individual and national competitiveness. In this respect trying to ensure that all children maximise their developmental opportunities, educational attainment and overall health and well-being becomes a key priority for social and economic policy. This is a future-oriented approach, which considers childhood as a preparation for adulthood, so that investment in children in the present is designed to ensure that they will develop into productive and law-abiding adults. The state takes on this new and pre-emptive role primarily because the challenges are so great that 'the family' is no longer seen as adequate, on its own, for carrying out the tasks expected of it.

In contrast, the rationale for policies and practices which emphasise children's rights perceive children as individuals in the here and now and, while different, equally as valuable as adults. These policies are concerned with the quality of children's childhood, stating that it is a social justice issue to make sure that children are treated with respect and given a loving upbringing. This is the state aiming to promote a happy and caring childhood, securing children the same rights granted to others, and aiming to give children in the child welfare system the same opportunities as other children in society. Children are not seen so much as future workers, but as current citizens.

Overall, the child-focused orientation puts children's rights above parents' rights and emphasises parental obligations and responsibilities as carers. The child welfare systems provide services to promote children's needs and well-being, often with and via the parents and carers, but in return demands change and 'outcomes' for the child.

The three orientations identified by Gilbert et al. (2011a) can be summarised as Table 2:

Table 2. Three Orientations on the Role of the State vis à vis Child Maltreatment.

	Child Focus	**Family Service**	**Child Protection**
Driver for Intervention	The individual child's needs in a present and future perspective/societies need healthy and contributing citizens	The family unit needs assistance	Parents being neglectful towards children (maltreatment)
Role of the State	Paternalistic/defamilialisation—state assumes parent role; but seeks to refamilialise child by foster home/kinship/adoption	Parental support—state seeks to strengthen family relations	Sanctioning—state functions as 'night-watchman' to ensure child's safety
Problem Frame	Child's development and unequal outcomes for children	Social/Psychological (family systems, poverty, inequality)	Individual/Moralistic
Mode of Intervention	Early intervention and regulatory/Needs assessment	Therapeutic/Needs assessment	Legalistic/Investigative
Aim of Intervention	Promote well-being via social investment and/or equal opportunity	Prevention/Social bonding	Protection/Harm reduction
State–Parent Relationship	Substitutive/Partnership	Partnership	Adversarial
Balance of Rights	Children's rights/Parental responsibility	Parents' rights to family life mediated by professional social workers	Children's/Parents' rights enforced with legal means

Developed from Gilbert et al. (2011a).

The orientations can be seen to range along a continuum from a more laissez faire neo-liberal approach which emphasises the night-watchman functions of government to the more social democratic approach which advances policies much more associated with defamiliarisation. The three orientations can be seen to parallel Esping-Andersen's (1990) often-cited classification of liberal (Anglo-American), conservative (Continental) and social democratic (Nordic) welfare state regimes.

One of the very positive outcomes of these various comparative projects has been the development of conceptual frameworks, which are able to help explain variations between child protection systems and critically analyse child protection policies and practices in any particular jurisdiction. In doing so, the importance of different cultural, and political contexts and values is underlined. As Neil Gilbert suggested, the comparative study of how different countries respond to child abuse has advanced over the last two decades, particularly regarding the general characteristics of the systems they develop for these interventions' (Gilbert 2012, p. 532). However, I would go further, for Gilbert suggests that these different systems have been developed in response to the problem of child maltreatment. But as I have argued, such systems have developed their own dynamics so that they seem to operate rather independently of the social problem which it is assumed

they are trying to respond to—such systems do not so much respond to the problem of child maltreatment as construct and constitute it. This is an issue I will return to later.

4. Child Protection Typologies

A particular problem with this research is that it has only been carried out in high-income Western democracies. There is thus a major problem with the relevance of the 'orientations' that have been developed and their applicability to many societies. These problems have been demonstrated in research carried out in several countries including China (Katz et al. 2011; Shang and Katz 2014) and West Africa (Krueger et al. 2014) and, more recently, the Asia-Pacific region (Lonne 2021).

This has prompted attempts to develop new 'typologies' for comparing child protection systems across the globe (UNICEF and UNHCR 2013) and that rather than focusing on the specific structures or components of the systems the analysis might shift to the essential social values, laws and culture which act to inform and provide the focus of the different systems. Such an approach has similarities with some long-standing ideal-type 'models' of child welfare which have been developed over several years. For example, Frost and Stein's (1989) discussion of the politics of child welfare drew on 'child saving', 'child welfare' and 'child liberation' perspectives and Roger Smith (1991) talked in terms of 'protection', 'welfare' and 'rights'. Perhaps the most detailed and sophisticated analysis was provided by Lorraine Fox Harding who outlined different 'value perspectives' evident in debates about child care law in England and Wales in the 1980s. While originally based on her identification of two value positions (Fox 1982), she subsequently developed this into a fourfold classification (Fox Harding 1997): laissez faire and patriarchy; state paternalism and child protection; the modern defence of the birth family and parents' rights; and children's rights and child liberation. Roger Smith (2005) later revised this classification. The Fox Harding/Smith classification can be summarised as follows:

- Laissez Faire and Minimal State Intervention

Here, the essential view is that the family should not be disturbed except in very extreme circumstances, and the role of the state should be a minimal one. While traditionally the 'family' meant the nuclear patriarchal married heterosexual couple with children, the approach is quite capable of recognising the wide variation in contemporary family relations and practices.

- Child Protection and the Authoritative State

Here, extensive state intervention to protect and care for children is seen as legitimate and state intervention may be authoritative and biological family ties not necessarily given pre-eminence. Good-quality substitute care is favoured, particularly adoption, when the care of biological parents is seen to be inadequate.

- Working in Partnership

Here, while state intervention is seen as very legitimate, the intervention should aim to help and support both parents and children and should try and keep heavy-handed state intervention through the courts to a minimum.

- Children's Rights

The perspective advocates the child as a subject whose voice and wishes should be central in decisions made and prioritises the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

While these various models and typologies have something of a different basis and focus to the child protection system 'orientations' outlined by Gilbert et al. (2011a), there are clearly many important similarities. Crucially, the focal concern is analyses of different possible relationships between the state and the family.

More recently, Connolly and Katz (2019) have developed a provisional 'values and beliefs' typology for classifying child protection systems based on two value dimensions—Individualism and Collectivism: and Authoritarianism and Permissiveness. From these

two continuums four types of child protection systems emerge: Authoritarian Individualism; Authoritarian Collectivism; Permissive Individualism; and Permissive Collectivism (Figure 1).
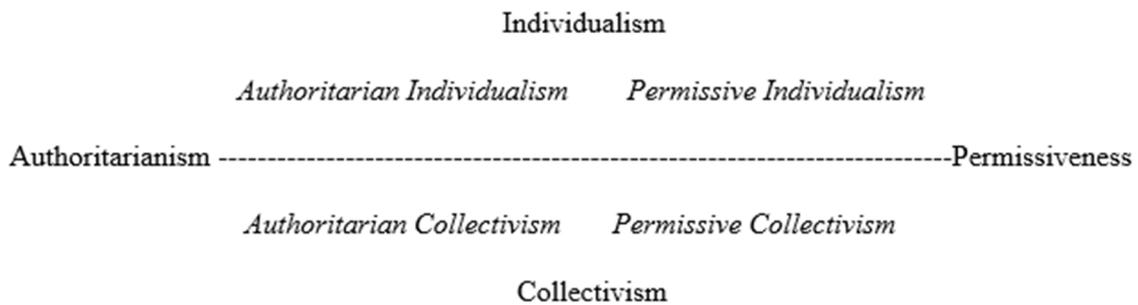
Figure 1. Theoretical Typology of Child Protection Systems.

Following Connolly and Katz (2019), the essential characteristics of the four types are:

- Authoritative Individualism

Here, the child protection system focuses upon identifying and assessing individual children who are 'at risk' of abuse, punishing individual perpetrators and removing children from harmful situations. Early intervention is targeted at 'high-risk' vulnerable families who are offered 'interventions' to bring about change with sanctions applied if they do not comply or there is no improvement.

- Permissive Individualism

While the focus is also upon identifying vulnerable children and their families, the emphasis is upon supporting them in order to enhance their overall well-being. Here, early intervention aims to provide unconditional support to children and families who volunteer for services and where little compulsion is used.

- Authoritarian Collectivism

Primarily focuses on intervening in and regulating collective societal behaviour towards children and young people. The main emphasis is upon legal and cultural change through tight regulation of communities and organisations and clear standards of behaviour for organisations and communities to follow. While the rights of the child are likely to be emphasised, the system focuses on community priorities.

- Permissive Collectivism

Emphasises the support of communities to improve the well-being of children and is likely to involve community development and public health approaches. It involves media campaigns and other health promotion-type tools to bring about cultural change. Unlike a more regulatory approach, the system is likely to be concentrated at the community level and encourage a diversity of approaches.

Connolly et al. stress that it is a provisional typology, and that the framework requires further refinement, particularly through its application and development in 'real world' situations. But like the earlier typologies discussed, such an approach helps to make explicit the values and beliefs which both inform and help drive child protections systems in different societies and provides a good basis for comparing them. They also stress that they are 'ideal types' so will not be identified in any pure form in any particular society. All are likely to have some elements of both Authoritarianism and Permissiveness and Individualism and Collectivism. However, not only will the balance be different between different societies, but it is likely to change within societies over time.

However, Connolly and Katz assert that a child protection system:

Consists of the full range of activities and processes which are in place in a jurisdiction to prevent abuse and neglect, respond to concerns or allegations regarding the abuse and neglect of children, protect and support children and families where abuse has occurred and punish perpetrators of abuse (Connolly and Katz 2019, p. 382, my emphasis).

As with so many texts on child protection, it takes for granted that child protection policies, practices and systems operate to prevent and respond to child abuse. While it might be the case that violence against children is a global problem which takes different forms in different places (see for example Bissell 2015; Finkelhor and Lannen 2015; Krueger et al. 2015), child protection policies and practices cannot be understood simply as a response to the phenomena of child abuse. They have dynamics and determinations of their own and can operate independently of the social problem, child maltreatment, which it is assumed they are designed to respond to.

The relationship between child maltreatment and child protection policies and practices is a complex one. Rather than see child protection as operating completely autonomously from the social problem of child maltreatment, it is perhaps more appropriate to see it in terms of a relationship of relative autonomy. We can analyse the processes of child protection policy and practice and their impact without needing to assert these are completely unrelated to views about the prevalence, nature, explanations and experienced threats of child maltreatment. Real or perceived changes in child maltreatment—both historically and comparatively—affect policy and practice to the extent that they generate shifts in public, media and professional opinion and subsequently gain political traction, legal enactment, and practical enforcement.

5. Future Research Priorities

While the development of comparative research has demonstrated there are a range of different ways that child protection can be pursued and, in the process, has helped develop critical approaches to policy and practice, we have also noted how most is have been carried out in relation to advanced Western societies. It is also evident that the focus is very much upon how different societies construct the relationship between the state and the family. However, in some societies, the state is quite undeveloped. Does this mean that such societies have little formal child protection?

Recent research reported by El-Hoss and Brown (2022) in Lebanon demonstrates how Lebanon has multiple, devolved, systems, both statutory and religious, and each contain characteristics which are enshrined in legislation, but it is not appropriate to try and identify a single state lead system. They also argue that the Lebanese example challenges any assumption that progress simply involves moving towards an increasingly state-centred and regulated model. Integrated models that draw upon both formal government and non-government processes enshrined in legislation exist and should be equally recognised. Informal, community driven forms of child protection are important but have received little research attention, particularly how these vary both between and within different societies. In many societies and in history, child protection is carried out by religious institutions and how these vary and relate to the state are important areas for future research.

In addition, it is important to recognise that communities play a key role. 'Child protection' in this context refers not to state-imposed measures but to civil society's routines of socialisation, norm-setting, monitoring, and informal sanctioning—routines that channel individuals in positive child-rearing directions, establish peaceable social relations, and create safe public places. However, it is also important to recognise that such routine social control is enabled or inhibited by socio-economic structures, the supply of public resources and the wider political economy. Communities do not operate in isolation, and the way formal and informal systems of child protection are crucially influenced by the social, political and economic contexts in which they operate (Firmin 2020).

An area which has received increased research attention in recent years is in relation to the impacts, both intended and unintended, of state child protection policies and practices on different parts of the community—in particular, the quite different impacts of such policies upon the most deprived children and families, and the racialised nature of such interventions. The work of Paul Bywaters and his research team associated with the Child Welfare Inequalities Project in the UK (Bywaters and the Child Welfare Inequalities Team 2020) has been particularly influential in this regard. They have gathered considerable evidence demonstrating the very strong correlation between local authority deprivation scores and the rates of children in out-of-home care in England (Bywaters et al. 2016) and that this closely mirrors the relationship between deprivation and inequalities in life expectancy at birth. Patterns of service supply are also affected by inequality. Analysis of service expenditure shows that the more deprived local authorities faced larger expenditure cuts than the less deprived local authorities in the period of financial austerity from 2010/11 to 2015/16, and that the cuts in budgets had meant that by 2015/16, a smaller proportion of expenditure was funding family support and a larger proportion was spent on children in out-of-home care and those subject to child protection plans (Webb and Bywaters 2018); there is a very weak and worsening correspondence between funding and needs, especially for preventive services in England (Webb 2022).

In the US, state child protection has been characterised as being akin to 'poverty governance', whereby child protection is primarily concerned with state surveillance and 'getting eyes in the home' (Fong 2020). It is not only concerned with 'saving children', but crucially 'controlling families' (Edwards 2016). For many years, it has been demonstrated that the US child protection system is racialised, where Black and Brown children are removed from home on a disproportionate rate compared to their percentage in the wider population (Roberts 2002; Greene et al. 2011; Barth et al. 2020). It is now being argued that the system is so broken it needs to be abolished for racism is seen to be so rooted in the systems history, policies, and practices that they are not easily reformed. Rather the system needs to be ended to ensure racial equity (Dettlaff et al. 2020).

It is important to try and bring these threads of critical analysis together so that we can begin to assess not only how state child protection policies, practices and systems vary between different societies but also how other non-state approaches to child protection impact and whether there are different outcomes and impacts for children, families and communities, particularly in terms of key social divisions such as race, social class, gender, and ability.

6. Conclusions

Child protection is the dominant means in advanced liberal societies through which the state attempts to control the behaviour of parents and ensure the welfare of children. More recently, the focus of attention has broadened to include any situation where adults encounter children including schools, day care, the church, sport and the wider community (see for example Firmin 2020). A whole range of sociological, political, cultural, and economic factors can influence the development child protection and the way it operates in any particular society. In the process, the study of child protection policies, practices and systems advance our understanding of the societies which generate them.

In this article, I have concentrated on trying to demonstrate how the development of comparative studies has acted to further our understanding and analyses of child protection, policies, practices, and systems. One of the aims of using comparison is to advance our 'learning from difference' to identify possible improvements. Some years ago, Rachel Hetherington argued that there were three key elements in the process of learning from difference in comparative research: description; comparison; and reflection (Hetherington 2006). While she argued that the description of a system may start with an account of the formal structures, it also needs to try and describe how it works on a day-to-day basis. She felt that the overall culture in which the system operates and the way it is experienced by the children, young people, and adults—including parents and professionals—is key.

A challenge with making comparisons is the difficulty of establishing whether two things that might appear the same are really the same, and whether two things that appear different are really different. This is something Hetherington says we must always be sensitive to and connects with the third element she sees as being key in the process of learning from comparative work—reflection. She argues that such learning develops from self-questioning and requires the ability to be both reflective and critical. It is important to question and interrogate material in order to make our assumptions transparent so that they can be subject to change. Richard Freeman (Freeman 2006) goes further, and argues that comparison not only requires us to make explicit what previously might have been taken for granted, it also needs to be described in quite new ways so that it can be compared with something else. Comparison can be difficult and highly disorientating but also highly creative. In the process, it is not only reflective but also generative of new ideas, policies, and practices (Freeman 2008). It is for this reason that the development of comparative research has played an important role in the development of child protection studies.

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Ambivalence in Child Protection Proceedings: Parents' Views on Their Interactions with Child Protection Authorities

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Abstract: Child protection is a field characterized by intrinsic tensions and ambivalence, related to the state's intervention in the family sphere and to a double mandate of care and control. This article focuses on the participation of parents in statutory child protection proceedings and the ambivalence they experience in their interactions with the Child and Adult Protection Authority in Switzerland (CAPA). The aim is to explore parents' views on what they consider as hindering or enabling in their interactions with the CAPA in order to be able to fully participate in child protection proceedings. The article is based on a large interdisciplinary research project including multi-perspective cases collected in four cantons of Switzerland and puts the focus on in-depth interviews with ten birth parents. Results show that ambivalence is inherent to the interactions between parents and the CAPA, as the mere opening of child protection proceedings is experienced as a threat to the parents' integrity. Establishing trust, recognizing parents' expertise and acknowledging their needs are key to re-establishing parental integrity, which seems to be a fundamental pre-requisite for reducing ambivalence and enhancing participation in child protection proceedings.

Keywords: child protection; parents; ambivalence; recognition; participation; integrity

1. Introduction

The field of child protection has long considered child protection practices and policies as straightforward responses to child abuse and neglect, but has recently been moving away from this view, acknowledging that these practices and policies have their own dynamics and determinations (Parton 2022) that can produce intrinsic tensions and ambivalence at different levels. Such fundamental tensions occur because child protection authorities have a seemingly contradictory double mandate of *care and control* (Böhnisch and Lösch 1973; Featherstone et al. 2014; Mitchell 2022) or, in other words, of *care and intervention*. This means that authorities have the duty to intervene in families by using potentially coercive measures and restricting parental rights in order to protect children from abuse and neglect and ensure their wellbeing. Many studies indicate that involving families in child protection proceedings gives rise to ambivalent yet differentiated experiences and emotions on the part of both parents and children. Child protection interventions can lead to the experience of negative feelings such as fear, shame, stigma, powerlessness, disrespect, anger, as well as positive feelings (Bekaert et al. 2021; Cossar et al. 2016; Dale 2004; Dillon et al. 2016; Dumbrill 2006; Featherstone et al. 2014; Gibson 2019; Petersen 2018; Wolff et al. 2016; Quick and Scott 2019). Positive feelings such as trust, dialogue, support and respect are highly important relational aspects to enhance positive experiences, as the available body of literature indicates (Arbeiter and Toros 2017; Bekaert et al. 2021; Dumbrill 2006; Featherstone et al. 2014; Gallagher et al. 2012; Husby et al. 2018; Höjer 2011; Rüegger et al. 2021). It has been shown that positive experiences help to engage parents, which is fundamental to obtaining positive outcomes of child protection interventions (Gibson 2019;

Arbeiter and Toros 2017). Furthermore, ambivalent feelings of parents are understandable as state intervention in the private family sphere happens within the context of preexisting family difficulties and can have an unknown major biographical and long-lasting impact on the lives of individual family members.

In this complex context, the child protection authorities have to guarantee the right to participate of the persons concerned, both parents and children. Healy and Darlington (2009, p. 420) problematize the notion of participation as 'working with' the client and, at the same time, the requirement for child protection practitioners to exercise power against their client's wishes when needed. This illustrates that parents are in a less powerful (decisional) position than child protection professionals (Featherstone et al. 2014). This leads to conflict when understanding participation as a deliberative process (Habermas 1981) and when stating that legitimate decisions can only be made by deliberating with the persons concerned at eye level (Willumsen and Skivenes 2005). The structurally given *tension of participation in the context of potential coercion* is inherent to statutory child protection and highly challenging. Healy and Darlington (2009, pp. 421–22) found that tensions inherent to child protection cases are rooted in parents' multiple roles and statuses such as "as carers, rights-bearing citizens and the subjects of child endangerment allegations". As we will argue, the sociology of ambivalence picks up on the issue of roles and delivers insightful explanations for understanding ambivalence embedded in interactions in child protection proceedings. The concept of sociological ambivalence has been used by scholars in the field of family relations; in particular, when studying intergenerational relations and roles (Aeby et al. 2021; Connidis 2015; Connidis and McMullin 2002; Lüscher 2002; Lüscher and Pillemer 1998; Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Phillips 2011; Rappoport and Lowenstein 2007; Willson et al. 2003) but it has not been applied to the field of child protection (with the notable exception of a recent study on foster care by Järvinen and Luckow (2020)). Although scholars have pointed out organizational ambivalence and tensions occurring in the field of child protection, they have mainly referred to concepts from Lipsky's (1980) theory of street-level bureaucracy to explain them (Koch et al. 2019). Useful as this is, particular in order to understand professionals' views, the concept of ambivalence provides a complementary and necessary perspective when considering actual interactions between actors (parents) and their embeddedness in a wider social context (rooted in Norbert Elias' figuration theory (1983); see also Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Phillips 2011).

This article puts the focus on parents and their perspective, as little is known on how they experience their actual interactions with the Swiss child protection authorities (Biesel et al. 2017; Schoch et al. 2020). We first briefly describe the Swiss context and then discuss the concept of ambivalence and its applicability in the field of child protection. After specifying our methodological approach, we present the results of our qualitative data analysis and explore the ambivalent feelings of parents involved in statutory child protection proceedings, and their strategies to interact with the authorities. Lastly, we discuss which interactions parents consider to be enabling or to hinder their participation in the proceedings.

1.1. The Swiss Child Protection Context

In Switzerland, the Child and Adult Protection Authority (CAPA) is a court-like decision-making body in cases of child endangerment reports filed in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect. The CAPA is responsible for conducting child protection proceedings, which involves assessing the child's wellbeing (or mandating a social service to do so), meeting the individuals concerned in the context of formal hearings and taking statutory child protection decisions under federal Swiss civil law (Schnurr 2017; Schoch et al. 2020). According to the Swiss system of federalism, the organization of the CAPA as well as all other supportive child protection services are under the jurisdiction of the cantons. Thus, the Swiss child protection system rather resembles a patchwork of 26 cantonal regimes (Jud and Knüsel 2019; Schnurr 2017). In general, during child protection proceedings, the CAPA follows the principle of no-fault liability by focusing on the child's wellbeing. When choos-

ing a child protection measure, the CAPA must consider the principles of proportionality (as little intervention as possible but as much as needed to ensure the child's wellbeing), complementarity (complementing parents' actions, not taking over responsibilities that they are able to fulfil) and subsidiarity (taking over duties not carried out by the parents to ensure the child's wellbeing) (Fassbind 2016; Schnurr 2017).

It is, however, crucial to mention that according to the Swiss Civil Code, the Child and Adult Protection Authority is only authorized to order child protection measures, and hence to intervene in the family, if parents are unable or unwilling to resolve identified situations of child endangerment. Separately from statutory child protection, social agencies such as general social services or children's services offer counseling and/or mediate access to non-statutory support services for families and children. This is often referred to as the "voluntary" part of the child protection system in Switzerland. These services (as well as, for instance, schools or any individual) can file an endangerment report if the child's wellbeing seems at risk (Rosch and Hauri 2016). Thus, the "voluntary" involvement of a family with supporting services can switch to (involuntary) statutory child protection proceedings led by the CAPA. To parents, the boundaries between these two types of child protection services often seem rather blurry (Koch et al. 2019; Koch and Schoch 2022; Schnurr 2017).

1.2. Ambivalence and Tensions in Child Protection Proceedings: Theoretical Background

Ambivalence can be defined as a lasting co-occurrence of positive and negative dimensions within the same relationship (Lüscher 2002). Connidis and McMullin (2002) conceptualized ambivalence as socially structured contradictions becoming manifest in interaction. Thus, the *sociology of ambivalence* concentrates on the ambivalence a person can experience in social interactions and not on the intrapersonal ambivalence a person may feel in a psychological sense. Sociological ambivalence arises from "incompatible normative expectations of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors assigned to a status" and further "refers to opposing normative tendencies in the social definition of a role" (Merton and Barber 1976, pp. 10, 12). Potentially conflicting norms and counter-norms are built into the social definition of a role and provide for the normatively acceptable range of behaviours to fulfil different functions (Merton and Barber 1976, pp. 17–19). For example, the role of a physician requires the "oscillation of behaviors: of [affective] detachment and compassion, of discipline and permissiveness, of personal and impersonal treatment" (Merton and Barber 1976, p. 8). Ambivalence is consequently inherent to each role and can be understood as "conflict in patterned situations and social structure" (Merton and Barber 1976, p. 19). Hence, the relationship between "professionals" and so called "clients"—such as a doctor and her/his client—should also be understood as structurally ambivalent (Merton and Barber 1976, p. 19).

There are also external, structural sources of ambivalence towards a role. Most important for the field of child protection is the social context of the client–professional interaction characterized by an imbalance in power in favor of the professionals—the members of the Child and Adult Protection Authority (CAPA) who hold decisional power and are equipped with specialized knowledge on the topic of child wellbeing. The clients here are parents who feel they are being perceived as failing in the eyes of the authority (Quick and Scott 2019, p. 486) and are suspected of having problems and a need for support. The relationship between parents and professionals is therefore characterized by basic anxiety on the part of the parents rooted in uncertainty regarding "how things really stand" and what the outcome will be (Merton and Barber 1976, p. 23). This applies very well to the context of child protection proceedings in which potential coercive measures can be decided upon if the professionals think these are needed to ensure or restore the child's wellbeing. Furthermore, parents might hope to be reassured and helped by the professional's "specialized knowledge" (Merton and Barber 1976, pp. 27–28). The aspect of the professional's authority or power can reinforce parent's anxiety because their specialized knowledge creates a dependence on the professional for the solving of their problem. A good example

would be the authority's specialized knowledge on the different measures and which forms of support offers exist in the region, which parents are unlikely to know. Some persons also feel ashamed about their inability to solve their problems by themselves and their need for professional help. Ambivalent feelings of parents are further fueled by the fact that they—unlike customers—usually cannot leave the client–professional relationship easily. Accordingly, in the case of statutory child protection proceedings where cooperation between parents and the authority is compulsory, and coercive child protection measures can be taken, ambivalent feelings can increase even more. Furthermore, the relationship is accompanied by the parent's fear of not living up to the professional's expectations regarding how to act. Parents can feel frustrated by or hostile towards professionals since they can require parents to abandon habits and practices or ask for the revealing of private information on potentially shameful actions. This can damage the parent's self-esteem. The professional's authority can therefore create ambivalent feelings in the parent, oscillating between respect, admiration, love and fear, hatred, and contempt (Merton and Barber 1976, pp. 19–28).

Questions of power are indeed crucial to understanding tensions and ambivalence arising from interactions. Even in a structurally weaker position, parents and children should be understood as active social actors, whose agency depends on varying enabling or restricting characteristics of social structures (Duncan 2019; Raithelhuber and Schröer 2018; Schoch et al. 2020). To quote Connidis and McMullin (2002, p. 558): "Ambivalence is a particularly useful concept when imbedded in a theoretical framework that views social structure as structured social relations, and individuals as actors who exercise agency as they negotiate relationships within the constraints of social structure".

This relational aspect echoes Honneth's (1995) *recognition theory* with the three axes of recognition and can be applied to the relationship between professionals and parents in the context of child protection proceedings, as shown in a previous article (Schoch et al. 2020). (1) The axis of *love* is linked to experiences of love in close relationships such as among couples, family members or friends, which creates self-confidence. The experiences of violence would be a sign of lack of recognition on this axis and relates to interactions where individuals show a lack of genuine empathy and concern for someone's feelings. (2) Recognition on the axis of *rights* is realized if individuals have rights and are treated equally, which is a source of self-respect. If individuals are excluded from certain rights, this axis of recognition is disrespected. From this perspective, it means that rights have to be actively guaranteed to all concerned individuals during child protection proceedings. (3) Recognition on the axis of *solidarity* can be experienced if there is respect for other people's opinions, roles, status, attitudes, or skills. This enhances their self-esteem. The opposite of recognition in the form of solidarity is experienced in the form of shame, denigration, or loss of honour. This is linked to recognizing parents' different roles, expertise and diverging opinions, even if child protection measures might be needed. Experiences of disrespect on these axes of recognition can lead to social resistance, conflict, and the struggle for the recognition of individuals in a way that re-establishes lost dignity.

Recognition theory can be an inspiring approach to defining and establishing integrity in social interactions. *Integrity* can generally be defined as a state of physical and psychological soundness as well as the opportunity and ability to achieve self-set goals (Becker-Lenz and Müller-Hermann 2013, p. 212). Hence, if parents or children in child protection proceedings experience disrespect with regard to social recognition in one of the above-mentioned ways, e.g., psychological violence, no respect for their rights or roles or a feeling of shame, this can be seen as a violation of their integrity. Furthermore, not feeling listened to properly or a lack of empathy when formulating an opinion restricts an individual's ability to define or achieve self-set goals, and hence curtails their integrity. Consequently, we suggest linking the sociology of ambivalence, recognition theory and the concept of integrity to analyze the perspective of parents on their interactions with child protection authorities.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Data Collection and Sample

Our data stem from an interdisciplinary research project entitled "Integrity, autonomy and participation: How do children and parents experience the proceedings of Child and Adult Protection Authorities?". The empirical study comprised three parts: a qualitative part with participant observations of hearings conducted by the CAPA in 2019 (1a), and case-based multi-perspective interviews in 2019 and 2020 (1b), an online quantitative survey in 2021 and 2022 (2), and focus groups in 2022 (3). For this article, we used data from part 1b (interviews) only. Our data collection method was based on the multi-perspective case work method, which is well known in social work (Müller 2017). It implies integrating all perspectives, namely, of parents, children and CAPA members to contextualize and connect subjective experiences. Experienced researchers with specialist training in working with traumatized populations (Gorin et al. 2008, p. 280) conducted the semi-structured interviews. Recruitment was carried out in partnership with two CAPAs located in the German-speaking region of Switzerland and two CAPAs located in the French-speaking region of Switzerland.

Data from ten cases were collected in the study, including at least the perspectives of a CAPA member and the perspective of a family member, either a parent or a child (1b). The two inclusion conditions were that a decision had already been made to avoid interfering with the decision-making process, and that the last decision (as there are often several decisions over time) had been made within the previous year to avoid memory bias and to allow participants to reflect on the whole process. However, this article is based on a subset of seven cases as three cases did not include the parents' perspective (see Table 1).

Table 1. Data sample summary.

Case	Parent Interviews	Other Interviews	Report by
C1	Father	CAPA member and deputy	Self-report and third party
C2	Mother	CAPA member and deputy, child	Self-report and third party
C3	Mother, father (separate interviews)	CAPA member and deputy	Third party
C4	Mother	CAPA member and deputy	Self-report
C5	Mother and father (joint interview)	CAPA member and deputy	Self-report
C6	Mother, father (separate interviews)	CAPA member, child	Self-report and third party
C7	Mother	CAPA member, child	Self-report

In two cases, parents were no longer involved in their child(ren)'s lives (a child with a deceased father and a mother abroad; a child abandoned with a relative who became the child's foster family). In the third case, we were not able to organize an interview with the parents due to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. From these seven cases, we obtained a total of nine interviews with ten birth parents (six mothers, four fathers). The higher number of female participants reflects the focus on mothers in child protection (Brandon et al. 2019). We focused on families with child endangerment situations other than conflicts about visitation rights only. There are no cases of sexual abuse represented in the sample. The recruitment method via the CAPA has probably caused a selection bias toward easier cases. Indeed, it is likely that parents who were perceived as uncooperative or highly dissatisfied were less likely to be invited and less willing to participate in our study. The fact that the child endangerment report mainly stems from the parents themselves seems to support this selection bias hypothesis. Indeed, in all but one case, parents reported approaching the CAPA themselves to receive support in conflicting family situations, even when this was conducted in parallel with a report made by a third party (three cases). In only one case (C3) were parents reported by a third party only. Nevertheless, even in case of self-reporting, there is often a professional involved who is aware of the family situation

and who advises the parents to do so (e.g., a schoolteacher in C7). Hence, it is likely that not all parents were intrinsically motivated to reach out to the CAPA voluntarily, but rather motivated by the threat that third parties could do so in their stead (Koch and Schoch 2022). All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim with the exception of one interview where notes were taken instead, as the parent refused the recording.

2.2. Data Analysis Method for Interviews

The multi-perspective case study design used in this study is adapted from an approach to the analysis of serious or fatal child protection cases, known as the dialogical-systemic case laboratory (Biesel and Wolff 2013). We analyzed the interview data in a two-step process: an initial reconstructive approach based on the integrative procedure for the reconstructive analysis (Kruse et al. 2011) was applied to two full cases and all persons interviewed in the cases (children, parents, and CAPA members). In this first analytical step, we reconstructed the meaning of the specific case and identified recurring patterns and themes reported by parents. Based on this knowledge, the second analytical step consisted of conducting a thematically inspired analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) in all cases. Thematic analysis aims to identify themes or patterns in the data which are important in relation to the research question. As a framing strategy with a theoretically informed but open perspective (Braun and Clarke 2006), we focused on recurring patterns in interactions between parents and the CAPA members in which the interviewees reported on experiencing hindering or enabling participation during the child protection proceedings (an open deductive approach). With this analysis strategy, we were able to stay close to the data, detecting themes guided by their definition of "keyness" (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 82).

3. Results

3.1. Ambivalence at the Root of the Proceedings: Experiencing the Threat to Parental Integrity

Most parents were not clear about whether their motivation to file an endangerment report was intrinsically motivated or if the motivation to do so was extrinsic due to the threat that other persons could do so instead. This hints at the first structural ambivalence of care and control in the field: once the CAPA receives a child endangerment report (either filed by a parent or/and a third party such as the school, a social service or a private person), parents are legally obliged to cooperate in the assessment and, if required, to accept child protection measures.

The CAPA intervention is first interpreted by the interviewed parents as an indication that the parents in general must have lost "control" (C2) of the situation or that something was "really wrong" (C5) within the family system. Some parents mention the difficulty of losing control and influence over the situation, and that they went through an internal process of acknowledging that they were not able to support their children sufficiently, admitting that they felt unable to solve their difficulties by themselves and that they needed support. In this escalating context, the CAPA was usually seen as a last resort solution, "the last chance" (C5) to avoid an out-of-home placement (for a voluntary request) or as a dead end (when being reported by a third party).

Although the parents themselves report that at certain times they were glad that the CAPA was involved, their contact was without exception accompanied by ambivalence, experiencing feelings oscillating between negative and positive at once. All parents report–to varying degrees and at different stages—that they were also sceptical, distrustful or anxious of the CAPA. Furthermore, parents report not only having experienced support, but also strong negative feelings such as self-doubt, self-reproach, and/or shame about being dependent on external help. These topics often came up implicitly or in a negating formulation, as seen in the following citation:

> *"It's not about my damaged pride: Did I fail as a mother? Although two have turned out well and the third now just, uh, crosses the line a bit, uh, yes, if you can stand above that, then, I think, the contact with the CAPA is good." (C4)*

One mother explicitly mentions the most painful experience during the child protection proceedings was that she felt she was perceived by the CAPA as a bad mother, as a threat to her own child (C3). Interestingly, all interviewed parents touch on the issue of potentially being suspected of being an uncaring, harmful or bad parent figure. Another mother explicitly describes the involvement of the CAPA as "humiliating" because as a mother you wish to have everything "under control" and you would like to do "things right" (C2). Some parents mentioned finding it exhausting or even humiliating to have to disclose private information such as their family difficulties repeatedly in front of different professionals during the proceedings and possibly also to professionals in voluntary services consulted before the proceedings.

Regardless of the context or the case specificity, all interviewed parents mention their parental role being questioned. This is perceived as hurtful or shameful, lowering parents' self-esteem, and can be interpreted as a violation of parental integrity since—in terms of recognition theory—experiencing shame is seen as a lack of recognition. Furthermore, it indicates that parental integrity might be threatened per se by the mere opening of child protection proceedings.

It seems worth mentioning an important insight, even though it cannot be elaborated in depth. The threat to one's integrity seems to be even more serious for mothers as they are often perceived as the "leading case worker" as a mother described it (C5). This is in line with previous research about the differentiated involvement of mothers and fathers in child protection (Brandon et al. 2019; Vogel Campanello et al. 2021; Aeby et al. 2021). It seems that by focusing on the mother as main addressee, fathers can be put into a marginalized position in the course of the proceedings.

Despite the experience of threatened parental integrity, and despite their scepticism at the start of the proceedings, most of the parents rate their experience with the CAPA overall as mainly positive. Other scholars report a much more negative overall evaluation of the proceeding (Petersen 2018), as our quantitative survey indicate too. The reason for the relatively positive overall evaluation in our qualitative sample could be due to the selection bias we explained in the materials and methods section. Indeed, parents retrospectively describe the actions and decisions of the CAPA as legitimate overall, given their family situation at that time, while also reporting on negative experiences such as distrust or disagreements with the professionals at certain stages or in certain situations during the proceedings. Hence, without any exception, parents reported experiencing ambivalent feelings during child protection proceedings and felt a lack of recognition in fulfilling their parental role adequately.

3.2. Ambivalence of the Parental Role: Parents' Reactions to the Perceived Violation of Parental Integrity
Strategies of Differentiation and Narrative Shift

Parents seem to develop *strategies of differentiation* and *narrative shift* as a reaction to the fundamental threat to their parental integrity, or, in other words, the experienced lack of recognition in their parental role and the threatening stigma as potentially failing families.

Regarding the *differentiation strategy*, it consists of picturing worse family situations, mentioning that they do not belong to the category of the classical 'problematic' families who are usually involved with the CAPA, such as parents abusing drugs, neglecting the child's supervision, hitting the child, not knowing or not wanting to know about the child's delinquent behaviour or school absenteeism. By adopting this strategy, parents distance and distinguish themselves from others (othering) and downplay the severity of their own case. For instance, a mother explained that her case was not as "catastrophic" as others were, that her house was always "clean" and her children always had "food on the table" (C7). Differentiation strategies often include parents presenting themselves as competent parents. As an example, one father reports that they received a lot of understanding for their difficult situation from the CAPA but questions whether it would have been the same if they "had done something wrong" or if they had been "reluctant" to fulfil their

parental duties and therefore could have been blamed for the difficulties (C5). In one case (C1), the father mentions that the CAPA legitimized him as a good parent and judged the fulfilment of his parental role positively by telling him that he was "not a threat" to his children. Besides a differentiation strategy by means of which parents portray themselves as fulfilling their parental role well, some also explicitly rate their encounter with the CAPA as completely free from feelings of being judged negatively. Asked about advice to other parents in child protection proceedings, parents often say that parents should not be anxious that the CAPA would intend to "just take away the child" (C5) from them but that they were eager to support and help the family solve their problems; hence, it would make sense to cooperate rather than to oppose them.

In most of the parents' accounts, we could identify a *strategy of narrative shift*. At a certain point the narratives shifted from the potentially failing parent towards the child's wellbeing. In most parents' presentations, we observed the justification discourse pointing out the main role and primary interest of the CAPA, which is to ensure the child's wellbeing and that they would not focus on the parents lacking skills. "Because for the CAPA, it's about the child, it's not about saying that you've brought him up wrong. They don't do that." (C5). In all cases except for one, the CAPA is portrayed by parents as focusing on supporting the family to solve the conflictual family situation and on their duty to focus on children and not on parents. The CAPA members seem to often shift the narrative away from the parents towards the child's wellbeing. This emphasis often seems to be gratefully taken up by parents. Nevertheless, the ambivalent feeling of parents concerning the questioning of fulfilling their parental role persists. This strategy also redistributes responsibility toward the child: in some cases, parents describe their child and his or her challenges and problems as one part of the source of the family troubles, as this mother's quote shows:

> "Because basically I always thought, I am a good mummy, I do everything right. I look after my son properly. He is placed because it is simply not possible otherwise due to his situation. With school, with the whole thing, it was simply not acceptable for, for society." (C2)

3.3. Ambivalence around Specialized Knowledge: Parents Complying and Expressing Disagreement

Most parents report on uncertainty and ambivalence in cases of *disagreement* with the CAPA's view even though they report on possibilities to express disagreement. This indicates contestation regarding who has specialized knowledge about the child, the parents or the CAPA. Overall, it seems that *compliance* was a strategy often used, as the risks of expressing disagreement or of opposing were deemed too high. Open opposition is mostly seen as pointless since parents clearly see the CAPA is in a more powerful position and they cannot leave the relationship.

One case (C3) strongly differs from the others in terms of how the parents interpret the role of 'good' parents in the context of the CAPA's intervention, colliding with the CAPA's expectations. Furthermore, their way of expressing disagreement or complying with the CAPA is worth highlighting. It serves as a case example of reasons for interactions that are perceived as intrusive and experienced as lacking recognition, violating parent's integrity.

The situation was as follows: the eight-year-old child with special educational needs was placed in institutional care for two years with the original consent of his separated parents. The mother did not share the view on her child's special needs, assessed by the CAPA and wanted the child to return home. She therefore moved to a different canton but there were difficulties finding a school offer for special educational needs. The CAPA, eager to ensure special needs education for the child, in consequence decided that the child had to remain permanently in institutional care, independent of the parents' consent.

The father perceives the child protection authority as being an unquestionable authority and he is convinced he could not have expressed his disagreement about the permanent placement of his child without his rights being restricted as a consequence. He argues that he did not speak up against the CAPA's decision because he feared this would be

interpreted as not wanting the best for his child and hence that he would not be fulfilling his parental role well. From his perspective, the best thing for the child must be to comply and do what the CAPA says, as an expert organization. In contrast to the father, the mother interpreted the fulfilment of her parental role by opposing, showing her disagreement with the child protection authority and fleeing to her country of origin with her child. In her view, her flight was a gesture of care towards her son, taking over her responsibility in her role as a parent. As a result of the mother's action, when she shortly after returned to Switzerland, the CAPA restricted the parental rights of both parents and placed the child back into institutional care permanently. Hence, the family experienced the CAPA as a controlling, judging, and even punishing authority. Nevertheless, both parents retrospectively came to judge the CAPA's decision as the best solution given the circumstances.

An underlying subject which arises in different cases is *specialized knowledge*, as described by Merton and Barber (1976). A shortcoming of their theorization is that the professional's authority and power position is seen as quite deterministic and strongly defines the inferior power position of the parents. Our data do not substantiate such a deterministic theorization. Instead, the interactions can be described as contested, and the term 'negotiation' better represents the nature of parents' experiences, as the previous case and the following example show.

A mother describes her ambivalent feelings at a "difficult meeting", organized by the CAPA and attended by many involved child protection professionals, during an escalating situation with her child (C2):

> *"And Mr. Miller [CAPA], just listened and made up his mind and I didn't know: Is he on my side? Did he really hear me? Did he understand? Or are they only the educated ones, the ones who are really professional? Does their opinion then count more than mum's opinion who says 'Hey, that's my son!'? It's about him. And about me. And I know him much better than ((laughing)) all of you who are sitting there".*

In retrospect, she says that today she would be much more assertive as a mother with her specialized knowledge of her children and would not let herself be so easily impressed by experts (i.e., teachers) "who must know best". Parents' ambivalent feelings arise from the tension between perceiving and trusting the CAPA as an expert organization with extensive experience in child protection and family problems and perceiving themselves to be the experts on their child. They have had a very personal and long-lasting relationship, which is suddenly questioned by the CAPA's involvement and expert knowledge. Simultaneously, as elaborated earlier, parents mention a degree of dependence on the CAPA's support and specialized knowledge to solve their family's difficulties, but also express doubts regarding the CAPA's expertise of their family, making an ambivalence visible.

3.4. Reducing Ambivalence: Parents' View of CAPA's Strategies to Establish Trust and Re-Establish Parental Integrity

Our interviews revealed three key interactions identified by parents as fostering their agency and enabling their participation: First, parents felt supported by receiving adequate and *quick support* from the CAPA if needed. Second, parents reported that they felt they were given some *autonomy* in the proceedings, e.g., when they could influence the proceedings' timely progression or in other words, the speed of the proceedings. Third, parents felt they could *negotiate measures* with the CAPA. Those interactions are connected by parents feeling recognized and having their integrity respected, which seems to have fostered their trust in the CAPA. These experiences seemed to help to re-establish their initially threatened parental integrity.

All interviewed parents report that they gained trust in the CAPA when they received quick and adequate *support* in situations of emergency. As mentioned in the following citation, a turning point in the proceeding was described (C2): "Where I realised I can make a phone call, I am heard, my worries are heard. Also, the rest of the family is being taken care of [by the CAPA] and they act and they act fairly quickly and very competently". The feeling of being able to rely on the CAPA to take decisive actions, and that they teamed

up with the parents fosters a trusting relationship between the CAPA and the parents (e.g. C2, C4, C5). In some cases, it could be a turning point in the development of trust towards the authority.

Particular significance concerning the feeling of parents' *autonomy* seems to be connected to the possibility of influencing the temporal progression (speed) of the proceedings (substantiated by Petersen 2018). All parents reported on different phases during the proceedings: sometimes they felt the progression of the proceedings was not fast enough; in other moments, parents felt that the next steps were coming too fast to adjust emotionally, especially if a placement was envisaged. Case 7 is a good example of an overall positive assessment of the CAPA's intervention negatively affected by wrong timing: this single mother was struggling with her teenage boy who had dropped out of school. The professionals eventually managed to find a place in an institution with integrated schooling, but the teenage boy had to enter right away, leading to the cancellation of a long-expected family holiday. As a result, both the mother and the son fought against the measure when it was first announced. It is only in retrospect that they both agreed on its usefulness. Parents who experienced that their need to speed up or slow down the proceedings was respected by the CAPA felt recognized by being understood in their needs and in receiving individualized and case adequate support (in terms of recognition theory on the axis of love and solidarity). In such participative interactions, parents could gain trust in the CAPA as a reliable and helpful partner.

The feeling of participating was further fueled by experiences of being "involved" (Bouma et al. 2018) in a discursive manner, having some influence on the proceeding. Many parents report that the CAPA "suggested" measures or how to proceed (i.e., C4, C2), which facilitates a debate and *negotiation* and indicates there were at least deliberative moments in the decisional process. One divorced father (C1) describes how "actually, the decision was made, like, together. So together with the CAPA". A debate and negotiation of different possibilities as well as being informed on the content of reports (C5) or the opportunity to correct the written record of the hearing (C1; C2) made parents feel they had some power and influence on the proceedings.

It seems essential for a positive, integrity restoring experience that parents perceive the process to be influenceable and participatory: where parents receive support, are taken seriously by being acknowledged in their needs, are given some autonomy and are recognized as experts of their children, and their wishes and views are debated.

4. Discussion

This article is based on the experiences of parents in their interactions with the Child and Adult Protection Authority (CAPA) in Switzerland. It explores parents' retrospectively reported views on interactions with the CAPA which hindered or enabled their participation during statutory child protection proceedings. The field of child protection is characterized by tensions due to the double mandate of care and control/intervention and the challenge to parents' participation in the context of potential coercion as Healy and Darlington (2009) pointed out. Hence, parents report on ambivalence in interactions with the CAPA. The sociology of ambivalence assigns the reasons for ambivalence to competing norms engrained in social roles such as those of parents or professionals in social interactions. Our data show that parents are sceptical towards the CAPA (often in the beginning), as holder of the power and feel anxious or ashamed about the intervention or experience self-doubt related to not adequately fulfilling the role of the 'good' parent (Merton and Barber 1976). Expressed in the language of recognition theory, parents do not feel recognized in their parental role since experiencing shame can be interpreted as a violation of their integrity. We could say that their parental integrity is fundamentally threatened by the mere opening of child protection proceedings. In this context, tensions and ambivalence are at the core of the interactions between parents and the authorities, even if these can be reduced significantly over time. The imbalance of power between professionals and parents contributes to ambivalence and

can generate negative feelings, but also positive ones when solutions are debated and found to support distressed parents.

We showed different strategies used by parents to handle this threat to parental integrity, such as strategies of differentiation and narrative shift, as well as an oscillation between compliance and expressing disagreement. While parents might be dependent on the specialized knowledge of the CAPA to a certain extent, they also want to restore their integrity by being recognized as experts on their own child and family. Given the fact that most parents feel ambivalent, fearful of the CAPA's intervention and threatened in their parental integrity in the beginning, our results suggest that over time and in concrete interactions, parents' integrity can be restored, enabling full participation. Therefore, from the viewpoint of parents, it seems crucial to re-establish parents' integrity through a trusting relationship with the CAPA in which they experience recognition, and they still have a degree of autonomy, for example, by influencing the speed of the progression of the proceedings (also supported by Petersen's research (Petersen 2018)), as long as the child's wellbeing can be assured. In contrast, if integrity is not restored, parents experience recurring difficulties related to expressing themselves, feeling heard, or raising disagreement, which then hinders full participation.

We detected two key points for more participative and less coercive experiences of the proceedings from the parents' perspective: acting as a reliable and supportive authority and giving parents the opportunity to experience the proceedings as a deliberative process (Habermas 1981). Such interactions in which parents feel the CAPA is in fact exercising "power with" them in form of supporting them, giving them some autonomy promotes the full participation of parents and is also described and substantiated by Dumbrill's research (2006). This is an alternative to using power "over them" in the form of coercion (Dumbrill 2006). This echoes our previous findings in which we argue that integrity, autonomy and participation are strongly interrelated and advocate for its conceptualization as a nexus (Schoch et al. 2020).

Although the qualitative data of our study have some limitations due to the small sample size, the results of the analysis suggest an underlying ambivalence that interactions with the CAPA make parents feel that they did not live up to role expectations regarding adequate parenting. In order to fully participate, parents need their integrity to be restored by empathic, trustful interactions in which they experience recognition in order to reduce their ambivalent feelings and be in a position to benefit from the CAPA's support. With the theoretical focus on roles and social expectations towards the individual as the holder of a certain role, the theoretical concept of ambivalence complements the structural notion of the care and control/intervention concept. It also shapes the view on power asymmetries and delivers explanations as to how they fuel ambivalence among parents in interactions with CAPA members.

The strong focus on parents' experience in this article is in line with the call to recognize them as "people with needs" (Featherstone et al. 2014). It is challenging for professionals to ensure parents' integrity, autonomy and participation without losing sight of the child's wellbeing and giving him or her a voice, and to achieve a "family-minded humane practice" (Featherstone et al. 2014). Too strong a focus on a trustful relationship and cooperative process with the parents can bring with it the danger of overlooking endangerment situations and of downgrading the child's perspective. Precisely because inherent tensions and ambivalence in child protection proceedings remain unresolvable to a certain degree, it is even more important to reduce ambivalence by supporting interactions that preserve integrity, permit autonomy and hence ensure the participation of all concerned persons.

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Parental Partnership, Advocacy and Engagement: The Way Forward

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Abstract: This article, written with parents as co-authors, has two aims: (1) to provide a critical view of the English child protection system based on parents' views and to locate these views within contemporary child protection studies and (2) to present the transformative value of co-production in the context of child protection studies both as a form of critical scholarship and as a means to influence policy and practice. The current children's social work system in England does not achieve good outcomes for families, and many children and parents frequently experience it as stigmatizing, inhumane, and harmful. The article presents the experience and recommendations for change produced by parents with a broad range of experience with child protection services in England. The Parents, Families and Allies Network worked with five allied organizations in which parents identified the extensive range of problems that the current system presents and ways forward to achieve more supportive, humane, and inclusive practice with families. Seven main themes emerged: a better definition of need and response to need; partnership, participation, and humane practice; improving legal representation and support in legal proceedings; better support in care proceedings; permanence that maintains links; a better response to domestic violence; and the lack of support for disabled children. The article discusses five features of the project that supported meaningful co-production: taking a political stance, choosing clear and feasible aims, incorporating a range of knowledge, the participation of parents with lived experience throughout all phases of the project, and not settling with just knowledge production.

Keywords: parent advocacy; participation; child protection; co-production

1. Introduction

A substantial body of critical research into the experiences of parents and children involved with the child protection system written in the last 20 years indicates that they often experience the process as intimidating, confusing, shaming, and humiliating (Ghaffar et al. 2012; Gupta et al. 2018; Gibson 2020; Warner 2015). Bringing parents' and children's voices to the forefront of research has been invaluable, and they comprise a crucial component of the development of a critical body of knowledge on child welfare. However, most studies in this field examine the lives of parents, children, and young people without paying attention to their involvement in the process (Flinders et al. 2016). Thus, in these studies, the perspectives of parents and children are collected and voiced, but they are barely involved in framing research questions, collecting or analysing data, or interpreting findings and making recommendations. Moreover, once they share their perspectives and knowledge, research participants are often disconnected from the subsequent phases and are not exposed to the impact of these studies on reality (Critchley and Mitchell 2020).

In this article, we present a project that attempts to exemplify and conceptualize how and why co-production can be an essential component of critical child protection studies. The project, which we refer to throughout the article as the 'consultation', was developed in response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (IRCSC) in England (henceforth the 'Care Review'). Initiated by the Parents, Families and Allies Network (PFAN), the consultation brought together parents and allies from a range of organizations to co-produce a report that points to the shortcomings of the children's social care system on the one hand, and, on the other, that offers clear recommendations regarding the changes needed. The consultation forms part of a wider PFAN project that involves working towards the implementation of fundamental changes from current discourses of child protection and rescue to ones of children's rights and strengthening families and communities. The report was published online on 14 February 2022 and was presented to the Care Review. It received coverage in the media and in social work journals.

This article is based on that report and was written by a team of parents (Taliah Drayak and Tammy Mayes) and allies (Simon Haworth, Andy Bilson and Yuval Saar-Heiman) from PFAN in 2022. The idea of transforming the report into an article for this Special Issue, suggested by one of the allies, evoked a discussion regarding the value and impact of publishing in an academic journal. On the one hand, we acknowledge the value of solidifying parents' views in academic discourse. On the other hand, we are also aware of both the inadequate influence such an article would have on policy and its limited relevance to the families involved with services. This ambivalence continued as the work evolved. The need to adapt the intentionally stark and simple messages of the report into an academic article created tension between the aspiration to keep the article as close to the report as possible, i.e., solely focussing on presenting the voices of parents, and the objective of using the report as a starting point for wider discussions, i.e., discussing the process of co-production. Naturally, parents were concerned that an academic route would relegate the voices of parents, which comprise the core of the report, to the background.

Following several discussions, drafts, and comments from reviewers, we were able to articulate two aims for this article: (1) to provide a critical view of the English child protection system based on parents' views and to locate these views within contemporary child protection studies and (2) to present the value of co-production in the context of child protection studies both as a form of critical scholarship and as a means to influence policy and practice.

Hence, the article begins with a description of the background of the initiation of the Care Review. Next, it describes the consultation in terms of who took part in it and how it was conducted. Following this, it presents seven key areas of the system that were identified by the participants involved in the consultation as requiring change. Each section begins by reporting the views shared in the consultation and then relates these views to the academic literature and ends with our recommendations for change towards more humane and supportive ways of working. In the discussion, we argue that co-production should be an essential component of critical child protection scholarship and reflect on the transformative possibilities of co-production in critical scholarship, a key feature of this article, and the consultation itself.

The Background to the Consultation: The 'Case for Change' (CfC)

The Care Review is the most recent of many reviews of children's social care in the UK that have been conducted in the last 30 years. In June 2021, five months after its inception, the Care Review published the Case for Change (CfC) report (IRSCE 2021), which was described as an ' ... early attempt to synthesise what we have heard so far and transparently set out what we think the biggest problems in children's social care are' (IRSCE 2021, p. 5). The report aspired to outline the main issues that needed to be changed in the children's social care system. It asserts that '[t]he experiences and outcomes of children and families tell us that children's social care needs to change' (IRSCE 2021, p. 10) and indicates that 'the system is under significant strain: more families are being

investigated, more children are in care and costs are spiraling as money is increasingly spent on crisis intervention' (IRSCE 2021, p. 10). The CfC reaffirmed calls made for substantive change by UK social work scholars (e.g., Bywaters, Featherstone, Gupta, Morris, Parton, and White) in the last twenty years.

The key issues identified by the CfC as requiring change were:

- Support offered to families: More help needs to be offered to families and communities, with a move away from a culture of assessing and investigating families to one of support and help that has been shown to be effective;
- Rebalancing the system: Children's social care is currently focussed at the acute end of the system: child protection and care proceedings. The system needs to be rebalanced to offer effective and timely support to families;
- Cultural change: Children's social care is currently bureaucratic, rule-bound, and adversarial, leaving little or no space for the relationship-based supportive work that is key to helping families;
- A system with a clear purpose: Children's social care needs a clear purpose and much better coordination between services and organizations nationally and locally to support families and communities and to act decisively to ensure children's safety;
- Clear and evidence-based decision making: Currently, decision making is inconsistent and is often not good enough. Clear decision making by skilled and well-supported social workers is key to an effective system;
- Direct time with families: Social workers need to be supported so that they can spend more of their time directly working with children and their families. Currently, there is too much bureaucracy and risk aversion;
- Children and young people's relationships: Children and young people in care need to be supported to maintain and build positive loving relationships, but at present, systems often serve to break or sever their important relationships;
- Poverty and other disadvantages: Social inequalities and disadvantages play significant roles in child maltreatment and state intervention in family life, but systems do not effectively pay attention to their roles. This needs to change.

While there was much that was included in the CfC that the members of PFAN found persuasive, including its description of the impacts of contemporary practices and systems, concerns were raised regarding issues that were missed or not fully explored and the ways in which the conclusions will be taken forward. First, the cycle of escalating investigations and blaming of parents may continue, so transformational change is urgent and necessary, with a move from a culture of parent blame and child rescue to genuine partnership and participation being fundamental to progress. Second, families are under immense and increasing stress and strain, with the growing poverty, inequality, and state intervention in family life generating a range of problems. These concerns led to the consultation described below and the subsequent identification of seven key areas in which urgent changes are needed in the PFAN (2022) report referred to above (see https://www.pfan.uk/response-to-case-for-change-by-parents-families-and-allies-network-pfan/).

It is important to remember that the issues identified here continue to generate significant barriers to engagement for families, few of whom feel involved or respected when engaging with children's social care (Dale 2004; Wilkins and Forrester 2021). Levels of satisfaction with children's social care are low, and families often experience feelings of shame as a result of their involvement with it (Gibson 2020; Wilkins and Forrester 2021). Looking beyond the child, whom the system isolates as an object of unwavering focus, are the child's parents, who are often left feeling disposable and disposed of. Parents feel judged, silenced, and punished and lose their identities as they engage with systems low that are on humanity and care (Clapton 2020).

2. The Consultation

The publication of the CfC evoked many responses among all of those involved in working toward change in the child protection system. PFAN members were especially sceptical regarding the weight given to the voices and views of experts by experience in the review. This led to a discussion between authors Andy Bilson, Taliah Drayak and Tammy Mayes that ended with a decision to begin working on a co-produced response to the CfC. In the first phase, the PFAN executive team (Simon Haworth, Andy Bilson, Taliah Drayak and Tammy Mayes) conducted a range of exploratory conversations and agreed that genuine co-production was crucial, with the understanding that we would all need to share power and work towards authentic empowerment. These aims necessitated a range of practices along the way, including regularly revisiting issues of shared understanding and informed engagement as well as regularly rescheduling meetings to ensure that everyone could participate fully.

The internal work within PFAN led to the development of a set of guiding questions for consultation as well as a list of potential organizations and parent groups that might be interested in taking part in co-producing a response based on a structured consultation. PFAN approached 13 organizations that had empowered parents and that were focussed on changing the child protection system through innovation and genuine participation and asked them to contribute to the consultation. Five organizations responded to the invitation. Details of the contributing organizations are shown in Box 1. The parents from these groups have wide and varied experience with children's social care. Among them were parents whose children had been removed to long- and short-term care or adoption, some at birth; who required services because of a disability; who had been the subjects of child protection investigations; and who had children in need.

The contributing organizations included:

- One that provides therapeutic support to parents referred to children's social care for concerns about child abuse;
- One that uses a whole-family approach to offer holistic support and that provides child and adult mental health and social care services;
- One national body that campaigns for and promotes peer advocacy;
- One network of parents of children with disabilities;
- Two projects set up with support from a children's social care service to provide advice on policy and practice and that offer peer support to parents.

Following the initial aspiration to develop a response that would point to the short-comings of the children's social care system and suggest clear recommendations regarding the changes needed, the PFAN team developed the following points as a basis for the discussions within each of the organizations:

- The key problems experienced by families with children's social care;
- Examples of how these problems have been or could be overcome or mitigated;
- Any areas where children's social care or other services have been helpful;
- Any ideas on specific changes to children's social care that would make a difference to the problems they had identified.

Meetings between the PFAN team and representatives from each of the organizations were held to prepare for the consultation. The groups each undertook their own consultations and provided written responses to PFAN. Due to the different natures of the participating organizations, the approaches to information gathering varied, with each group seeking the most compassionate way to support parents and allies in sharing their views. Four of the organizations were small organizations that held meetings, and the other one used online surveys that received several hundred responses. The consultations were conducted between January and March 2022, with all of the organizations providing feedback on what their groups of parents and allies had shared.

Once the responses were received, Andy Bilson conducted an initial thematic analysis of them and emphasized the key themes and the links between them (Braun and Clarke 2019). A draft report of the key findings was then produced, circulated within the PFAN, and uploaded to a Google Drive folder that enabled members to edit the document. A comment made by one of the parents that had a significant influence on the final report was that some parts of the report used professional jargon and that the report should be written in a simple and accessible manner. Based on these comments, another draft was produced and was circulated to all of the contributors. A meeting with the representatives of the contributors was then held to finalize the report, agree upon recommendations, develop plans for presenting it to the Care Review, and make it widely available to those responsible for children's social care.

The report was submitted to the Care Review and was later presented to senior members of the review, including the chairman, at an online meeting. Following several discussions, the group representatives decided to limit the number of participants in the meeting to allow for an effective conversation with the review to take place. Attendance was limited to three people per group, and parent attendance was prioritized. The meeting was chaired by Tammy Mayes, a parent with lived experience. Alongside the meeting with the Care Review, the dissemination of the report included an interview with Taliah Drayak on national television, who represented the participants involved in the consultation. Finally, all of the organizations agreed to produce a webinar at which the report would be presented. The representatives of each of the organizations presented some of the insights that emerged from the consultation. The webinar was an important part of the process because it enabled the community of people committed to changing child protection to come together, take pride in their work and knowledge, and further the relationships between them.

The consultation was focussed on action, listening to marginalized voices, and calling for change and was not a funded empirical study. It was undertaken as a response to the Care Review. Therefore, procedural academic ethical approval was not deemed necessary. Nevertheless, in line with Butler's (2002) 'Code of ethics for social work and social care research', the consultation included an ongoing effort to engage in genuine co-production and empowerment. Further, we embraced an ethics of care focussed on supportive relationships, developing trust, and caring (Held 2007). This ethical awareness was maintained throughout the process and led to an emphasis on transparency that enabled all of the participants to be genuinely informed about the possible implications of their participation. For example, we had several discussions with participants who were concerned that the Care Review might co-opt the outputs of the work or use them in a tokenistic manner. Another ethical issue that received extensive attention was the participants' well-being. One of the key challenges faced by those with lived experience is communicating across various audiences to share messages more widely (Beresford 2007). As a team, we were always considerate and ensured that the members with lived experience were supported in sharing their experience and knowledge. Empowerment was key to the consultation and the way in which it was conducted as an organic process founded on parents' views and rights, culminating in two parents co-authoring this article.

Box 1. Contributing groups.

Parents, Families and Allies Network promotes the rights and improves the lives and life chances of parents and children involved with children's social work in the UK. We aim to transform policy and practice to ensure that parent's views and experiences are heard through participation in every decision that affects them and their children. We enable participation through promoting, developing, and supporting parent advocacy and parent advocates via our publications, workshops, conferences, support groups, training, consultancy, research, information exchange, advocacy programs, and campaigns.
Contact: admin@pfan.uk.
Website: https://pfan.uk.

Box 1. *Cont.*

Love Barrow Together are a team of co-located health and social care workers across child and adult services. We believe that in order to genuinely help families who face complex problems and who often receive fragmented and chaotic services, we need to really listen and understand. We also believe that it is time to move away from public services that determine what families need and instead to see people themselves as active participants who can ask for what they need and who bring assets and skills to share. We try to provide what families themselves have asked for, i.e., a service for whole families that combines child and adult mental health and social care, compassion and understanding; a main keyworker who acts as a transitional attachment figure, early help from the local community, and an ability to be clear and honest with families when there are child protection issues.
Contact: info@lovebarrowfamilies.co.uk.
Website: https://www.lovebarrowfamilies.co.uk/.

New Beginnings' mission is to work holistically with families who are known to Children's Social Care for concerns relating to neglect as well as emotional, physical, or sexual abuse.
We have learned that parents who find themselves in this situation have most likely experienced prolonged episodes of trauma, such as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, often within the home, at some point in their lives. These traumatic events can lead to issues with mental illness and health as well as drug and alcohol misuse.
Our vision is to work closely with parents in the child protection process so that they can develop the strength, knowledge, and power to become the parents they want to be and, in return, teach other parents how to do the same.
Contact: info@newbeginningsgm.com.
Website: https://www.newbeginningsgm.com/.

The Parent and Carer Alliance C.I.C. aims to ensure that families whose children have additional needs can share experiences, feel less alone, are better prepared and informed, are able to access vital services, and can raise concerns to make positive changes.
Contact: info@parentandcareralliance.org.uk.
Website: www.parentandcareralliance.org.uk.

Southwark Family Council brings together parents, carers, and other family members to share their views on children's services in Southwark and to be involved in shaping services and practice.
Contact: Southwark.familycouncil@southwark.gov.uk.
Website: www.southwark.gov.uk/familycouncil.

Southwark Parent to Parent Peer Advocacy provides advocates with their own experience with children's services to support other parents at Child Protection Conferences.
Contact: Parentadvocacy@southwark.gov.uk.
Website: www.southwark.gov.uk/parentadvocacy.

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3. Key Problems and Ways Forward

The consultation identified seven key areas where urgent changes are needed. This section looks at each area as well as the suggested ways forward. In each subsection, the views shared in the consultation are reported, and the subsection then relates these views to relevant academic literature, grounding the literature in the messy real world in the process.

3.1. A Better Definition of Need and Response to Need

A major concern raised in the consultation was that the main focus of children's social care is on child protection and removal to care or adoption. The parents who took part in the consultation argued that instead of focussing on risk and individualized services, we should formulate a broader definition of need and support. They pointed to the following areas as being crucial for creating safe environments for children and their families: secure and affordable housing, adequate benefits, secure and well-paid employment, and strong communities. Furthermore, mental health services, education, nurseries and childcare, inclusive and accessible parks and libraries, and public health approaches to child maltreatment are important in this context. The participants asserted

that although social work should support families in poverty, poverty is often considered an additional marker of risk rather than an amplifier of crisis and is a reason to provide support. This was demonstrated in the following example reported by one participant in the consultation:

> One mother found herself in emergency accommodation and, awaiting her first Universal Credit payment, accessed a food bank to feed herself and her child. In the hearing to remove her child from her care, her use of the food bank was deemed evidence of further risk to the child and was used to support the local authority's application to remove the child.

Whilst there is growing recognition of the impact of austerity and poverty on the involvement of families in the child protection system (Bywaters et al. 2022), research indicates that the current system tends to ignore poverty and its harsh ramifications in people's lives, while broad family services focus on individualized services (Featherstone et al. 2018a; Morris et al. 2018). Moreover, the focus on the perceived risks that may exist for individuals can prevent social workers from addressing the environment in which the family exists (Taylor 2017).

Based on the consultation, we argue that supporting families in these dimensions of their lives should be an integral part of children's services. These services should be well-funded and provided through partnerships with children, parents, families, neighborhoods, and communities. We suggest that organizations assess (with families) how poverty-aware their practices are and aim to 'poverty-proof' local policies and practices. This process should lead to the provision of financial and practical support to help children and families, with carefully developed guidelines regarding how such assistance is applied.

3.2. Partnership, Participation, and Humane Practice

The parents who took part in the consultation shared deep concerns about being shamed, humiliated, and excluded when working with children's social care. There was a collective view that social work involvement lacked the essential elements of partnership, participation, and humanity. In addition, that involvement is focussed on risks and problems and not on coproduction and communities. Finally, the instability in the system and high worker turnover impede partnership. For example, parents shared the following:

> *There are problems with it being all meetings and no provision. Professionals lack time, social workers have to rush off from meetings and do not have time to spend with families or to deal with any issues that arise.*

The consultation found that across the UK, parent advocacy groups and local authority parent partnership programs are developing out of need and the recognition that the child protection system does not work when we fail to support parents and exclude them from being active participants in child welfare and child protection systems.

These emerging groups provide online and face-to-face support and guidance. Some parents who have been through the system serve as advocates for others who attend meetings. An example of work undertaken by a member of PFAN (who is a parent with lived experience) undertaking work without payment shows the impact that parent advocacy can have:

> *In a recent case I have been working on, the mother had had social work involvement for the past seven years. The case had stagnated, and the view of Mum was solidified. After working together with me for eight months, the most recent social work report reflects that Mum has had 'significant and unexpected personal growth and is showing real insight into her children's needs.' For the first time, the local authority is happy to agree to unsupervised contact and feels Mum is no longer a risk to her children.*

The views of the parents in the consultation align with the research into parental involvement in child protection systems (Clapton 2020; Dale 2004; Muench et al. 2017).

Parental advocacy offers a successful model of support for parents at such meetings (Tobis 2013). Research shows that promoting parent advocacy and including it alongside

services is a powerful way to change organizational cultures in child welfare systems (Lalayants 2017). Moreover, parent advocacy programs are demonstrating positive effects in terms of both proximal outcomes such as parental empowerment and engagement in services (e.g., Berrick et al. 2011; Summers et al. 2012) and distal outcomes such as reunification and permanency (e.g., Enano et al. 2016; Lalayants 2017). A recent systematic review of 13 experimental studies on parent advocacy interventions in the United States found that research outcomes are ' . . . mainly favourable, specifically for reunification rates, subsequent maltreatment incidences, utilization of resources and services, and parenting practices' (Acri et al. 2021, p. 19).

We argue that we should develop a nationwide parent–peer advocacy system in the UK with advocates who have lived experience with children's social care. Its services should be available to parents involved in all stages of children's social care/child welfare to support them, assist them in understanding their rights and responsibilities, and guide them. Furthermore, government policies should be amended to promote the participation of parents and challenge the current child rescue narrative. These policies should include a clear statement of parents' right to advocacy and support and should express the expectation that children's social care and child welfare organizations will ensure the availability of independent peer advocacy services for the parents involved with these systems. Finally, partnership and co-production with children and parents, wider family, and community should be promoted for all children in need.

3.3. Improving Legal Representation and Support in Legal Proceedings

The participants involved in the consultations described courts as often being alien and intimidating places for families and as tending to take the side of children's services. They asserted that good quality legal representation is vital. However, in the consultation, local solicitors were often considered by the parents not to properly represent them and were seen by the parents as not being independent of the local authority. Because of this, the parents argued that there is a need for a panel of independent legal representatives who are committed to strongly contesting cases on the behalf of parents and children. This parent's experience illustrates the problem:

> Susan opposed the local authority's plan for her daughter to be adopted and became convinced that the local solicitors who represented her were being influenced by their relationship with their senior managers and social workers within the town. She was criticised by the local authority for changing solicitors twice as a result of her concerns. She eventually appointed an independent solicitor from outside of the area. The court went on to return her child to her home, where she has remained.

The increases in cuts to legal aid in recent years have meant that thousands more people face family courts alone, particularly when attempting to revoke care orders. These cuts mean that some of the most vulnerable people in our society lack proper legal advice at the most significant times in their lives and in those of their families (Cobb 2013). These cuts have far-reaching effects on families, as this mother's account of winning a legal battle to have her child returned demonstrates:

> *The initial blow was having to spend all our savings on legal fees before we could qualify for legal aid. Years of hard work and saving gone almost overnight. Next, we went from being a two-income household to being on benefits. This was a huge adjustment for us as a family, but to continue to qualify for legal aid we could not afford to work. If we worked, we could not possibly make enough to pay our legal expenses. It is devastating, and the authorities are spending huge sums pursuing blame—not a solution or support.*

There are systems in the United States, notably in New York, where legal representatives for families include a team with a lawyer, a social worker, and a parent advocate. Such representation has been shown to assist parents to better engage with the court system, support fewer children staying in care, and, when a child needs care away from their

parents, help this to be achieved within shorter timeframes (Courtney and Hook 2016; Family Justice Initiative 2019). Such holistic legal support is not available to families in the UK.

We argue for the establishment of holistic family defence teams similar to the ones in the model described above so that lawyers, social workers, and parent advocates can offer the holistic, compassionate, and wrap-around support that families need during court proceedings. In addition, to promote the independence of lawyers representing parents, panels of lawyers committed to independence from the local authority need to be established. Finally, and vitally, the currently harmful and severe restrictions on who can access legal aid need to be urgently reviewed to enable better access for parents during the pre-proceedings, appeals, and applications to end care orders.

3.4. Better Support in Care Proceedings

Beyond the huge challenges of engaging with the court system, the participants in the consultation pointed to the lack of investment in therapeutic services for parents involved in care proceedings. This lack is amplified due to the short time periods (in England, 26 weeks) in which parents may make the changes required to prevent their child from entering care. More importantly, the participants indicated that if they are given appropriate support, families can make the required changes. One of the participants from New Beginnings described the following:

> *Many of our parents have been blamed for not understanding social work concerns, interrupting professionals, being disrespectful, not making eye contact (therefore they are hiding something), being unable to keep the home tidy, starting tasks but being unable to finish them, being easily distracted/unable to focus, and self-medicating with cannabis or amphetamines. They are felt to be the problem. Yet, what we have found is that many have undiagnosed ADHD or autism. We have found that as soon as parents have been supported when they stop attempting to self-medicate and receive the right kind of ADHD medication, life has calmed down, safeguarding concerns have reduced, and harmony is brought into the family home.*

Resonating this claim, Justice Sir Andrew McFarlane stated the following (cited in *The Guardian*) (Butler 2018):

> *It may properly be said that we have reached a stage where the threshold for obtaining a public law court order is noticeably low, whereas, no doubt as a result of the current financial climate, the threshold for a family being able to access specialist support services in the community is, conversely, very high.*

There is a range of sensible steps that can be taken. We argue that focussed investment is needed in therapeutic support for parents and specialist support for families with complex needs. We need to recognise that when problems become more chronic, rapid change will likely not be achievable. Therefore, the 26-week timeframe mentioned above should be extended, and services should be made available quickly when parents are making the necessary changes. Services and communities must be reconnected. Therefore, we need services that are embedded in neighbourhoods and that provide a sense of belonging to socially isolated families. Social workers need to be able to recognise and respond to signs of problems such as ADHD, autism, and other mental health and trauma-related difficulties. Moreover, training in key areas, including domestic violence, poverty, and disabilities, is imperative.

3.5. Permanence That Maintains Links

Every adoption begins with the greatest loss any parent and child can experience. This was clearly and powerfully expressed by parents in the consultation, several of whom have had their children removed and subsequently adopted. Parents who participated in the consultation expressed grave concerns about how they had been abandoned without

support, how poor communication had served to compound the harm they had suffered, and how aspects of heritage and identity had not been valued and supported.

The views shared by parents in the consultation are similar to those shared in research studies into adoption and how it is experienced. Many adopted children lose all ties to their biological families and heritages, not just to their parents, but also their grandparents, uncles, aunts, and siblings (Featherstone et al. 2018a; Neil 2002). Although adoption is viewed as the gold standard alternative care arrangement, breakdowns in adoptive placements do occur. Smith (2014) found a disruption rate of 9.5%, with at least 5% to 10% of children re-entering care following adoption orders in the US. In the UK, Selwyn, Wijedasa, and Meakings found that between 2% and 9% of adoptions are disrupted following adoption orders (Selwyn et al. 2014).

There has been a 50% increase in the number of children living separately from their birth parents in the last ten years (PFAN 2022), so there is a substantially increased population whose needs we need to understand and meet. There are significant differences between the local authorities in England and the rates of adoption. Where adoption rates have risen, the numbers of child protection investigations, children in need, and children in care have also increased (Bilson and Hunter Munro 2019). All of this suggests that the promotion of adoption is associated with a growing culture of rescue and parental blame.

An increasing number of studies from around the world show the benefits of more 'open' adoption arrangements and reveal that they can better meet the needs of the adopted child's identity and development and allow adopted children to process their thoughts and feelings about their adoptions, construct their identities, build their self-esteem, and help them to seek answers to questions (Brodzinsky 2006; Del Pozo de Bolger et al. 2021; Neil 2010). Openness in adoption arrangements tends to be beneficial not just for adoptees, but also for other adoptive family members (Smith et al. 2020). Surprisingly to some perhaps, it can increase the parents' bond with their adopted child and cement their position as repositories of childhood memories and the gatekeepers of artefacts that represent the child's early life (Brodzinsky 2014).

The current way of working can therefore be understood as damaging to all involved. We argue that adoption should only be used for orphans, and where permanent alternative care is required, special guardianship should be used and should support more open contact arrangements. Moreover, we claim that adoption and special guardianship arrangements should be predominantly open, the benefits of this type of arrangement highlighted above. Social workers who wish to push the boundaries towards more open arrangements need to be prepared to invest time, effort, and emotional energy to facilitate what is an ongoing process (Townsend 2003). In social work, formulating care plans needs to move away from the rigid, formulaic, or even 'invisible' (Kempenaar 2015) nature of many of these plans and should instead consider that plans should be strength-based, flexible, and pro-actively mediated between all of the involved parties.

3.6. Better Response to Domestic Abuse

The problematic link between domestic abuse and child protection was mentioned repeatedly throughout the consultation. Participants asserted that by linking domestic abuse with risk to children, the system doubly oppresses women. They are simultaneously subjected to domestic abuse and the threat or actuality of having their children removed. In addition, the participants revealed that once a mother is identified as having experienced domestic abuse, she is seen as not only having subjected her children to past harm but also as presenting a future risk since she is considered likely to enter into another harmful relationship in the future. One of the participants in the consultation shared the following:

> *One mother whose three older children were removed seven years before her recent pregnancy found herself in court being told she 'had been ruled out as a potential carer' for her unborn baby. Without even completing a pre-birth assessment, the local authority felt the historical evidence was sufficient to write this woman off for life. Thankfully, a parent advocate's fight to achieve a mother and baby placement for her was eventually*

successful, and all current assessments show huge growth and change. This woman, who had been written off for who she was almost a decade previously, is successfully parenting a child with no further state involvement.

Moreover, the participants in the consultation described professionals as lacking an in-depth understanding of the nature of controlling relationships and how abusive partners may use the system to continue control and abuse. Research has demonstrated that this lack of understanding is reflected in a one-size-fits-all policy that hampers an in-depth understanding of the issues involved in each family (Daniel 2017; Ferguson et al. 2020; Masson and Parton 2020). Moreover, such a policy ignores a vast body of knowledge that points to different kinds of domestic abuse, each of which requires a different response, and to the fact that although specific violent acts can look alike, risks differ by type (Alaggia et al. 2015).

We argue that we should develop parent advocacy with a specific focus on advocates with lived experience of both children's social care and domestic abuse. Moreover, we need to develop knowledge about the different types of domestic abuse in practice and develop tailor-made services that respond differentially to different families' needs.

3.7. Disabled Children

Disabled children and their families are amongst the most severely disadvantaged groups in society. Accordingly, current legislation in the UK states that all disabled children are in need and that social work agencies have a duty to safeguard and promote their welfare. Nonetheless, the parents who contributed to the consultation shared experiences of requesting support but then being forced through a process where the focus was on risk, safeguarding, and child protection. They reported that when no safeguarding issue was found, they were left with no support for the needs that first led them to request assistance and were often too traumatized by the process to ask for it again. They also mentioned that they had to resort to hiring a solicitor or taking their case to a tribunal to even get an assessment of their child's needs. One parent's experience illustrated many of these issues:

I found the social worker aggressive. The process felt intrusive and not at all supportive. We felt confused and powerless in a process that made our situation worse. The social worker frequently failed to meet timelines and never provided any information to explain the process we were going through or where we could find better support and information. We were made to feel that we were failures as parents, that my daughter was a burden on the local authority because her needs are so great, and that we could not meet her needs.

A key issue identified by parents in the consultation was the social workers' lack of knowledge of disabilities. The views shared by parents in the consultation portrayed significant and worrying issues that they faced when trying to access support:

We had a total of 18 social workers. Only two had any disability experience. The child in need plan was finally completed four years later after I resorted to obtaining a solicitor.

Parents revealed that they found social work was all meetings and no provision. Families described how there was a great deal of activity—meetings held, assessments carried out, reports written—but that this activity rarely translated into anything that was in helpful to the children or their families in any way. One parent shared the following:

Needs are identified, but there is no way to force needs to be met if support is not found. We are constantly told we qualify for a personal assistant, but the department is fully aware that there are no PAs available in our area. We have now also lost our respite centre and are only told that the council is trying to find something else, but for over a year, nothing else has been offered.

Again, the views of parents in the consultation are in line with themes of research into support for parents of children with disabilities. Clements and Aiello (2021) call this investigative approach institutionalizing parent blame. In their research, they found parent blame was institutionalized into national and local procedures and policies in the UK and are embedded in the assessment protocols that guide the actions of front-line workers.

Many disabled children are, in practice, being refused assessments of their needs due to assessment criteria that create unlawful barriers (Clements and Aiello 2021) to accessing their statutory rights to support by adding additional severe definitions of what constitutes a 'disabled child'. Indeed, statistics gathered through a series of freedom of information requests by one of the authors, Andy Bilson (2022), show a rapid increase in assessments of disabled children that focus on child protection.

Parents of children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to being accused of fabricating or inducing their children's illnesses (FII). The term FII and the approach to identifying and responding to it have been strongly criticized for the lack of any evidence base (Gullon-Scott and Long 2022). Groups that represent parents with disabled children report that many of their members have been wrongly accused of FII, particularly when seeking extra help, asking for a second opinion, or due to a disagreement between medical staff regarding their child's condition (see, e.g., Autism Eye 2018; Colby 2014; Siret 2019; Ehlers Danlos Support UK 2017; Not Fine in Schools 2018). When such allegations are made about how these parents care for their children, the impact can be profound and long-lasting.

We argue that changes must be made to the national and local guidance that supports this parent-blaming approach. For this to happen, administrative tools such as assessment protocols would need to focus on supporting families rather than on risk and harm. We argue that there is a need for separate guidance for assessment and provisions for children with disabilities. Furthermore, social work and social workers need to develop knowledge of children's specific conditions when carrying out assessments with families. Finally, there is a clear need to improve the funding for children with disabilities.

In what follows, we discuss how the actions taken in the consultation and the fact that it was genuinely co-produced can inspire critical scholarship focussed on real-world change.

4. Discussion

Up until this section, the article has focussed on the aim of providing a critical view of the English child protection system based on parents' views. In this discussion, we hope to meet our second aim, i.e., to present the value of co-production in the context of child protection studies, both as a form of critical scholarship and as a means of influencing policy and practice. To do so, we first discuss the value of co-production for critical child protection scholarship. Next, we suggest five features of the consultation that, in our view, supported a meaningful and critical co-production process.

Taking a structural approach, critical child protection scholarship recognises that child protection systems have governance, control, and normative functions that reflect and maintain political, cultural, and social norms (Keddell 2021). Thus, critical child protection studies require the acknowledgement of the immense impact of social injustice and inequality on families and children. As this Special Issue demonstrates, there has been an increase in studies that apply critical analysis to the child protection system. However, the development of paradigmatic and methodological concepts that can contribute to this body of knowledge is scant. We suggest that critical child protection studies need to 'redress inequalities by giving precedence... to the voices of the least advantaged groups in society' (Mertens et al. 2009, p. 89). Thus, it should encourage the use of research for social justice purposes, including making such research accessible for public education, social policymaking, and community transformation.

While we are cautious about framing the consultation as a successful process of co-production (the question of what makes such a process successful is beyond the scope of this article), our collective experience, alongside the feedback from those who took part in the consultation, points to five features that made this process meaningful and that supported critical scholarship: taking a political stance, choosing clear and feasible aims, incorporating a range of knowledge, the participation of parents with lived experience throughout all phases of the consultation, and not settling for knowledge production.

Taking a political stance: In line with Hyslop and Keddell's (2018) assertion that progressive child protection practice and scholarship require political advocacy alongside practice reforms, it is important to acknowledge the explicit framing of the consultation process as an ethical and political act. By being aware that 'the radical values of co-production may be replaced by those of the market, in a rush to tick a 'participatory' box for research funding' (Critchley and Mitchell 2020, p. 2300), the consultation purposefully took a political stance. It did so in two main ways: first, by pointing to the oppressive nature of the current child protection system and committing to working towards transforming policy and practice, and second, by asserting that bringing the voices of parents into the realm of policymaking is an issue of human rights and social power. Making these two premises explicit is the key to utilizing co-production in a transformative manner.

Choosing clear and feasible aims: Interestingly, the question of whether to engage with the Care Review evoked an important discussion about the routes taken to promote change. Some of the PFAN members were reluctant to engage with the review team and voiced concerns that such a collaboration might be used to co-opt parent voices. What helped to resolve this discussion was agreeing on a focussed mission of presenting parents' views to the review and making them widely available to the people responsible for children's social care. Thus, articulating the aims of the consultation in terms of feasible measures and ensuring it would enable some accessibility to policymakers was crucial for both the process and the outcomes of the consultation.

Incorporating a range of knowledge: As described above, the consultation involved a range of participants from different backgrounds and social positions. Basing the report on this unique blend of people highlights the fact that the consultation and the wider PFAN project are rooted in a clear social epistemology that recognizes the experiential knowledge of people resisting social oppression in daily life as well as the key role they play in taking effective action against social exclusion. The importance of diverse voices is reflected in the range of specific areas covered by the participants, e.g., poverty, domestic abuse, and disabled children.

Participation of parents with lived experience throughout all phases of the consultation: Whilst the concept of co-production is widespread, what constitutes co-production remains largely contested (Carpentier 2016; Oliver et al. 2019). There are also different levels of collaboration and co-production that range from tokenistic ones to genuine and empowering ones. As Oliver, Kothari, and Mays (Oliver et al. 2019) note, '[t]here are many forms of collaborative research practices, including coproduction, co-design, co-creation, stakeholder and public engagement, participation/involvement and integrated knowledge translation . . . ' (ibid., p. 17). A major feature of our consultation was that aside from the various groups and people with lived experiences who contributed, the consultation was co-initiated and co-facilitated by the PFAN team, which includes both parents and allies. This core group was involved in each phase of the consultation: the discussions regarding the aims, the development of questions for the consultation, the analysis of the contributions received from the groups, the writing of different parts of the final report, campaigning with the report, and, finally, the writing and reviewing of this article. Importantly, we do not wish to paint a sugar-coated picture of the process. Such work is rife with power issues, and eventually, much of the actual writing of the report was carried out by the academics in the group. However, we all feel confident that this work reflects our joint endeavours and diverse contributions to a genuine co-production.

Not settling for knowledge production: As described above, the production of the report was only a first step in the consultation and the wider PFAN project. Based on a deep commitment to social justice and promoting the reform of the child protection system, both aspire to make an impact on the social reality of children and their families. Thus, the dissemination of the report was an integral and crucial part of the consultation and aimed to promote a better understanding of parents' views on and experiences with the system. The campaign that followed the publication of the report included several avenues, each of which targeted different audiences and had different aims. The report was presented to

the Care Review team, aiming to influence policymakers and their decisions directly. The report was also presented on BBC Radio Four, a national radio station in the UK. Given that social policy is heavily influenced by public discourse, campaigning via media is a crucial part of any work for social change. This is especially relevant in the context of child protection, where the public discourse regarding parents is deeply stigmatizing and blaming (Clapton 2020; Featherstone et al. 2018b). The report was also promoted through work with the social work press. This included articles being published in *Community Care*, *Professional Social Work*, and a blog on research in practice. PFAN hosted a webinar in which the different groups that contributed to the consultation presented their work and shared it with the wider community in an attempt to put social work's mission into practice by 'working across academic, practice, and class boundaries to . . . build a pedagogy of resistance that enables a rereading of the world and a re-visioning of the future' (Kina and Gonçalves 2018, p. 373).

5. Conclusions

The parents and allies who took part in the consultation identified seven key areas for change in the current children's social care system and offered constructive suggestions for transformation. We are pleased that the Care Review has recommended that parent advocacy be available for parents in the child protection system in England and has suggested significant funding for its implementation. However, we are also aware of the wider political, social, and economic structures that underpin current policy and practice that were not addressed by the review and that might threaten the implementation of this recommendation. Indeed, our suggestions were made against the background of growing inequalities, a defensive social care system in which there has been a constant withering of support for families, a redirection of what help remains into investigations of families, and an increase in the removal of children into care and adoption. This article and the consultation have attempted to show how critical child protection scholarship can and perhaps should be a conscious political act aimed at promoting collaborative change towards more humane, compassionate, and socially just ways of working with families.

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Article

Protective Support and Supportive Protection: Critical Reflections on Safe Practice and Safety in Supervision

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Abstract: This paper was based on a framework for practice and supervision based on 'protective-support and supportive-protection' (PS-SP) that can be used to discuss and plan for practice in a way that maximises the capacity of workers in child protection and welfare (CPW) services to provide support and protection simultaneously. The framework is underpinned by a long-established assumption about social work in child protection and welfare as a socio-legal practice of mediation in the social. The PS-SP framework was initially developed within an ecological context with a focus on networks and networking. In this paper, we developed this framework further, framing practice supervision using four functions of supervision (management, support, development, and mediation) and including a fifth component on safety. We did this alongside a review of related considerations around safety in supervision in general and in child protection and welfare in particular. While noting the important contribution of this work, we identified ongoing gaps for supervision focused on safety when considered within an ecological context. Bearing in mind the well-evidenced stress, challenges, and vicarious nature of child protection and welfare practice, we argued the importance of a wider framework based on PS-SP for supervision and support to manage this complexity with a particular emphasis on 'safety' as a contribution to this. To illustrate our framework and discussion, we referred to a case study throughout. This case study is drawn from a high-profile child abuse inquiry in Ireland over a decade ago. This case was chosen as it demonstrates the complex interplay of needs for support and protection over extended time. We considered how the PS-SP framework may be used in the present (hypothetically) regarding such a case scenario.

Keywords: supportive protection; protective support; supervision; safety; practitioner; child protection; welfare; support

1. Introduction

As Spratt et al. (2015) contend "child protection is the public issue of our time with increased public scrutiny of practice driven by public service enquiries and changing political and economic contexts" (citing Fernandez 2014, p. 801; Heino 2012, p. 157). Despite being such a well-researched area globally, child abuse and neglect, or child maltreatment remains a major social problem that requires interventions at individual, family, community, and societal levels. There are many and ongoing critiques of practice in this area, often in response to high-profile tragedies that diminish public and media confidence in the capacity of systems and professionals to respond appropriately to child abuse and neglect. A major challenge for systems and for practitioners is balancing the delivery of family support and child protection services with diversity in the orientations of child welfare systems evident globally (Gilbert et al. 2011; Merkel-Holguin et al. 2018; Canavan et al. 2022). One may argue that this has been advanced with the greater expansion of use of well-established models of child protection practice, such as Signs of Safety (Turnell and Murphy 2017) or Reclaiming Social Work (Cross et al. 2010) and family support practice, such as the Meitheal model in Ireland (DCEDIY 2022) that emphasises a strengths and partnership approach.

However, it can also be argued these models and associated supervision practices tend to focus on the micro-level of practice, without considering the impact of wider social factors. This is despite it being well-established that child welfare services aimed at support and protection need to be reoriented firmly towards an inequalities framework in light of the overarching evidence from studies such as Bywaters and the Child Welfare Inequalities Project Team (2020). For example, in Signs of Safety (SoS), the main role of the supervisor is to ensure fidelity and support the implementation of the practice model for families where it seems there is little or no focus on safety from the point of view of the practitioner (Keddell 2014). In our framework, use of the ecological model, within a networking context, is offered as one way to address this. Another limitation is that when applying different models of practice, most often, they do not fully address the inter-relationship between support and protection and can tend to be used in isolation or separately as a 'family support' or a 'child protection' model. For example, while Meitheal and Signs of Safety have many common features in the Irish context (Malone et al. 2018), there is no formal attempt to consider their interrelationship in the current model for integrated services. In the development of our model, as explained below, we attempted to contribute to informing how we can better integrate our approaches to protection and support.

We begin, in Devaney and McGregor (2017), with an historical overview of the history of family support (Devaney 2011) and history of child protection (Skehill 2007) to highlight the intrinsic interconnection between the histories of what we commonly refer to as 'family support' and 'child protection' and the nature of practices therein. Following on from this, in (McGregor and Devaney 2020a), we used a range of data sources to demonstrate that many families are 'in the middle' with regard for needs for support and protection. We followed this with an article (McGregor and Devaney 2020b) that broadened the consideration to how a practice and supervision framework based on protective support and supportive protection can incorporate the ecological model and a networking approach to take account of these wider factors more effectively in one-to-one practice and supervision.

From this work, the PS-SP framework of practice and supervision has emerged. The PS and SP framework advocates that children and young people are best protected by providing responsive support to them, to their parents, their family, and their wider networks. It further holds that practitioners working in CPW systems have both the responsibility and capacity to provide protective supports and supportive protection to children, young people, parents, and families. This framework is based on the fact that most families involved with the CPW system have changing levels of need and risk over time and are simultaneously in need of both support and protection (Devaney et al. 2021). As families' circumstances and levels of risk and need change over time, so too must the system's response to this. Families who receive the appropriate support response in a timely manner can progress to managing their challenges, functioning well, and ensuring children are protected and thriving. However, situations can change, relationships can deteriorate, and levels of need and risk can rise again. In order to emphasise the fluidity needed in a CPW system which reflects the need for 'protective support and supportive protection' and to respond to the complexities and changing levels of need and risk in families' lives over time, the authors adapted the four-tiered Hardiker model (Hardiker et al. 1991) to reflect this dynamic, open continuum, and to also include and account for the important role of informal social support in helping family members. The framework adds value in three key areas: it usefully focuses attention on the majority of 'families in the middle' and their fluctuating need for supportive as well as protective responses (categorised as Level 2–4a) and it brings 'informal support networks' (with this new Level 1a) into the frame of analysis, acknowledging the role of family, wider kin, and community in preventative support. It also crystallises that while 'universal' or 'Level 1' services are mostly supportive, there is also a need for a sharper emphasis on needs for protection rather than seeing this as something to be considered when the family's level of need is classified as Level 3 or 4 only. It also offers a way to shift beyond the negative impact of an over-focus on risk, especially in terms of how threatening this can be to families, by emphasising that

even at Level 3 and 4, where the focus is on legal protection, extensive supportive work remains essential. The framework is a scaffold for analysis, reflection, and thinking about a situation that seeks to address the known limits of support services that tend to refer to rather than engage with risk issues in a way that minimises emphasis on the supportive relationship and need for an integrated approach. Thirdly, it offers a framework to inform practice by highlighting that practitioners who are offering mostly support services need to be confident and competent in addressing child welfare concerns (beyond just legal requirements or mandatory reporting). Likewise, those offering risk management and protection services need to have excellent skills in supportive, relationship-based practice.

However, while providing an in-depth guide to how one might map and begin to address these issues, we suggest the framework, as it stands, remains too broad. To focus the work more stringently, we paid more attention in this article to the processes of supervision using Dr Tony Morrison's four functions of supervision, namely management, support, development, and mediation (Morrison and Hathaway 2005). We also argued that a greater focus on 'safety' as a core defining feature of supervision is needed based on the work of McPherson et al. (2016) situated within a wider ecological and network-based context. We emphasise that PS-SP is not another practice model. It is a broad framework for critical analysis, reflection, and thinking about the complex field of supporting and protecting children and families that can scaffold practice and supervision discussions.

With this starting point in mind, this paper considered how the broad framework of protective-support and supportive-protection in child protection and welfare (Devaney and McGregor 2017; McGregor and Devaney 2020a, 2020b) can complement and support the current demands and responsibilities of child welfare practitioners that pays attention to safety as a defining focus. We did this in the following ways.

In Section 2, we update and review international literature on child welfare orientations and practices that demonstrate a continued focus on 'interface' or 'integration' of support and protection. In this, we include a commentary on how safety and safe practice are conceptualised. We suggest our existing PS-SP framework contributes to this by providing a way to reflect on protection and support in an integrated and dualistic matter. In Section 3, in order to inform this development, we review current literature on supervision in general and safety in supervision in particular. We underline the contribution of this work but also highlight the limits of a focus on psychological or therapeutic 'safety'. In Section 4, our discussion, we consider the knowledge base to date on PS-SP and on supervision and safety and consider how we can advance our thinking and practice based on this. To illustrate our framework and discussion, we refer to a case study throughout. This case study is drawn from a high-profile child abuse inquiry in Ireland. This case is chosen as it demonstrates the complex interplay of needs for support and protection over extended time. We consider how the PS-SP framework may be used in the present (hypothetically) regarding such a case scenario to inform the application of the framework to practice scenarios. We propose ways in which the PS-SP framework can complement existing supervision models, extended to include a wider ecological and networked context. We conclude that no matter how many new frameworks we debate and advocate, it is down to the practitioners and those who supervise and support them to implement it in very complex contexts and how they have to feel safe in doing so.

2. Orientations in Child Welfare: Implications for Practice

As discussed in previous work and updated here, there is an array of literature to inform us on the orientations of child welfare systems and which considers how child protection and support is organised and delivered. Below we discuss some of the prominent themes in this literature, highlighting the complexities involved and raise the question of how practitioners operating in these systems and doing the direct work are supported and supervised in relation to safe practice that takes account of this complex context. We suggest that the PS-SP framework offers a useful tool, which resonates across jurisdictions

and orientations, to help mediate and manage child protection and welfare practices and systems.

It is well known that child protection and welfare systems are shaped by their national and regional context. Today, in nearly all jurisdictions, there is a marked emphasis on rights (Lonne et al. 2021; Spratt et al. 2015; Gilbert et al. 2011). This is true for established systems such as the Irish welfare and protection system (Burns and McGregor 2019; Tusla 2019), the devolved regions of the United Kingdom (Bunting et al. 2017, p. 6), the Netherlands (López et al. 2018), France (Bolter and Séraphin 2019), and evolving systems such as those in Hungary and Romania (Anghel et al. 2013, p. 248), Mexico (Valencia Corral et al. 2020, p. 3), and India (Rotabi et al. 2019). Of relevance to this paper is the emphasis on a right to both support and protection as needed.

Gilbert et al. (2011) and Collins (2018, p. 371) have noted the "pendulum swing" between prevention and protection throughout systems and identify public agenda setting as a driver in the orientation of systems. The way support and protection are implemented has been advanced with current developments in research relating to intervention, prevention, and public health models. For example, Malone and Canavan (2021) noted that the current trend in practice is orientated towards intervention and prevention, while Lonne et al. (2021, p. 12) pointed out that a public health paradigm of universal prevention approaches is emerging. This universal preventative approach is held by some to be an effective response to the prevalence of child maltreatment and systemic failures (Daro 2019, p. 17; Herrenkohl et al. 2020; Churchill and Fawcett 2016). There are ongoing challenges, however, in the idea of replacing one system type with another, with greater efforts required to support practitioners and service managers to examine how best to mediate and manage practice in the context of an ongoing and dynamic interplay between support and protection. In Ireland, for example, while there has been a shift to greater attention to support, prevention, and early intervention since the establishment of Tusla -Child and Family Agency (Tusla), like many other child welfare systems, the focus remains within a narrower child protection focus (Canavan et al. 2022). The implementation of the Meitheal model as a national practice model for family support (DCEDIY 2022) and Signs of Safety (Turnell and Murphy 2017) as a national model for child protection within Tusla has reinforced a positioning of 'support' and 'protection' both conceptually and in practice as 'interfacing' rather than 'integrated'. This is despite both models deriving from very similar core values and principles (Malone et al. 2018). While helpfully differentiating between levels of need and associated service response, the day-to-day reality for practice and practitioners is that the majority of child welfare interventions are with 'families in the middle' who are usually in need of both support and protection either at the same time or at different times, moving between levels and thresholds (McGregor and Devaney 2020a) with children and young people at risk of abuse or neglect protected by timely, appropriate support and protection. However, the complexity of addressing the need for support and protection across a person's or family's whole eco-system requires a more structured and detailed framework than is presently available, as discussed in (McGregor and Devaney 2020b). With our framework, our argument is that it should not be about 'either/or' as if the systems re-interfacing and separate, but rather that we place PS-SP as an overarching framework to better inform practice using the well-defined thresholds and continuums of practice that are essential for decision making, needs analysis, and service delivery. In McGregor and Devaney (2020a), we argued that the Hardiker model (for example) should be developed to incorporate differentiation of high-risk work that comes into the PS-SP frame and which aligns more within a criminal justice model. We also suggested the addition of the role of informal support and protection referred to later. Here, we illustrated how the model can be applied specifically in relation to safety and safe practice in supervision and practice development (p. 28).

The facts are that despite in-depth analysis of many dimensions of child welfare practice, there continues to be widespread evidence of increasing rates of referrals to child protection and welfare systems in the international literature due to wider definitions of need

and risk, which broadens the scope for service provision (Canavan and Furey 2019). This has resulted in increased demand on systems, which has led to discussions around differentiation within services in order to provide a service that is responsive, relevant, and appropriate to family needs and circumstances (Churchill and Fawcett 2016; Gilbert et al. 2011). This can be seen in dualistic approaches that are tailored to the particular needs of cohorts who are either most at risk with an acute need for protection, or a those with non-urgent need for welfare interventions (Trocmé et al. 2014, p. 484; Churchill and Fawcett 2016, p. 310). This approach can be seen in the US, Australia, Canada, and Ireland (Spratt 2008, p. 420; Trocmé et al. 2014, p. 484; Malone and Canavan 2021).

Many authors have reflected on the effectiveness of these various orientations towards service provision. Kojan and Lonne (2012) compared the social democratic Norwegian child protection and welfare system to the neoliberal Australian system, which is orientated towards protection from risk of harm and neglect in order to consider the effectiveness of their respective regimes. They note that the Australian system emphasises procedures and standardised assessment with increasing investigations and risk-averse interventions, resulting in rising numbers of children in out-of-home care. Conversely, even though the significant professional discretion in Norway gives room for contextual solutions, high numbers of children enter out-of-home care. Nonetheless, the authors maintained that as both systems are functioning well there may be room to consider the learning in each one (Kojan and Lonne 2012, p. 105). Pösö et al. (2014) argued that a universal family service orientation may ignore diversity of needs and rights of children needing protection and support. However, in such deliberations, less emphasis is placed on the question of how the practitioner is supported in doing this complex work, whatever the 'orientation' of the system, that demands complex and delicate mediation between support and protection for children, young people, and families. This becomes more problematic when one considers this practice of support and protection within an ecological context.

For example, with regard to culture, which imbues all aspects of the ecological levels, as Rotabi et al. (2019) argued, practice must be grounded in a culturally relevant values base to be effective (see also, Jabeen 2016; Chung et al. 2022). Authors have also called for the integration of family and community-based efforts to support child protection to support a sustainable practice in the safeguarding in the absence of formalised regulated systems in the African literature (Canavera et al. 2016, p. 366). This reflection on cultural strengths in developing systems, including the role of communities, especially indigenous communities and informal networks of support, offers alternative routes to child safeguarding that are culturally acceptable and sustainable (Canavera et al. 2016; Connolly and Katz 2019).

Additionally, thinking of exo- and macro- levels of the ecological system in particular, numerous authors have criticised the individualisation of social problems under neo-liberal system reforms and innovation as a solution to child maltreatment in society. This is because these orientations towards prevention and intervention do not address the structural roots of issues that drive child maltreatment in society due to a focus on issues of family functioning at the expense of material improvements in family lives and communities (O'Leary and Lyons 2021, p. 2; Churchill and Fawcett 2016, p. 315; Bolter and Séraphin 2019, p. 76). The need to rethink child protection and welfare in the context of the reality of the impact of inequality has been well established (Bywaters and the Child Welfare Inequalities Project Team 2020; Maguire-Jack and Katz 2022). This reinforces the importance of an ecological and network frame (McGregor and Devaney 2020b) that recognises the relationship between social context and inequalities and child protection and welfare practice (Bywaters and the Child Welfare Inequalities Project Team 2020; see also El Husseiny et al. 2021; Schmid 2007). It is of particular interest to note that all the discussions above, in one way or another, are concerned with the inter-play between support and protection and this manifests itself in many ways internationally. For example, Katz and Hetherington (2006, p. 429) considered the range of differences between dualistic and holistic systems in the European context. Dualistic systems are child protection focused, and family support is in the main dealt with separately, while holistic systems promote

family support and prevention, on a continuum of care. Ireland provides an example of a holistic system in a traditionally rudimentary regime, as practice in principle often combines child-focused protection and interventions, and family support through a mixed provision of service led by a state agency, combined with provision from community and third-sector organisations (Burns and McGregor 2019, p. 132; Malone and Canavan 2021, p. 6). It is within an Irish context specifically that McGregor and Devaney advocated for further advancement of a 'holistic' approach by framing practice in terms of protective-support (when mostly working in a supportive context) and supportive-protection (when mostly working in a protection context). The underpinning message, as reinforced in international literature, is that most intervention is with the majority of families ('families in the middle') who require both support and protection simultaneously. It is for this reason that we think that the PS-SP framework situated within an ecological context is well placed to enhance both supervision and practice in this area.

Throughout the discussions on orientations in child welfare in general, while much emphasis is placed on practice guidance and requirements, less attention is paid to the support and supervision for the practitioner to deliver safely on this complex issue that is, beyond doubt, a major political and public concern internationally. Overall, we can conclude from the literature that while there is a prevalence of ongoing dynamic change processes across various jurisdictions with an emphasis upon improved professional practice, system integration, and better outcomes for children and families (Lonne et al. 2021, p. 3), there is limited attention paid to the supervision and support for the practitioner to implement these practices and systems on a day-to-day basis. Implicit within the discussions above are concerns about safety practices, policy and practice guidance, safeguarding approaches, and practice models focused on safety (e.g., Signs of Safety). From this synthesis of some of the literature relating to orientations in child welfare and the emphasis on safety therein, it is clear that the practitioner and supervisor operate in a tricky space and have a great deal to consider. The PS-SP framework serves as a way of considering the duality that is referred to in the literature. It promotes an approach that is well beyond interface—as we know that is too simplistic for most realities of child welfare practice—and towards an integrative and interactive approach. Underpinned by children's right to protection, development, support, and survival, the PS-SP framework offers substance and foundation to build on what is already available. As discussed below in Section 3, supervision plays a key role in child protection and welfare practice. However, in these approaches, there is notably limited attention paid to safety when it comes to supporting the people who are charged to deliver on the ground in relation to support and protection. Even where this is present, most notably influenced by the work of McPherson et al., etc., it tends to focus on the micro aspects of safety, for example, relational and psychological aspects. In the discussion, we consider how an emphasis on protective support-supportive protection, with a particular focus on safety across the ecological system, can add to existing models and practices to help address the widely acknowledged public and political problem of improving child welfare outcomes. We acknowledge safety is just one of many core concerns in child welfare intervention and we suggest this framework can be adapted to include a range of 'scaffolds' for critical reflection, analysis, and thinking about how best to intervene, especially in complex cases (thinking specifically about risk management) affected by both individual and socio-structural factors.

3. Supervision in Child Protection and Welfare

It is generally accepted that working with children and families is complex, with each set of circumstances and family being unique. Policy makers, managers, practitioners, and academics generally agree that good supervision is essential for high-quality practice in children and family services (Beddoe et al. 2014) and it is recognised as an essential resource for practitioners if they are to provide services which benefit children and their families. In child protection and welfare social work services, supervision is identified as a core feature of practice and is described as a "core mechanism for helping social workers reflect on the

understanding they are forming of the family . . . their emotional response and whether this is adversely affecting their reasoning, and for making decisions" (Munro 2009). As Munro (2011) cautioned, helping families can "never be simply a case of taking an intervention off a shelf and applying it to a family" (p. 44). Expanding on this viewpoint, Thompson (2009) described how "the field of practice is not a static, passive recipient of expert knowledge. The situation itself 'talks back', resists and constrains the practitioner's every move" (p. 319). There is a need, therefore, for high-quality support and supervision to counteract some of the tension and complexity in CPW and to support the work towards meeting the needs of children and families. Munro (2001) described supervision as a core mechanism for critical reflection on the understanding of the family, for workers to consider their emotional response and whether it is adversely affecting their reasoning, and for making decisions about how best to help (p. 53).

Supervision for practitioners in children and family services is typically described as a process which is multidisciplinary, collaborative, and relevant across a range of helping professions (Davys and Beddoe 2010). The goal of supervision is to enhance supervisees' professional knowledge, practice skills, and social functioning, and to develop the quality of professional service that is provided to clients (Bogo and Sewell 2018). Through supervision, social workers' abilities are strengthened, and it is ensured that social workers are held accountable for the services they render. Linking supervision to job satisfaction and the retention of social workers, Carpenter et al. (2013) emphasised that if supervisees have a positive experience of supervision, they are more likely to be motivated and view their role and work within the organisation more favourably. Furthermore, Beddoe et al. (2014) identified supervision as central to good practice and found that supervision contributes to competent professional practices that benefit service users. Moreover, there is also a strong correlation between effective supervision and outcomes for service users with evidence suggesting that supervision may promote empowerment, fewer complaints, and more positive feedback (Akesson and Canavera 2017). This means that service users also benefit in the supervision process because social workers are empowered and encouraged to perform their duties properly.

The literature originally referred to the functions of supervision as administrative, educative, and supportive (Kadushin 1976), while Morrison developed these ideas further and referred to competent, accountable performance or practice (managerial); continuing professional development (developmental); personal support (supportive); and engaging the individual with the organisation (mediation function). Richards et al. (1990) initially added this fourth function—mediation—describing it as the "capacity to act as a representative for the team and to enable others to participate in service delivery" (Richards et al. 1990, p. 14). The meditative aspect of supervision explicitly recognises the complex and competing personal, organisational, and professional agendas present in the supervision encounter (Morrison and Hathaway 2005). Aligned with this point are critiques of the supervision process which note that supervision is used as an opportunity to shape the practitioner into organisationally preferred ways of practice and that it can be solely focused on risk and used as a mechanism to prevent mistakes (Beddoe 2010). Concerns have been raised on the focus of supervision questioning as to whether it is primarily related to performance management. Baginsky et al. (2010) found that local authority managers consider supervision a mechanism for performance management, and although this may result in regular supervision, it makes it less likely the focus will be on support and learning (p. 1280). This challenge is also exacerbated by the complex recording requirements for both practice and supervision (Wilkins 2017). Undoubtedly, the challenging environment of child protection and welfare work necessitates a formal process for workers to review, reflect, evaluate, and plan, with a dual focus of ensuring good outcomes for the child, young person, and family while also attending to the professional and personal needs of the practitioner and the agency or system requirements. Indeed, O'Donoghue (2015) provided the evidence for practitioners' preference for supervision that focuses on their education, support, and practice rather than administrative matters.

Referring to the need for high standards of professional practice, Higham (2006, p. 201) highlighted the multiple social work roles (e.g., planner, assessor, evaluator, supporter, advocate, protector, and manager) that balance empowerment and emancipation with protection and support. Despite its challenges, supervision is welcomed by practitioners and used as a resource to support them in this day-to-day work. The key objectives of supervision are to improve the supervisee's capacity to do the job effectively through educational supervision; to provide clear guidelines on and familiarity with the organisation's mission policies to enable workers to perform their duties; and, lastly, to provide emotional and moral support to the supervisees so that they can have a sense of belonging and satisfaction in their job (Kadushin and Harkness 2014). As noted, practitioners working in child protection and welfare require a safe space for supervision and support to manage this complex and challenging role. In order to protect and support children, young people and families' practitioners must feel, and perceive themselves to be, protected (safe), and supported.

McPherson and colleagues (McPherson et al. 2016) usefully called for organisations to plan for, resource, and prioritise supervision in child and family practice and a conceptual framework that addresses multidimensional nature of practice and supervision. To this end, we include a focus specifically on safety, alongside Morison's four functions of supervision in the context of support and protection. This work advances thinking about safety in practice beyond 'health and safety', keeping children and families safe from a child protection perspective (as referenced above) and physical safety of practitioners in relation to the day-to-day practice. This illustrates how the framework can be used and how other concepts, such as tackling child welfare inequality or working across the life course with families and children can be adapted from this.

4. Discussion: Protecting and Supporting Child Protection and Welfare Practitioners through Safe Supervision

Regardless of the orientation or jurisdiction, the evidence is compelling that child welfare interventions and practice is underpinned by a balancing of support and protection within a rights-based framework. We have already discussed the many theories and practice models that exist to conceptualise and to some extent guide this mediation work. However, as Keddell (2014) argued in relation to one of the most well-known models, Signs of Safety, while it has provided practice guidance and supervisory contexts to focus on safety, partnership, and collaboration with families, it remains focused mostly on the micro-level. There is a need for a more expansive framework, within which specific models and approaches can continue to be used, that captures the complex inter-play of protection and support by using an ecological and networked approach as the norm, which is the case in the PS-SP framework that we illustrate in this discussion by reference to a case study example.

A Case Study to apply the PS-SP framework

The paper now presents key points from an Irish case inquiry report, the Roscommon Child Care Case, in order to consider the application of the PS-SP model in practice and to reflect on its strengths and limitations. This inquiry report (Gibbons 2010) concerned a family of six children whose two parents were convicted of incest, neglect, ill-treatment (Mrs. A), and rape and sexual assault (Mr. A). A key concern in the inquiry report was the extent to which too much emphasis was placed on an optimistic focus on support to the detriment of a sufficient amount of protection for the children (p. 69). A key feature of the case was that there was extensive family support and child protection interventions with the family over many years.

Key points of relevance to this paper from the Inquiry report include:

- The Inquiry Team concluded that the six children were neglected and emotionally abused by their parents until their removal from the home (p. 94). These children were denied their most basic needs for security, food, warmth, clothing, and the loving

care of their parents. They were abused by their parents in their home where they had every right to feel safe (p. 4)

- There is no evidence that either parent understood or sought to consistently meet their children's needs. Both parents, but particularly Mr. A, successfully resisted the efforts of professionals to work in a meaningful way with the children, while appearing to be cooperative on the surface (p. 94).

- Other significant issues raised were an uncertainty that the children were being adequately fed, concern that both parents were drinking to excess, and that the family money was being spent on alcohol rather than food (p. 22).

- There was a belief that these parents could, with support, meet the needs of their children (p. 94).

- The services put in to support the family, although very well intentioned, failed on many occasions to respond fully to the chaos of their daily lives, failed to recognise the risk indicators that arose, and, as a consequence, failed to respond appropriately to the needs of the children (p. 4).

- The six children at the centre of this case were denied their voices on many occasions (p. 5).

- The personnel involved with this family relied on a perceived strong attachment of the children to their parents. They did not recognise classic indicators of insecure disorganised attachment (p. 89).

- A consistent aspect of this case was the attempts by relatives and neighbours to highlight the plight of these children. The concerns expressed by neighbours and family members were consistent with each other and over time (p. 88).

The Inquiry Report also noted:

- Child welfare and protection work is challenging. Child welfare and protection work carries risk. It is not easy to get it right and no person or system will get the balance right all of the time. Most of the services involved with the A family were hopeful that there could be change. That hope is essential to the delivery of services to families experiencing difficulties. However, hope needs to be informed by some evidence of change and of life getting better for children (p. 5).

- Workers should be mindful of the need to consider alternative plans where the desired outcomes are not achieved. In all situations it is important that the case file records the reflective thinking, planning and consideration of outcomes that is guiding the work for the child and family (p. 88).

This case inquiry occurred over a decade ago and the practice issues relate mostly to the late 20th and into the early 21st century. Much has changed since then but the case itself serves as a good illustration of the complex interplay of support and protection needs. We refer to the case as one that can be accessed for learning and reflection purposes and reflect on how an SP-PS approach to practice and supervision may assist in the mindset, context, and knowledge of today.[1]

The late Dr Morrison contended that "the quality of child protection and welfare work will never improve unless agencies understand and invest in high quality supervision" (Morrison and Hathaway 2005, p. 138). In addition, and in order to provide this level of reflective supervision, managers tasked with providing such support require training and knowledge which provides them with the skills to support individual workers (Munro 2011). As Wilkins et al. (2017) noted, to create good social work practice, we need to ensure that social workers are provided with the right supervision, and to ensure this, we have to provide support for managers and create the right systemic conditions. Finding a model of social work supervision that avoids a dialectic between either being a therapeutic, introspective activity or as a tool for surveillance is critical (Manthorpe et al. 2015, p. 3; Beddoe et al. 2014, p. 1). Connecting this to our case example, the complexity of the case would be such that time and space for reflection would need to be structured in a planned way under each of the headings of Management, Mediation, Development and Support with the overarching theme of safety. The PS-SP framework could be used here as a tool for

case management to highlight the 'duality of support and protection' that was needed in this case. This could mean that rather than addressing tasks separately (e.g., a supervision order application, a home help service referral, referral to speech and language etc.) the PS-SP framework could be used as a way to consider the holistic range of services and to plan how the practitioner could network within the ecosystem of this family (which included many actors and services at the meso and exo level) so that a more integrated approach between all services could be developed. A key criticism in the inquiry was the fact that despite the involvement of so many services with the family, there was inadequate coordination and sometimes contradictions that prevented an integrated approach. Even with more well-established tools for intervention in the present day, these issues persist within our systems. For the supervision context, the task would be to shift from thinking about the list of support services and list of risk management/legal tasks and instead to come to the discussion with SP (i.e., ensuring home help is confident raising concerns from observations with the child welfare worker, which do not come within mandatory reporting but do contribute to supporting in a protective way). Likewise, ensuring the solicitors and legal team are fully aware, and trained if needed, in the range of support services available to ensure their protective/legal work does not delink completely from the supportive relational practice. The task for the person in supervision is to reflect on how they can develop their overall approach to see, from the outset, the wider PS-SP framework. This would mean that in using SOS, for example, reflection on how to broaden the concept of safety planning to the wider exo and macro system might be incorporated. In Appendix A, for example, we suggest that Mediation and Support need to be seen as a dynamic process across the eco-system rather than focusing on just one or another level of the systems.

Morrison's model (Morrison and Hathaway 2005) is widely known as the $4 \times 4 \times 4$ model, referring to the four stakeholders in supervision (family members who use the service, practitioners, the organisation itself, and partners' organisations); the four functions of supervision (management, support, development, and mediation); and the four elements of the supervisory cycle (experience, reflection, analysis, action planning). This model acknowledges the interdependence of all four functions of supervision, their impact on key stakeholders, and the four stages of the supervision cycle. Much of the literature on supervision also talks about the importance of a safe relationship between the supervisor and supervisee. The helping alliance which is forged is critical in the change process, as this is where the work takes place, and where change can be attempted (Sanders and Munford 2006). Including safety (McPherson et al. 2016) as the 'fifth' dimension of this well-established supervision model helps in ensuring this safe space for relationships to develop. This safe space allows practitioners to openly consider and reflect on all aspects of their role, the responsibilities and remit of the agency, the circumstances in which the children, young people, and families are living in, the implications of this, the risks and protective factors, and the emotions associated with all of these issues. Indeed, the need for safety has a much wider and, in many ways, more tangible reach. In this paper, we reflected on how the PS-SP model can contribute to this using concrete tools to apply and evaluate the use of a PS-SP approach with an overarching emphasis on safety within supervision frameworks.

For example, using the ecological model as outlined in Appendix A, a focus in the micro- meso sphere could be on maximising supportive protection amongst extended family members. There was involvement of the maternal grandmother, an aunt, and other relatives in the Roscommon Child Care case. A more focused engagement with the family system to maximise support and protection could have been applied. Other considerations at the micro-level would be in the situation where Signs of Safety was being used with the child and the family. By using the PS–SP framework, the concept of 'safety' could be broadened to explore how this could be maximised within the eco-system of the family. A safety plan could be reviewed and revised on the basis of supervision based on the following questions: how does this plan maximise protection in relation to the agreed

supports to this family? How can a supportive approach be maximised with parents while engaging in risk management and protection work with the children?

Reflecting on applying the framework at the exo level, one focus within Management could be about how to have a more consistency across models such as for example Meitheal and Signs of Safety. This could be addressed in practitioner development by initiating greater cooperation or joint training between family support, social work, public health, and other professionals involved.

In relation to mediation, the importance of networking, for example, could be considered in the supervision process. In this case, services were often focused on either the children (child protection and welfare) or the parents (home help) and a networked approach could have brought services together better to offer better support while protecting (e.g., earlier intervention in relation to clear evidence of alcohol misuse) and better protection while supporting (e.g., more networking by child protection with persons conducting practical support relating to hygiene and the household). This networking is required across agencies and sectors (welfare, health, education etc.). The use of identified networks to ensure collaboration with the necessary personnel to maximise PS-SP can broaden practices in relation to safety planning and safe practice as illustrated in Appendix A.

A safety dimension relates to the wider community, where members of public, such as the shop assistants, who might notice children doing shopping on their own, including for alcohol, should not just apply the law (not sell the alcohol) but also notify the local family resource center of their concerns for greater support to the family. From a developmental and/or management perspective, the PS-SP framework could inform critical thinking about the role of community in child protection and welfare. In the Roscommon case, for example, many referrals and expressions of concern came from the community but the report notes these were not generally taken seriously (McGregor and Dolan 2021, p. 145). However, it seems they may have been willing to play a more active part in the supportive protection if given the opportunity to do this. How to engage the public in the complex area of child protection and welfare, especially thinking about safety, confidentiality, and rights, is a challenging question. The PS-SP framework might offer more creative ways to think about this and explore (development) how the child welfare worker, for example, can mediate between their organisation, the law, and family privacy on one hand and the potential to harness wider family support and protection informally within communities on the other.

While acknowledging that risk assessment and tools to do this are central to child welfare and protection practice and many models prevail in different contexts to help move beyond defensive practice and reframe, more emphasis should be placed on its counterpoint, safety, in supervision discussions and analyses of practice. This contributes to existing models such as Signs of Safety in three ways: (a) the focus is on the practitioner and supervisor, (b) the focus is from micro to macro and chrono level capturing practitioners 'direct practice' and 'networked practice' across the eco system, and (c) PS-SP framework grounds the focus firmly on the duality of support and protection that, we contend, features across child welfare and protection systems irrespective of orientation and context. Why is this important? As referenced above, we know that wider inequalities have a major impact on individual family and child protection matters. Therefore, a wider frame for supervision is essential to mediate this and add to what is already known from evidence and experience. For example, we already know about the importance of a focus on safety in relation to feeling safe, keeping families safe, and safe supervision. Of note also, a wide range of studies conclude that the supervision process works best if it offers a space to explore emotions, develop knowledge and skills, and shape and/or improve social work practice decision-making. The use of supervision and other management techniques to enable practitioners to explore emotions is particularly neglected and lacking in practice, yet is highly relevant (Turney and Ruch 2018), as well as an organisational-level focus on safety in relation to health and safety policies and safety guidance and support for home visiting and day-to-day practices. We also have macro-level policy and legislation focused on safeguarding, but, again, the emphasis tends to be on the micro- and inter- personal level.

We have extensive literature on collaboration in child welfare and know its importance (Bruning and Doek 2021, p. 253; Churchill and Fawcett 2016, p. 313; Katz and Hetherington 2006, p. 433; Rácz 2015) and interagency cooperation (McGregor and Devaney 2020b, p. 283; Rácz and Bogács 2019, p. 156). It is also well established that partnership with service users is a key aspect of effective practice (Malone and Canavan 2021; Churchill and Fawcett 2016; Spratt et al. 2015; Connolly and Devaney 2018, p. 5; Meysen and Kelly 2018, p. 228). Yet, as Cortis et al. (2019, p. 56) warned, embedding relational approaches in child welfare practice remains difficult due to the systemic difficulties that Anglo-welfare states face in terms of escalating reports of maltreatment, increasing complexity of client circumstances, and rising resource pressures and costs. This again points to the need for a broader approach and more explicit framing in relation to safety, which underpins the intentions and complex context of much child welfare practice.

However, we argue that safety needs to be viewed from a wider dimension and we hope this discussion of the PS-SP framework in the context of safety in supervision adds to and complements existing approaches. It is also intended to offer ideas for how supervision models can be developed to reflect the complexity of child protection as evidenced from the ethnographic observations and experiences of those working directly with children and families, from the perspective of children and families themselves, and also from the immense research and data available. As illustrated in Table A1, safety comes into the frame across the eco system with regard to safe practice, safe communities, safety in the Person–Process context, safety across the eco-context, and so on. Building on what is already known and understood about safety, more explicit use of the PS-SP framework can more assertively inform safe practice taking into account the person (e.g., emotion, psychological issues and feelings), the process (safe balancing of protection and support), the context (detailing safety practices from micro to macro level), and time (explicitly exploring chrono level challenges of system change, managerialism, and resource management, for example).

Table A1 provides an example of how this could be applied to the case study if intervening in the present day. Reflecting on the Roscommon Case from this perspective this offers two important features. Firstly, an overarching systematic focus on PS-SP across all aspects of the support and protection work. This would lead to greater collaboration and networking between the different services and a commitment to approaching the case as a team, and not a single agency/practitioner who has sole responsibility at any point in time. Secondly, using PPCT as the tool to inform discussions ensures that practice and safety issues are not confined to micro- and mezo-level issues only but automatically are considered holistically from the ecological perspective. This means that application of models, such as Signs of Safety, could have a wider framework for reflection so that strengths and facilitators (for example) are not only focused on the child, family, and immediate context but also on the wider socio-economic and organisational context. All of this work in the present must be informed by a partnership and participative approach with children and families.

5. Conclusions

As mentioned, authors A and B put forward a model of PS-SP practice based in a broad ecological framework with an emphasis on networking. Recognising the need to 'test' this model in practice its value and significance is well debated. However, having reflected further on the model, we are now of the view one notable and necessary addition in the model is consideration of safety within this ecological context and with more specific attention to models and processes of supervision. This model encourages workers and supervisors to reframe the focus on risk and think also about its counterpoint, safety. We now contend that a safe milieu for the supervisee (and the supervisor) is required to ensure acceptance and understanding in their role to protect and support. We proposed some exploratory and reflective prompts to support supervisees and supervisors to think about safety in their role by reference to the Roscommon Case example and the illustration provided in Appendix A. Our argument is that it is practitioners and supervisors who are

best placed to populate and develop such a framework relating to their own practice. This then creates the opportunity to evaluate its usefulness for supervision with the intention of enhancing practitioner safety that, in turn, should lead to greater potential to engage directly with children and families, and indirectly through networking and collaboration, to achieve enhanced safety as a core and central outcome of any child protection and welfare system.

Supportive protection and protective support need to happen within the context of the ecological model and a networked approach that provides scope for a holistic and integrated response. It needs to be applied and tested by supervisors and supervisees to advance and develop this as it is in this ethnographic space of direct engagement in child welfare that the depth of mediation of protection and support is crystallised. We see those in practice, and those they are practising with as best placed to inform and expand the tremendous body of literature and research we have with regard to how best to mediate this space. A space we know is mostly a complex duality of PS-SP across many domains. Our argument is that while we will always need thresholds and levels of need/risk to inform decision making and practice, we also need to have an overarching reflective scaffold to see the whole context, and the wider set of circumstances in which children and families live. The PS-SP framework allows space for reflection, critical thinking, and a focus on safety without becoming subsumed into the more micro aspects of the 'case'.

This paper is written in the context of a general commitment to an increased pursuit of evidence-based policy and practice to ensure effective service provision across many jurisdictions (e.g., Spratt et al. 2015, p. 1522; Xu et al. 2018, p. 117). It reinforces the evidence from Lonne et al. (2021, p. 1), who identified the increased use of practice frameworks being used in conjunction with risk assessment tools aimed at promoting equality and quality service provision (Heino 2012, p. 158). In previous work, we offered an evaluation frame including a revised Hardiker model (Hardiker et al. 1991) which has been presented as a tool for diverting families with complex needs that do not fit either universal or protection intervention thresholds to an appropriate model of support (McGregor and Devaney 2020a, pp. 277, 287). In this paper, building on the PS-SP framework from (McGregor and Devaney 2020b), we hope to have added to this repertoire by focusing on another important dimension of child welfare practice, safety.

Reiterating an argument previously made (McGregor and Devaney 2020b), in order to truly test the framework, we need practitioners and supervisors to engage in its use in supervision and case work. As real-world experts, they are the ethnographers of practice, and are best placed—indeed, maybe the only ones placed—to articulate and ground the theorisation and conceptualisation of PS and SP which, are well established within the complex reality of child protection and welfare practice.

Appendix A

Table A1. Illustrative Example of Case Study as Applied to Child Protection and Welfare Social Work.

Bio-eco level	Safety			Personal Support (supportive for the practitioner)
	Management (competent, accountable performance or practice)	Mediation (engaging the individual with the organisation/s)	Development (continuing professional development)	
Person	Ensuring regular supervision using PS-SP framework including leadership on ensuring everyone knows CP is their business Ensure clarity for each practitioner on their role and purpose Clarity on expected outcomes and associated plan of action for each child Clarity on process for risk escalation Ensure each child's views are heard, recorded and presented in appropriate fora Protected caseloads for new or inexperienced workers	Reflecting on skills, knowledge and values to ensure balance of duality of PS-SP Clarity of role and of role of other colleagues and agencies	e.g., Training needs in: Networking and build confidence to engage across support and protection services Specialist training (e.g., in this case attachment, working with resistant parents, recognizing risk, the impact of chronic neglect, participation and involvement of children and young people, Use of standardized common assessment framework	Use current emphasis of safety in supervision Space to talk about emotions, psycholgical impact, how to work with parents when they are resistant, being safe enough to be confident to network and call out protection needs Be able to identify challenges and training needs
Process	Explicit use of PS-SP framework to discuss cases and apply to practice models	Using the PS-SP framework as guide for supervision and mediation actions Duality in practice across sectors Engaging individual with organization/mediation function Mediation as capacity to act on behalf of organization and work with others—responsibility for CP across system (e.g., mediation between child welfare org, health org, home help, school and legal services) Clarity of role and of role of other professionals and agencies	Developing practice with focus on direct practice and networked practice Continuing Professional Development (CPD) required to support this e.g., in this case, leadership, advanced skills in balancing support and protection, and training in specialist work with complex cases would have enabled a more integrated and potentially more supportive AND protective SAFE engagement with the family	Feeling safe to engage in networking in unsafe communities Using this case example: Engaging extended family, other professionals, and the community in the process of assessment, intervention and reviewing needs of children and dual protective/supportive focus

Table A1. *Cont.*

		Management (competent, accountable performance or practice)	**Safety** (keeping children safe and safety of practitioners) Mediation (engaging the individual with the organisation/s)	Development (continuing professional development)	Personal Support (supportive for the practitioner)
Bio-eco level					
Context	**Micro**	Risk management discussed in context of safety outcomes Use concept of PS-SP to broaden the concept of safety planning	Mediation is framed more around risk/safety dichotomy within PS-SP context across each of the levels Mediation is applied across the system considering and inclusive of all stakeholders across all levels	CPD specialist training, e.g., in attachment	Safety discussions about micro-level practice—safe children, safe families, safe practitioners How can systems and practices ensure safety in networking? Safety discussions about exo-macro level indirect practice and networking—e.g., creating safety nets through family and social support
	Meso	Focus on relationship with supervisor? Is this a safe space? Workers in this case needed a safe environment to discuss their concerns etc.			
	Exo	What organisational management systems are in place for safety protocols—are they sufficient? Consider 'safety nets' 'safe communities' 'safety organised practice'		Developing networking practices: interdisciplinary—targeted services, community organizations—reflections on 'safe collaboration'	
	Macro	Wider focus on CORU proficiencies—for e.g., on safe practice/wider regulatory concerns? Consider 'cultural safety'			

Table A1. *Cont.*

	Safety (keeping children safe and safety of practitioners)		Development (continuing professional development)	Personal Support (supportive for the practitioner)
	Management (competent, accountable performance or practice)	Mediation (engaging the individual with the organisation/s)		
Bio-eco level				
Time **Chrono**	Recognise that management of CPW in this time is, by nature, complex balancing of PS-SP in context of managerialism etc. Recognize and address pressure of competing demands and resources	Mediation for safety taking into account children's and young person's participation and voice	Consider recent learning to inform implications of working with complex families With resistant parents.	Where are the 'safe spaces' for practice in your context/moment Applying to the case example: how can practitioners create a safe space with other practitioners to ensure no one practitioner feels solely responsible A shared sense of PS–PS
Moments	Using case example instilling confidence in practitioners to base decision making on observations, concerns etc. which were noted repeatedly Using supervision to help practitioner to 'join' the experiences over time of home visits, reports received, ongoing high level of need and risk for the children involved, lack of positive progress or change Recognise emotion, feelings and impact on day-to-day practice actions Assurance and confidence to escalate risk management and make hard decisions regarding alternative care etc.	In depth analysis in specific case discussions of mediation of SP-PS to enhance safety		Having space in supervision to reflect on the different levels of practice needed in order to ensure safety

Note

1   See also McGregor and Dolan (2021), for example of use of this case study to reflect on support and protection across the lifecourse.

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Article

The Subjective Well-Being of Children in Residential Care: Has It Changed in Recent Years?

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Abstract: The subjective well-being of children in residential care is a relevant issue given the practical implications for improving the lives of these children who live in contexts of vulnerability. The question addressed in this respect was: "How does this well-being change over the years"? Thus, the aim of this study was to compare the subjective well-being displayed by adolescents aged 11–14 in residential care in Catalonia (north-eastern Spain) in 2014 to that displayed by adolescents in residential care in 2020. To this end, 572 responses to a questionnaire adapted from the Children's Worlds project (364 from 2014 and 208 from 2020) were analysed with respect to the life satisfaction items. In both 2014 and 2020, the questionnaires had the same wording, and data were disaggregated by gender. No significant differences in means were observed between most of the life satisfaction items in 2014 and 2020, with the exception of satisfaction with friends and classmates and the area where you live, with lower means for these items in 2020. There is a discussion of the possible influence of COVID-19 on these results, while the overall stability of these children's subjective well-being over the years is highlighted.

1. Introduction

Studies on subjective well-being have increased in recent decades, and, albeit to a lesser extent, this rise has also included research on the well-being of vulnerable populations such as children in the care system. The authors understand subjective well-being to be a psychosocial component of quality of life (Casas 2011). The study of well-being focuses on the evaluations that individuals—in these cases, children—make regarding their own lives, both with regard to individual domains and overall. In this article, we focus on the subjective well-being of children in residential care, comparing the data collection that was performed in 2014 with that of 2020. The article has three main axes: children in residential care; their subjective well-being; and variations in well-being over time, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.1. Residential Care in Spain

According to data from the Spanish Childhood Observatory (2020), 55% of children in the Spanish care system are in residential care and 45% in foster care, while among the latter, 65% are in kinship family foster care and 35% are with non-kinship families. The same source indicates that residential care has increased in recent years. One of the reasons for this has been the influx of a large number of children, mainly boys, from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa, who arrive alone and are admitted to residential care. Figure 1 which shows data for Catalonia, where the present research is focused, shows how both

forms of foster care and pre-adoption care have remained fairly stable over recent years, while residential care has substantially increased.
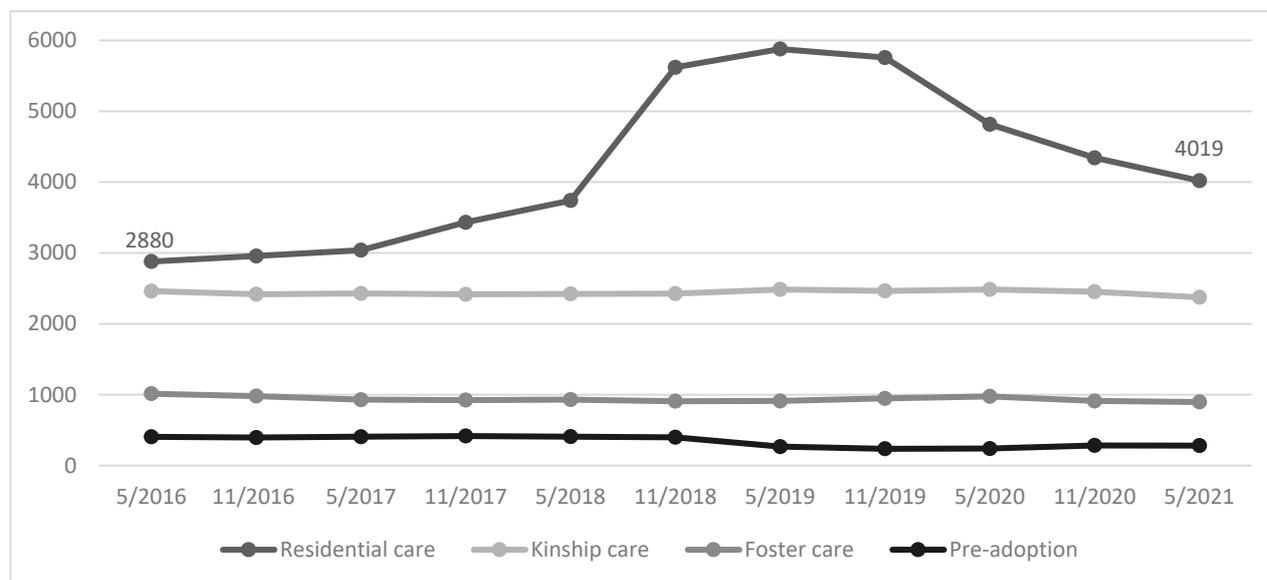

Figure 1. Evolution of care measures in Catalonia (2016–2021). Source: authors' own work, based on official data from the DGAIA (Catalan Directorate General of Child and Adolescent Care), available at https://treballiaferssocials.gencat.cat/ (accessed on 1 November 2021).

Thus, when it comes to residential care, there continues to be a large group of children that needs to be the focus of applied research in order to determine and improve their well-being. Delving deeper into the reasons that residential care is so prevalent, aside from the entry of young migrants who come alone, it should be noted that there are other factors associated with its ongoing implementation. On the one hand, socio-political efforts have been tame and, according to Delgado et al. (2020), have lacked the conviction to reduce residential care and make foster care more widespread. Indeed, it is only recently that a legislative amendment has recommended that children under 6 years of age do not enter residential care (Act 26/2015). According to data from the Spanish Childhood Observatory (2020), this goal had still not been fully achieved at the end of 2019: 5% of children in residential care were under 6 years of age and 9% were aged between 7 and 10. These children were mainly of Spanish origin and no differences were found according to gender. One reason identified in the study by López and Valle (2015) to explain why the population under 12 was in residential care was a lack of foster families. This reveals how the foster care programmes that began in Spain in the 1990s have generally been very underdeveloped (Del Valle et al. 2009). An important difference is noted from other countries in this regard, mainly English-speaking ones, where residential care is conceived as therapeutic and reserved for adolescents with severe behavioural problems (Whittaker et al. 2016). In Spain, many of the children in residential care are there due to a lack of foster care places. Care must therefore be taken when making cross-country comparisons (Martín et al. 2018). There are also historical reasons for this, with fewer advances in democracy and cultural awareness, with a certain trust in residential care and children being cared for by people outside the family being perceived with distrust (see Del Valle and Casas 2002). This also explains the high levels of kinship foster care within the system (Del Valle et al. 2009).

1.2. The Subjective Well-Being of Children in Residential Care

Research on the subjective well-being of children in the care system is still in its infancy both nationally and internationally. Studying children's subjective well-being allows us to understand their points of view on different aspects of their lives, the evaluations they make

and the perceptions they have about their lives, and in particular about the residential home where they are accommodated, their family of origin, school, use of time and their perceptions regarding the future, among other aspects. In Spain, Llosada-Gistau et al. (2015, 2017) have carried out studies focusing on this population and have reported higher well-being scores among those living in kinship and non-kinship foster families, which are fairly similar to those of the general child population, while they observed significantly lower scores among the population in residential care. Specifically, the mean score on the PWI–SC scale stands at 80.70 out of 100 for children in care; however, those in residential care have a lower SWB (75.87) than those in kinship (87.91) and non-kinship foster care (86.78), with significant differences ($p < 0.01$). Another study compared the subjective well-being of children in care in Spain and Portugal (Carvalho et al. 2020). In Portugal, the mean score on the PWI–SC scale stands at 78.4 (SD 1.77) for those in residential care and 87.6 (SD 1.03) for those in family foster care. Similar studies in Brazil (Schütz et al. 2015) have also focused on residential care population. On the PWI–SC, those in residential centres are 77.8 (SD 1.95) compared to those living with their families at 87.9 (0.93). González-García et al. (2021) recently studied this phenomenon in the population of residential homes accommodating children with behavioural problems and observed that girls scored significantly lower in life satisfaction. Satisfaction with life as a whole (OLS) in boys obtained a mean of 73.4 (SD 2.76) and among girls a mean of 56.6 (SD 3.16). These differences by gender coincide with those previously noted by Llosada-Gistau et al. (2017, 2019) and with Ortúzar et al. (2019) in Chile and Peru, where boys present higher levels of well-being than girls in all measurements. For instance, in the OLS scale, differences are significant by sex [t (364) = 438,706, $p < 0.001$). It is important to note that in all the above countries, residential care is the most common measure, with very few children in foster care. All of these recent studies (Catalonia, Brazil, Portugal, Chile and Peru) used an adaptation of the Children's Worlds questionnaire (for more details, see Llosada-Gistau et al. 2015). This has allowed for a comparison of data, as well as a comparison with those of the general population. It has revealed a situation of disadvantage among children in residential care, while at the same time constituting a robust line of cross-country research.

What is the value of studying SWB in this population? First, as children, like the rest of the population at the same ages, it underlines the fact that we should consider childhood as a stage of life with its own sociological characteristics (Ben-Arieh 2008) and assume that subjective social indicators may be as useful as objective indicators in decision making and in promoting social policies. It also emphasizes that children should be regarded not merely as passive subjects but as active social stakeholders; we should listen to their opinions and evaluations (children's rights were considered in the 1989 UNC). Moreover, SWB enables us to study the positive aspects of childhood from the perspective of childhood and not just from the more common approach of considering what the children may become as adults (Casas 2011).

Secondly, and specifically with this population, the study of SWB allows us to identify which factors or conditions of the protection system help to increase children's well-being in care, such as the existence of stability, the prioritization of school or their levels of participation in issues that affect them (for more details, see Garcia-Molsosa et al. 2019), and in which type of placement they are most likely to be found. At the same time, it still needs to be confirmed whether the results remain stable over the years (and across countries) as well as whether the social context may influence the results. This is explored further in the next section.

1.3. Measuring Subjective Well-Being over Time

To date, few studies have re-administered the subjective well-being questionnaire after a few years, meaning there is a lack of information on trends in these children's subjective well-being over time, and on the reliability of the items studied over time. In a study on foster care by Montserrat and Casas (2006), the questionnaire was re-administered after one year and it was observed that the mean responses obtained for most of the questions

did not show any statistically significant differences. There was a positive and significant correlation between most responses from one year to the next, and this consistency in responses suggested that the perceptions and evaluations of foster children were stable, and that the items used in the questionnaire over time were reliable. However, we have not been able to identify any further research in this regard. Having more data would thus allow us to better understand the points of view of children in residential care, have more elements to improve the service and finally, promote greater well-being among these children via their direct involvement and participation.

Thus, in order to address this shortcoming in the literature, a study was conducted with the general aim of comparing the subjective well-being of adolescents aged 11 to 14 in residential care in Catalonia (northeast Spain) in 2014 with that reported in 2020. The main research questions are as follows: (i) Is there continuity in the levels of subjective well-being—overall and by domains—between boys and girls in residential care in Catalonia after six years? (ii) Are there gender differences as in 2014? (iii) Are there explanations for a possible influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the results?

In addition, based on the findings, and as a result of the context of the pandemic in which the questionnaires were administered, an attempt has been made to provide possible interpretations of the influence of lockdown measures during COVID-19 on the responses reported in 2020.

2. Materials and Methods

The study design is based on the collection of quantitative data by the authors of this article, with the use of the same instrument for the two points of collection and aimed at the same type of population.

2.1. Participants

The target population comprised adolescents living in residential care in Catalonia while they could not live with their family of origin. In most cases, this was due to situations of neglect or abuse (56% of the care system population, according to 2020 data from the Department of Labour, Social Affairs and Families; this figure was 50% in 2014). The age range—between 11 and 14—was selected in 2014 in order to be able to use the same questionnaire as the one used with the general population in Catalonia by the International Children's Worlds Survey (https://isciweb.org/the-questionnaire, accessed on 1 November 2021), which was aimed at the population aged 12–13. In the case of the in-care population, this was deemed the most suitable age range for participants to answer the questionnaire autonomously, and it was maintained for the 2020 collection.

In 2014, the questionnaire was sent to the total population within this age range living in residential care in Catalonia (N = 526), and 376 adolescents responded (71.5% response rate). In 2020, it was also sent to the total population aged 11 to 14 (N = 638) and 265 questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 41.5%.

As Table 1 shows, 572 responses were analysed. Questionnaires with more than three items missing from the well-being index were not included. Of the respondents analysed, girls comprised 46.4% in 2014 and 44.2% in 2020 (the difference is not significant), 16% and 21% were born abroad, respectively, and the average age for each data collection was 13.1 and 12.7, respectively. This distribution in terms of age, gender and origin in both 2014 and 2020 is very similar to that of the whole population of children in residential care in Catalonia in this age group (DGAIA 2021; Llosada-Gistau et al. 2015), which, despite the lower response rate in 2020, means the sample is sufficiently representative.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample by gender and year of data collection.

	2014 Sample	%	2020 Sample	%	Total	%
Boys	195	53.6%	116	55.8%	311	54.4%
Girls	169	46.4%	92	44.2%	261	45.6%
Total	364	100.0%	208	100.0%	572	100.0%

2.2. Instruments and Procedure

A self-reported anonymous on-line questionnaire was used for data collection, which included the subjective well-being items already used in a previous adapted and tested version of the International Children's Worlds Survey questionnaire (https://isciweb.org/the-questionnaire, accessed on 1 November 2021) (see Llosada-Gistau et al. 2015), following the question, 'How satisfied are you with each of the following things in your life?'. The eleven questions on subjective well-being analysed (on an 11-point scale from 0 to 10, from 'Do not agree at all' to 'Totally agree') included a single item scale focusing on Overall Life Satisfaction (OLS) and ten questions on the children's satisfaction with different domains of their lives: health, the things you have, safety, what can happen to you later in life, the use of time, friends, the area where you live, classmates, the freedom you have and how adults listen to you.

A pilot test was conducted in both 2014 and 2020: in 2014, eight boys and eight girls participated from one home, and in 2020, four boys and five girls from another residential home participated. After they had answered the questionnaire, a discussion group was held (face-to-face in 2014 and online in 2020), where the children explained their views on the questionnaire to the researchers.

In both 2014 and 2020, the questionnaire was sent to residential home directors by the child protection authorities in Catalonia, so that they could then pass it on to the children in the target age group and provide guidance to help those with reading comprehension, language or attention problems. The children could choose between Catalan and Spanish versions.

2.3. Data Analysis

Two types of analysis were performed to analyse the data: on the one hand, a descriptive analysis of the samples from both waves, and on the other, a bivariate analysis to compare the means for the items on satisfaction with life included in the two questionnaires, which were comparable because their wording was identical. A dual comparison was carried out using the selected items on satisfaction: first, the means according to the gender of the adolescents (between boys and girls) for each of the years analysed, and then the means for boys and girls separately between the two years (boys in 2014 compared to boys in 2020, and the same for girls). These comparisons were conducted using the Student's T test for two independent samples. The data have been compared by gender to check if the differences found in 2014 persist six years later.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

This research was approved and authorized by the Spanish child protection authorities for both the 2014 and 2020 collections. The children who answered the questionnaires participated anonymously, voluntarily and without receiving any incentive. The research team signed a contract with the authorities containing all aspects of data processing and confidentiality, and no personal data were accessed, including the e-mail addresses of the residential homes, since the authorities were responsible for the administration and sending of the questionnaires. The research has preserved the confidentiality of the cases and complied with Act 3/2018 on the protection of personal data and the guaranteeing of digital rights.

3. Results

Table 2 shows the proportion of boys and girls who reported scores below or equal to 7 (which we have considered low SWB) and the proportion who reported scores above 7 (which we have considered normal or high SWB) for the OLS scale and for the other satisfaction items included in the study.

Table 2. Proportion (%) of participants who reported low and high scores for different subjective well-being domains and for overall life satisfaction (OLS) by gender and year of data collection.

	2014				2020			
	Low SWB ($\leq$7)		High SWB (>7)		Low SWB ($\leq$7)		High SWB (>7)	
	Boys	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**
OLS	38.5%	60.4%	61.5%	39.6%	42.2%	43.5%	57.8%	56.5%
Satisfaction health	21.0%	29.6%	79.0%	70.4%	20.4%	24.7%	79.6%	75.3%
Satisfaction with the things you have	50.3%	48.5%	49.7%	51.5%	45.0%	29.2%	55.0%	70.8%
Satisfaction with safety	35.4%	58.6%	64.6%	41.4%	47.6%	45.9%	52.4%	54.1%
Satisfaction with what may happen to you later in life	37.4%	53.7%	62.6%	46.3%	47.6%	51.2%	52.4%	48.8%
Satisfaction with your use of time	47.2%	52.7%	52.8%	47.3%	43.6%	42.7%	56.4%	57.3%
Satisfaction with friends	31.4%	21.3%	68.6%	78.7%	28.4%	27.3%	71.6%	72.7%
Satisfaction with the area where you live	29.5%	42.2%	70.5%	57.8%	46.8%	51.7%	53.2%	48.3%
Satisfaction with classmates	33.9%	46.8%	66.1%	53.2%	48.7%	42.1%	51.3%	57.9%
Satisfaction with the freedom you have	56.2%	63.7%	43.8%	36.3%	58.7%	57.1%	41.3%	42.9%
Satisfaction with how adults listen to you	36.4%	46.8%	63.6%	53.2%	35.6%	31.8%	64.4%	68.2%

Splitting two groups below and above 7 points out of 10 is justified because, in general, the subjective well-being of most people is stable and predictable between 70 and 90 points out of 100 points (Cummins 2010). Scores below 70 points could indicate that personal homeostasis is not enough to cope with difficult or stressful life situations that affect people.

The data in the table show us that the proportion of girls with low SWB decreases in the 2020 sample compared to the 2014 one in most of the items analysed. Outstanding differences are observed, for example, in the different proportions of the OLS scale (from 60.4% to 43.5%) or of *Satisfaction with the things you have* (from 48.5% to 29.2%). The only two items in which the proportion of low SWB is higher in 2020 compared to 2014 are *Satisfaction with the area where you live* (from 42.2% to 51.7%) and *Satisfaction with friends* (from 21, 3% to 27.3%). Among boys, the proportions between both years are more similar than among girls. However, a higher proportion of low SWB is observed in 2020 compared to 2014, especially with regard to the *Satisfaction with safety* (from 35.4% to 47.6%), *Satisfaction with the area where you live* (from 29.5% to 46.8%) and *Satisfaction with classmates* (from 33.9% to 48.7%).

No significant differences in means were observed between the 2014 and 2020 waves for most of the life satisfaction items selected for this study. Differences were only observed between the following items: *satisfaction with friends* ($p < 0.05$), *satisfaction with classmates* ($p < 0.01$) and *satisfaction with the area where you live* ($p < 0.001$). In all three items, the overall means for 2020 were lower than those for 2014.

Second, if we compare the satisfaction means between boys and girls for the years 2014 and 2020, we observe that boys displayed greater satisfaction than girls for most of the items analysed in 2014, the majority of these differences being statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). However, these differences did not persist six years later (bearing in mind that the second sample was obtained just after the enforced lockdown due to the COVID-19

pandemic). Thus, in the 2020 sample, it is observed that none of the selected items achieved statistical significance in the comparison by gender.

Figure 2 shows differences by gender in the overall life satisfaction index measured using a single item (Overall Life Satisfaction—OLS). Significant gender differences were observed in the 2014 wave (where girls scored lower than boys), while these decreased in the 2020 wave.
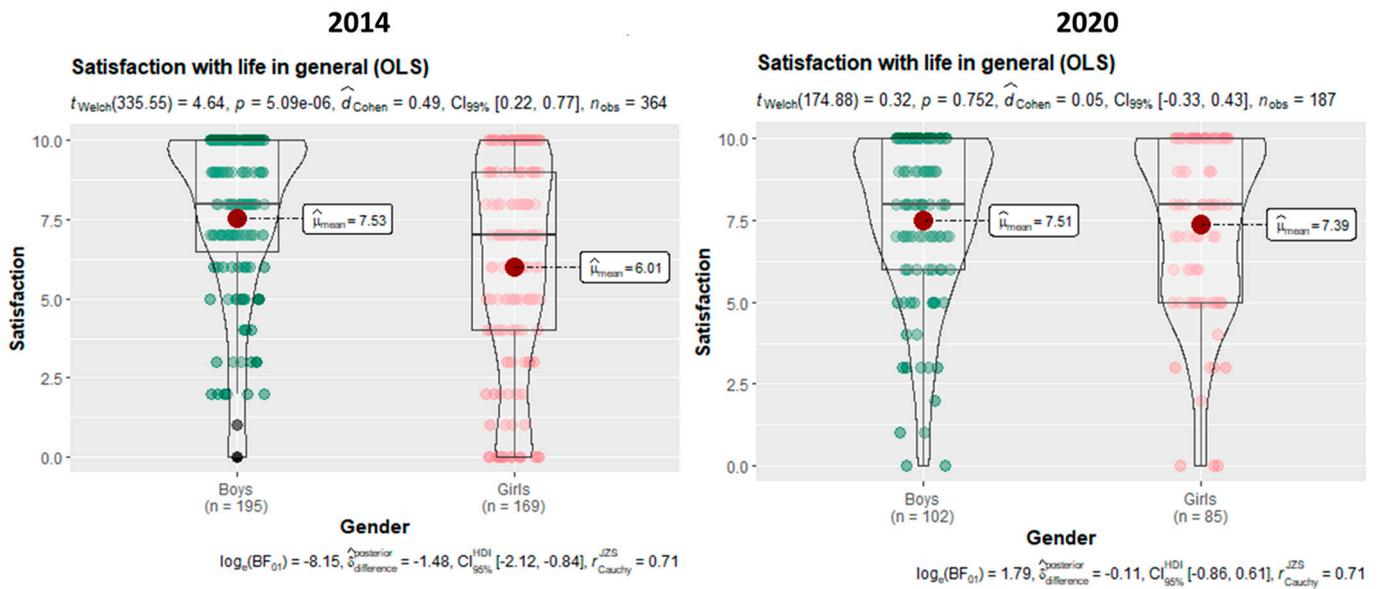

Figure 2. Comparison of means for Overall Life Satisfaction (OLS) by gender and year of data collection.

It is particularly worth highlighting the change displayed by girls in the index on overall satisfaction with life measured using a single item (Overall Life Satisfaction—OLS): while in 2014 they barely exceeded a mean satisfaction score of 6 points out of 10, thus displaying significantly lower satisfaction than boys, in 2020 they reported a mean score of 7.39, which does not significantly differ from the 7.5 points displayed by boys for both years (see Table 3 and Figure 3).

Table 3. Comparison of means of the comparable satisfaction items between both samples by gender and year of data collection.

|	2014			2020			*p*-Values Comparison for the Two Years	
	Boys	**Girls**	***p*-Value**	**Boys**	**Girls**	***p*-Value**	**Boys**	**Girls**
OLS	7.53	6.01	$p < 0.001$	7.51	7.39	$p = 0.752$	$p = 0.955$	$p < 0.001$
Satisfaction health	8.82	8.16	$p = 0.005$	8.46	8.21	$p = 0.453$	$p = 0.150$	$p = 0.869$
Satisfaction with the things you have	7.25	7.08	$p = 0.537$	7.80	8.30	$p = 0.073$	$p = 0.042$	$p < 0.001$
Satisfaction with safety	8.06	6.70	$p < 0.001$	7.49	7.13	$p = 0.375$	$p = 0.049$	$p < 0.273$
Satisfaction with what may happen to you later in life	7.78	6.75	$p < 0.001$	7.32	7.05	$p = 0.465$	$p = 0.135$	$p = 0.412$
Satisfaction with your use of time	7.33	6.99	$p = 0.204$	7.72	7.72	$p = 0.998$	$p = 0.159$	$p = 0.009$
Satisfaction with friends	8.20	8.53	$p = 0.131$	8.34	7.97	$p = 0.314$	$p = 0.555$	$p = 0.112$
Satisfaction with the area where you live	8.06	7.44	$p = 0.023$	7.10	6.69	$p = 0.357$	$p = 0.005$	$p = 0.057$
Satisfaction with classmates	8.00	7.13	$p = 0.002$	7.07	7.28	$p = 0.626$	$p = 0.006$	$p = 0.695$
Satisfaction with the freedom you have	6.30	5.70	$p = 0.085$	6.46	6.62	$p = 0.721$	$p = 0.678$	$p = 0.028$
Satisfaction with how adults listen to you	7.82	7.20	$p = 0.023$	7.63	7.84	$p = 0.574$	$p = 0.532$	$p = 0.060$
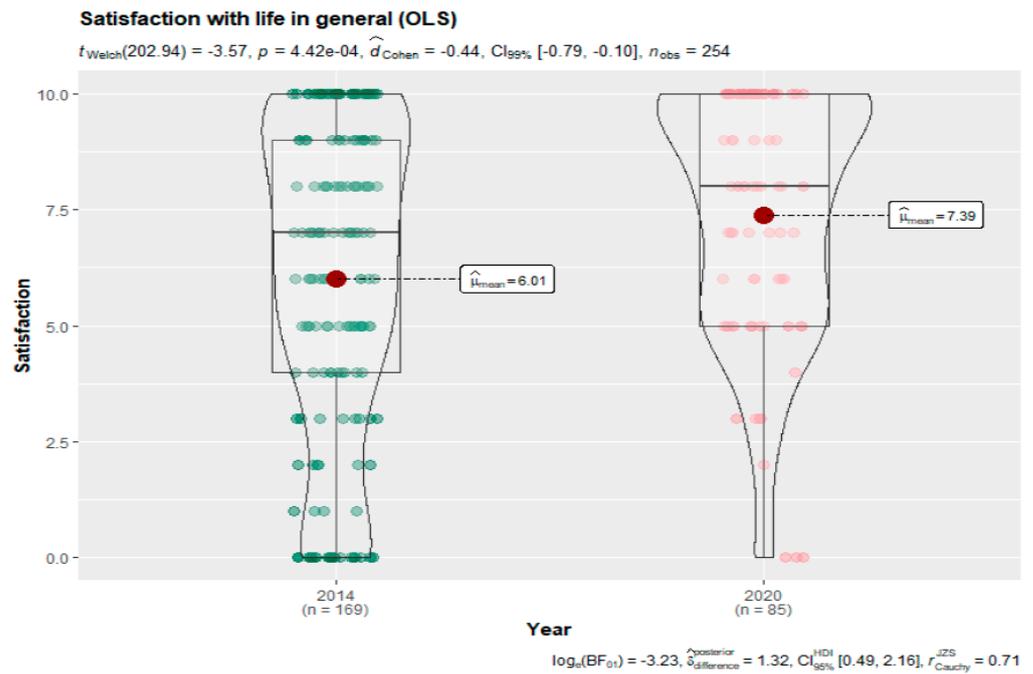
Figure 3. Comparison of means for satisfaction with life in general (OLS) among girls by year of data collection.

If we analyse only the satisfaction means for both years among girls, the means shown for 2020 exceed those of 2014 in most of the selected satisfaction items. The most noteworthy changes are the increase in OLS (+1.38 points), satisfaction with the things you have (+1.23 points) and satisfaction with the freedom you have (+0.92 points). The two satisfaction items that decreased in 2020 compared to 2014 were satisfaction with the place where you live (−0.75) and satisfaction with friends (−0.56), although neither reached statistical significance ($p > 0.05$).

Among boys, most of the selected satisfaction items remained stable between the two years. However, a decrease was observed in satisfaction with the area where you live (−0.96 points), satisfaction with classmates (−0.93) and satisfaction with safety (−0.57). Figure 4 shows this decrease in satisfaction with classmates among boys between 2014 and 2020. All three items showed statistically significant differences between the two years ($p < 0.05$). On the other hand, the only item where boys displayed greater satisfaction in 2020 compared to 2014 was in satisfaction with the things you have (+0.55), as was also the case among girls of the same age.
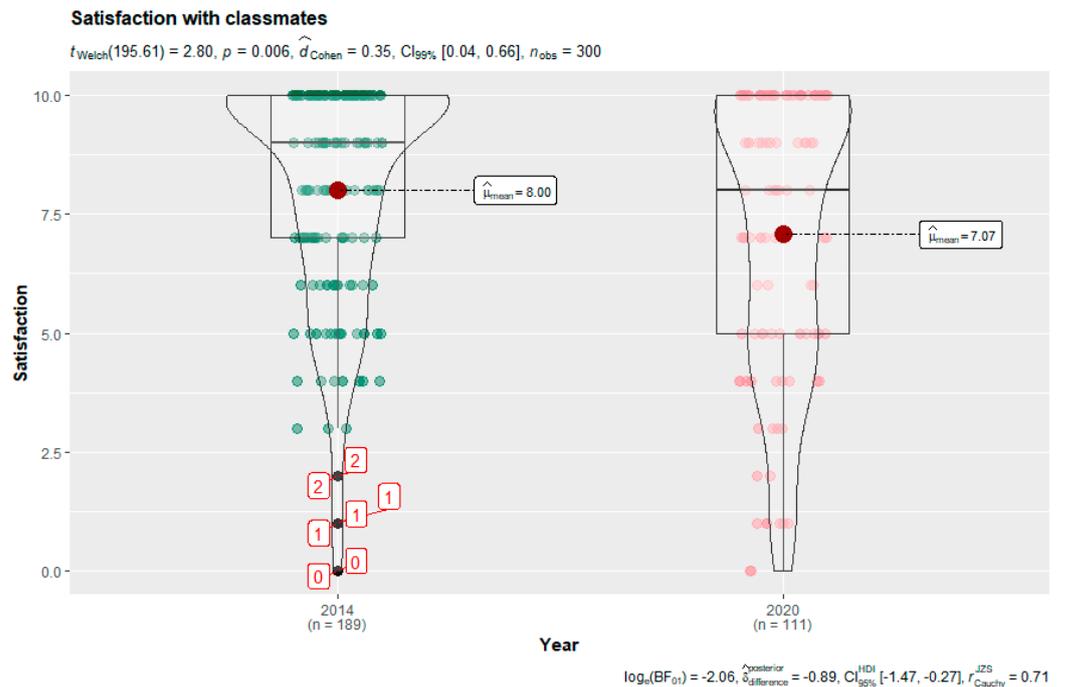
Satisfaction with classmates

$t_{Welch}(195.61) = 2.80$, $p = 0.006$, $\hat{d}_{Cohen} = 0.35$, $CI_{99\%}$ [0.04, 0.66], $n_{obs} = 300$

$\log_e(BF_{01}) = -2.06$, $\hat{\delta}_{difference}^{posterior} = -0.89$, $CI_{95\%}^{HDI}$ [-1.47, -0.27], $r_{Cauchy}^{JZS} = 0.71$

Figure 4. Comparison of means for satisfaction with classmates among boys by year of data collection.

4. Discussion

The results of the present study show a continuity in the levels of subjective well-being among boys and girls in residential care in Catalonia between 2014 and 2020, endorsing the reliability of the responses given by boys and girls in previous studies (Montserrat and Casas 2006). Thus, on the one hand, the usefulness of the questionnaire adapted by Llosada-Gistau et al. (2015) in evaluating the subjective well-being of boys and girls in the care system is confirmed. On the other hand, the relevance and need for studies based on the subjective well-being of children and adolescents is reaffirmed, including collecting their own perceptions as a reference for organizing and defining, in this case, resources for residential care.

According to these results, the subjective well-being of boys and girls aged between 11 and 14 in residential care in Catalonia has remained stable over time, as happened with children in foster care (Montserrat and Casas 2006). Consistently, their scores are in the lower range compared to other children inside and outside the care system (Llosada-Gistau et al. 2015, 2017). These results reinforce the need to review such placements and promote family fostering, when possible, since research has also identified worse outcomes for children in residential care in other areas such as education, sociability or health (e.g., Garcia-Molsosa et al. 2020). On the one hand, this consistency was to be expected, since there have been no structural changes in terms of residential care in the Spanish care system over the last five years, such as a reduction in the number of places per home, staff stability or an improvement in the children's educational situation or social capital and participation (Carvalho et al. 2020; Garcia-Molsosa et al. 2019). Neither has the profile of boys and girls accommodated in homes in Catalonia in this age group changed significantly, meaning similar responses can therefore be expected (DGAIA 2021). The number of foreign adolescents has increased, but this increase has mainly been seen in adolescents who are 15 years old and above. Finally, this constancy in the results fits with the homeostasis principle of "subjective well-being", which justifies its stability over time, in contrast with individuals' emotional states (Cummins 2010).

However, three items displayed differences between 2014 and 2020: *satisfaction with friends, with classmates* and *with the area where you live*, with the overall means for 2020 being lower than in 2014. Presumably, the effects of the pandemic and the consequent lockdown could explain these differences in all three items with respect to 2014, in the sense that

it has probably been difficult to maintain relationships with friends and/or classmates due to limitations in social interactions among the entire child population, but especially those in residential care, due to the logistical difficulties and resource requirements (human, material) that this entails (Montserrat et al. 2021). As for the low level of satisfaction with the place where you live (referring to the neighbourhood), this may also be due to the conditions of confinement experienced during lockdown, in which boys and girls did not have the option to move freely around their local area. However, future studies should be undertaken to explore these three aspects in greater depth, since the results do not allow us to confirm or refute these hypotheses. As a counterargument to them, studies such as the one conducted by Vallejo-Slocker et al. (2020) have questioned the potential impact that COVID-19 lockdowns may have had among this population in terms of their subjective well-being. However, others claim that there may have been changes in their family situation (more "hurried" returns home) or the emergence of feelings of anguish or concern regarding the health and possible loss of loved ones, in line with Haffejee and Levine (2020) and Wilke et al. (2020). These elements are not included in the questionnaire administered in this study and should be taken into account in subsequent analyses. It should also be borne in mind that the effects of the pandemic may emerge later, with a worsening of mental health among the child and adolescent population, especially the more vulnerable (Romero et al. 2020), and of their educational situation (Bonal and González 2020), elements that are not included in this study and that will need to be explored further.

Another result that may have been influenced by the lockdowns has been the improvement these adolescents express in terms of *satisfaction with the things they have*, which may be related to improvements that the residential homes have been obliged to quickly implement in terms of material conditions, especially in relation to access to electronic devices, computers, mobile phones and internet connections. This was the only means the homes had to allow the children who lived there to attend school classes online.

As for differences in SWB due to gender, the results reveal that these are not as obvious or as clear as they were in 2014. This result was unexpected and may also contradict the scientific literature in the field of children's care (Dinisman et al. 2012; Llosada-Gistau et al. 2019; Martín 2015; Selwyn et al. 2016), where girls have reported lower subjective well-being scores than boys. As an explanation for this, we could hypothesize a possible "positive effect" of COVID-19 lockdown measures on girls in residential care, perhaps due to their being less exposed to the social life in which they find themselves in a situation of greater vulnerability due to their family situation and gender factors. Authors such as Kaye-Tzadok et al. (2017) have pointed out that the area where girls are less satisfied compared to boys is that of interpersonal relationships, and in this study, lockdowns may have allowed them to be less exposed to conflict, an issue that should be explored more in the future to determine whether this hypothesis is supported by the evidence.

All that being said, according to a recent study (Montserrat et al. 2021), this positive effect may have been due to an improvement in relationships with social educators in the residential homes and the fact of finding in them a trusted person during lockdown, together with an improvement in academic results, also as a result of lockdown. These hypotheses gain weight if we take into account the results of previous studies, wherein precisely these aspects were found to be least satisfactory among children and adolescents in residential care (Ortúzar et al. 2019; Garcia-Molsosa et al. 2019). Another possible explanation is that school professionals have begun to incorporate a gender perspective into their interventions, given the social pressure to do so. These results will need to be followed very closely in order to see how this aspect evolves in the future, thus representing a clear impetus for future research.

The most important limitation of this research was probably having administered the questionnaire during full lockdown, which has led to our venturing hypotheses that will have to be tested in the future. At the same time, however, this did present an opportunity to verify that despite changing environmental conditions, the measurement of subjective well-being remains quite stable over time and differences are concentrated mainly in

the field of interpersonal relationships, which constitute the relations most affected by lockdown. It will be necessary to complement this study with a more qualitative approach with regard to the opinions of children and adolescents, whose experiences and concerns will help us explain their subjective well-being as well as formulate hypotheses about the changes that have taken place over time. There is therefore an evident need for further longitudinal research in this regard.

Despite the limitations of this study, some implications for policy and practice can be suggested based on its results. On the one hand, family foster care should be encouraged as the best way to endorse factors that increase children's well-being, such as stability, the prioritization of school or higher levels of participation among children in care. On the other hand, residential care should be improved regarding: (1) the promotion of relationships with peers outside the residential centre, including in times of crisis. In order to do so, logistical and resource limitations must be overcome. (2) Professionals in residential centres should be stabilised and cared for, considering their importance in children's lives, especially in times of crisis. (3) Caregivers must adopt a gender perspective to better fit girls' particular socio-emotional needs.

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Green Lights and Red Flags: The (Im)Possibilities of Contextual Safeguarding Responses to Extra-Familial Harm in the UK

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Abstract: Young people experience significant harm in a range of social contexts and from adults and peers unconnected to their caregivers. The recognition of this by policymakers in England, Scotland, and Wales has resulted in child protection policy frameworks increasingly requiring social work responses to the extra-familial contexts where such harm occurs, as well as to the young people affected. This paper presents results from an embedded research project in which five local children's social care departments used a Contextual Safeguarding framework to respond to this shifting policy direction. The data collected via ethnographic methods over three years included meeting and practice observations ($n = 65$), meeting participation ($n = 334$), reviews of young people's case files ($n = 122$), interviews ($n = 27$) and focus groups ($n = 33$) with professionals, focus groups ($n = 6$), interviews ($n = 2$) and surveys ($n = 78$) with parents and young people, and analysis of local policies and procedures ($n = 101$). At two stages in the project, the researchers used this dataset to review the progress in each participant site against the Contextual Safeguarding framework. Reporting on the progress made across the five sites, this paper identifies elements of the system change that appeared most feasible or challenging. The results demonstrate four ways in which current policy reforms fall short in creating national contexts that are conducive to the implementation of Contextual Safeguarding, despite local progress towards this goal. The implications for the policy and practices are outlined, with fundamental questions asked of the statutory systems which need to protect, but all too often criminalise, young people abused beyond their front doors.

Keywords: adolescents; extra-familial harm; exploitation; child protection; Contextual Safeguarding

1. Introduction

When a child is relatively safe with their caregivers but at risk of significant harm from peers or adults unconnected to their families, who should coordinate a response? Since 2018, policymakers in England, Wales, and Scotland have increasingly situated responses with the child and family social workers and the child protection systems in which they work. Concurrently, the policy has been updated to recommend that social workers assess and intervene with peer groups, schools, and public places where extra-familial harm (EFH) occurs and support the young people and families affected. These policy developments have been influenced by the concept of 'Contextual Safeguarding' (Firmin 2020), which was introduced to illustrate the gaps in the child protection responses to EFH. While many have welcomed these developments (Brandon et al. 2020; Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner 2020), the feasibility of Contextual Safeguarding is under-researched. Is national policy recognition of Contextual Safeguarding reflected in the local responses to EFH? To what extent are social workers practising in systems that can, as a Contextual Safeguarding framework (CS Framework hereafter) suggests, assess (and respond to) risks that are *faced by*, as well as in, families? This paper offers a system insight into these questions. Presenting data from five social care departments that implemented Contextual Safeguarding over three years, we report on where implementation has been most feasible; where the challenges persist; and what this tells us about the sufficiency of child protection policy frameworks that promote Contextual Safeguarding responses to EFH.

2. Background

In addition to the challenges they may face within their families, young people during adolescence may also be harmed in extra-familial contexts. As they enter their first romantic, or intimate, relationships, a significant minority of young people report physical, emotional, or sexual abuse (Barter et al. 2015; Foshee et al. 2014). Some are sexually exploited by adults unconnected to their families (Berelowitz et al. 2013; Dierkhisinga et al. 2020), as well as by peers (Firmin 2017; Radford et al. 2011), and others are exploited into transporting/distributing drugs (Hudek 2018; Turner et al. 2019). The significant, and sometimes fatal, consequences of these forms of harm to young people's welfare has resulted in their gradual framing as child protection issues by policymakers in England, Wales, and Scotland (HM Government 2018; Scottish Government 2021; Welsh Government 2021).

2.1. Challenges of Child Protection Responses to Extra-Familial Harm

Multiple inquiries and policy reports have identified fundamental limitations in the child protection responses to EFH in the UK (Brandon et al. 2020; Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel 2020; Firmin 2017; Hanson and Holmes 2014). These limitations are wide-ranging and include the focus of child protection systems on younger children rather than adolescents (Brandon et al. 2020; Hanson and Holmes 2014); on the presumed distinctions between the victims and the perpetrators of abuse, which are often blurred in cases of EFH (Cockbain and Brayley 2012; Turner et al. 2019); on the system responses to the agentic nature of young people affected by EFH, who 'choose' to spend time with those who harm them (Lefevre et al. 2017; Lloyd 2019); on the nature of some EFH requiring social workers to coordinate plans to support young people impacted by organised crime (Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel 2020); and on the fact that EFH often occurs in (extra-familial) contexts that are not the traditional focus of child protection systems (Firmin 2017).

2.2. The Development of Contextual Safeguarding

While there is no silver bullet to resolve these challenges, a range of innovations have attempted to address them (Ofsted 2018; Scott et al. 2017). In this paper, we focus on efforts to resolve the challenge presented by child protection systems focused on individual children and families affected by EFH and not on the contexts where it occurs (Firmin 2017). This mismatch was brought to life through a review of nine cases where young people came to severe or fatal harm within peer, as opposed to familial, relationships (Firmin 2017). In every case, the social workers assessed the capacity of parents/carers to protect their children from extra-familial risks, while the risks escalated in peer groups, schools, and public places; this is a pattern which has since been noted in multiple national publications (Brandon et al. 2020; Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel 2020; MacAlister 2022).

As a result of the nine-case review, in 2015 the term 'Contextual Safeguarding' was coined and converted into a four-part framework (Firmin et al. 2016) to conceptualise the features of the child protection and wider safeguarding systems capable of targeting the extra-familial contexts where EFH occurs. The CS Framework recommended four domains against which to organise system responses to EFH; Table 1 details these domains in comparison to the existing UK child protection systems.

Policy frameworks in England, Wales, and Scotland have been adapted, in response to the development of Contextual Safeguarding, to promote social work responses to extra-familial contexts (peer groups, schools, and neighbourhoods). In 2018, England's statutory safeguarding guidance was amended to recommend that in cases of EFH:

> [Social work] interventions should focus on addressing these wider environmental factors, which are likely to be a threat to the safety and welfare of a number of different children who may or may not be known to local authority children's social care. (HM Government 2018, p. 25)

In 2021, revisions to Scotland's child protection guidance resulted in a recommendation that social work plans:

> ... seek to create the conditions in which young people can make safer choices rather than simply focusing on changing young people's behaviour in persistently harmful contexts. (Scottish Government 2021, p. 79)

In the same year the All Wales Safeguarding Guidance on Child Sexual Exploitation was updated to recommend that:

> Interventions, together with support, are required in the places where children socialise and spend time, such as shopping centres and transport hubs. (Welsh Government 2021, p. 26)

These amendments were presented as additional, something newly required of social workers and the child protection systems in which they operated (Firmin 2020).

Accordingly, the children's social care departments in England (since 2017), Wales (from 2019), and Scotland (from 2020) have been using the CS Framework to build child protection systems capable of responding to contexts affected by EFH. Policy adaptations to promote contextual child protection approaches to EFH have created an authorising national environment for these local efforts. This paper explores whether such authorisation has created the conditions in which Contextual Safeguarding is feasible.

Table 1. Domains of Contextual Safeguarding against traditional child and family system.

Domain	A Contextual Safeguarding System	A Child- and Family-Focused System
1	Targets contexts where EFH occurs: identify, assess, and intervene to change the social conditions of those contexts that are associated with EFH	Targets (in)action by parents/carers to build their capacity to protect their child from EFH
2	Uses child protection and wider child welfare legislation, as opposed to community safety and criminal justice frameworks, to organise their responses to extra-familial contexts where EFH occurs	Draws upon community safety and policing legislation to organise responses to contexts beyond families – reserving the use of child protection legislation for family intervention
3	Involves partnerships between those who lead child protection responses and individuals/organisations who have a reach into, or influence over, extra-familial contexts where EFH occurs	Relies on key statutory partners (the police, health, and education) to coordinate plans for children and families affected by EFH
4	Measures the contextual, as well as the individual, impact of safeguarding responses to EFH; in particular whether safety has increased in contexts where EFH has occurred in addition to safeguarding any young people affected	Measures the impact of safeguarding responses on the behaviour of young people and parents/carers

3. Methodology

The paper presents findings from a three-year, multi-site project in which five children and families social care departments in England and Wales applied the CS Framework. The project ran from May 2018 to June 2022. The participating sites aimed to *design, test, and embed a Contextual Safeguarding approach to EFH across children and families services*, to assist the research team in understanding what Contextual Safeguarding looked like in practice, its feasibility, and the conditions that facilitated this. Four research objectives were developed in accordance with the four domains of the CS Framework. How, and in what ways (or not), did the sites create system responses to EFH that:

1. Targeted the social conditions in which extra-familial harm occurs (Domain 1);
2. Used child protection and wider child welfare legislation, as opposed to community safety and criminal justice frameworks, to respond to extra-familial harm (Domain 2);
3. Involved individuals and organisations that have a reach into, or influence over, extra-familial contexts (Domain 3);
4. Measured the contextual, as well as the individual, impact of any response offered to extra-familial harm (Domain 4).

3.1. Research Process

Thirty local areas responded to a call for interest to participate in the project. Five were selected as research sites based on their readiness to undergo extensive system change and variation in geographical spread; authority type; social work models being used; types of EFH identified locally; and local demographics, such as poverty rates and ethnic diversity. The sites were:

- A unitary city council in the southwest of England covering a small urban area;
- A unitary council in southwest England covering a large rural area;
- A unitary authority council on the south Wales coast that included urban and rural areas;
- A metropolitan borough council in the northwest of England;
- A large county council with 12 district councils in the southeast of England covering rural, coastal, and urban areas.

A project team of eight researchers across two universities worked alongside the sites. They adopted a methodology informed by an embedded approach to the research, working collaboratively with the sites to co-create shared project plans and outputs (McGinity and Salokangas 2014; Lloyd 2021). The research was conducted over three phases:

- Phase one: understand the site's current response to EFH and develop a plan to adapt that response against the CS Framework;
- Phase two: run two pilots at each site that build responses to extra-familial contexts, and assess their alignment with the CS Framework;
- Phase three: embed pilot results and disseminate learning.

Across phases one and two, the research team used a range of methods to capture the extent to which the sites were working towards the four domains of the CS Framework. These methods included:

- Observations of 65 meetings and the practice related to cases of EFH;
- File review of 122 cases and assessments;
- System mapping ($n = 10$): to understand the journey of children and contexts through the system;
- Participation in 334 meetings to inform developing work;
- 27 Interviews and 33 focus groups with practitioners;
- 6 focus groups, 2 interviews, and 78 surveys with parents and young people to capture their experiences and perspectives on the new approaches to EFH;
- Documentary review of 101 new and existing policies and documents relating to EFH.

3.2. Ethics and Limitations

The ethics for the research was granted by two universities. The consent to participate was secured throughout. The initial consent was agreed by the Director of Children's Services and a multi-agency partnership. The consent for individual participation was gained individually. The consent considered the impact of the research, the confidentiality, and the right to withdraw.

Several limitations are relevant to the study. Firstly, COVID-19 significantly impacted the project. Prior to this, the researchers had been physically present at the sites; this was not possible from March 2020, impacting the development of the relationships with the practitioners and the provision of informal support and reflection. Moreover, COVID-19 put restraints on the involvement of the children's service practitioners in creating and innovating system change, as they were responding to the immediate needs of young people during the pandemic. Secondly, the project did not aim to develop a single approach to responding to contexts associated with EFH. The systems created in these five sites are not necessarily feasible in other UK or international locations, which may operate in different political, social, economic, and cultural contexts. The study sought to understand the possibilities and constraints of Contextual Safeguarding in the current policy landscape in five exemplar sites.

3.3. Analysis

An iterative approach to the analysis was undertaken, punctuated by formal analysis sessions. Throughout the project, the researchers documented thoughts and reflections which were discussed during fortnightly reflective team meetings. Emerging findings were considered monthly with the sites and through governance arrangements. A systematic approach to analysis was then undertaken at several points throughout the project. A System Review framework (Firmin 2021) was used, whereby the research team considered the data collected against each domain of the CS Framework and for different parts of a site's local child protection and wider safeguarding system:

- 'referral': activities to (a) support referrals of contexts associated with EFH and (b) record contextual information when young people affected by EFH were referred for support;
- 'assessment': activities to (a) assess contexts associated with EFH and (b) gather contextual information when assessing the needs of young people affected by EFH;
- 'planning': activities to agree plans (a) for contexts associated with EFH and (b) that support young people by identifying and addressing contexts where they are unsafe;
- 'response': activities that (a) respond to changes in the social conditions of the contexts associated with EFH and (b) respond to young people affected by EFH in ways that recognise the impact of contextual factors on their decision making and behaviour.

The data were organised against the framework to be illustrative of approaches that were 'green' (appropriate or emerging), 'amber' (some elements but not yet integrated), and 'red' (no evidence or limited evidence) practices as they aligned to the CS Framework (see Table 2 below). Each field of the table was populated with evidence. Table 2 provides a pared-down example of this. Once the data were organised, the researchers used the CS System Review framework to decide on the overall colour of each unit. In the example in Table 2, the unit for Domain 1, at the point of referrals into the system, would be scored as 'amber' because while there is evidence of emerging green practice, many elements of the system at this practice point are not yet developed or integrated. The project co-investigator was present at every rating session to ensure consistency in the application of the framework.

Table 2. example system review framework.

	Referral	Assessment	Planning	Response
Domain 1: Target	Red - Case reviews highlight that assessments of young people do not consistently include information on contexts Amber - Lack of clarity of threshold for cases of EFH - No formal established mechanism for logging contexts in at the front door Green - Front doors have systems in place for referring locations and peer groups - Referrals are being utilised for level 2 by multi-agency partners	Red - Individual assessments do not routinely ask questions about broader contexts Amber - Variation in thresholds for location assessments Green - Have developed a pathway for assessing locations and peer groups	Red - EFH meetings are not seen as priority so less attendance at meetings and less time for assessment Amber - While planning meetings are able to articulate context most in need, this is not necessarily evidenced in the target of interventions Green - Panel process builds relationships with partners and reduces individual practitioner anxiety	Red - lack of knowledge or understanding of potential interventions Amber - Evidence of some peer group intervention work but does not fully consider the peer group dynamics or address them Green - Use of partnerships facilitates responses in the places and spaces they spend their time with the people they are friends with

Table 2. *Cont.*

	Referral	Assessment	Planning	Response
Domain 2: Legislative framework				
Domain 3: Partnerships				
Domain 4: Outcomes				

The findings were presented to the site representative and then at the 'system review' meetings for input from the site participants. This RAG rating process was undertaken at two points in the project: at the end of phase one in 2019 and at the end of phase two in 2021. The researchers produced two colour-coded tables for each site to illustrate progress in implementing Contextual Safeguarding from 2019 to 2021 (see Table 3 below).

For this paper, all ten colour-coded tables were analysed. The colours were converted into numbers (red = 0, amber = 1, green = 2) to calculate the sites' total points for implementation of each domain at phase one and two and the differences in each site's performance between phase one and two for each domain and to provide an implementation rank for each domain from the highest to the lowest score.

Table 3. Findings of stage one and two RAG rating.

| | | | Site U | | | | Site V | | | | Site X | | | | Site Y | | | | Site Z | | | |
| | | | Part of System | | | | Part of System | | | | Part of System | | | | Part of System | | | | Part of System | | | |
			Ref	As	Pla	Re	Ref	As	Plan	Re	Ref	As	Pla	Re	Ref	As	Pla	Re	Ref	As	Pla	Re
Stage one	Domain	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
		2	0	1	0	X	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	X	0	0	0
		3	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	X	1	0
		4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stage two	Domain	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1
		2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	0	1	2	2	2	2
		3	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
		4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Note: X indicates insufficient data to provide a score.

4. Findings

Table 3 shows the RAG rating results after stage one and stage two for all five sites (referred to as U, V, X, Y, and Z for anonymity). The findings at these two stages demonstrate site-level developments across the project. The four domains of the CS Framework run vertically, and the part of the site's system under analysis runs horizontally (Ref = referral, As = assessment, Plan = planning, and Re = Response).

By drawing together the total number of points scored across the sites for each domain of the CS Framework, we illustrate the progress the sites made between stages one and two of the project (Table 4).

Table 4. Total points and difference across stage one and two.

	Total Points		Difference
	Stage One	**Stage Two**	
Domain 1	10	27	17
Domain 2	8	36	28
Domain 3	10	29	19
Domain 4	0	22	22

At stage one, the sites scored highest for alignment with Domains 2 and 3 (10), with Domain 4 scoring the lowest. At stage two the sites scored highest for Domain 2 (36), with Domain 4 still scoring the lowest (22). The sites made the greatest improvement in developing systems that aligned to Domain 2 of Contextual Safeguarding and the least in their system's ability to align to Domains 1 and 3. These results are examined below; they are contextualised with reference to the dataset used throughout the RAG rating process.

4.1. Most Progress: Domain 2

Domain 2 of the CS Framework recommends that the responses to EFH be built upon child protection and wider safeguarding and legislation/guidance, as opposed to community safety or wider criminal justice policy. The local systems aligned to this domain would likely feature social work responses to young people affected by EFH even when the parents/carers were assessed as protective (so as to respond to extra-familial factors), as well as the contexts in which EFH occurred (rather than police-led responses to groups or locations).

4.2. Alignment to Domain 2 at Stage One

At stage one, the sites scored a total of eight points for Domain 2. Every site was assessed as red for Domain 2 in at least one part of their system. Two sites (U and Y) were unable to demonstrate evidence of a child protection and wider child welfare approach to EFH at the point where young people, and the associated contexts, were referred for support. The two sites that were making progress towards a child welfare approach to referrals for EFH (X and Z) were unable to provide evidence of this through the assessments. In three of the five sites, there was no evidence that the plans to respond to EFH were child-welfare-led (as opposed to criminal-justice-led). Site Z scored red in every part of their system for Domain 2, except for referrals where the data were insufficient to reach a conclusion. No site scored green for Domain 2 in any part of their system.

The reviews of the social work case files at stage one evidenced how some sites only drew upon safeguarding frameworks when the EFH was assessed as being attributable to the (in)action of the parents and therefore the home context. Without such attribution, young people affected by EFH were closed to children's social care:

> B is still at risk of CSE (child sexual exploitation) and as such she is receiving support at school from [VCS organisation] on a weekly basis. B's mother has a safety plan in place and supervises B. There is no role for the Children's Social Work Team at this moment. (Dip-Sampling Data, Site Z, 2019)

> I had a positive feeling about this family, despite the incidents leading to this referral. N (brother) has agreed to referrals to PREVENT and Skills for Work... I see no further role for Children's Service. (Dip-Sampling Data, Site U, 2019)

The role of the social work and the child protection processes were largely reserved for intervention with the home, as opposed to the extra-familial, contexts.

The responses to EFH that went beyond parenting intervention were heavily reliant on community safety and policing responses (counter to Domain 2). This reliance was acutely evident when the sites responded to extra-familial contexts. The tasking of interventions into extra-familial contexts was managed through panels that themselves were heavily influenced by crime data. The role of social workers was limited to assessing the parents/carers of young people at risk of harm in those contexts – not the contexts themselves. At Site V, for example, an outreach team had been commissioned to support young people who were being criminally exploited or were at risk of serious violence and to work in the places and spaces where this harm was occurring. This team was based within a community safety directorate and had no social work involvement. The young people were identified by an algorithm which drew heavily from police data. The social worker responses to the young people concerned were viewed as being independent of that team and were parent-focused.

As such, at the stage one sites the responses to EFH were not aligned to Domain 2 of Contextual Safeguarding. The child protection systems and the social workers within them:

a.   Assessed, and developed plans to address, parenting/home contexts of young people at risk of EFH;

b.   Had an undecided, contested, or wholly absent role in responding to extra-familial contexts; a responsibility held by the criminal justice and community safety professionals.

4.3. Alignment to Domain 2 at Stage Two

By stage two, most sites were working towards or had resolved both of the afore-mentioned challenges. Various activities were undertaken to achieve this progress. We highlight three:

1.   Revision of the social care pathway for young people at risk of EFH;

2.   The increasing of the social work involvement in the assessment of extra-familial contexts;

3.   The building of a welfare-based understanding of EFH across a workforce.

The first two of these were consistent across multiple sites; the third demonstrates the contrasting progress made against Domain 2 in Sites Y and Z.

All the sites revised their social care pathway (and associated planning processes) for young people who had experienced EFH. They used child protection and wider safeguarding guidance to frame responses to EFH and to put in place social-work-led planning and oversight for the young people (and contexts) affected. For example, one site (code not provided to protect identity) piloted a 'Risk Outside of the Home' (ROTH) pathway and an associated conference. This pathway was to be used to coordinate plans for young people where the principal source of significant harm was extra-familial. The social workers were responsible for completing assessments and authoring reports ahead of a ROTH conference and a meeting, chaired by a child protection chair, to agree a plan. In these meetings, the social workers and partner organisations focused on the context(s) in which young people were at risk of harm, as opposed to the (in)action of parents. Parents/carers attended the meetings as safeguarding partners.

In one ROTH conference, the professionals were observed discussing the welfare of a young person at his college. He had been attacked on the college premises and was no longer attending due to safety concerns. The social worker leading the assessment stated that actions were required to build safety at the college itself, and the college leadership were asked to account for any work undertaken to date or planned in the interim; a shared safety plan was also devised for this young person and two of his peers; the plan was co-owned by them and their parents to identify safe ways (and places) for them to spend time together until the wider community-based risks had been addressed. The plan therefore was largely focused on his peer group and his college—as opposed to creating safety in an already protective family home.

Not all the sites introduced such extensive changes. Some made small amendments to existing systems or clarified the role of social workers in these cases. For example, Site Z reviewed and refined a pathway for supporting adolescents at risk of harm, auditing its use to ensure access to support due to the EFH not being reliant on the identified risks within the home context.

Sites V and X piloted social-work-led assessments of extra-familial contexts, including peer groups and public spaces, such as streets, beaches, and parks, and all the sites attempted to assess the welfare of the young people in extra-familial contexts during the test period. These processes meant that if young people were believed to be at risk of significant harm in an extra-familial context, a social-work-led assessment of that context was undertaken. Site V piloted five assessments and Site X piloted ten. The prior context responses had been the remit of community safety partnerships. The participants noted the distinct perspective a social work assessment brought to how the risks in extra-familial contexts were understood:

> We couldn't have done it without social care and having that, this piece of work ongoing, I don't think, I don't think it would have happened without the pilot running . . . to get people involved that I hadn't really thought of. I don't think I'd have thought about involving housing, if I'm honest. (Site V, FG10)

Across all the assessments, the young people's welfare, rather than crime, was a central concern. This shift in focus informed the development of child-welfare-orientated planning for contexts. For example, following a serious disturbance involving serious violence between young people on the seafront, the beach was referred to children's social care for assessment. The area had experienced the closure of over-18 establishments due to COVID-19 restrictions, which reduced the business oversight of the area and increased the number of adults using the beach and mixing with young people. Social workers in Site X led an assessment of the location to increase young people's safety at the beachfront. Social workers used this assessment to coordinate a multi-agency response to the beach involving activities, including increasing detached youth work provision, social media engagement, and increased guardianship via bed and breakfasts and cafes to help keep young people safe.

As with the efforts to develop social work pathways for young people at risk of EFH, introducing social work oversight in response to extra-familial contexts increased the site alignment with Domain 2. Such activities were built upon child protection legislation and wider safeguarding guidance, increasing the extent to which the sites took a child welfare approach to EFH, while simultaneously decreasing community-safety-framed interventions.

By reporting the progress the sites made in aligning to Domain 2 via structural or practical changes, we risk overlooking the culturally focused system change. Comparing the progress of Sites Y and Z is helpful here. Site Z made the most progress on Domain 2 between stages one and two, whereas Site Y made the least. At stage one, Site Z scored red; a child welfare response to EFH was absent. The stage one system review raised significant questions about the culture of the service. The data collected demonstrated that the practitioners were struggling to recognise young people/contexts affected by EFH as being in need of a social work response. Consequently, Site Z focused on training 391 social care professionals, 91 professionals from statutory partner agencies, and 7 from a fast-food outlet where young people were spending time. These efforts offered consistent communication that EFH was a child welfare, and not solely a community safety, issue and provided the foundations upon which to introduce the type of structural or practical changes outlined previously.

Comparatively, and as will be explored in later sections of this paper, Site Y did not build a collective understanding amongst its workforce that EFH was a child welfare issue. By stage two, there remained multiple examples of how social workers and their partner agencies framed responses via policing and community safety policy and practice. This meant that even when they introduced some contextual practices into their assessment and planning processes or attempted to undertake welfare-based assessments of extra-familial contexts, the social work plans remained predominantly concerned with parenting. For example, while the risks to one young person appeared to be community-based, the statement read at the end of their child protection conference stated:

> . . . we want to live in home where you don't witness fighting in family or community, we want you to feel supported and have consistent parent boundaries and to engage in support and interventions available so mum can live in a safe a supported community and we want him to be better able to manage his behaviour in school and in community. (Site Y, Observation 48)

4.4. Least Progress: Domains 1 and 3

Domain 1 of the CS Framework recommends that local responses to EFH target the contexts where such harm occurs—by assessing and intervening in ways that change the social conditions of those contexts. In short, it is about identifying and addressing the social norms conducive to EFH, not simply changing people's behaviour in, or the design of,

those contexts. Domain 3 of the CS Framework recommends that any efforts to implement Domain 1 occur through partnerships between those who traditionally lead child protection responses to harm (children's social care) and the individuals/organisations who can influence extra-familial contexts. These partners may include people who work in libraries, shopping centres, transport hubs, youth clubs, schools, etc., as well as the young people and families in contexts where EFH has occurred.

4.5. Alignment to Domains 1 and 3 at Stage One

In 2019, the sites scored a total of ten points for their alignment with both Domain 1 and Domain 3 of the CS Framework, making them the highest-scoring domains at stage one. For Domain 1, four of the five sites were assessed as demonstrating amber practice in at least one part of their system, and at three sites (U, V and X), the majority of the system was assessed as amber. For Domain 3, all the sites could demonstrate amber practice in at least one part of their system.

Perhaps it is unsurprising that at stage one the sites scored highest for Domain 1. While not a correct interpretation, the researchers in the Contextual Safeguarding team have found that practitioners often associate Domain 1 with social care interventions in places outside the family, such as when intervening to change the behaviour of individuals in extra-familial contexts rather than the social conditions of those contexts. As such, the data from stage one illustrated multiple activities with 'amber' alignment to Domain 1, such as:

> [Early help service] have been doing peer-group eco mapping e.g., to inform working with a peer group following a suicide. Another related to a location. (Amber, Stage one, Domain 1, Site X)

> Have analytical capacity to peer group map and location map. (Amber, Stage One, Domain 1, Site U)

As the test site practitioners developed responses to locations outside the home (Domain 1), they needed to do so with the agreement and cooperation of their partners in those locations (Domain 3). Consequently, the fact that the sites received the same score for alignment with Domain 3 as they did with Domain 1 was somewhat expected. England's Disrupting Exploitation Toolkit (Home Office 2019) and the Welsh CSE guidance (Welsh Government 2021) both recommend that agencies intervene in locations associated with EFH in collaboration with multi-agency partners. At stage one, we saw multiple examples of this:

> Youth Community Safety group meeting has positive welfare outputs—disrupting gangs work in parks etc. (Amber, stage one, domain three, Site Z)

> [Safeguarding Service] is developing a service with schools. (Green, stage one, domain three, Site Y)

> [Youth Services] in development provide group interventions. (Green, stage one, domain three, Site U)

At stage one, Domains 1 and 3 of the CS Framework appeared to be interdependent. Emboldened by national policy frameworks that promoted location-based interventions and local senior commitment to Contextual Safeguarding, the sites developed approaches to working in extra-familial contexts with multi-agency partners as the first steps in creating their system change.

4.6. Alignment to Domains 1 and 3 at Stage 2

By stage two, the sites had made the least progress with respect of Domains 1 and 3. While no sites scored red for Domain 1 at stage two, they also failed to progress to green in more than two parts of the system.

To be considered 'green' for Domain 1, the sites had to do more than undertake safeguarding work in contexts outside the home (enough to potentially score amber); this

work needed to tackle the social conditions of abuse. To align with Domain 3, the sites had to move beyond work with statutory partners deployed into extra-familial contexts (such as policing, schools, and health services) and instead engage non-traditional partners based in the contexts in which the young people spent time (such as with young people, families, businesses, and residents). The ability to create systems that aligned to Domains 1 and 3, or the challenges of doing so, therefore remained interdependent.

The implications of this interdependence are exemplified through the data collected from Sites U and Y, which piloted responses to extra-familial contexts between stage one and two. Site U's response was a community meeting for schools to raise concerns about EFH, and Site Y assessed a neighbourhood and peer group associated with EFH.

Site U introduced a 'community meeting' process for schools to raise trends related to EFH. These community meetings brought together schools with the local authority adolescent team and other local agencies. In one meeting, a school raised concerns about a group of young people coming to the attention of the local police (present in the meeting) and where there was "a lot of bad feeling [directed at] these young people in the community" (school staff, meeting observation 44). In the meeting, different partners discussed the concerns that had arisen (such as criminal damage and being 'abusive to the public') and attributed them to a lack of activities for young people. In the meeting, the partners—the police, the youth workers, and the school—discussed how to pool funding to resource a few days away for the group to build relationships and address some of the challenges arising in the community. The meeting concluded with each organisation seeking funding and the youth workers and police agreeing to watch out for the welfare of the group when not at school.

Site Y undertook a context assessment in response to concerns that a group of young people were being criminally exploited. This involved an assessment of an estate, the surrounding area, and a group of young people associated with the concerns. The area was identified by the crime data received by the Community Safety Partnership in relation to, and as the product of, a police operation. The aim was to undertake assessments to reduce the perpetration of criminal exploitation in this area (by adults and young people) and increase the safeguarding of the young people. The information supplied by the young people to the safeguarding practitioners who were completing a peer assessment was triaged through a police website, and the lead social worker overseeing the assessment noted that the assessments "may lead to more arrests of young people" (notes, observation 46). The assessments supported the identification of guardianship in the area (youth workers) and highlighted options for other interventions to disrupt the crime, such as increased police patrols, CCTV, and licensing incentives (issuing notices to businesses where young people may be being harmed to disrupt activity). The practitioners noted that they were unable to engage young people in discussions about their peers but felt the peer assessment had helped them to understand the group more.

The examples from Sites U and Y illustrate two very different approaches to addressing EFH. While both pilots engaged similar partners, there were clear differences in the focus of the assessments. Site U's pilot evidenced a commitment to ensuring the welfare of the young people; to understanding the context in which concerning behaviours had occurred; and to identifying activities/opportunities for the young people—thus changing the social conditions of the context (Domain 1). While the police were involved, this was to explore their guardianship role in looking out for the young people who may be vulnerable. At Site Y, assessments were led by Community Safety, focused on mapping crime data and considered opportunities to prevent crime via disruption (for example, by arresting adult perpetrators) to protect young people who may be exploited. This response reinforced the social conditions of the contexts where policing enforcement was dominant.

To align to the CS Framework, it is not enough for safeguarding professionals to work in contexts beyond the home with traditional safeguarding partners. Where the focus of the work is still individualised, it is likely that interventions will focus on changing the behaviours of individuals, not the contexts where the behaviour occurs (as Domain 1

requires). This, in turn, highlights the significant influence of the partnerships promoted via Domain 3 of the CS Framework. While neither site particularly engaged with non-traditional partners or young people and families (and as such were mainly marked as amber for Domain 3 at stage two), the task of the partners also influenced the approach taken to targeting the contexts/groups associated with EFH. For example, the police were involved at both sites. At Site Y, they were engaged in assessments focused on crime reduction, where arrests of young people were seen as a possible impact of the work—reinforcing existing relationships. At Site U the intervention plan included activities to change relationships between the police and the local young people.

At its most extreme, a site's performance at the intersection of Domains 1 and 3 can influence whether they align with Domain 2—the extent to which the work is framed as a child protection and wider safeguarding response. This was evident when Site Y still scored red for Domain 2 in their system's approach to planning at stage two. It is worth noting the contextual differences between Sites U and Y. At Site U, the practitioners were concerned about, among other things, a peer group 'pulling up flowers' in the high street (notes observation 44). At Site Y, the peer group were being exploited to traffic class A drugs and had experienced multiple stabbings. In this context, Site Y struggled to shift the dominant narrative of crime prevention in favour of welfare when planning in cases of EFH (Owens and Lloyd Forthcoming).

5. Discussion

The efforts of the five sites featured in this paper demonstrate that an updated policy framework does not a Contextual Safeguarding system make. While most sites managed to increase the social work oversight of both the contexts where EFH occurred and the young people affected (and therefore align to Domain 2 of the framework), this did not always result in child welfare responses that (a) targeted the social conditions of those contexts (Domain 1) or (b) featured partnerships with individuals and organisations who could influence those contexts (Domain 3). Four themes emerged across the findings detailed above which offer some explanation of these shortcomings.

Firstly, social care systems in England and Wales (as with many other countries in the Global North) are designed upon behaviourist principles (Gilbert et al. 2011). Domain 1 of the CS Framework requires local services to address the social conditions in which harm occurs—not just target behaviour-change interventions at individuals who comprise a peer group or spend time in a public place. The individualised nature of the UK's child protection systems has been well documented (Featherstone et al. 2018; Parton 2014; Rogowski 2012). Individualised systems ask people to behave differently in persistently unsafe and unequal conditions; their behaviour (and not the context in which it occurs) is the target of the system. Through recognition of 'extra-familial' interpersonal harms, the researchers behind Contextual Safeguarding highlighted the limitations of that ask. Yet, expanding social work intervention to peer groups and locations has not necessarily shifted the focus of the social work interventions offered within individualised systems. The challenges the sites experienced in moving from amber to green in Domain 1 of the CS Framework were largely associated with their persistent focus on individuals who spent time in extra-familial contexts rather than the wider social conditions which informed their behaviour.

Secondly, child protection systems in England and Wales largely target the (in)action of parents in order to create safety. Parents, and the young people they support, are the target of the system—not a partner to it (Featherstone et al. 2018). While many areas have sought to redress this balance, introducing models such as Family Group Conferencing to create spaces where families can be partners in creating safety for children (Mason et al. 2017), these efforts do not characterise the systems more widely. Although the sites made some progress in pushing against this by attempting to target the contexts associated with EFH, the legacy of parent-focused systems meant that most sites struggled to establish collaborative social work relationships (and associated cultures) with non-

statutory organisations and individuals in extra-familial contexts. The two sites that performed best in this respect (V and X) had long-standing relationships with community organisations that they were able to leverage in response to extra-familial contexts. In the remaining three sites, the partnerships with young people, families, and their wider communities were not in the foreground of the responses to EFH, nor were they a consistent feature of their wider safeguarding system, and this undermined the alignment with Domain 3 of the CS Framework.

Thirdly, the national policy frameworks for EFH have long straddled criminal justice and children's social care departments (Cockbain and Brayley 2012; MacAlister 2022); the same patterns are borne out in local services. The jury is still out, it seems, as to whether EFH is primarily a criminal justice or a child protection matter, particularly when responding to serious violence. This tension was particularly apparent at Site Y from our dataset, but one that also challenged most sites. A clear steer from social care leadership in Sites U, V and X and a focus on shifting to a welfare-based culture at Site Z supported the four sites in aligning well with Domain 2 despite these tensions. However, all the sites are also operating in national policy contexts where community safety partnerships hold oversight of some forms of EFH – such as 'serious youth violence' (Firmin and Knowles 2022). In this sense, they have been authorised to develop social work responses to the contexts where EFH occurs in one set of policy documents, whilst another situates EFH as a community safety issue. No site appeared to fully resolve this by the end of the test period.

These three challenges within national systems/policy frameworks coalesced to produce a fourth and final challenge encountered by the sites—the desired outcomes for service responses to EFH and their (mis)alignment with the CS Framework. Most sites struggled to make any progress in consistently measuring the contextual impact of their responses to EFH (Domain 4). We have not reported progress against Domain 4 in this paper as this was the most undeveloped element of local responses at the start of the project and remained that way at the point of writing. All the test sites are operating in policy and practice environments that measure impact individually. How are social workers to assess and address risks *faced by* families when the systems they work in and the interventions they utilize are designed to measure change in the behaviour *within* those families instead of the contexts in which they are raising their children? Statutory commissioners and voluntary sector funding bodies resource interventions aligned to individual outcome measures, and government departments evaluate a range of responses on the same grounds (Preston et al. 2021). This focus is baked into so many structures in which these five research sites operate that it is interesting that they made any progress aligning to a CS Framework. However, as this project demonstrated, ensuring social work responses to EFH (Domain 2) does not mean that responses will seek change beyond the behaviour of individuals (Domain 1).

As well as highlighting where the sites were challenged, the four thematic barriers outlined above suggest the conditions required for Contextual Safeguarding to flourish, and these conditions go beyond the policy reforms outlined at the outset of this paper. It seems that for all four domains of the CS Framework to be implemented the sites need to be operating in national and local conditions that recognise and resource responses that are not underpinned by behaviourist principles; that (re)situate social work within communities, enabling relationships with non-statutory and community partners to be a common feature of the practice; that position criminal justice responses to EFH as secondary to (or subsumed under) safeguarding responses in both culture and practice rather than something delivered in parallel (and potentially undermining the safeguarding outcomes); and that routinely incorporate contextual outcome measures into commissioning frameworks and service reporting structures.

The variable absence/presence of these dynamics in local sites, and their general absence in national policy frameworks, is illustrated by the points of consistency/divergence across the sites and raises questions about the feasibility of Contextual Safeguarding. At the very least, it is critical to question the extent to which Contextual Safeguarding will be implemented as intended within national policy conditions or whether local efforts to do so

may risk the extension of individualised practices experienced by families to extra-familial contexts and the young people within them. Areas that wish to implement the CS Framework will need to consider how to mitigate these four challenges in local structures and cultures and in doing so provide conditions more favourable for implementation. For those involved in researching Contextual Safeguarding, this is an important point of learning. Phase 1 of this project involved mapping the structures that the sites had in place to respond to contexts associated to EFH—and the extent to which those structures aligned to the CS Framework; however, this mapping did not look for whether local conditions addressed the four thematic challenges discussed in this paper. While the challenges can, in some respects, be mapped onto the four domains of the CS Framework they are distinct from them; they are policy and cultural facilitators of implementation.

6. Conclusions

This paper explored the feasibility of Contextual Safeguarding responses to EFH in England and Wales by reviewing the implementation process at five test locations. The results suggest that some elements of the CS Framework have been more feasible than others and that progress across all the sites has been informed by four national shortfalls in creating the conditions conducive to Contextual Safeguarding.

Given these shortfalls, we can conclude that recognition of the CS Framework in national policies has not been sufficient to create conditions for the approach to be adopted in local systems. In particular, wider system characteristics that focus on behaviour, risk reduction, and individual outcome measures and are designed to 'do-to' children and families, rather than to 'work with' them, all require attention for national policy frameworks to facilitate the local implementation of Contextual Safeguarding. Furthermore, recommending social work responses to contexts and young people affected by EFH does not necessarily undo contrary policy frameworks that permit sanction-based community safety or criminal justice responses to the same young people and contexts. National policy frameworks currently promote both an increase in a child welfare response to EFH and the maintenance of a community safety response to EFH—without fully acknowledging that the latter may undermine the former. Any site wishing to adopt a Contextual Safeguarding approach will need to consider how they work within, and mitigate, these system constraints to stand the best chance of successful implementation.

The challenges identified also have implications that go beyond the implementation of Contextual Safeguarding. They create a situation in which contextual responses to EFH may do more harm than good. A fair criticism of Contextual Safeguarding is that it has the potential to extend the reach of state intervention into young people's lives, particularly into their friendships and communities (Wroe and Lloyd 2020). Such a critique is particularly pertinent if intervention is characterised by a focus on behaviour and crime reduction. While these features would not actually align to the CS Framework (Domains 1 and 3), the data presented in this paper illustrate that they could be a feature of implementation efforts and would potentially align to wider national recommendations to take a contextual approach to EFH (exclusive of alignment with the CS Framework).

Despite these challenges, most test sites developed a child protection response to contexts (and young people) associated with EFH. This progress suggests a desire for social work leadership/coordination in response to EFH and some alignment between this direction of travel and social work skills/values. Indeed, efforts to intervene at the point where structure and agency meet are well aligned to the ethics of social work promoted by the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW 2014). To further test the feasibility of Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, it will be critical to better understand and communicate the conditions most conducive to the implementation of the CS Framework, both in other UK settings (with test work underway in Scotland) and international settings (with international test work set to commence in late 2022), where contextual (and community) interventions are more prevalent, or criminal justice responses less dominant. In the intervening period, it appears that social work responses in England and Wales that address

risks faced by families, as well as in them, are being developed despite, rather than due to, the wider policy frameworks in which they operate.

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Article

When Helping Hurts: A Zemiological Analysis of a Child Protection Intervention in Adolescence—Implications for a Critical Child Protection Studies

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Abstract: This paper presents data from a three-year, mixed methods study into the rate and impact of 'relocation' as a response to extra-familial harm in adolescence by children's social care teams. Participatory approaches to research design, data collection and analysis are used to gain insights from young people, parents/carers and professionals about the impact of relocations on safety. Professionals and young people report a range of harms implicated in the use of relocations, whilst sharing that the intervention often increases safety. Data are analysed zemiologically to understand this ambivalence, connecting micro accounts of harm with meso, institutional and macro structures that determine child protection intervention. Zemiology is put forward as a promising approach for a Critical Child Protection Studies.

Keywords: child protection; relocation; children in care; adolescence; extra-familial harm; zemiology; social harm

1. Introduction

This paper applies a 'zemiological' lens to data from the second phase of a three-year, mixed methods study exploring when, why and how frequently the UK child protection system uses 'out of area' placements ('relocations') to safeguard adolescents from harms they have experienced in contexts beyond their families. Data from phase one of the research have been previously published (Firmin et al. 2021). Here, data are analysed 'zemioloigcally' using the typology proposed by Canning and Tombs (2021). 'Zemiology' is proposed as a theoretical and analytical approach to advance a field of Critical Child Protection Studies that explores the impact of child protection interventions on young people's experiences of harm and safety *and* the contribution of child protection to producing harms.

Relocation of adolescents is a common child protection response (Firmin et al. 2021) to harms such as peer-on-peer abuse and sexual and criminal exploitation, known in the UK context as 'extra-familial harm' (EFH herein, HM Government 2018). Relocation can rely on the full legal force of child protection legislation to remove children from their families and place them in the care of the state at a significant distance from their communities (Firmin et al. 2021). In many cases, relocating young people involves statutorily, or at least practically, depriving them of their liberty (Roe 2022; Firmin et al. 2021). To date, analysis of when, how and why relocations are used to safeguard adolescents has concerned itself with dilemmas of professional decision making in multi-disciplinary professional contexts and the extent to which the intervention achieves safety for young people (Firmin et al. 2021). The recent 'Case for Change' interim findings from the Independent Review into Children's Social Care in England (MacAlister 2021) suggest that relocations indicate a failure to safeguard adolescents in extra-familial contexts, and participatory research with professionals involved in the relocation of adolescents indicates that relocations are often felt to be the only means of keeping young people safe whilst they are ambivalent about their use (Firmin et al. 2021).

Zemiology is an emerging discipline studying harm to people, communities, and the environment (Canning and Tombs 2021). Although the term zemiology precedes their work, Canning and Tombs (2021) make a case for 'zemiology' as a study of harm distinct from criminology and 'crime', and as a discipline '*that seeks to unearth harmful structures, policies, decisions and practices, evidences the impact that they have and thus generates radical and sustainable changes so that they can be mitigated or eradicated*' (Canning and Tombs 2021, p. 1). Whilst 'child protection studies' is conceivably the study of, or a discipline concerned with, protection, it is simultaneously and necessarily the study of harm, both those caused by abuse and those implicated in system responses. Empirical and anecdotal evidence suggests a limited or adverse impact of child protection interventions globally (see Bilson et al. 2017; Keddell et al. 2019); as such, there is a need for robust praxiological frameworks to explore not only the effectiveness of interventions in reducing abuse but the role of child protection systems in reproducing and/or creating new harms (Parton 2019).

Zemiology facilitates an analysis of macro-level harm through methods that produce micro-level insights and vice versa (Canning and Tombs 2021). This is the approach taken here. There has been limited application of zemiology to the field of child protection (discussed further below). The paper has three aims: to expand on and further contextualise previous accounts of the harms implicated in relocations of adolescents (Firmin 2019; MacAlister 2021; Firmin et al. 2021); to bridge everyday accounts of harm and the meso institutional and macro structural drivers that are often obscured from everyday experience; and to make a case for zemiology as a useful theoretical approach in the field of Critical Child Protection Studies.

2. Background

2.1. Relocation: A Statutory Child Protection Intervention into the Lives of Adolescents

Initial findings from the national Independent Review into Children's Social Care in England note the possible deleterious consequences of relocating adolescents, including missing episodes and child death (MacAlister 2021). At the same time, findings from phase one of this study (Firmin et al. 2021) indicate that approximately 1 in 10 under adolescents who are known to children's social care teams in England and Wales due to risk in extra-familial contexts are relocated. The findings report significant variability in the use of relocations among local authorities, who were grouped according to the rate at which they relocated young people: 'group one' relocated 0–5% of young people; 'group two' relocated 5–10% young people; and 'group three' relocated 10–25% of young people (Firmin et al. 2021). This variation was dictated by a strategic (or lack of) vision around how adolescents are safeguarded and what this means for distance placements. Group one services had invested significantly in keeping or bringing children home. Group two areas tended to have no strategy regarding adolescent distant placements, with professionals reporting that they were often used as a 'last resort' in cases of escalating physical risk. For group three, relocation was seen as a solution to adolescent risk, often in the absence of alternative placements, pathways or support offers for young people (Firmin et al. 2021). Follow-up interviews with professionals suggested a range of negative impacts of relocations, including disruption of relationships and impacts on young people's mental health and well-being (Firmin et al. 2021).

This paper analyses data from the second phase of this research, where young people, their parents/carers and professionals were asked about their experiences of relocation, what helped, and did not help, and the extent to which relocations created safety in their lives. This paper adopts a broader theorisation of harm beyond that which is defined as abuse to support an understanding of the impact of relocations, and of the ambivalence evident in the accounts of those who have proposed and have lived them.

2.2. Zemiology: A Theoretical Basis for Critical Child Protection Studies

The acknowledgement in the Case for Change (MacAlister 2021) of 'relocation' as a significant child protection intervention with a limited evidence-based begins (although in

a limited way) to situate 'relocation' in the macro-context of contemporary child protection debates, policies and practices. In the Case for Change, relocation is situated as a symptom of a confused child protection system that, with a traditional focus on families, is limited in its knowledge, resources and confidence when responding to adolescent harm. However, the issues identified in the report in relation to adolescent safeguarding mirror those identified in traditional family work: competing policy priorities (including support or criminalisation of young people/families), racial disproportionality, assessment without support and reliance on proceedings to remove children into the care of the local authority to manage risk (MacAlister 2021). This suggests, perhaps, that the issue is not that the child protection system is not designed to create safety for adolescents but that it is not designed to create safety at all, a view recently debated by others (Garrett 2021; Maylea 2021).

Zemiology as a discipline has emerged from Critical Criminology and Social Harm Theory. Critical criminology, and further Social Harm Theory, deconstruct 'crime' and 'criminality' as social and political constructs disproportionately used to control poor and racialised communities. It contends that many harms are not crimes and that many crimes do not cause significant harm. At the same time, many legal activities, policies and decisions (often carried out by powerful states and corporations) cause very substantial harms to people and the environment (Pemberton 2015). Therefore, crime is not a proxy for harm or vice versa. Ultimately, social harm theory contends that 'crime' reduction is ineffective, with criminal justice responses such as imprisonment and offender programmes doing little to rehabilitate those who have harmed (Hillyard et al. 2004). Zemiology is concerned not only with the ineffectiveness of crime reduction responses but with harms beyond crime, particularly those implicated in the activities of large-scale corporations and institutions, including, but not limited to, the criminal justice system. In this sense, zemiology bridges structural, meso-institutional and everyday experiences of harm (Canning and Tombs 2021).

Canning and Tombs (2021), whose call to 'do zemiology' is taken forward here, propose a provisional zemiological typology of harms:

- *Physical harms*: including murder, abuse and sexual misconduct, however, social harm theorists have stressed the sometimes distributed and indirect nature of these harms. For example, the link between preventable deaths through malnutrition, poisoning or environmental degradation and corporate and governmental practices or policy decisions (Pemberton, in Canning and Tombs 2021, p. 71);
- *Emotional and psychological harms*: including mental illness, but also issues such as sleeplessness and worry. Zemiologists consider the impact of indirect harms, such as collective trauma or anxiety resulting from local environmental degradation or public discourses on 'terrorism', for example (Canning and Tombs 2021). Importantly Canning and Tombs propose (drawing on the work of Herman 1992) that the causes of emotional and psychological harms are often identifiable only if those experiencing them can know and speak of those causes;
- *Financial and economic harms*: including personal or household financial loss (financial harm) or economic harms related to macro-economic mismanagement by corporations and governments and the impacts of poverty and inequality (Canning and Tombs 2021);
- *Cultural harms*: including harms to culture (i.e., destruction of culture), by culture (i.e., imposition of culture) and cultural harm as misrecognition (i.e., misrepresentation expanded upon in 'harms of recognition' below) (Boukli and Copson 2020, in Canning and Tombs 2021, p. 74);
- *Harms of recognition (or relational harms)*: imposition of an identity on a person/s that is 'spoiled' or 'blemished' and that functions to 'other' (Pemberton 2015, in Canning and Tombs 2021, p. 79) or 'subordinate' (Fraser 2000, in Canning and Tombs 2021, p. 79);
- *Autonomy harms*: including restrictions on access to social opportunities (including resources, education, employment, training and work) that limit social opportunity and ability to self-actualise (Pemberton 2015, in Canning and Tombs 2021, p. 79).

2.3. Zemiology and Child Protection/Harm

Some have already begun to apply a zemiological lens to the analysis of child protection systems and/or of harms in the lives of children, although the discipline is an emerging one. Parton (2019) proposes that Social Harm Theory can be usefully applied to child harm, recognising issues such as child maltreatment and neglect as tied to inequalities, both within families and at a societal level, with inequality linked to family pressures and greater health and welfare issues across populations. Understood in this way, harms to children are less a matter of personal or interpersonal deficit or dysfunction but the direct or indirect consequences of social inequality (Bywaters et al. 2016). Social harm or zemiological analyses have also been applied to policing and social care interventions into drug dealing impacting young people (Mason 2020) and 'county lines' (Wroe 2021). This research identifies a range of racialised social harms enacted by the state through covert and surveillance-oriented interventions. Featherstone et al. (2021) have applied a social harm lens to the analysis of child protection post the COVID-19 pandemic, aligning the approach with initiatives within the fields of child inequalities (Bywaters 2020) and child harm (Featherstone et al. 2018) to propose a post-pandemic social work that is more collaborative, restorative and hopeful. Zemiology has also been applied to children's experiences in the digital world as a means of proposing democratic alternatives to internet 'blocking' in schools (Hope 2013) or disciplinarian approaches to 'sexting' (Lee and Crofts 2013).

There is a significant body of evidence that speaks to the limitations of contemporary child protection systems, both in their ability to identify and prevent harm (Bilson et al. 2017) and their disproportional application (Bywaters et al. 2017) across racialised and working-class populations. Zemiology offers a theoretical framework to foreground the role of social work in *producing* harm and a conceptualisation of these harms as potentially *as* significant in the lives of young people as those caused by interpersonal 'crimes' and abuse. Participatory research carried out with children in South Wales who had experienced harm and had encountered the youth justice system (Haines and Charles 2019) showed that children rejected the label of victim, felt unsupported by services, and interestingly, adopted what the authors describe as a 'zemiological' account of harm whereby their understanding of what was a harm was markedly different from criminological and adult understandings. Whilst young people in the study were generally not well informed about the workings of the criminal justice system, their accounts evidenced tacit acknowledgement that these were services under strain and that this was impacting their experiences.

Following this work, this paper applies a zemiological lens to young person, parent/carer, and professional accounts of relocations to describe the full spectrum of harms implicated in their use and to bridge these everyday accounts with their macro-structural contexts. In doing so, it supports an understanding of the divergent and ambivalent attitudes towards the use of relocations (Firmin 2019; Firmin et al. 2021; MacAlister 2021).

3. Methodology

The data presented in this article were collected as part of a three-year mixed methods study exploring the rate, cost and impact of relocation as a response to adolescent extra-familial harm in England, Wales and Scotland between 2019 and 2021. The research was organised around two phases. Data from a quantitative survey (phase one) distributed to 15 local authorities to ascertain the rates at which they relocated adolescents exposed to extra-familial risk has been published elsewhere in a findings paper, as well as a thematic paper exploring the impact of relocations on relationships (Firmin et al. 2021; Firmin and Owens 2022). The methodological and analytical approach for phase two is described below.

3.1. Participants

Fifteen local authority children's social care teams participated in a phase one survey about the rate at which they relocate adolescents exposed to extra-familial risks (see Firmin et al. 2021). All 15 local authorities were approached to take part in the second phase of the study, which aimed to explore the impact of relocations on young people's experiences

of safety. Three local authorities were short-listed to take part in phase two; each had different rates of relocation (i.e., high, low or medium, as described earlier). A single point of contact (SPOC) in each service was asked to identify three young people (aged 10–25) who had experienced a relocation in the past year. SPOCs acted as 'gatekeepers' and used videos and consent forms provided by the research team to inform young people about the research and invite them to participate. Each young person was asked if they were happy for their parent/carer to be interviewed and to identify two professionals to be interviewed. Recruitment and data collection took place during the COVID-19 lockdown, and this limited recruitment in some areas. Due to under-recruitment from the local authorities, additional interviewees were recruited from a residential children's home (one parent, two young people, three professionals) and a national parent advocacy organisation (one parent, one professional). In total five young people (aged 13–18), three parent/carers and 15 professionals were interviewed (professionals included social workers (n = 11); residential children's home manager (n = 1); parent advocate (n = 1); youth engagement worker (n = 1) and head of Pupil Referral Unit (n = 1).

3.2. Data Collection

Interview schedules were designed in collaboration with young people, parent/carers and professionals. Young person interview schedules were designed in collaboration with a young researcher's advisory panel based at University of Bedfordshire, who have expertise in care placements and child harm. Two focus groups were held where feedback was sought about the questions and design of the interview. The feedback was integrated, and an activity-based interview pack was professionally designed. A pilot interview was carried out with one young person from the advisory group.

The parent/carer interview schedule was drafted by the research team, mirroring the structure of the young person interview, and then discussed with three parents from a national parent advocacy organisation via video or telephone call. Feedback was integrated into the final design of the interview schedule.

The professional interview schedule was drafted by the research team, again mirroring the design of the other two schedules, and was discussed in an online focus group with a Research Advisory Group (RAG) attended by key policymakers, professionals and academics.

Interviews were carried out remotely and asked participants to share their experiences of relocation, their views on the process and their perceived impact on safety. Additional grant funding was successfully applied for to fund support services that had an existing relationship with participants to provide 'wrap-around' preparatory and debrief support to young people and parents/carers who participated in the interviews.

3.3. Data Analysis

Interview data were thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke 2006) by the research team against a coding framework that corresponded to the research questions:

- The extent to which relocations were helpful/unhelpful;
- The perceived impact of relocations on safety (a holistic account of safety was adopted based on Shuker's (2013) multi-dimensional model of safety, including: physical, relational and emotional safety).

Initial themes were discussed in two focus groups, one with the young researchers advisory panel and one with the RAG. Feedback was integrated, and a final set of themes across the three datasets (young people, parents/carers and professionals) was identified under the headings 'effectiveness' and 'impact on safety'. A findings paper detailing the results of this thematic analysis is published elsewhere (Wroe et al. 2022), and a brief overview is provided below.

In this paper, the data are analysed using the zemiological typology of harms described above, linking participants' everyday accounts of safety and harm with meso, institutional and macro power structures.

3.4. Ethics

The research was granted ethical approval University of Bedfordshire. Consent was sought before, during and after all interviews in line with best practices (Whittington 2019).

3.5. Limitations

COVID-19 limitations resulted in fewer young people and parents being recruited than intended. This impacts the generalisability of the findings.

4. Findings

Initial analyses of the data surfaced a shared set of conditions for relocations that young people, parents/carers and professionals felt were important for a relocation to be effective. These were: quality and consistency of support, suitability of placement and planning. In addition, young people and parents identified two additional themes that were not raised by professionals: communication and decision making; and supporting relationships with family. These findings indicated the importance of asking about safety when planning a relocation and that professional priorities may overlook the needs of families. Initial analyses of the data indicated that when the conditions for effective relocations are not considered, relocations can achieve a reduction in physical risk whilst significantly undermining safety in other areas of the young person's life. These initial findings are discussed in full in a forthcoming article (Wroe et al. 2022).

Here, a zemiological analytic lens is applied to the dataset to further explore the range of harms reported by young people.

4.1. A Zemiological Analysis of the Impact Relocation

4.1.1. Physical Harms

As identified in phase one (Firmin et al. 2021), relocations were generally intended to address the escalating physical risk to young people that could not, or could no longer, be managed locally. Here, escalating and significant risks to the young person's physical safety were always the threshold and driver for the move. However, accounts from young people, their parents/carers and professionals revealed that relocations carried with them several risks of physical harm beyond instances of abuse. In a minority of cases, young people experienced direct physical harms because of the relocation, including experiencing physical restraint by professionals in their placement.

Several indirect physical harms were implicated in the relocation of young people, specifically resource constraints that undermined the effectiveness of social care intervention. These can be understood as physical harms indirectly linked to the decision to relocate and the wider policy and economic context in which these decisions are made. Professionals reported a lack of alternative options for keeping young people safe, noting that in many instances, the source of the harm was left unaddressed:

> *the thresholds for intervention are so high that usually it is years of abuse that's taken place before relocation is considered, and often there are no real alternatives to that.*

(Professional Interview)

Professionals were concerned about the low availability of placements (n = 6), the cost of placements (n = 2), lack of resources for specialist services as an alternative to relocations (n = 2), rushed decision making (n = 1), pressures on social care (n = 1), including from the police (n = 6), lack of other support services (n = 3) and placements having to end, or multiple placement changes, due to financial constraints (n = 1):

> *It's really patchy, to be honest, I would say. I would say some agencies are really great. A lot of parents that I've worked with, they would go and look at different units and Ofsted reports, but at the end of the day it depends on what's available, it depends on what the local authority's willing to pay. And often there's a step process that I think's quite challenging sometimes for parents, where they will go through, they'll try this, the cheapest one first.*

(Parent Advocate Interview)

Importantly, these constraints were seen to undermine the ability of the placement to achieve physical safety for young people (n = 8 professionals), with a lack of collaboration with young people, short timescales for decisions, unsuitability of placements that did not match need, lack of support in and around the placement (including support to maintain family relationships) all thought to increase the likelihood of the relocation failing and/or of young people going missing from their placement and being subject to further physical harms:

Did you ever leave it at some point?

Aye!

Why did you want to leave? Why did you want to do that?

I dunno, I just didn't feel like it was working so I removed myself from the situation instead of talking about it.

You were worried?

Aye, like [inaudible 0:25:50] didn't want to be in the situation so I ran away from problems instead of facing it.

(Young Person Interview)

These direct and indirect physical harms can be understood, zemiologically, as connected to neoliberal ideological and economic decisions that mean social care services deliver individual case-work models that target children's choices and behaviour (Lorenz 2016; Featherstone et al. 2018), leaving unaddressed the contexts in which they are harmed (Firmin 2019). As Firmin (2019) proposed, relocation locates risk *in* rather than *around* the young person, and the choice to do so carries with it many indirect consequences for the physical safety of young people.

4.1.2. Emotional and Psychological Harms

In some instances, young people's emotional and mental well-being significantly deteriorated in their out of area placements, and many young people reported feelings of isolation, displays of anxious behaviour and worry and uncertainty connected to their experience of being placed out of area:

[young person] was being secured because they were at risk of suicide or death through misadventure, that was the grounds for [young person] to be . . . But what we were acknowledging was their dysregulation and their high levels of distress was a consequence to their child sexual exploitation, a couple of weekends prior to that. Then the rejection from their family and then this young person came in, seen the relationships that she had, [young person] just spilled over, they couldn't contain all the different feelings and they completely spilled over.

(Professional Interview)

there was a feeling that his mental health took a dip and there were feelings of isolation. He was picking at his eyebrows and his eyelashes, so there was nerves there. He was a teenage boy who was used to being out with his friends and participating in many different things who was then, with the best will in the world, with two staff who worked tirelessly with him. But [professional] and [professional] aren't as fun as what you'll, any of the 15-year-olds you're going to be at that point in time. So, it was about how we kept him occupied and focused and then there was an issue about accommodation.

(Professional Interview)

Significantly, participants connected these experiences to process issues including how decisions were made and communicated. Young people linked opaque processes with experiences of discomfort, lack of control and distress:

I hate when, there's only one thing I ever hate, and it's when people promise me something then they don't do it, know what I mean.

Yeah. Yeah I do.

So it gets to me. I apologise. I meant to say that in the first part.

No that's fine. You don't need to apologise at all. And would you say that's the case for everyone, like professionals you've worked with, family, friends, all of them?

Aye. Aye.

Yeah.

You froze a bit on my screen just then. Can you say that again, what you just said, because I didn't hear it?

What did I say there? What did I just say? I've got other things going on in my -

You've got a load of things going on in your head. I said, so is that true for everyone; friends, family, professionals, promising you things and not delivering them?

Aye that, I hate when that happens. They promise you something and then they don't do it do it.

Yeah.

. . . got a good bond with. It gets to me, know what I mean like. It's not just a wee thing. It might seem like a small thing to a lot of people, but I don't think it is.

(Young Person Interview)

the people who are in charge of you know what's going on but they don't tell you until after they've put you in it, so they don't tell you until it's too late

Is that how you felt sometimes?

Aye, you feel like you put in to something, they don't explain what it's like and how it is . . . until you're already there.

(Young Person Interview)

Zemiology supports an understanding of these distributed psychological effects. Young people displayed or reported a range of psychological impacts, including emotional distress and unease to mental illness, including re-traumatisation and depression. As Canning and Tombs (2021) note, the causes of emotional and psychological harms can be obscured, particularly because victims of harm are often silenced interpersonally, societally and politically. Zemiology, they argue, can create the conditions for those who have been harmed to understand the causes of harm and to name and voice them. Feminist movements have long taught the importance of connecting micro instances of harm with macro structures, and recovery from trauma can be facilitated by being able to identify and name both the interpersonal and the structural causes of violence (Herman 1992, in Canning and Tombs 2021). Whilst a causal relationship could not always be established (nor was it always reported by participants) between the relocation and emotional distress or mental ill health, two of five young people reported that they were not able to discuss their mental health concerns with any professionals involved in their placement, and for one young person multiple relocations were delaying their access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS):

I mean I think that's difficult because I think for a lot of our young people that are running lines there is a reality that if you're local you've got more resources available, resources that you have control over, because the local authority has its resources, you would hope. So the boy in [new area] had to wait 12 weeks for CAMHS, even though he had the seven day follow-up, but even though he was immediately suicidal he waited months for an appointment with a CAMHS worker. He started seeing that person and then he moved back, and we've been told there's a nine-month waiting list for CAMHS in [hometown].

(Professional Interview)

I think for young people that do have significant ties to [local area] and in terms of relationships with family, then it's that sort of further loss of identity, loss of belonging that impacts on your self-confidence, your sense of worth, your general emotional health, and low mood and depression and anxiety.

(Professional Interview)

Zemiological approaches to understanding emotional and psychological harms could create space for young people to talk about the emotional and mental health impact of child protection interventions and the wider policy and resource issues that determine the type and level of support they receive. For example, the lack of alternative support (as expressed by professionals) contributing to their relocation and under-funded mental health services.

4.1.3. Financial and Economic Harms

As with all social harms described in a zemiological typology, financial and economic harms often incorporate other forms of harm, '*including the mental or emotional effects of job or property loss, and the relational harms which families or social units living together can experience when financial pressures push them apart*' (Canning and Tombs 2021, p. 73). One parent interviewee described losing her secure tenancy as a result of relocating her family. In this instance, she had sought support from children's services to move her family due to significant physical threats to her son and ultimately decided to leave her family home. This parent described how she lost access to her furniture, how the Council struggled to find housing for her large family and how her family were eventually split up, with some family members living in a caravan. For this parent, the financial harms are evident; however, wider economic processes resulting in a lack of resources for services and availability of suitable accommodation (as expressed by professionals below) can also be understood zemiologically as contributing to this family's loss of tenancy and separation.

Zemiology provides a framework for describing the harms implicated in broader governmental, corporate and policy decisions that create inequality, poverty and austerity at a local and global scale. Current economic conditions, where funding for children's social care has seen a 24% reduction in the past decade (48% for early intervention services, Williams and Franklin 2021), are the context in which practitioners and families were navigating decisions made (or made for them) about a relocation. These economic harms are evidently linked then to other forms of harm experienced by young people:

And the placement worked really well for her (...)unfortunately the placement broke down, not due to any sort of reasons with the young person, it was more a financial issue really I think, because it was a solo placement for [young person], it was actually a two bedded unit, and we couldn't match what they were asking in terms of keeping that other bed open.

(Professional Interview)

We're paying for two properties, the finances had gone awry, we have no resources that can bridge those two boroughs. And that was because they were placed in safe accommodation and not supported to go through the other local authority's own homelessness route (...) If they'd been supported to do that, they would have got a service from [Local Authority] social care. But the way they were housed really limited the support available to them.

(Professional Interview)

4.1.4. Harms of Recognition (or Relational Harms)

Social harm theorists have described 'relational harms' as '*enforced exclusion from social networks or personal relationships*' caused by 'social structures' that limit 'self-actualisation' (Pemberton, in Canning and Tombs 2021, p. 78). Often the purpose of relocation is to disrupt abusive relationships and to remove young people from harmful contexts (Firmin et al. 2021). At the same time, professionals, and more so young people and parents, have shared the ways in which these moves sever safe and protective relationships and bonds with family, friends, professionals and social networks (see also Firmin and Owens

2022). When asked about the impact of relocations on safety, participants, much like in work described by Haines and Charles (2019), responded with a zemiological account of harm that extended beyond the ability of the placement to manage risk or not, including specifically the impact on relationships:

> *I think it can make a young person more vulnerable, and breaking down those supports that they already have, maybe, you know, the dinner lady that served them dinner every day for the last five years, as a social worker, you know, you might not even be aware particularly of that relationship if it's not something the young person has discussed with you. But it could be that person that just smiles at them every day when they're giving them their dinner that is making a huge impact on that young person.*

> *So for me I feel it can be quite a dangerous practice moving young people out of areas where they know where they've got pre-existing relationships, and even friends, pets, you know, I've moved children who have been so distraught about not living next door to the neighbour's dog. They'd go out and stroke the dog or something.*

> *So I think it's decisions that we can take, but there's a lot of information that we're perhaps not always privy to around positive relationships in terms of what may be safeguarding a young person even just slightly that you're destroying with maybe that choice.*

(Professional Interview)

For Canning and Tombs (2021), 'harms of recognition' can precede these relational harms. These include institutional 'misrecognitions' (Fraser 2000, in Canning and Tombs 2021, p. 79) that distort individuals' or communities' realities and function to justify subordination and ill-treatment. Certainly, young people shared that the decision to relocate them felt like punishment:

> *That was alarming as I was a young girl [details of harm removed for anonymity], and I got punished. I'm the one who got put in secure never mind I've got an [injury from an accident preceding the relocation -this section removed for anonymity] . . .*

> **And at that point, when you say it was you that was punished, what do you mean by that?**

> *I was moved around. I weren't around my family. I needed my family. I had just come out of a traumatic experience. My friend died and I got an injury. I needed my family, and I was getting moved around and a lot of changes going on what shouldn't have been happening at the time, what obviously is getting spoken about now, and is getting chased up because certain things shouldn't have been going on with me being in the care system. [Inaudible 09:21] chase up every individual [inaudible 09:24] who they are.*

> **I'm sorry to hear about that experience. It sounds like a really hard experience, and then I hear what you're saying then; that then by being moved around you felt like that was a level of punishment then.**

> *You're alone when, you're alone when you're in another city. You have got these staff members, but really you're bringing up yourself in a city on your own. Like I've been in care homes and I've seen a lot. I've been in a secure unit where staff let certain kids spit in each other's drinks and pass it [inaudible 10:03]. That's the sort of stuff I've seen. Do you know what I mean? There's certain things always stick with you. It'll always stick with you. And that's what the system needs to understand, that us kids will always have that instilled in us.*

(Young Person Interview)

Young people's descriptions of being 'punished' can be read as testimonies of their misrecognition by professional agencies. The young person above shares that she was a 13-year-old girl, foregrounding her youth and details of her victimisation, and contrasts this with the response she received—punished and placed in a secure (welfare) provision (a 'secure' placement requires a court order that prevents a child from leaving). In this

sense, the young person could be understood as having been 'misrecognised' as somehow culpable for her abuse and treated accordingly.

Whether professional agencies intentionally responsibilise adolescents for the harm they experience in extra-familial contexts, a zemiological analysis can support an understanding of how pervasive attitudes towards teenagers as troublesome or as comparable to adults in their choices works to exclude adolescents (particularly Black and working-class adolescents) from narrowly defined recognitions of victimhood (Brown 2019; Davis and Marsh 2020). The stigmatisation of adolescents in this way could work to implicitly rationalise their treatment as 'criminals' (Tyler 2021), with them being removed from families and friends in a system ostensibly geared towards their safety:

> **So, you've recently moved in to secure, right? So, that's another move then is that your third move?**
>
> *Yeah.*
>
> **And, how was that like compared to the others?**
>
> *It was not good.*
>
> **It's not good? Why?**
>
> *No, it's like you're locked up, it's like a jail.*
>
> **Like a jail ... so, like for the other moves, did you understand why you had to move?**
>
> *Aye.*
>
> **But do you agree with it?**
>
> *No.*
>
> (Young Person Interview)
>
> *"You're doing this to me, moving me away from all my friends, you've put me in prison, you've cut me off." I was like the next step is secure, and I don't want to put him in secure, because secure doesn't work either.*
>
> (Professional Interview)

4.1.5. Cultural Harms

Several young people reported feeling 'out of place' in the area to which they had been relocated. For some, the familiarity or unfamiliarity of the local high street (i.e., what sorts of shops and supermarkets were there) was important. For others, the décor in the accommodation led to feelings of unease and unfamiliarity, which led to them asking to leave, and one young person reported that they felt they had to change their persona to fit in in different settings:

> *I'm from up north. I went to [city] and how they are up there and how it is here is two different things You have to change your whole persona. Then you get moved to another city down south, so you have to change your persona again. Then you get moved here so then you have to change again. It's literally like ...*
>
> **And so can you explain that a little bit more to me. So in what ways do you have to change your persona, and why do you think it is that you need to do that?**
>
> *Because different cities and different, like south, north, east, west, different places have different attitudes and different approaches, and different talks, different like code talk. Not even code talks, but different banter. Everything's different. So I'm having to adjust and keep up with where I'm being moved, and that's with anyone who's been moved out of area, change and keep up to the point where you end up being this angry person. You end up being this angry person because you're having to try and keep up with any rules and having to adjust [inaudible 11:49] it happens again, and you're always ready for it.*
>
> **Ready for the next move?**

Yeah, you're always ready. When you're in care you're sat and you know that you'll move again. You can never be too comfortable in care. You can never, this is going to be my home for the next three years. It's never like that.

(Young Person Interview)

These expressions of unease and unfamiliarity could be understood as 'cultural harms' where young people had to adapt their accustomed ways of doing and *being* to get by, removed from the familiarity of their own family and community cultures.

Young people from working-class and racially minoritised families are disproportionately likely to have social work involvement in their lives and to be placed away from their families (Bywaters et al. 2017). Previous findings identified 215 young people who were placed out of area due to extra-familial risks in September 2019 (Firmin et al. 2021). A total of 19% were Black, and a further 14% were identified as 'Mixed', Asian (3%) or 'Other' (5%). As only 5% of under 18's in Britain are Black, an over-representation of Black children in out of area placements is indicated. This would reflect and exceed the overall children in care statistics where Black children are over-represented as children in care at a rate of 7% (HM Government 2021). A zemiological analysis, therefore, flags that further monitoring of practice data is required to understand any disproportional use of out of area placements for Black children and could make a case for these indicative figures to be appropriately considered in Britain's post-colonial legal/institutional context. Such figures may reflect the persisting disproportionality in national trends for children in care and in prison settings, where Black and 'Mixed' ethnicity children are significantly over-represented in the youth justice estate (51%) and amongst children referred to secure children's homes on welfare grounds where they experience differential treatment (Roe 2022).

4.1.6. Autonomy Harms

Relocations warrant monitoring and investigation of their use as they involve significant acts of state intervention into the lives of young people and their families. A total of 90 out of the 215 young people identified as relocated in phase one (Firmin et al. 2021) were relocated under a Care Order (Section 31), a statutory order that places the child in the care of the local authority with parental responsibility shared between the local authority and the parents. At least two professionals interviewed in phase two recognised that the relocation equated to a 'deprivation of liberty' (these were secure welfare settings) and spoke of the detrimental impacts on mental health. Critically, where deprivations of liberty are considered for older teenagers, they must be the least restrictive option (Roe 2022). Where alternative means of supporting adolescents at risk in extra-familial contexts are not resourced (as suggested by professionals in this study), this poses ethical and legal questions about the grounds on which deprivations of liberty are ordered and the extent to which alternatives are or can be explored. Research undertaken by (Roe 2022) indicates a rise in applications to the courts to deprive children of their liberty in alternative placements (with demand for secure placements exceeding availability) and warns of a lack of oversight as to what sorts of restrictions are being placed on these children who often have complex needs and presenting risks, including criminal and sexual exploitation.

A zemiological analysis could situate the use of deprivations of liberty through relocations (whether formally recognised or not, being placed 100 miles from your hometown with no mobile phone is significantly restrictive) as a function of 'carceral' social work, and a long tradition of removal, separation and confinement being used by social workers in their work with families and communities. Jacobs et al. (2020) define carceral social work as that which collaborates with the police and policing and that which uses methods of social control outside of work with the police and criminal courts, in particular targeting poor and racially minoritised families. Certainly, young people interviewed here felt and spoke to the parallels between their experiences of relocation and being in 'jail' or 'prison' (as described above).

However, autonomy harms are not only those that directly restrict the movement and freedoms of young people; they are defined (Pemberton 2015, in Canning and Tombs 2021)

as harms to an individual's or communities' ability to reach their potential. Young people interviewed here spoke about the ways in which being relocated and then experiencing multiple moves between placements caused significant and long-term disruptions to their lives, reflecting wider trends in outcomes for care experienced children:

> *Because it feels like a game because you're in one place and then you start to have bonds with people and then you move and then you go, "I'm not trusting anybody" and then you start to open up and then you get moved again.*

(Young Person Interview)

> *You're alone when, you're alone when you're in another city. You have got these staff members, but really you're bringing up yourself in a city on your own.*

(Young Person Interview)

This was particularly apparent in relation to education and training opportunities:

> *For one I was, the thing where people need to realise and all the people need to realise, it starts from school. It all starts from being expelled or excluded from school. Do you know what I mean? When I got excluded I were in year seven. I was going out with older people because I wasn't at school and everyone else was. So I never had no one my age to go to school with, or chill with every day, because everyone else was at school. So that's where it all started; school. And the thing is now, because I got kicked out of school and I was tarnished in school from year seven, I've never had a good, I've never had [inaudible 25:01] education. It's always been a fight because I've got [inaudible 25:06] I act like this, or my paperwork says I can't do this. I actually can do this*

> **Right.**

> *and it's always been a battle -*

> **Right.**

> *- and now I'm 18 I'm willing to do whatever to be able to get my education, because that's the one thing what I missed out on throughout all my care. I was literally [inaudible 25:28] care, and I'm learning myself because there's no teachers available and stuff.*

> *I'm sat doing a B-Tech on my own, and do you know what I mean? [Inaudible 25:40] like that. I'm having to apply for education*

> **And do that for yourself.**

> *terrible, very terrible battle, but I really, really think that I could, that the system could have helped me a lot more [inaudible 25:55] I start college last year. My EHC plan was out of date by about three years [inaudible 26:04]. So they should be updating my stuff so I can do what I need to do, because I'm [inaudible 26:10] because my EHC plan isn't updated and that's my fault, and probably that's how I [inaudible 26:22] battling with the system and education [inaudible 26:26].*

> **It sounds like having to take it into your own hands sometimes.**

> *Yeah. I've got so much books of education books and stuff like that but I teach myself because I like learning, but the system won't let me into college or I'm too high risk to go to [inaudible 26:44], and that's what has happened, because of all the moves and this and that and whatever.*

(Young Person Interview)

> **Alright, and then when you moved here, was there anything that you wish was different about where you are? So apart from, like you said, all the -**

> *[Inaudible 21:58] didn't happen.*

> **You wish it didn't happen, and why not?**

> *Because I'd still be in college if none of this happened.*

> **Are you not in college at the moment?**

> *No.*

But you want to be?

Yeah. I want to finish [inaudible 22:21] degree in construction.

Right. Do you know if maybe you'll have a chance to go back?

No

You don't think you will?

No.

So you wish you were back school

Yeah.

And do you have any kind of online school at the moment or anything?

No. I go to something at the youth centre.

And what's that like?

It's alright, but that's just to do with like other purposes and that.

Okay so it's not really about a degree.

No

(Young Person Interview)

However, it is important to note that for several young people, the relocation created opportunities for education and for social engagement, meeting new (safe) friends and getting access to better local provisions (in one case, a better local youth club). They also created opportunities for young people to access therapy and to form supportive relationships with professionals away from crisis situations in their home communities; these tensions are discussed further below. Applying a zemiological lens to the views reported by young people, parents/carers and professionals could provide a framework for understanding the ambivalence and contradictions in these micro-level accounts of safety and harm in the context of institutional and macro-level economic, policy and practice structures.

4.2. Ambivalence in Participant Accounts

As a social worker and social work academic, it is often difficult to be confronted with the reality that, too often, attempts to help can involve significant amounts of hurting. At the same time, the accounts provided through this research evidenced that professionals (as well as, of course, young people and parents) felt unease, anxiety, uncertainty and in some cases, a sense of helplessness about the options available to them, and therefore young people and families, in their current practice contexts:

And to me it feels really sad because we have upheld our service to say we are there to protect and serve these families, but it feels as if we've left them hanging out to dry.

(Professional Interview)

I definitely think sometimes when people come to me as a senior manager, asking for a young person to be placed away is absolutely we don't know what to do, and we're finding it very difficult to see this young person being draw into risk in front of our eyes. But there's also something which is about we don't know what to do. I get that, you know, I get it, I've been that person. So another risk assessment, another strategy meeting, another briefing, another . . . So I get it, there is something about we can't continue to let both in terms of the work it creates, and in terms of the impact on the young person.

(Professional Interview)

But I do feel in terms of specialist emotional health services for those young people that require them we are still a ways from that. It is around requesting those resources, the argument of funding for those specialist services, which for me, I feel they should be more readily available.

(Professional Interview)

The data clearly indicates that professionals feel their options were limited due to the level of risk facing young people, but also due to impoverished service settings that are not resourced to help and where there remains a mismatch between how problems are framed and the solutions on offer. Despite these reservations, when asked about the overall impact that relocations had on safety, 10 out of 23 participants felt the relocation made them/the young person safer (9 professionals also shared that the relocation had not reduced risk or addressed vulnerability). This seemed incongruent, but in circumstances that were so constrained, it was evident from the data that relocation, with the many potential harms it could cause to young people's relationships and well-being, was the only option they felt they had to keep the young person physically safe:

> *So, it was needed. I don't agree with secure accommodation, but it was needed at that time and I think it's something that I'm going to take up with my senior management that we need to try and replicate a kind of secure environment without children having to go to secure, because it doesn't work for them. But we do need to have something whereby our young people can go to, to keep themselves safe, but it's still in their community with the trusted people around them. But that's above me.*

(Professional Interview)

Whilst professionals shared that restrictions and current practice models prevented them from providing the type of support they felt was needed, young people were less able to articulate why the intervention that they did not want and that felt hard in many significant ways was (they felt) the best thing for them:

> *It's been difficult sometimes.*
>
> ***It has been?***
>
> *Aye. It's been a struggle man. First time I come in here I was only 12. It's been a struggle, but it's worked.*
>
> ***So you were only 12 when you first came in, so that's a long time to get to know them over time and get to know who they are. And do you think it is just time that's helped, or has anything else helped?***
>
> *[Inaudible 19:26] know what I mean, because I've clicked with certain staff straightaway, and then I've took time to work with some staff to . . .*
>
> ***And what was making it a struggle at times? What was that?***
>
> *Because when I first came in here I was just a small boy. I was running about daft and that, just basically causing it, and then obviously—and that, and I used to get off my head and then I'd get moved about . . .*

(Young Person Interview)

> ***Do you think that at some point you wished that something was done differently?***
>
> *Yeah.*
>
> ***You do or you don't?***
>
> *Like I know why I was put in, like all the different movements but I didn't want, not that I didn't want to, I knew that it was the best thing to do but I didn't want to meet new people like staff and stuff it was kind of . . .*
>
> ***Okay, so you knew it was the best thing for you but you didn't want to have to keep meeting new people***
>
> *Yeah.*
>
> ***Because is it like having to build all those relationships and trust again, do you find that really difficult?***
>
> *Sometimes.*
>
> ***And, do you think there are things that would have made the experience of moving a bit easier for you? Like what would have helped make it better?***

Knowing what to expect

(Young Person Interview)

The accounts shared here indicate a definite lack of choice and alternatives. Whilst professionals spoke to the resource deficient contexts they were working in, young people, whilst reporting a spectrum of social harms connected to child protection help (beyond the abuse they were experiencing), were seemingly less privy to, or able to articulate, this wider context. If young people are excluded from decision making (as they expressed above) and from understanding the macro, structural issues that drive institutional and professional decision making, their ability to understand, contextualise and recover from their experiences of harm (broadly defined) are potentially undermined.

5. Conclusions

This paper does not intend to argue for or against the use of relocations to safeguard adolescents from risks in extra-familial contexts. It is evident from the small dataset analysed here that relocations can have a broad range of supportive and harmful impacts on young people, frequently leading to increased feelings of safety whilst resulting in significant disruptions to important (safe) relationships and education, accompanied by varying (and at times very significant) levels of emotional distress and mental ill-health. Placing a child in care at a distance from their family is a significant interference by the state in private and family life, in some cases depriving parents of full parental responsibility and young people of their liberty. In all cases, guidance states that child protection interventions, such as relocations, should only be used where they are in the best interests of children and other options of safety have been exhausted (Roe 2022; Firmin et al. 2021). This threshold is undermined in a context where there are felt to be limited or no other options.

The data presented here are from a research study that aimed to use participatory approaches to research design and data collection to understand what we learn about relocations when we engage young people, their parents/carers and professionals in conversations about the impacts of relocations on safety. Analyses of young person, parents/carer and professional interviews surfaced a range of harms beyond those that would typically be considered (criminal) harm/abuse or professional malpractice. This paper aimed to think zemiologically about these harms.

The young people who shared their experiences of relocations had all experienced or been at risk of serious physical and/or sexual harm. In many instances, they were relocated when social workers no longer knew how or had the resources to protect them from these harms. For professionals, their constrained practice contexts (as well as high levels of physical risk to young people) contributed to 'last resort decisions' to relocate (see also Firmin et al. 2021). The analysis presented above demonstrated how these last resort decisions had significant impacts on the lives of young people who, much like in the research by Haines and Charles (2019), to some extent, understood that they had experienced a broad 'zemiological' range of harms that exceeded their experiences of (criminal) abuse, and professional malpractice.

Canning and Tombs (2021) work lays out a proposal for 'doing zemiology' that includes documenting harms alongside an analysis of how they are produced. In this paper, professionals spoke to the institutional, meso-level contexts that constrained their choices and abilities to provide safety for young people (in some cases, they acknowledged, causing harms). The analysis presented here has gone some way to linking these institutional constraints to macro, structural processes such as inequality, austerity and individualism that dictate how adolescence, violence and helping are understood in contemporary neoliberal society.

Canning and Tombs (2021) propose that zemiological enquiries centre on the use of language and dialogue to name and 'consciousness' raise about societal causes of personal and interpersonal harms, so that we can begin to have conversations about, and mobilise around, structural causes. The participatory approaches to research design, data collection and data analysis used here created opportunities for discussions about safety

and harms implicated in child protection interventions both in the design of the methods for data collection, through participant interviews, and by collaborative analysis of the data. Policy recommendations have been made based on these findings, as well as the publication of a set of resources for young people, parents/carers and professionals who are navigating proposed relocations. Framed zemiologically, future research could extend these approaches to create opportunities for young people, their families, and professionals to engage in conversations about macro power structures that inform their experiences of harm and help, alongside or beyond policy reform recommendations, to begin to imagine radical alternatives. This 'studying up' (Canning and Tombs 2021, p. 123) should be a central concern for Critical Child Protection Studies.

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Article

Parental Digital Mediation According to the Age of Minors: From Restraint and Control to Active Mediation

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Abstract: Research shows that parental mediation is essential for the introduction of minors into the digital environment and their development therein as well as to reduce their exposure to online risks. The present study examines parental strategies depending on whether minors are (dis)connected to the Internet and whether they differ according to their age. The motivations for minors to connect are also examined in relation to the frequency to which they connect to the Internet (activities related to school or learning, interacting with friends, and being entertained). The sample consists of 776 Spanish families with minors aged 5–17. Results show that parental mediation depends on the age of the minor, parental mediation strategies are more restrictive when minors are younger, and as their age increases strategies become more dialogue and collaboration oriented. In adolescence, parents mainly control internet purchases, yet they become more flexible with minors' presence on social networks. The conclusions reveal that parental mediation is in the process of evolving from a restrictive approach to one that is more empathetic. The change in mediation is due to a greater awareness of the relevance of proper use of the Internet for the well-being of their children.

Keywords: social networks; parental mediation; minors; children; motivations

1. Introduction

Due to the level of importance that the use of the Internet has reached in life development during childhood and adolescence (López-de-Ayala et al. 2021; Suárez-Álvarez and García-Jiménez 2021), the risks faced when they connect to the Internet are being increasingly studied by scholars (Díaz-Vicario et al. 2019; Deslandes and Coutinho 2020; Longobardi et al. 2020; García-Jiménez et al. 2022). In addition, parental mediation has become a major object of study (Bartau-Rojas et al. 2018; Dedkova and Smahel 2020; Inkeles 2017; Lippold et al. 2022; Nikken 2017; Peled 2018; Sciacca et al. 2021; Steinfeld 2021; Suárez-Álvarez et al. 2020; Symons et al. 2017; Zaman and Mifsud 2017).

Previous research related to parental mediation contribute to clarify parents' behavior towards their children's (dis)connection to the Internet. Livingstone and Helsper (2008) established three types of mediation strategies: (1) active mediation involves engaging minors in dialogue about the content they are watching, (2) restrictive mediation involves rules that set time limits, location, and content, and (3) co-use is a measure in which parents remain present and share the experience but do not comment on the content or its effects. In addition, Garmendia et al. (2016) placed Internet mediation into three categories: (1) active mediation focuses on supervision, accompaniment, and guidance, (2) restrictive mediation is based on the establishment of rules and limits, but it must be adapted according to the age and maturity of the minor, and (3) technical mediation consists of monitoring digital devices. Livingstone et al. (2017) updated those findings and they suggested two typologies: (1) restrictive mediation based on strong supervision of what minors are allowed to see on the Internet, which might end up undermining dialogue between parents

and their children and a loss of parents' ability to guide their children while they are on the Internet, and (2) enabling mediation, which combines a contribution to making minors manage by themselves the most of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) with an attempt to minimize risk. Likewise, Torrecillas-Lacave et al. (2017) enlarged the kinds of models of parental mediation and defined four family models: (1) worried and absent (parents are aware of the superiority of their children's knowledge of the Internet), (2) concerned counsellors (parents guide and engage in dialogue with their children and are present when they use social networks), (3) carefree permissive parents, who do not believe that the use and consumption of ICT has any influence on their children nor that the Internet is important for their development, (4) carefree controllers, who consider ICT important in all aspects of their children's lives and establish control measures such as limiting consumption time, knowing what their children are doing on the Internet, and being aware of what they post.

However, age-specific mediation strategies have received much less study. Álvarez-García et al. (2019) pointed out that adolescents perceive the degree of mediation to be scant. These researchers also stated that both restrictive and supervisory actions decrease as minors grow older. Regarding parents' perspective, Sorbring (2014) confirms this trend in their study based on parents with minors between 13 and 15 years of age, and states that parents' concerns vary according to the age and gender of the child and that parents with a greater understanding of negative Internet experiences are the most concerned. In their research on families with minors in primary school, Bartau-Rojas et al. (2018, p. 77) state that parental strategies focus on support and control in order to teach minors the advantages and risks they may encounter while browsing, "although their choices and combinations depend on some of their own personal characteristics such as age and maturity". According to Yubero et al. (2018, p. 8), whose research is based on families with minors between 12 and 17 years of age, they confirm that "as the age of the child increases" parents' concerns about the negative aspects of the Internet are reduced and that families combine both active and restrictive mediation strategies. Moreover, parents who connect regularly to the Internet choose active mediation tactics without significant gender differences. Caivano et al. (2020, p. 12), whose investigation is based on parents with minors between 8 and 16 years of age, contradict these findings, suggesting that restrictive mediation was found to be the most effective for parents' awareness about cyberbullying experiences and they also point out that "restrictive mediation was more effective for parental awareness of bystander experiences in adolescents".

This parental mediation relates to minors' motivations to use the Internet. The Internet has become indispensable for minors (Lin 2021). In some cases, they claim that they cannot live without the Internet (O'Reilly et al. 2018). Minors' main motivations for Internet use and consumption are having fun, socialisation, and self-expression (Bossen and Kottasz 2020; Festl 2021; Morgan 2020; Thompson et al. 2019; Throuvala et al. 2019), as well as engagement with issues of public interest (Boyd 2014) and building their identity (Huang et al. 2021). Del Prete and Redon (2020) add the need of belonging to a group and social acceptance. These motivations are considered as dynamics generated in network socialization that allow them to self-define and actively participate with their peers (Décieux et al. 2019).

2. Research Objectives and Questions

This bibliographic review verifies the need for parental mediation to introduce minors to the Internet, from their childhood to adulthood. The aim of this research is to conduct an analysis of the mediation strategies used by parents related to their children's (dis)connection to the Internet and to investigate whether there are significant differences in these mediation strategies depending on the age of the minors. Based on the previous literature, the research questions are:

Q1. As minors grow older, does parental guardianship of the use of the Internet ease?

Q2. Linked to the previous question: are parents' and guardians' active mediation actions and follow-up controls influenced by the age of the minors?

From a descriptive approach, this study addresses the extent of minors' self-access to the Internet (executed actions with previous authorization), the purpose of such access (the reasons why they connect), active mediation strategies, and further controls related to the age of the minors.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Participants

A total of 776 correctly filled-in questionnaires were obtained from individuals (father, mother, and guardians) with responsibility for minors aged from 5 to 17. Amongst those surveyed, 533 were women and 213 were men. A multistage stratified sampling by conglomerates was carried out involving schools in the City of Madrid (Spain). The official website of the Ministry of Education of the Autonomous Region of Madrid was used to define the categories of the educational centers included in the study: educational stage (preschool/primary/secondary education), type of educational center (public, private, or semi-private schools), and socio-economic level of the area in which the educational center was located. By simple random sampling, one educational center per stratum was selected with a total of eight schools: three semi-private and five public, with voluntary participation of the minors' parents in these educational centers.

3.2. Procedure

In order to address this issue, a quantitative methodology was used through a questionnaire, which is considered the most appropriate technique as it allows to obtain knowledge regarding the mediation strategies developed by parents taking into account the age of minors (from 5 to 17). To this end, a questionnaire was developed for parents and guardians of minors attending educational centers in the city of Madrid. Questionnaires were delivered via an online format to facilitate the participation of the sampling units so that each individual, by clicking on a link, could reply to the enquiries in the questionnaire.

Statistical data analysis was performed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software version 24 (IBM SPSS Statistics V24, Armonk, New York). Data processing was carried out by descriptive analyses, Chi-Square test was used for the relationship between variables, and Cramer's V was used as measure of association. The methods used to analyze the results of the questionnaires were first an inductive approach, followed by a deductive approach.

3.3. Measure

The dimensions of analysis evaluated can be observed in the questions included in the questionnaire (Table 1).

Table 1. Aspects evaluated in relation to parenting mediation strategies.

Dimensions of Analysis
1. Control over access
Your child's use of the Internet at home requires permission from:
i.   Parents ii.   Guardian iii.   Older sibling iv.   Others v.   Unrestricted access
Indicate whether your child is allowed to do each of the following things on the Internet and, if so, whether he/she can do them alone, with your permission, and with your supervision:
i.   Use messaging software

Table 1. *Cont.*

Dimensions of Analysis

Use the Internet

ii.   Watch videos on the Internet
iii.   Have a profile on a social network
iv.   Download music or films
v.   Upload photos
vi.   Music or videos for sharing
vii. Shop online
viii. Install web applications

2. Motivation for going online
How often does your child go online (never, occasionally, daily, or several times a day)?

i.   Do school or learning-related activities
ii.   Keep in touch with friends
iii.   Entertain themselves
iv.   Do something else

3. Actions of active mediation
Indicate if you do, or have done, any of these things with your child on the Internet, explaining that some websites are good and some are not:

i.   Explaining how to use the Internet safely
ii.   Supervising without actively participating
iii.   Suggesting how to behave on the Internet
iv.   Guiding children in unpleasant situations on the Internet
v.   Sharing passwords on the Internet

4. Post-parental control
When your child uses the Internet, do you check any of the following?

i.   The history of websites visited
ii.   The composition of WhatsApp groups
iii.   The friends they have added
iv.   The contents of their profile
v.   The messages they have received
vi.   The files they have downloaded.

4. Results

4.1. Control over Internet Access

Parents were asked whether their children should request permission to connect to the Internet and who should have the authority to make the decision. This control of access is proving to be one of the main strategies of parental mediation as three quarters of minors (74%) needed to ask for permission in order to connect to the Internet compared with a quarter (26%), who can access freely. Of the 74% who must ask for consent, 66% have to ask their parents, 6% must ask the person who cares for them, 1% have to make the request to older siblings, and another 1% have to ask other people in charge of them.

Access control shows a positive association with age as evidenced by the statistical contrast performed (*Chi = 218.27 df = 5 p < 0.001, Cramer's V = 0.540 p < 0.001*). This question is focused on minors who have to ask for permission before connecting. As minors grow older, their parents exercise less control over their access to the Internet. Looking at the results by age, it can be seen that 94% of the minors in the third year of preschool (4–5 years old) cannot connect without parental permission, the percentage of minors in years 2 and 3 of primary school drops to 89%, and again is reduced in the case of minors in years 4 and 5 of primary school (79%). The percentage continues to drop as parents of older minors are surveyed. With the onset of secondary school, when minors are 12 years old and attend years 7 and 8 of secondary school, 62% cannot connect without the permission of an adult. In years 9 and 10 of secondary school it drops significantly to 40% and when they attend years 11 and 12 of secondary school, at 16–17 years of age, only 25% of minors have to

ask for permission to connect. Therefore, the older the minors become the less they are controlled on their access to the Internet (see Figure 1).
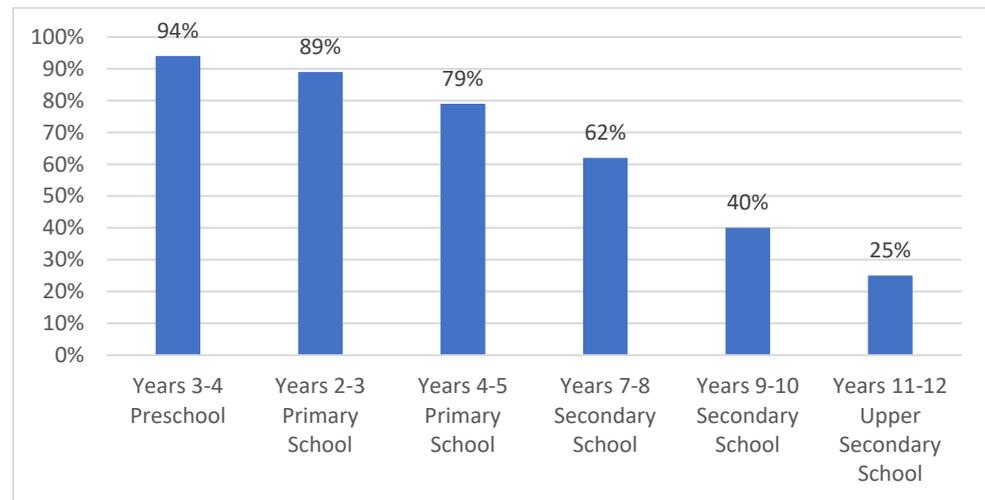

Figure 1. Parents who allow access to the Internet only with explicit permission.

In the next step of our analysis, we investigated the types of activities in which parents allow their children to participate. To do this, parents were asked to indicate which activities their children are allowed to do by themselves, those that require permission, and those that must be carried out with adult supervision.

Activities that minors are allowed to do with or without permission:

- Use of instant messaging programs (e.g., Messenger, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Telegram, etc.). An evolution in parents' mediation strategies is observed. Parents allow their children to use these types of programs with greater freedom and flexibility as children grow older. When they are smaller, nearly all minors are forbidden to use these programs yet when they reach Years 11 and 12 of upper secondary school, most are allowed to use them without supervision. The comparison shows statistically significant differences (*Pearson's Chi Square = 341.944, df = 6 p < 0.001*). The association between the educational stage and the type of permission is evident (*Cramer's V = 0.477 p < 0.001*). Differences occur at the preschool and primary school levels, where the percentage of families who do not authorize instant messaging use is significantly higher, while at the secondary and upper secondary school levels the percentage of families that allow their children to use these programs without supervision is significantly higher.

- Watching video clips on the Internet (on channels such as YouTube). This action is widely accepted by the majority of parents from the minors' early ages. The younger minors watch these videos with supervision and as they grow older parents give them more freedom to see this type of virtual content with a strong relationship between the type of permission given and the age of the minors (*Chi-Square = 99.99 df = 6 p < 0.001*, *Cramer's V = 0.258 p < 0.001*). In the pre-school and primary stages, the percentage of families who authorize watching video clips on the Internet with supervision is higher, while in the later stages of secondary and upper secondary school a significantly lower percentage of parents supervise the viewing and a higher percentage authorize them to do so independently.

- Browsing the Internet. When minors enter primary school, more than 80% of parents allow their children to surf the Internet either alone or with supervision. The percentage of parents who do not authorize Internet browsing is significantly higher only at the pre-school level. When minors move to the next educational stage, the percentage of parents who give consent increases, but with supervision. Finally, in the later years of secondary and upper secondary school, the practice is widespread and

> occurs without direct supervision (*Chi-Square = 228.24 df = 6 p < 0.001, Cramer's V = 0.390 p < 0.001*).

- Having your own profile on a social network (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.,). Parents are mainly reluctant to give permission to their children to have their own profile on a social network; this is only allowed by 26.1% of families. The authorization also varies according to age (*Chi Square = 321.462 df = 6 p = < 0.001, Cramer's V = 0.463 p < 0.001*). In preschool and primary school almost none of the parents allow their children to use this type of online service. These differences are statistically important with regard to the total. In secondary and upper secondary school, the percentage of authorization with supervision rises.

Finally, unsupervised access, which is also greater in secondary and upper secondary stages, particularly increases in years 11 and 12 of upper secondary school as the figure rises to 66% of those who choose to study at this level.

- Downloading music or movies. The possibility of obtaining permission to download songs or movies is another activity that is likely to be allowed according to age (*Chi Square = 267.238 df = 6 p < 0.001, Cramer's V = 0.422 p < 0.001*). In the preschool and primary stages, a significant percentage of families do not allow their children to engage in this activity, but as they grow older parents allow them to access this audio-visual content on their own, especially in the secondary and upper secondary stages.
- Shopping online. Buying products and services via the Internet (e-commerce) is a yearly increasing activity as confirmed by data published by the National Commission on Markets and Competition (NCMC 2021). However, this increase is mainly related to purchases made by adults since the freedom for minors to buy online is heavily monitored. Internet shopping is the activity that is most strongly limited by parents with minors of all ages (52.8%); however, permission is correlated to the educational stage of the minors (*Chi-Square = 53.757 df = 6 p < 0.001, Cramer's V = 0.189 p < 0.001*). Until minors reach years 11 and 12 of upper secondary school, 82.5% of them are not allowed to shop online and even at this stage 68% are not allowed to do so.

4.2. Motivation for Connecting

Three scenarios are considered in relation to the frequency with which minors connect to the Internet: to carry out activities related to school or learning, to be in contact with their friends, and for entertainment. In all three cases, the following assumption can be observed: the older the minors the more they use the Internet, with statistically significant differences between the three age groups. Educational use is the main reason for connecting on a daily basis for almost half of the interviewees (48.5%) or occasionally (44.5%). As can be seen in Table 1, the educational stage reflects the frequency with which this occurs. In the preschool and primary stages, this situation usually occurs on an occasional basis, while in secondary and upper secondary school it occurs more on a daily basis.

Social interaction motivates occasional connection in 44.5% of the cases and daily connection in 41% of the total sample. However, the age of the minors has a statistically significant effect on the frequency of access. The majority of preschool minors do not have access to the Internet for this reason (83.3%) nor do 45.1% of primary school pupils. It has been observed that in primary school, occasional access by pupils occurs more frequently than with the rest of the students, while in secondary and upper secondary school most are connected on a daily basis (see Table 2).

Table 2. Reasons for connecting and frequency of connection by educational stage.

How Often Your Child Connects to Do School Tasks or to Do Activities Pertaining to Learning	Childhood Education	Primary Education	Secondary School	Upper Secondary School	Total
Never	**23.3%**	3.4%	1.2%	0.9%	7.1%
Occasionally	**61.7%**	**50.5%**	34.6%	27.8%	44.5%
Once or several times a day	15.0%	46.1%	**64.2%**	**71.3%**	48.5%
Pearson's Chi-Square = 182.098, df = 6 (p-value < 0.001)					

Keep in touch with friends	Childhood Education	Primary Education	Secondary School	Upper Secondary School	Total
Never	**83.3%**	**45.1%**	5.8%	0.0%	34.3%
Occasionally	12.2%	**39.2%**	26.5%	13.9%	44.5%
Once or several times a day	4.4%	15.7%	**67.7%**	**86.1%**	41.0%
Pearson's Chi-Square = 453.399, df = 6 (p-value < 0.001)					

Entertaiment	Childhood Education	Primary Education	Secondary School	Upper Secondary School	Total
Never	**10.6%**	7.8%	5.1%	0.0%	6.4%
Occasionally	**66.7%**	**58.8%**	37.0%	36.1%	49.9%
Once or several times a day	22.8%	33.3%	**58.0%**	**63.9%**	43.7%
Pearson's Chi-Square = 84.399, df = 6 (p-value < 0.001)					

Do something else	Childhood Education	Primary Education	Secondary School	Upper Secondary School	Total
Never	**65.5%**	49.3%	33.7%	34.3%	45.6%
Occasionally	28.2%	35.0%	34.5%	29.6%	324%
Once or several times a day	6.2%	15.8%	**31.8%**	**36.1%**	21.9%
Pearson's Chi-Square = 84.399, df = 6 (p-value < 0.001)					

Data in bold indicates that the percentage in the square is greater than expected at a significance level (*p*-value) of 0.001. Underlined data indicates that the percentage in the square is less than expected at a significance level (*p*-value) of 0.001. A *p*-value less than 0.001 indicates that the analysis result is statistically significant.

The use of the Internet for online entertainment is sporadic for half of the families (49.9%) or each day for four in ten (43.7%). However, data related to the use of the Internet for entertainment purposes, according to educational stage, shows that preschool and primary school minors do so mostly on an occasional basis. Contrarily, among secondary and upper secondary school students, this kind of activity predominates on a daily basis.

4.3. Active Mediation Strategies

Once the restrictive control strategies and the motivation for access had been analyzed, the active mediation strategies that parents develop regarding orientation and accompaniment of their children while they are connected were studied. They were asked a number of questions focused on the actions they take with their children, as shown in Table 1, point 6.

Most families report a high level of involvement in active mediation strategies. The most prevalent action is explaining to minors that there are websites that are good and others that are not (84%), followed by guiding minors in unpleasant situations on the Internet (69% of parents), while sharing of passwords is the only action with a lower rate of incidence. The figure does not reach 28.5% of those surveyed.

As in previous sections, initiatives vary according to the minors' ages. This is statistically significant, as shown in Table 3. In the preschool and primary stages, a higher percentage of families report supervision without active participation (80% in the two age groups). In contrast, the other actions are undertaken less frequently at these two stages of education. Explaining how to use the Internet safely is carried out by only 55% of families with minors in preschool and suggesting how to behave correctly is performed by just 34.4% of parents with minors at this same educational stage. In the primary education phase, the

frequency with which families participate in these two actions increases, reaching 79.5% and 71.2%, respectively (see Table 3).

Table 3. Active mediation measures by educational stage.

Active Mediation Strategies	Childhood Education	Primary Education	Secondary School	Upper Secondary School	Total	Chi-Square d.f. = 3	*p*-Value
Explain which web pages are good or not	<u>66.1</u>	85.9	**91.4**	**92.6**	84.0	59.9	<0.001
Explain how to use the Internet safely	<u>55.0</u>	79.5	**85.2**	**85.2**	76.4	62.51	<0.001
Supervise without any active participation	**80.6**	**80.5**	<u>63.4</u>	<u>58.3</u>	71.5	32.76	<0.001
Suggest how to behave on the Internet	<u>34.4</u>	71.2	**85.6**	**77.8**	68.3	136.04	<0.001
Guide minors in unpleasant situations on the Internet	<u>45.6</u>	67.3	**84.4**	74.1	68.9	79.15	<0.001
Share Internet passwords	<u>10.6</u>	24.9	**38.9**	**40.7**	28.5	51.33	<0.001

Data in bold indicates that the percentage in the square is greater than expected at a significance level (*p*-value) of 0.001. Underlined data indicates that the percentage in the square is less than expected at a significance level (*p*-value) of 0.001. A *p*-value less than 0.001 indicates that the analysis result is statistically significant.

The secondary and upper secondary are the stages in which parents are more active in mediation strategies, both in terms of safety as well as in the prevention of conflicts and unpleasant situations. Finally, sharing Internet passwords is one of the least common safeguards practiced within families. Less than a third of respondents know the passwords of their children. It would seem logical that passwords might not exist until minors have their own profiles, but even in the secondary and upper secondary stages, this strategy is only utilized in around 40% of the cases.

4.4. Posterior Parental Control

When minors finish a session using the Internet, parents can conduct some post-control tasks such as inspecting or checking the record of web pages visited, checking WhatsApp groups, monitoring friends added, monitoring the content of social network profiles, and monitoring files downloaded. It is observed that an average of just over half of the parents perform one or more of these tasks. Overall, controls are lower in the early stages of education, they increase during primary and secondary school, and they descend again in upper secondary school. Checking the record of websites visited is a control technique that is most frequently used in the primary school stage. Checking the members of WhatsApp groups occurs more frequently during primary and secondary school in comparison with the preschool years, at which time minors still do not have access to this application. In upper secondary school, other types of controls are used. Something similar occurs with friends added and the content of profiles. In the preschool stage, control measures are followed to a lesser extent than in primary and secondary school. Messages received and files downloaded are more controlled in the primary school stage in contrast to the decrease of this type of control in the upper secondary phase (see Table 4).

Table 4. Posterior parental control by educational phase.

When Your Child Connects to the Internet, You Check	Childhood Education	Primary Education	Secondary School	Upper Secondary School	Total	*Chi-Square*	*p*-Value
History of visited pages	48.9%	**63.9%**	53.7%	48.1%	54.5%	14.41	<0.010
Membership of WhatsApp groups	<u>40.0%</u>	**59.0%**	51.0%	<u>20.4%</u>	46.1%	47.70	<0.001
Friends added	<u>41.1%</u>	**65.4%**	57.6%	<u>33.3%</u>	52.3%	41.51	<0.001
Content of profiles	<u>43.3%</u>	**61.5%**	63.0%	<u>47.2%</u>	55.6%	25.62	<0.001
Messages received	37.2%	**58.5%**	39.3%	<u>15.7%</u>	40.7%	56.02	<0.001
Files downloaded	52.8%	**61.5%**	<u>43.2%</u>	<u>28.7%</u>	48.4%	34.95	<0.001

Data in bold indicates that the percentage in the square is greater than expected at a significance level (*p*-value) of 0.001. Underlined data indicates that the percentage in the square is less than expected at a significance level (*p*-value) of 0.001. A *p*-value less than 0.001 indicates that the analysis result is statistically significant.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

The parents surveyed in this research showed high percentages of parental mediation in the different types of risk their children may face when they connect to the Internet. A pattern of parental behavior was verified: as minors grow older there is less control over access, corroborating the findings of Álvarez-García et al. (2019), but a higher level of active mediation with posterior control. Parents of preschool minors set restrictive mediation strategies based on connection time and rules for connecting. Once a selection of the channels to which minors are allowed to connect is made, parents do not give them suggestions of behavior (only 31% do so) nor do they guide their children when facing risky situations they may encounter while browsing (47%). This may result from parents who consider their children too young to address these issues or from parents who trust in the online content chosen by their children or by themselves in previously selected child-specific television channels or apps. During the primary education stage, mediation continues to be restrictive, based mainly on prohibition and the establishment of rules for connection times or on the content that minors watch. These findings contradict the conclusions of Bartau-Rojas et al. (2018) that assess that parents opt for a more dialogic mediation at this age.

When minors reach pre-adolescence and adolescence, they begin to use the Internet massively (National Statistics Institute 2020, 2021). This phase coincides with the beginning of the secondary school years. Access to the Internet in this period is due to both academic and social reasons (Bossen and Kottasz 2020; Festl 2021; Morgan 2020) and it changes from occasional to daily use. This is when 80% of parents choose active mediation strategies. They become more communicative and closer to their children. They try to explain to their children the situations they might encounter on the Internet and how they can manage or resolve them. They tell them which pages are good and which are not and how they can use the Internet safely. Moreover, parents monitor how their children use the Internet and inform them about the potential risks of social networks. It is during this phase when posterior control occurs more frequently. In the next educational stage, when minors reach the upper secondary school level, the attitude of parents changes once again. When minors are around 16 years old, parents lower their level of mediation despite the high vulnerability of girls on social networks such as YouTube (García-Jiménez et al. 2022). Parents continue to exercise active mediation and dialogue, but they reduce their intervention and they do not advocate the restrictive mediation mentioned by Caivano et al. (2020). This decrease in parental involvement might be due to three main causes: (1) they believe their children have greater digital competency as they grow older, (2) they are not aware of the relevance of this period in the growth of minors, and (3) when minors reach adolescence, they demand greater freedom and trust from their parents. Consequently, parents find themselves at a crossroads, where they try to control what their children do on the Internet while they face the demand for greater autonomy from their adolescent children.

This active mediation seems to diminish when it comes to reviewing what their children have done while online and only half of the parents worry about checking the record of websites visited, scrutinizing members of WhatsApp groups, examining the contents of their profile on social networks, or examining the messages or files they have received and sent. Parents do not know which pages they have visited, the people with whom they have had conversations, and whether they were appropriate or not. Parental mediation is undergoing a progressive development away from being more restrictive to being more communicative and concerned, and they are gaining greater awareness of the importance of the Internet and its possible effects on minors. However, there is still a long way to go. It has been observed that parents demonstrate very close control with certain actions such as making purchases through the Internet, possibly for fear of the consequences. In contrast, parental supervision is laxer in allowing minors the autonomy to create profiles on social network platforms at the start of adolescence.

One of the main contributions of this research is the study of parental control evolution of parents and guardians in the complex online framework in which minors grow up. The

size of the used sample is vital to obtain deeper knowledge regarding parental strategies and minors' potential exposure to online risks and motivations to connect to the Internet.

6. Limitations of the Study

Data collection was conducted online in a specific period and geographical area; therefore, the generalization of the findings is difficult to establish. Although the study details the mediation actions carried out by parents or guardians, family cohabitation is not addressed, which makes it difficult to know whether the strategies are shared or whether they depend on the respondent's gender or on any other feature. Nevertheless, this study contributes to the investigation of the most current trends in parents' and guardians' mediation strategies and how they are implemented depending on the age of the minors.

7. Future Research

For future lines of research, it will be useful to discover whether the new generations of parents increase their digital literacy and whether this concludes with the combination of both types of mediation (active and restrictive) that will help young people to self-regulate and manage online risks. Therefore, expanding the sample and including other regions of the world is recommended. It is necessary to carry out studies that identify changes in trends and that analyze the parents' role in parental mediation based on the age and gender of minors.

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Article

Missing Children in Italy from 2000 to 2020: A Review of the Phenomenon Reported by Newspapers

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Abstract: The disappearance of children has become a public social issue that has captured the attention of many in the last two decades, especially because there is not a worldwide consensus on the definition of "missing child". This research analyzed events of missing children from 2000 to 2020 in Italy; data were collected from the main national sources of information: the websites of two Italian press agencies (ANSA and Adnkronos) and the four main Italian newspapers (Il Messaggero, La Repubblica, Il Corriere Della Sera, La Stampa) with a double-blind procedure. Our data show that male minors disappear to a greater extent than female minors and the disappearance of Italian minors is more represented than that of foreign minors. The majority of minors are found and when they are found they are still alive often within the first week after the disappearance. Our data shows that children disappear between the ages of 0–5 more than the cases involving adolescents. Also, of 182 missing and found children, information regarding the presence of abuse was reported in only 18 cases. The data of the present study were discussed in comparison with those of the Italian Government's Extraordinary Commissioner for Missing Persons highlighting differences between the official data on missing children and those reported by newspapers; this study is intended to highlight a growing focus on the phenomenon, not only from a media perspective but also from an institutional one.

Keywords: disappearance; abuse; neglect; victims; abduction; missing adolescent

1. Introduction

The disappearance of children has become a public social issue that has captured the attention of many in the last two decades. There is no worldwide consensus on the definition of "missing child" or how to investigate missing/abducted child cases. A missing child can be defined as "any person under the age of 18 whose whereabouts are unknown" (ICMEC n.d.b). Children can go missing for a variety of reasons and it is important for countries to further define this phenomenon by categorizing disappearances according to risk and circumstances (Vermeulen 2005). Following the International Center for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC n.d.a) categories of "missing children" include, but are not limited to: endangered runaway (a child voluntarily leaves home without the permission of his/her parents or custodian for a variety of reasons); family abduction (the taking, keeping, or concealment of one or more children by a parent, other family member, custodian, or his/her agent, in derogation of the custody and/or visitation rights of another parent or family member); non-family abduction (the forcible and unauthorized taking of a child by someone other than a family member); lost, injured, or otherwise missing (a child who has disappeared under circumstances that are unknown and difficult to determine); abandoned

or unaccompanied child (a child who is not accompanied by an adult legally responsible for him/her, including those traveling alone without custody permission, those separated by an emergency, those in a refugee situation, and those who have been abandoned or otherwise left without adult care).

The number of missing children at a global, European, and national level is increasing, and while many cases have been resolved successfully, others have unfortunately had dramatic outcomes, and others remain tragically unsolved. As reported by ICMEC, the phenomenon has reached alarming dimensions all over the globe, although the lack of a common definition of "missing child" or a shared response to the problem result in few reliable statistics on the extent of the problem worldwide (ICMEC n.d.b).

In many countries, statistics on missing children do not even exist and, unfortunately, even available data can be inaccurate due to under-reporting or under-recognition of the phenomenon, inflation, incorrect database entry of case information, and removal of records once a case has been closed. At the European level, to achieve greater operational synergies, there is a single phone number (116000) for missing children, providing a free service for reporting cases of disappearance of underage and adolescent children, active 24 h a day, which collects reports and data to be sent to the Police Forces. In addition, on 7 January 2020, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe approved a resolution stating that states must take action to prevent cases of disappearance.

Actually, according to a study by the European Commission, about 250,000 children and adolescents go missing every year (which means that a child goes missing every 2 min) with Germany, the UK, France, and Spain being the countries with the most missing children in 2018, while Italy reports the lowest number of missing children compared to other European countries, although there were 13,527 cases of disappearance recorded by law enforcement in 2020 (Telefono Azzurro 2021).

What concerns Italy in particular, given a large number of voluntary runaways, many children are quickly found, but many others are still missing, with an alarming trend of almost one missing per hour: in 2020, 7672 children disappeared in our country, of which 5511 were foreigners (71.8%), and concerning age and gender, male adolescents between 14 and 17 years are those most at risk (AGI 2021). Thankfully, of those missing, 3332 (43.3%) have already been found.

Notwithstanding, Global Missing Children Network (GMCN n.d.) Italy reports that 30 children have already gone missing in the year March 2021–2022, although because of the obscure number the amount could be even higher.

Media portray vivid accounts of child disappearances, particularly high-profile abductions by strangers (Greer et al. 2012; van de Rijt et al. 2018). Such overrepresentation triggers fear in almost all parents, as child abduction is one of the most stressful forms of criminal victimization (Lord et al. 2001; Spilman 2006), especially when the abductor is embodied by a family member (Cole and Bradford 1992; Gandasaputra 2005; Greif and Hegar 1992; Long et al. 1991).

In 2002, the United States and some districts of Canada adopted a national alert system in cases of suspected child abductions, known as AMBER (an acronym for America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response) alert. This system involves regular alert messages through the radio, television, mobile phones, and electronic road signs to activate a network for the rapid circulation of useful information to make the community aware and actively participate in the search (Telefono Azzurro 2010). In March 2011, the alert system, with some variations, was also adopted by countries such as Australia (Queensland) and Malaysia, and only Netherlands, France, and Ireland in Europe, although it is a very useful and effective tool for finding missing children. As Greer and colleagues found out, the mere use of "AMBER" as a label in a missing child case increased community involvement in the search for the missing child (from 1996 to 2009, AMBER alerts helped track down 495 abducted children) (Greer et al. 2012). Italy, along with other European countries (e.g., Greece, Belgium, France, Portugal, and Romania), is now implementing a common automated alert system and participating in the ECAAS (European Child Alert Automated

System) Daphne project (The Smile of the Child n.d.). In addition, the ICAAS (Italian Child Abduction Alert System), an "early warning" system for missing children, is currently under development at a national level.

Concerning the psychological implications, except for a few studies (Forehand et al. 1989; Kennedy et al. 2021), it is unclear which coping strategies are employed by parents of victims to effectively deal with the pain of abduction. Research (Davis et al. 1996; Finkelhor and Hashima 2001; Finkelhor and Ormrod 2001) has shown that the psychological and emotional impact of any criminal victimization can be severe, especially if the crime represents a violation of a personal relationship or is depriving victims of their sense of personal control. More specifically, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and prolonged grief reactions were identified as the most frequently reported psychological responses among relatives of missing persons (Kennedy et al. 2019; Lenferink et al. 2017, 2018).

In some cases, the trauma of disappearance, albeit not as severe as physical torture, can produce similar effects, predisposing family members to the so-called "torture syndrome" (Quirk and Casco 1994).

Harmful effects of disappearance are also particularly present in children who have been found after their disappearance, as they represent the primary victims, especially when abuses are experienced. Several supportive interventions can be offered to victims, either as an initial intervention or as long-term support to cope with the suffering and hopefully try to move on.

Aims and Objectives

From these premises, we conducted research using newspapers to understand the phenomenon of missing children for 20 years; more specifically, the aim of the present study was:

(1)   Analyze the characteristics of missing children's episodes reported by newspapers, from 2000 to 2020, in Italy.

(2)   Identify differences in information on missing children and their kidnappers, if any. (e.g., victim's gender, ethnic background, presence of abuse, knowledge of the kidnapper).

2. Methods

2.1. Procedures

To conduct the research, methodological indications found in previous research in Italy were followed (Barchielli et al. 2021; Roma et al. 2012).

Events of missing children from 2000 to 2020 have been collected from the main national sources of information: the websites of two Italian press agencies (ANSA and Adnkronos) and the four main Italian newspapers (Il Messaggero, La Repubblica, Il Corriere della Sera, La Stampa); local press information has been used to complete the information coming from national press agencies since, from a preliminary investigation, we realized that newspapers had more exhaustive information about the cases. A data set with the considered variables has been developed.

Two independent researchers collected the articles, through a double-blind procedure, to determine whether the recovered articles met the inclusion criteria outlined above. The full texts of the articles were independently evaluated by two reviewers. If necessary, discrepancies were resolved by an initial discussion or by a third auditor. Finally, two researchers encoded them independently.

All the articles concerning the disappearance of minors, regardless of the kind of disappearance, have been included; the missing cases considered are those that occurred between 2000 and 2020.

The data set included (a) information about sex, age, nationality, and the region of the missing children; (b) the conditions under which the minor was found; (c) the relationship between perpetrator and victim; (d) information about sex, age, nationality of

the kidnapper; (e) the days from disappearance to being found; (f) the presence of abuse if any.

2.2. Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using the software package SPSS, version 27. An analysis of descriptive statistics was conducted to illustrate the domestic violence events' demographic and other selected characteristics.

In addition, the comparison between missing male and female children was reported with crosstabs and chi-square analysis. A *p*-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant and a 95% confidence interval was used.

3. Results

From the analysis of 189 newspaper articles, it emerged that 201 children went missing from 2000 to 2020 in Italy; 55% were males while 45% were female. On average, 9 children a year went missing, with a mean age of 8.39 years (SD = 4.33); 58.7% were Italian while 41.3% had different nationalities. Table 1 shows descriptive information about children's disappearance.

Table 1. Descriptive information about children's disappearance, by gender.

		Male	Female	Total
Victim Nationality	Italian	69	50	119
	Foreign	38	44	82
Outcome	Found	101	81	182
	Still missing	6	13	19
If found	Alive	83	68	151
	Dead	20	16	36
	Missing value	4	10	14
Motive	Non-familiar kidnapping	8	19	27
	Familiar kidnapping	17	12	29
	Escape	29	29	58
	Abandonment	1	1	2
	Disappearance	15	12	27
	Benign disappearance	37	21	58
Total		107	94	201

Regarding authors, the newspaper contained information about 61 identified perpetrators, detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive information about perpetrators, by gender.

		Male	Female	Total
Perpetrator nationality	Italian	20	8	28
	Foreign	21	12	33
Known by the victim	Yes	31	16	47
	No	10	4	14
If known	Parent	15	7	22
	Grandparent	0	4	4
	Relatives	2	3	5
	Family friends	4	0	4
	Friends	10	2	12
Total		41	20	61

Chi-Square Analysis

A chi-square analysis was performed to see if there were any gender differences in the likelihood of finding missing children and in the presence of abuse during abduction. While no gender differences were found in the event outcome ($X2_{(1, 189)} = 2.939$, $p = 0.086$), the chi-square analysis showed differences in the presence of abuse ($X2_{(4, 18)} = 2.084$, $p = 0.044$) (Table 3).

Table 3. Crosstab Abuse*Victim Sex.

			Male	**Female**	**Total**
Presence of abuse	Physical abuse	Count	3	1	4
		Expected	0.9	3.1	4.0
		Residual	2.1	−2.1	
		Standard residual	2.2	−1.2	
	Sexual abuse	Count	0	7	7
		Expected	1.6	5.4	7.0
		Residual	−1.6	1.6	
		Standard residual	−1.2	0.7	
	Corpse concealment	Count	1	2	3
		Expected	0.7	2.3	3.0
		Residual	0.3	−0.3	
		Standard residual	0.4	−0.2	
	Attempted abuse	Count	0	3	3
		Expected	0.7	2.3	3.0
		Residual	−0.7	0.7	
		Standard residual	−0.8	0.4	
	Trafficking	Count	0	1	1
		Expected	0.2	0.8	1.0
		Residual	−0.5	0.2	
		Standard residual	−0.5	0.3	
Total			4	14	18

A second chi-square analysis reported statistically nonsignificant differences in cases where the perpetrator knew the victim and in the event outcome (missing children found alive or dead; $X2_{(1, 46)} = 0.001$, $p = 0.973$) and in the presence of abuse during the abduction ($X2_{(3, 16)} = 7.111$, $p = 0.068$).

4. Discussion

With the limits of the sampling methodology, the number of cases of missing children in Italy reported in newspapers between 1 January 2000 and 31 December 2020 is 202. The data reported in this study are comparable with the periodic statistical reports of the Italian Government's Extraordinary Commissioner for Missing Persons (Ministero dell'Interno 2021). The period considered in them goes from 1 January 1974 to 31 December 2020, with more in-depth investigations by macro-period. The statistics reported in the periodic reports show that the percentage of male missing persons (63%) is higher than that of female missing persons (37%). Our data, although in different percentages, confirm the national trend whereby male minors disappear to a greater extent (53.2%) than female minors. However, other countries such as the UK found the opposite, since 66% of all female missing incidents reported to the police relate to girls aged 12–17 years according to the reports (National Crime Agency 2021).

The periodic reports of the Extraordinary Commissioner of the Italian Government for Missing Persons (Ministero dell'Interno 2021) disconfirm the data on the nationality of the missing minors that, on the contrary, are reported in the newspapers analyzed in which

Italian minors who have disappeared are the majority (59.2%), unlike the reports in which foreign minors represent the majority of the total number of reports.

The periodical reports, on the other hand, confirm the data regarding the finding of the victim: the majority of minors are found (our data show 90.5%) and when they are found they are still alive (75.1%) often within the first week after the disappearance they return spontaneously after a few days due to lack of economic resources for sustenance (escape 28.9%; benign disappearance 28.9%).

Regarding the motive of disappearance, the periodic reports have highlighted, as the main motive underlying the disappearances, adolescent escape, which accounts for about 65% of the total, followed by family abduction, about 20%, and a remaining 15% of disappearances of other types (including accidental events, such as injury or sudden death). Comparative data reported in the United Kingdom estimate that one in nine children will run away from home or substitute care before their 16th birthday, and most children and youth run away from home because of family issues (Hill 2016).

The data from the present research, however, shows different results with most of the newspaper reported cases involving children who go missing between the ages of 0–5 (28.7%), while reported cases involving adolescents (aged 12–17) are 19.5%. This figure can be explained by the greater impact of news stories about the disappearance of a very young child compared with an adolescent. Missing children are often in the news because these stories trigger emotional responses to those who are seen as innocent victims. However, public interest in missing children and media coverage of their cases are very unevenly distributed. Some famous incidents receive national and even international attention for months on end, while others are completely ignored by media coverage (Liebler 2004; Wilson et al. 2005; Wanzo 2008; Min and Feaster 2010). Moreover, adolescents often field voluntary removal as a response to a real or perceived lack of well-being in the family (Biehal et al. 2003; Mitchell 2003; NSPCC 2011; Rees 2011; Rees and Lee 2005; Safe on the Streets Research Team 1999; Wade 2003; Wade and Rees 1999). Protecting missing children is not only a priority for the police but also a public health concern, in light of emerging evidence that missing children may be at heightened risk of abuse, exploitation, and harm (Sidebottom et al. 2020).

Of 182 missing and found children, information regarding the presence of abuse was reported in only 18 cases. It should be emphasized, however, that it cannot be ruled out that in many other cases there was abuse that went unreported or unremembered by the victim, and although this figure is quite small it is an important finding. Children can face significant risks to their safety when they run away or go missing from home, including physical assault, sexual exploitation, and involvement in criminal activity. A 2011 survey conducted by Rees found that one in eleven youth reported being hurt or harmed while away from home. One in six reported sleeping outdoors or being with someone they had just met. Nearly one in eight said they stole to survive and one in eleven reported begging (Rees 2011). The periodic reports of the Extraordinary Commissioner of the Italian Government for Missing Persons (Ministero dell'Interno 2021), on the other hand, did not report any data on possible abuse and/or violence the children may have undergone during the period of disappearance.

Children living with parents with drug and alcohol problems often seek help from friends and family (Bancroft 2004; Houmøller et al. 2011), and most remain living with friends and family (Rees 2011; Rees and Lee 2005; Wade and Rees 1999). However, there may still be significant risks to this group; one-sixth of youth have been physically or sexually assaulted when staying with friends and one in twenty have been assaulted when staying with relatives (Wade and Rees 1999).

There is very interesting data related to kidnappings, showing that 75.8% of cases are carried out by persons known to the minor, while in 24.2% of the cases, they are carried out by strangers. Kidnappings could be due to conflicting marital dynamics in which one of the two parents wants to deprive the other of the right to see his or her child, or, sometimes, there are circumstances in which the kidnapping of a minor is used as an instrument of

revenge against a family member. This research has also shown that in almost all cases of abduction it was possible to identify the abductor and that, consistent with the previous data, in 46.8% of cases the abductor was one of the two parents, in 8.5% a grandparent, in 10.6% a family member, and in 8.5% a family friend. These data are in line with those recorded throughout Europe by Missing Children Europe (2021) which reports flight and family abduction as the main reasons behind the disappearance of minors.

Although our data are not statistically significant, it emerges that among the minors found, more males (3) than females (1) had been physically abused, while only female minors (7) had been sexually abused. However, compared to the reported cases of abuse/violence, the data are positive the number of children abused or raped is small when compared to the total number of children abused or raped.

A second chi-square analysis was then performed to identify whether, in cases where the perpetrator knew the victim, there were differences in the outcome of the event (missing children found alive or dead) and in the presence of abuse during abduction. Both analyses reported statistically nonsignificant differences.

The main limitations of the present study stem from the source chosen to search the data. Searching for cases of missing children in Italy through newspaper information poses an important limitation: newspapers have a quantity and type of information that depends very much on editorial policies and therefore it must be considered that there may be a subjective narrative and a selection of details that are provided. Moreover, as reported in the result section, some expected frequencies were small, thus violating one of chi-square's assumptions, therefore, the presented results must be carefully interpreted.

Although the double-blind method was used, having analyzed several newspapers and having selected a long period (20 years), it is not possible to exclude that there was an underestimation of the frequency of the phenomenon. However, there is growing attention to the phenomenon, from a media point of view and an institutional point of view.

Furthermore, the methodology used has some bias: first, the information contained in the newspaper depends on editorial policies and focuses more on the interest of the media (McQuail 1985; Cheng et al. 2014); secondly, the information is partial and speculative, especially with regard to the motivation of the kidnapper. Despite these limitations, this methodology can only understand how information about such events is disseminated to the national population. Indeed, because of the obscure number of missing children, it is not possible to obtain complete and accurate data from an unambiguous database, nor to have access to crucial information such as the gender of the child and the abductor (if present), whether the child has been found, or the occurrence of any abuse (Sullivan 2020).

5. Conclusions and Future Perspectives

In conclusion, a discrepancy between the missing children phenomenon and the news from newspaper sources highlighted a different trend in the effective number of missing children. It may be useful to train journalists to give them guidelines on the most effective ways to disclose a missing child report to assist in the investigation itself. Moreover, it could be useful to develop training programs on disseminating the news, to avoid the secondary victimization of the missing child's family members.

Furthermore, together with the ICAAS, the adoption of recent biometric technology, face recognition, etc., could be useful. Indeed, face recognition is perhaps the most promising biometric technology for recovering missing children, since parents and relatives are more likely to have a photograph of their lost child's face rather than their fingerprint or iris (Deb et al. 2021).

Future research might also focus on children who go missing repeatedly versus children who go missing once and whether this information is picked up and disseminated by newspapers. As Bezeczky and Wilkins (Bezeczky and Wilkins 2022) pointed out, their results showed that around 40 percent of children in their sample were reported missing more than once during the study period. Children reported missing repeatedly were more likely to be White and live in residential care.

Last but not least, it is important to consider aspects of the emotional and psychological experience of missing children. It is of utmost importance to investigate how children deal with the enormous distress they face during their disappearance and how they cope with this traumatic experience. It would be useful to provide psychological support to the parents during/after the child's disappearance, and in cases where the child is found, to provide psychological support to the child as well.

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Article

Tracking Progress towards the International Safeguards for Children in Sport

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Abstract: In 2018, a review was conducted to explore sporting organisations' use of global safeguarding policies. Due to an increase in the number of organisations now adopting these policies, it is thought that an up-to-date review should be conducted to reinstate what is known. As such, this study aims to assess the current state of sporting organisations on the adoption and implementation of the International Safeguards for Children in Sport. Global organisations were contacted to take part in an online questionnaire which explored their use of the International Safeguards for Children in Sport and adopted a novel use for the activation states theory. Results indicated an international, multi-sector use of the International Safeguards as well as supported the relevancy of these Safeguards. There was some stabilisation in activation states since the last review whilst others have progressed from reactive to active. Similarly, thematic analysis highlighted multiple key indicators important in creating a broader impact through safeguarding, such as an increase in disclosures. Furthermore, the results appear to support the newly developed Safeguarding Culture in Sport model. Overall, this research appears to demonstrate an improvement in organisations' engagement with safeguarding but also highlights areas where this can be further improved.

Keywords: safeguarding; International Safeguards; abuse; activation states; safety culture

1. Introduction

Recently there has been increased awareness on the situation of abuse in sport, highlighted through victims (for example former British Gymnast Amy Tinkler; Ingle 2020), perpetrators (for example former USA Gymnastics coach Larry Nassar; Fisher and Anders 2020) and television programmes (such as *Football's Darkest Secret*; Varley 2021). Over three decades, research has highlighted welfare concerns are present at individual, relational and organisational levels (Brackenridge and Rhind 2014). Brackenridge (2001) emphasised that in response to such high-profile cases the British sporting agenda has taken a devoted interest in engaging with child protection, yet this was not always the situation. Brackenridge et al. (2005) remarked that governing bodies were firstly cautious in the uptake of safeguarding policies possibly due to a denial of the issue within sport, potential for bad publicity and a sense that it impeded organisation's integrity. Similarly, the international pace of child protection policies varies considerably. Consequently, a standardised set of safeguards were developed based off of empirical research by Brackenridge et al. (2012). These aided organisations to overcome a range of safeguarding challenges highlighted in past research (Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere 2020). The International Safeguards for Children in Sport (International Working Group 2016) are:

1. Developing your policy;
2. Procedures for responding to safeguarding concerns;
3. Advice and support;
4. Minimising risks to children;
5. Guidelines for behaviour;

6.   Recruiting, training and communicating;
7.   Working with partners;
8.   Monitoring and evaluating.

Brackenridge et al. (2005) note that a key way to change processes and highlight potential resistance is through assessing the commitment of organisations in adopting safeguarding policies. Using a standardised self-audit tool which matches these safeguards, organisation's progress can be monitored and a record maintained of how developed, effective and impactful these policies are, something previously noted as needing attention (Brackenridge 2001). Thus, the main aim of this research will be:

> To assess the current state of sporting organisations on the adoption and imple-
> mentation of the International Safeguards for Children in Sport.

1.1. Welfare

Abuse can take many forms but five are most noted in sport; emotional, physical, sexual, neglect, and poor practice (Raakman et al. 2011). During 2011, 652 safeguarding cases were managed by sporting organisations (Rhind et al. 2014). Goosey (2021) noted that individuals who experience harm can be affected through physical and psychological injury, often causing developmental impact. Additionally, Radford et al. (2011) noted that over 90 per cent of children who have suffered abuse experienced it from someone they know. Thus, responsible organisations need to maintain a keen interest in safeguarding practices to limit experiences of organisational abuse, or neglect of an institution in allowing safeguarding concerns to be continued/not investigated (Keeling and Oakley 2021). Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere (2020) noted that through the Safeguards, participants saw a rise in the number of safeguarding concerns presented potentially due to increased awareness and/or trust in the system. This prompted three research questions:

RQ1. Who is using the International Safeguards for Children in Sport?
RQ2. Where are organisations on their safeguarding journey?
RQ3. What are the broader impacts of the International Safeguards?

1.2. Activation States

The main theory underpinning this research is that of activation states (Brackenridge et al. 2005). The Hawthorn effect tends to appear in research as participants change their behaviour to suit what they feel is expected by the researcher. As such, for individuals to internalise actions they have to accept its importance and have confidence in how to approach it (Brackenridge et al. 2005). This is where the five activation states in child protection originate from; to assess stakeholders' level of activation towards safeguarding by highlighting what they 'say', 'know', 'feel' and 'do' about the subject. Holding an 'inactive' position means organisations have no knowledge surrounding safeguarding, 'reactive' highlights a reluctance to participate and commit whereas 'opposed' underlines an extremely critical view of safeguarding. The final two states are the ideal positions for organisations with an 'active' state demonstrating a strong base knowledge and involvement in solving it and a 'proactive' state demonstrating commitment and active advocacy. Research conducted in 2002–2003 noted a mixture of reactive and active states (Brackenridge et al. 2005) whilst the latest assessment by Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere (2020) specifically stated a change in knowledge from inactive to active. Using the activation states within this research is beneficial for assessing whether this has advanced, stabilised or regressed since the last review. This leads to the fourth research question:

RQ4. Where are organisations on the activation states?

1.3. Safeguarding Culture in Sport Model

Owusu-Sekyere et al. (2021) created a model to understand safeguarding culture within sport. Previously, research has centred on individual, organisational and interactional ways to curtail child maltreatment, yet the culture of sport is often mentioned as

another factor in the development of abuse (Owusu-Sekyere et al. 2021). The researchers thought that one way to satisfy this is to integrate a safety culture into sport from other settings such as aviation. As defined by Edwards et al. (2013, p. 77) a safety culture is:

> The assembly of underlying assumptions, beliefs, values and attitudes shared by members of an organisation, which interact with an organisation's structures and systems and the broader contextual setting to result in those external, readily visible, practices that influence safety.

Consequently, Owusu-Sekyere and colleagues developed the Safeguarding Culture in Sport Model (SCSM) explaining three themes important to the conceptualisation of a safeguarding culture in sport. Firstly, safety management systems (SMS) aid the creation and maintenance of robust cultures. This includes the sub-themes of safeguarding policy, incentives, planning and prevention, communication channels, training, and monitoring and evaluation. Next, stakeholder engagement explains the care and personal investment of safeguarding held in the culture and includes further sub-themes of appreciation, awareness and motivation. Lastly, leadership commitment was identified to explore how the highest levels of authority often hold the majority of influence on organisational safeguarding culture. Another finding within the research that did not emerge as a main theme was the variety of internal and external contextual factors that represent both mediating factors and potential resultants of the main themes (Owusu-Sekyere et al. 2021, p. 15). This model provides another potential avenue for investigation within present research as to whether this new concept can be supported.

1.4. Current Research

The 2018 review assessed the global status of safeguarding in thirty-two sporting organisations working with children (Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere 2020). It was noted by the end of the research that 125 organisations endorsed the International Safeguards. Roughly 400 organisations globally now use the Safeguards to develop policies and practices and therefore, another review of the current status of safeguarding in sport is required to explore whether the state of safeguarding has developed, stabilised or reduced.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

This study was comprised of organisations that were signed up to the International Safeguards newsletter by 7 June 2021. Discussions were held around exclusion criteria, but to truly explore the current state of safeguarding it was felt that all organisations including those who implemented the Safeguards in 2021 should be included. Four hundred organisations were contacted via the owner of this list, through an invitation email containing the participant information sheet and informed consent form allowing them to gain information about the research before agreeing to take part. Contact information for the researchers was also included so that any questions could be directed and answered appropriately. Sixty-nine participants accessed the survey through the invitation link provided. They were reminded that they had the right to withdraw, the confidentiality and anonymity of data, as well as participation being voluntary. To ensure anonymity, limited descriptive details were recorded. Participants were asked about the location(s) of their organisation, the sector(s) in which they work, their job role, and when their organisation began using the International Safeguards. I.P. addresses and other identifiable information, such as questions asking for the specific sports in which they operate, were not recorded to further protect the participant's identity.

2.2. Procedure

Ethical approval was granted by the University's Ethical Committee prior to data collection. A third-party organisation, International Working Group, worked on the researchers' behalf to send an invitation email to participants. This was because they have access to the list of organisations dedicated to the International Safeguards newsletter,

as well as protected the organisations' identities from the researchers and any potential bias that may have resulted. Participants were asked to complete their latest self-audit measure of the Safeguards, offered in April 2021, before completing the questionnaire. Next participants accessed the survey through a link provided in the email. From here they agreed to the informed consent statement, through a forced response, before beginning the survey. The questionnaire took participants around fifteen minutes to complete, depending on the length of reply to open response questions. Once the end of the survey was reached, the response was automatically recorded. The initial invitation email was distributed on 7 June 2021 with reminder emails being sent in late June and early July to increase responses. This procedure was taken due to the global reach of the participants and restrictions in place due to the ongoing pandemic.

2.3. Materials

A questionnaire, following a similar structure to that conducted by Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere (2020), was distributed to participating organisations. Minor changes were made to the questionnaire based off of collaboration between the researchers and the external collaborator as well as feedback from the University's ethical committee. The final questionnaire was comprised of 18 questions addressing issues relating to the organisation itself, their current status on the implementation of the Safeguards, personal experiences, and the reporting of abuse. The self-audit tool was also employed as it encourages self-reflection by asking organisations to consider potential headway they have made towards safeguarding, thus monitoring their progress. Two questions included in the current survey were focused on the results of this standardised and implemented measure, aiding comparison for how imbedded the Safeguards are within the participating organisations. A range of open and closed questions were used, allowing individual experiences to be grouped and summarised as well as aiding the understanding of real-world experiences of safeguarding in sport. The main survey was produced in English (United Kingdom) which could mean that, due to the global nature of the study, certain questions may become lost in translation to those participants who are not fluent in English and/or may discourage a participant from taking part. To counteract this, the researchers had prepared a shorter version of the survey in French; Spanish; Portuguese; Arabic; and Japanese consisting of mostly closed questions so that open responses were not impacted by translation issues. This was utilised to encourage more participants from non-fluent English-speaking countries to also be included and therefore reduce losses from the sample due to any potential language barrier.

For this study, the aim was to develop a quantitative method to assess the activation states of the organisation. The activation states are typically used qualitatively to explore the subtle wordings used by participants in interview responses, and therefore attempting to adapt them into a quantitative measure appears to be novel. To do this a matrix table was formed using example statements for each of the activation states and their corresponding actions provided by Brackenridge et al. (2005, p. 248). For example, the first action in the matrix related to voices, or what people 'say' about safeguarding in sport. Multiple examples were provided as to what spoken responses of this action include and from this, one example of each activation state was taken and used as an item for participants to identify. Participants were also asked to give their honest opinion of where their organisation currently is to attempt to minimise the Hawthorn effect.

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The survey was distributed via Qualtrics XM, where responses were also recorded meaning that incomplete surveys could be easily identified before analysis began. The number of responses obtained caused a change in analysis from an inferential statistic to descriptive approach to be taken. Analysis was structured around the four research questions. Firstly, the descriptive information provided was used to explore RQ1. This involved exploring the location, sectors and year in which organisations began implementing the

Safeguards, allowing for the global reach of the Safeguards to be understood as well as exploring whether the standards are still relevant to organisations.

Secondly, quantitative data for the year in which the organisation began implementing the Safeguards and the step within the Safeguards identified through their self-audit was analysed descriptively and the representative activation state identified, answering RQ4. Analysis comprised of dividing participants into separate groups depending on the response step and year in which they began implementing the Safeguards and then identifying the modal response of participants in those corresponding groups. The activation states were assigned a number in which the modal response related to was identified, i.e., if the modal response for years 2016 and 2017 was 3 for 'say' this identified a reactive activation state for the action of voices whereas a score of 5 would symbolise a proactive state. Furthermore, this allowed discussion around the current analysis and previous research, establishing whether the activation states have further progressed or stabilised since the last review.

Thirdly, the qualitative questions were analysed through thematic analysis. This allowed the researchers to explore the key themes relating to RQ2 and RQ3. Finally, questions to comprehend the number of children who are protected under the International Safeguards and whether more or less cases are being reported since the Safeguards have been in place were used to further explore the indicators of broader impact.

3. Results

Sixty-nine responses were recorded, 68 from the English and 1 from the translated version of the survey. From these, nineteen were removed as participants had only stated their informed consent and answered no further questions. This resulted in a sample of fifty participants for analysis.

3.1. Who Is Using the International Safeguards for Children in Sport?

Participants were asked on the sector in which their organisation operates, where they are geographically based and the year in which they began using the Safeguards, allowing for the international nature of the Safeguards to be updated. The demographics relating to sporting sector, geographical location and the year in which organisations adopted the Safeguards as a model of practice are presented in the relevant tables below:

Table 1 demonstrates the year in which the organisations adopted the International Safeguards into their model of practice.

Table 1. Sporting sector in which organisations are based.

Sector	Count	Percentage
Elite	16	21.62%
Sport for Development	35	47.30%
Recreational	15	20.27%
Other	8	10.81%
Total	74	100%

Note. Some participants indicated multiple responses, hence the higher count total than number of participants who answered this question (n = 50). Responses in the other category included: "all", "child protection", "education" and "international development and humanitarian".

Table 2 demonstrates the year in which the organisations adopted the International Safeguards into their model of practice.

Table 2. Geographical location of participants.

Location	Count	Percentage
Africa	5	7.35%
Asia	7	10.29%
Australia/Oceania	10	14.71%
Europe	11	16.18%
North America	3	4.41%
South America	2	2.94%
Global	8	11.76%
Specific Country/Countries	22	32.35%
Total	68	99.99%

Note. Some participants responded to multiple options hence the higher count total than participants who answered the question (n = 50). Responses for the specific country option included but were not limited to: "Brazil"; "Botswana"; "Switzerland"; "Caribbean St. Lucia"; and "China and Pakistan".

Table 3 demonstrates the year in which the organisations adopted the International Safeguards into their model of practice.

Table 3. The year in which the organisations began developing the International Safeguards.

Year	Count	Percentage
2016 (Original Pioneers)	9	23.08%
2017	10	25.64%
2018	1	2.56%
2019	7	17.95%
2020	5	12.82%
2021	7	17.95%
Total	39	100%

Note. The lower count than total participants noted was due to attrition in the number of participant responses.

3.2. Where Are Organisations on the Activation States?

The activation states (Brackenridge et al. 2005) underpinned the research and considered the theory from a quantitative, rather than traditionally qualitative, approach. The dependent variable of activation state was divided into the four sub-sections: 'say', 'know', 'feel' and 'do', and compared against the individual variable of year in which the organisations began implementing the Safeguards and the five steps within the Safeguards they identified from their self-audit measure.

3.2.1. Length of Time Engaged with the Safeguards versus Activation State

As shown in Table 4 below, a comparison was conducted to establish if the length of time organisations had been engaged with the International Safeguards lead to greater progression along the activation states. These groups identify those engaged with the International Safeguards since they were pioneered (2016/17) and newer organisations (2019/20/21). The three years for the second group was to make participant numbers for each group comparable and due to the fact that the year 2021 represented roughly six months due to the research timing.

Table 4. Year of International Safeguard introduction versus activation state.

Year	Say	Know	Feel	Do
2016/17 (n = 12)	Active (n = 6)	Active (n = 5)	Active (n = 10)	Reactive, Active & Proactive (n = 3)
2019/20/21 (n = 14)	Active (n = 7)	Active (n = 7)	Active (n = 9)	Opposed (n = 5)

Note. N represents the number of modal responses obtained for the corresponding state identified.

3.2.2. Step Identified through Self-Audit versus Activation State

Next, Table 5 demonstrates how the activation states compared against the stage identified by the organisations via an external self-audit. Steps 1–3 represent the initial stages and steps 4–5 the later stages of development. The results are summarised below:

Table 5. Stage of International Safeguards measured via self-audit versus activation state.

Step	Say	Know	Feel	Do
1, 2 and 3 (n = 8)	Reactive (n = 3)	Reactive (n = 5)	Active (n = 5)	Reactive (n = 4)
4 and 5 (n = 19)	Active (n = 12)	Active (n = 9)	Active (n = 15)	Active (n = 11)

Note. N represents the number of modal responses obtained for the corresponding state identified.

3.3. Where Are Organisations on Their Safeguarding Journey?

Table 6 demonstrates participants' results from their independent self-audit measure. Participants identified on a scale for each of the eight International Safeguards whether their organisation had them fully in place. The results are demonstrated below:

Table 6. Overall rating from self-audit measure of the eight International Safeguards.

Safeguard	Fully in Place	Partially	Not in Place	Total Count
1	28 (70.0%)	9 (22.5%)	3 (7.5%)	40 (100%)
2	22 (55.0%)	16 (40.0%)	2 (5.0%)	40 (100%)
3	23 (57.5%)	14 (35.0%)	3 (7.5%)	40 (100%)
4	29 (72.5%)	9 (22.5%)	2 (5.0%)	40 (100%)
5	28 (70.0%)	10 (25.0%)	2 (5.0%)	40 (100%)
6	19 (47.5%)	17 (42.5%)	4 (10.0%)	40 (100%)
7	23 (57.5%)	12 (30.0%)	5 (12.5%)	40 (100%)
8	17 (42.5%)	15 (37.5%)	8 (20.0%)	40 (100%)

Note. The lower count than total participants noted was due to attrition in the number of participant responses.

3.3.1. Thematic Analysis

The open questions led to multiple themes being acknowledged. Three main themes, as seen in Figure 1 below, were identified in relation to where organisations are on their safeguarding journey: stakeholder engagement, environment and safety management systems (SMS). Further to this, some of the sub-themes also highlighted impacts of safeguarding culture and thus, a fourth theme was created to encapsulate this.
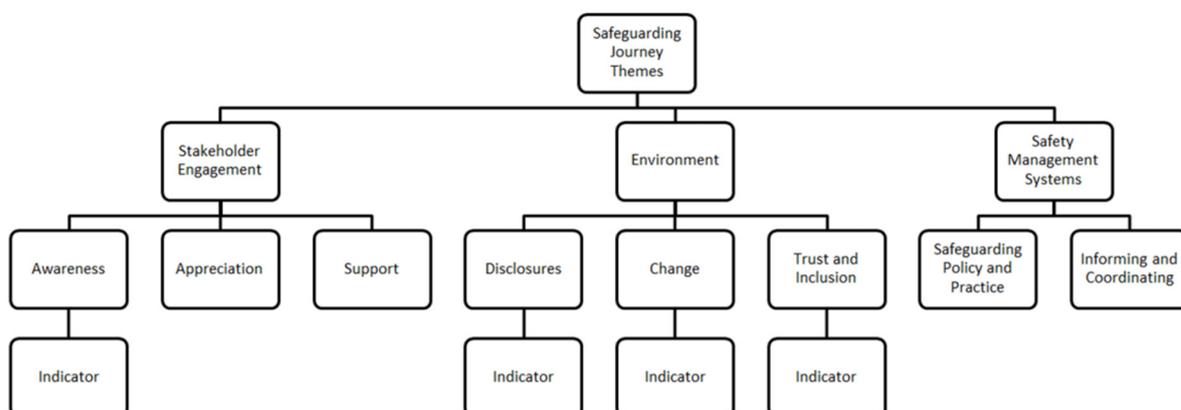

Figure 1. Key Theme Framework.

Stakeholder Engagement

Firstly, stakeholder engagement is used to detail the development in understanding and advancement of safeguarding practices in recent years. This was further divided into three sub-themes: awareness, appreciation and support.

Awareness

Through the implementation of the Safeguards, multiple participating organisations highlighted that there is now increased awareness in multiple areas around safeguarding in sport. Primarily the range of understanding across departments within organisations was noted, for example "stronger awareness and practices at many levels across the organization" (Safeguarding Project Manager) and "children's rights awareness among every workplace in the institutions" (Safeguarding Coordinator). Moreover, an Outgoing Director noted "more people from our network [are] completing basic safeguarding awareness training". However, one participant noted that "more awareness about safeguarding to the general public [would] be greatly appreciated" and this might begin to "make it [a] must for all organisation[s] dealing with children" (Country Manager).

Appreciation

Appreciation is used in this context to describe how safeguarding appears to have become more important to organisations. Participants highlighted how increased awareness and engagement has led to "the safeguards [becoming] the very first thing most people engage with when they come to the organisation" (Chairman). Participants also noted how the Safeguards have become more important in cultures where this has not always been the case, for example an Outgoing Director noted that there is "good evidence of coaches in the Caribbean demonstrating awareness of safeguarding and becoming advocates in their organisations". Furthermore, a Programme's Manager noted how "sport for development organisations [have] gathered together to discuss the importance of embracing the International Safeguards into their organisations, as well as committing to it". Furthermore, in terms of the reporting of abuse, one participant noted that the importance of "working with well-informed staff and directly doing specific safeguarding activities with children has led to greater notification and perception of cases needing attention" (Sports Coordinator).

Support

The final sub-theme for stakeholder engagement is support. This explores how backing for the Safeguards has increased within and outside of organisations. In terms of within organisation support, multiple participants noted how this has improved such as "increased cooperation of all stakeholders to ensure safeguarding is in place" (Get into Rugby Manager) and how working in alliance creates a "co-responsibility [approach] over safeguarding" (Coach Responsible for Child Protection). Multiple organisations also noted how parental support for organisations to utilise the Safeguards has intensified. For example, a Get into Rugby Manager noted that "there was an increase in parental support" and a Coach noted how "parents are very satisfied according to interview". However, the amount of support appears to still vary between cultures, with one participant stating that their country is still "slow to support" (President).

Environment

The next key theme identified was environment, relating to how the culture around safeguarding within sport is beginning to shift. This was divided into three further sub-themes: disclosures, change and trust and inclusion.

Disclosures

The sub-theme of disclosures captures how the atmosphere on the reporting of cases and the organisational environment has been affected since the introduction of the Safeguards. For example, organisations expressed how there have been greater responses in regard to the follow up of cases with the guidelines that the Safeguards provide. Participants expressed how a change in attitude has been noted, for example "by working with the children directly on the Safeguards, we have noticed a significant diminution of physical and especially verbal aggression" (Sports Coordinator). One compelling story from a Sport Development Officer noted that "children [who] participate in sport have become more

aware and have reported cases of abuse which [has led to] cases being reported to the courts and perpetrators of abuse being sentenced". Another comes from a President who noted that "the international safeguards and policies adopted by organisations we work with directly have really assisted in preventing any adverse incidents due to the constant reporting and communications required".

Change

An aspect of change widely expressed by the participants was the ability to use the Safeguards to standardise the sporting sector. For example, a Programme's Manager noted that using the Safeguards means that they can become a part of the "worldwide safeguarding procedure agenda" and how the Safeguards can be used as a "reference point across the entire sport for development sector, aligning with like-minded organisations" (Global Director of Programmes and Grants). Another organisation noted how they are "being used to model good practice" and how they have through the Safeguards been able to "influence other codes [of practice] in the country on safeguarding children in sport" (Training and Education manager).

Trust and Inclusion

Multiple organisations noted how "building a safe environment" (Safeguarding Coordinator) often led to greater feelings of trust and inclusion from within the organisation. A Country Manager noted that utilising the Safeguards has allowed a "safer program for children to be in and participate". Likewise, a Chair of the Council, also noted how by utilising the Safeguards can build trust with parents, "children can participate in sport with the parents being assured that the safeguards are in place to ensure student safety".

Safety Management Systems

The final main theme on the current review of safeguarding is safety management systems. This is used to summarise the standardisation and global nature of the International Safeguards that the participants noted in their responses. This is divided into two sub-themes: safeguarding policy and practice, and informing and coordinating.

Safeguarding Policy and Practice

This theme encompasses the participants' expression of how the Safeguards are aiding the introduction and regulation of safeguarding within the sector. A Coach Responsible for Child Protection noted how their organisation now approaches "safeguarding as a whole, in its different aspects, and point[s] them out in [their] policy". A compelling story came from a director who noted:

> As evaluators, we consistently find issues where safeguards are not applied by the organisations we are evaluating. The Safeguards provide a framework that we can use to assess where programs are at with regard to safeguarding and to provide those organisations with a framework and tools to meet their obligations. For our own organisation, it provides a framework to ensure that we are on boarding our consultants and staff and ensuring that safeguarding and protection are front and centre of our approaches to all of our work.

Another note of importance was how organisations recognised that they were "following global best practices in safeguarding as a basis for [their] own practices, structures and guide[lines]" (Board Member) and were now "part of a recognised international body working on safeguarding" (General Manager Government and Stakeholder Engagement). This standardisation was also stated as being helpful when relating to behavioural practices of members within the organisations, "having clear guidelines and policies help with our staff, so there is no question of what is ok and what is not ok in terms of our behaviour etc." (Director). Similarly, a Country Manager noted that "a lot of youth we work with do not know how to interact with children the right way so through this program

they know now who to directly handle children safely by protecting themselves as well" (Country Manager).

Informing and Coordinating

Informing and coordinating describes how through the Safeguards organisations are becoming more knowledgeable about what constitutes abuse, how it can be prevented and how organisations are working together to prevent future cases and build a safer system. In terms of informing, participants noted how an understanding around the forms of abuse have aided a reduction in incidence, "children now understand the damage that pejorative nicknames can cause others and are stopping using them" (Sports coordinator). Another noted that they now understand "how a safeguarding policy can contribute to the reduction of violence in daily relations" (Sports coordinator).

A Get into Rugby manager noted how they are supporting the coordination of safeguarding, "having the most experience—I am to represent our NOC soon in the IOC's safeguarding course in September 2021 so we can train more if not all NGBs [National Governing Bodies] to have and implement Safeguarding Policies". Participants also expressed how they "share [their] protocol [and] processes" (Coach Responsible for Child Protection) and "have safeguarding in mind whenever [they] develop programs with [their] counterparts" (Chairman).

3.4. What Are the Broader Impacts of the International Safeguards?

A question concerning the job role of the participants was included in the survey to explore the range of roles engaged with safeguarding in organisations. Answers ranged from "Staff", "Head teacher" and "Coach" to "President", "CEO [Chief Executive Officer]" and "Director". A few organisations also recorded themselves as holding a direct child protection or safeguarding role, such as "Safeguarding project manager", "child wellbeing and protection officer", "coach responsible for child protection", and "safeguarding coordinator".

Two questions were asked to explore how many children are protected by the Safeguards. The number of children noted as directly under the protection of those involved was 10,945,514 and the indirect number was noted at 11,609,120. Placed together, from the 47 and 46 participants, respectively, who answered these questions it means approximately 22,554,634 children are being protected in some manner by the International Safeguards.

3.4.1. Thematic Analysis

Some of the themes identified from the thematic analysis also identified signs of cultural change. This led to the fourth key theme, indicators, describing how the Safeguards appear to have had a broader impact on organisations and the young people they work with.

Awareness

Through increased awareness around the Safeguards and policies, multiple organisations expressed that young people are becoming more aware of their rights and are engaging with safeguarding practices. A Director of operations noted that "despite not being best placed to respond in many cases this is the first time many young people have been made aware of their rights and that something that has happened is not ok". Similarly, a safeguarding coordinator stated "[the Safeguards have] helped to increase children's knowledge about what a safeguarding policy is and also different forms of violence". When remarking how the reporting of cases has changed since the introduction of the Safeguards, a director of operations notes that "better awareness of participants and coaches rather than staff knowledge" has led to more cases and issues being raised.

Change

Multiple participants noted how the culture of safeguarding in sport is changing and improving, even in some cases to say that safeguarding is shifting "the entire culture of the organisation" (Chairman). Organisations gave examples of how using the Safeguards have

allowed for "improvements across all areas of [safeguarding] internally and externally as well as more regular reviews" (Director of operations) and how over time they have been able to have "developed, enhanced and revised" (Head of safeguarding) their approach to safeguarding, thus progressing the change within their organisation. A safeguarding coordinator expressed how they are the "first Spanish soccer elite team with [a child] safeguarding policy [and] the first . . . with [a child] safeguarding coordinator". However, a President noted that not all cultures were so willing to change, describing their respective country as holding a "head in sand mentality" towards safeguarding.

Trust

Organisations explained how by using the Safeguards within their organisation, children have developed the support to trust them with matters occurring outside of sport, for example a director of operations noted that "increased awareness of [their] work on [safeguarding] has led to [them to become] a first port of call for young people who have reported incidents outside of [the programme] and [are] looking for support". Furthermore, a chairman shared a compelling story about how the environment they have created through the Safeguards has allowed openness and trust:

> After our training in 2019 and our new group of mentors began working in our community, we saw a wonderful energy and openness to change and inclusion. This led to our first young man coming "out" as openly gay. In our context this is an amazing reality, but it was clear he trusted the staff mentors and participants in the safe space we had created within his community. He was able to share his fears and concerns and we were able to meet and exceed his expectations. In our cultural context this was a massive step forward and indirectly led to further training on inclusion and acceptance for our staff and mentors.

Disclosures

A sport development officer noted how "increased reporting of cases of abuse in sport [has] increased collaboration of sport and NGOs [Non-Governmental Organisations] to address abuse in sport". Participants noted how the Safeguards have created an environment where "children have been able to open up and share their experiences" (Training and education manager) and another explained that "it [is] clear [people trust] the staff mentors" (Chairman).

Furthermore, a specific question in the survey addressed how the reporting of abuse has changed for organisations since the introduction of the Safeguards. Table 7 illustrates participants' responses relating to the change in the number of cases reported or recorded since the introduction of the International Safeguards.

Table 7. Number of cases reported or recorded since the introduction of the International Safeguards.

Response	Count	Percentage
Yes More Cases	14	50.00%
Yes Less Cases	5	17.86%
No	9	32.14%
Total	28	100%

Note. The lower total count is due to attrition in participant numbers by this section of the survey.

For those who noted a drop in case numbers, they sited that their policies were working effectively, "we are very happy with the awareness and practical measures introduced to create a positive attitude towards the safety of children in our sports" (President). Alternatively, those stating no change related this to a lack of sufficient policy, "lack of paperwork or recording, but it is included in plans" (Rugby Coordinator with Community Engagements), or not holding a policy at all, "reporting lines have not yet been promoted as much as we are still in the process of finalizing policy and procedures" (Board Member).

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to assess the current state of sporting organisations on the adoption and implementation of the International Safeguards for Children in Sport. Consistent with previous research, multiple organisations identified adopting the Safeguards as a model of practice to develop their own policies and practices. The descriptive results and thematic analysis conducted identified key areas where the commitment to and the culture of safeguarding has improved as well as potential areas of further improvement.

4.1. Who Is Using the International Safeguards for Children in Sport?

The demographic results highlight the international, multi-sector spread of the International Safeguards as well as the progression that has been made since the last review. Firstly, a range of sectors within sport have utilised the Safeguards, demonstrating the progression and engagement across the industry. Secondly, whilst the numbers for some continents accounted for a low percentage of the overall sample, there was representation from all emphasising the ability of the Safeguards to be culturally adaptable and highlights the change in safeguarding practices across the globe. Thirdly, the Safeguards still appear to be relevant as multiple participants noted an uptake during the last few years, highlighting that there is still further progression to be made as new organisations are interested in utilising the Safeguards to develop their policies and practices.

4.2. Where Are Organisations on the Activation States?

This study also explored whether the length of time that organisations have been engaged with the Safeguards correspond with a progressed activation state. Both the pioneers (2016/17 group) and newer users (2019/20/21) of the Safeguards displayed active states for three of the four sub-sections: 'say', 'know' and 'feel'. Specifically in terms of knowledge, this subsection appears to have stabilised from the last review (Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere 2020). One potential reason for the active state across both groups is that as the concept of safeguarding in sport has grown, so has organisations initial reactions to what they know and say about safeguarding and how they feel about having a safeguarding policy in place. The area of difference between the two groups was 'do', or the actions that organisations take. Here there was a split between the pioneering group with an even representation between reactive, active and proactive states suggesting that even though these organisations have been engaged with the Safeguards for the longest, there is a difference between how quickly they are actively putting actions into place. A reason for this could be the length of time and resources needed to successful employ measures. This would coincide with the other finding of the newer group displaying an opposed state as they have not necessarily had the time and/or resources to act on their newly developed procedures.

The second measure of activation state was against the organisations step on their self-audit. Here, participants in the earlier steps (steps 1, 2 and 3) displayed mostly a reactive state. The fact that the only active was for the sub-section 'feel' could be due to the potential rise in the prevalence of cases being revealed and the multi-sport nature of them (Ingle 2020; Fisher and Anders 2020; Varley 2021), potentially leading to an increase in organisations' feelings that they need to become engaged with safeguarding. In comparison, the participants who identified as further along this journey (steps 4 and 5) displayed and active state for all four sub-sections. This appears to support the idea that being further along in the states suggests a more actively engaged approach and therefore, the earlier stages have not yet had the time needed to develop the same level of activation state. However, for both of these comparisons further investigations would be needed to draw more definitive conclusions about the correlation.

4.3. Where Are Organisations on Their Safeguarding Journey?

The results surrounding this question appear to paint a positive picture on the current state of safeguarding in sport. For all of the eight Safeguards, the majority of participants

recorded policies as being fully in place. There were some, for example Safeguards 6 and 8, that were a closer divide between fully and partially in place which could be due to the varying lengths of time to fully implement each individual Safeguard. Results from the thematic analysis appear to align with the SCSM (Owusu-Sekyere et al. 2021) with similar themes appearing throughout the current research.

4.3.1. Stakeholder Engagement

For stakeholder engagement, the key findings related to a shift in awareness of safeguarding, appreciation or importance of the topic and support for better policies to be held by organisations. Whilst there was still a mix around how much engagement is being seen, the majority of open responses noted a positive shift from members within organisations. Similarly, the awareness on the implications of holding the Safeguards as a set of standards was gaining response from the young people partaking in sport as well as leading guardians to have more interest in and support for the safety of their children within the organisation they belong to. Furthermore, organisations noted how the question of whether they are using the Safeguards are now becoming part of a stronger pull for other organisations to work with them or vice versa, highlighting how the engagement with an international set of standards is now becoming part of the wider coordinating agenda. The issue of abuse in sport appears to be gaining engagement from a variety of sources, strengthening the concept of and case for better safeguarding practices.

4.3.2. Environment

The next key theme lends support to the idea that the environment within organisations around safeguarding is beginning to positively shift. Multiple organisations noted how by using the Safeguards to create a safer environment, they have seen responses in how people involved in the organisation, be it coaches, athletes or others, are feeling more confident and safe to report incidents of potential abuse and neglect. They also note how these are being taken more seriously and investigated. Multiple organisations noted how NGBs and other governing organisations are now beginning to implement safeguarding policies within their institutions, highlighting an important environmental and cultural change.

4.3.3. Safety Management Systems

A key point noted with reference to this theme was how the Safeguards are now allowing the industry itself to follow standardised guidelines. By having a set of standards which are continually assessed, the Safeguards appear to be generating conformity amongst organisations meaning standards can be maintained and upheld. This conformity could potentially be building on confidence of sufferers of abuse that their cases will be investigated properly due to the standards being upheld. From the current research there appears to be better co-operation between organisations and a greater acceptance of the issue, something which has progressed from findings in the early 2000s (Brackenridge et al. 2005), signifying that the safeguarding agenda is moving in a positive direction.

4.4. What Are the Broader Impacts of the Safeguards?

The range of job roles noted by participant's potentially highlights that the importance of safeguarding has risen since the last review as specific safeguarding job roles are appearing within organisations, potentially signifying the importance and need for these roles within a sports setting. Similarly, the organisations surveyed identified as working directly with around 11 million children which is a rise from 6 million noted in 2018 (Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere 2019). Overall, the current numbers suggested by participants for both the direct and indirect totals suggest around 22.5 million children are being protected by the International Safeguards. However, given the higher number of organisations contacted in this present study, it is hoped that the actual number is much higher than that represented.

Some of the subthemes identified from analysis also indicated how the culture of safeguarding has been impacted. Through increased awareness, a change in environment, trust in the systems in place and a change in disclosure process, organisations noted a broader understanding of safeguarding. Compelling stories relating to members of organisations feeling safe to come out to their counterparts as gay may not appear on the surface to be related to safeguarding, but the participants note how building the system that they now have in place, through the Safeguards, has led to this individual to feel more comfortable and open in the environment. Similarly, other participants noted how members of their organisation identify to them safeguarding concerns outside of sport as they have confidence in this particular organisation to help them. These are examples of how the culture created through the Safeguards is seemingly leading for individuals to feel more comfortable and lead to more open conversations around abuse.

Overall, the findings display a rise in cases being reported to organisations since they have had the procedures and policies in place suggested by the Safeguards with 'no change' being noted as second highest and a drop in cases being slightly less common. This was noted by participants as being for a variety of reasons. Primarily, the reporting of cases was apparently heavily affected by the efficiency of the organisation's policies, with some signifying sufficient procedures whilst others note that they are still developing. Another potential reason for why cases rose was awareness of individual's rights. This implies that the Safeguards have potentially led to a broader impact on the culture of the organisations as sufferers of abuse appear to feel more confident in the system when coming forward and are more aware of their individual rights and how organisations can support this.

4.5. Strengths and Limitations of the Current Research

A unique element of this research was how the main researcher identified similar key themes to those of the SCSM (Owusu-Sekyere et al. 2021) without prior knowledge of this newly published model, which became apparent through initial discussions of the results. Specifically, the key themes of engagement and SMS held very strong similarities to those of the SCSM as well as some sub-themes such as awareness and policy and practice. Similarly, initial themes that were not reflected as universally also drew similarities, such as a few participants noting better training and communication within and amongst organisations. Upon review, the researchers felt that there was a strong connection and support for the SCSM and the current research, strengthening this new concept within safeguarding.

This research was pioneering in its attempt to use the activation states in a quantitative method. By using the example statements provided in Brackenridge et al. (2005), a simple matrix table which provides options for each action and state was created. This novel approach allowed the researchers to quickly ask a global spread of participants whether safeguarding is efficiently being practiced within their organisation rather than conduct follow-up interviews, as was the procedure over three years that Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere (2020) had for the first review. If used as a future method to quantitatively measure the activation states, more vigorous testing will be needed to ensure its integrity. Yet for this study, as the pioneers of this, the researchers feel that it was a sufficient novel use of the states and provided some compelling, logical results.

Despite the strengths of the present research, there were a few limitations. Firstly, there was a high rate of attrition in the number of participants that fully completed the questionnaire. The total number of responses recorded was 69 which then dropped to 50 once the data was cleaned, a drop of ~27 per cent. By the end of the questionnaire the response total from that 50 dropped to 28, ~44 per cent attrition. This could have been for a variety of reasons including the length of the survey and the time needed to complete it or the additional information that was required, such as self-audit scores. When tracking the responses, the researchers noted that many of the partially complete responses were only completed up to the self-audit questions, roughly a third of the way through. As noted in the invitation emails distributed to participants in preparation for the survey, the latest self-audit was required to be able to answer some of the questions. It appears that

participants may have reached this point within the survey, realised that they had not completed the self-audit and forgotten to return to complete their response. Whilst using the self-audit measure provided an accurate way of gaining a standardised response, the lack of completion from participants may have impacted the current review.

Secondly, due to the international nature of the Safeguards, the questionnaire was limited by language barriers. Even though translations of the survey were offered, only one participant contacted the main researcher directly to explain translation issues for a language that was not predicted. Similarly, another participant responded to some of the answers for the English survey in Portuguese. Due to time limitations as well as the impact that may have occurred on the integrity of the study, the use of interviews to counteract this issue was rejected as the questions may have become more leading in an interview setting and the translation issues may have still been apparent. Even though this was an issue that the researchers had considered due to the global participant sample, it may have needed greater attention so that all organisations using the Safeguards can be included in future reviews.

4.6. Future Research

In terms of future directions, reviews on the current state of safeguarding within sport should continue to be held at regular intervals so that a consistent picture can be gained and direct feedback from organisations using the Safeguards can be explored and developed. Participants involved in the current study suggested a few areas of weakness in which greater research could be beneficial. Firstly, the cultural difference within safeguarding was something noted as needing further exploration. Potential avenues for research include exploring why certain countries hold opposed views and are therefore slower to change and adopt not only the Safeguards but safeguarding as a whole and vice versa for those who are leading the charge. Another potential avenue is organisational safeguarding issues as participants within this study noted a lack of organisational responsibility to safeguarding. An example of potential research could be exploring historical issues of safeguarding in sport and whether those are the organisations that have changed the most or the least. Lastly, research around the public knowledge of safeguarding within sport could be useful in persuading more organisations on the severity of the issue. Whether this is for example, interviewing guardians and children involved in sport, or the general public around the time of a major event to gain their understanding on the issue, this could be beneficial to the overall movement of safeguarding in sport.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the direction of safeguarding in sport appears to be positive. Since the last review, more organisations have agreed to become a part of the International Safeguards for Children in Sport, up from 125 to 400, and a change from a reactive/active spilt in the last review appears to have become a more active state for those who have been engaged with safeguarding for a longer period. This all demonstrates a progressive movement of sporting organisations towards safeguarding and implementing policies and practices to aid children and young people to be better protected from abuse and other welfare concern. However, organisations need to stay committed to and engaged with the safeguarding movement for the wider impacts and message to be recognised.

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Article

Evaluation of Publicly Accessible Child Protection in Sport Education and Reporting Initiatives

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Abstract: Despite sport being a vehicle through which youth may achieve positive developmental outcomes, maltreatment in the youth sport context remains a significant concern. With increased athlete advocacy and research demonstrating the high prevalence of maltreatment in sport, and the urgent need to address it, many international organisations have created child protection in sport initiatives. Of particular focus to athletes and researchers is the provision of evidence-based comprehensive education and independent reporting mechanisms for athletes who experience harm. The current study examined the extent to which the publicly accessible information provided by three sport-specific child protection organisations regarding education and reporting is aligned with recommendations provided by researchers and athletes. With regard to education, the findings highlight accessibility, programming for various stakeholders, and coverage of topics of interest (e.g., forms of harm and reporting processes). However, educational information about equity, diversity, and inclusion and information on how to foster positive environments in sport was lacking. For reporting mechanisms, results showed that each organisation's approach to receiving reports of maltreatment varied, including their ability to directly intake, investigate, and sanction instances of maltreatment. The findings are interpreted and critiqued considering previous literature and recommendations for future research and practice are suggested.

Keywords: child protection; safe sport; education; reporting mechanisms

1. Introduction

1.1. The Emergence of the Safe Sport Movement in Research and Practice

Sport is well-recognised as a vehicle to foster positive health and developmental outcomes for youth (e.g., physical literacy, life skills development; Holt et al. 2020); however, concerns about the safety and physical and psychological welfare of young people participating in these environments have been raised in sport scholarship for decades (Cahill and Pearl 1993; David 1999, 2005; Orlick and Botterill 1975). Scholarly concerns about sports culture characterised by control, power imbalances, and a singular focus on performance outcomes, in conjunction with the reporting of high-profile cases of athletes' abuses in the media, have led to the growing interest in child protection in sport.

Initial interests in maltreatment in sport focused on girls' and women athletes' experiences of sexual abuse perpetrated by their male coaches (Brackenridge 2001). Since this early work, researchers have expanded their focus to include boys and men as survivors of sexual abuse (Hartill 2009). Prevalence studies across several countries indicate that between 40 and 79% of athletes reportedly experienced psychological violence (Alexander et al. 2011; Ohlert et al. 2021; Parent and Vaillancourt-Morel 2021; US Center for SafeSport 2021; Vertommen et al. 2016; Willson et al. 2021). Across these same studies, physical violence prevalence rates ranged between 11 and 56% and sexual violence prevalence rates

ranged from 9 to 29%. Only two studies have explored prevalence rates of neglect with findings ranging between 36% (Parent and Vaillancourt-Morel 2021) and 76% (Willson et al. 2021). Further, athletes from equity-deserving groups, including girls and women, 2SLGBTQI+, racialised and indigenous athletes, and athletes with a disability, are at an increased risk of harm in the sport context (e.g., Gurgis et al. 2022; Vertommen et al. 2016; Willson et al. 2021; US Center for SafeSport 2021). To reflect the expanded research focus, this body of scholarship and corresponding public advocacy has shifted from a 'child protection' approach (i.e., reactive) to the provision of 'safeguarding' or 'safe sport' (e.g., proactive, safe, and caring environment, values-based, athlete-centred; (Lang and Hartill 2014).[1]

Together, research studies and ongoing high-profile cases of athlete maltreatment across the globe have stimulated sport organisations to develop prevention and intervention strategies, including policy development, consensus statements, and the introduction of independent officers to investigate complaints (Brackenridge and Rhind 2014; Kerr et al. 2020). However, examinations of athlete protection initiatives of this nature previously implemented found that organisational adherence to policies and practices seemed to lose traction over time (Kerr et al. 2020), only to be revisited when new cases emerged in the public sphere. For example, a study of Canadian sport organisations revealed that despite mandates for independent reporting mechanisms as a requirement for federal funding, less than half of these organisations adhered to this requirement 20 years after it was instigated (Donnelly et al. 2016).

In another effort to stimulate change, several organisations were created with the primary goal of raising awareness and/or enhancing education related to maltreatment in sport, including Canada's Respect in Sport and Speak Out, Australia's Play by the Rules, and the United States' Safe4Athletes, among others. Following these developments, Kerr et al. (2014) examined seven international child protection in sport initiatives designed to enhance awareness of maltreatment and provide access to educational resources; they assessed the extent to which the initiatives were grounded in existing research and empirically evaluated in reference to their stated goals (i.e., awareness-raising and developing knowledge). The development of these initiatives was regarded as a positive step forward; however, the findings suggested that the initiatives were neither congruent with existing literature nor empirically evaluated. As a result, the authors recommended the initiatives endeavour to more closely align with research so that more effective measures could be created to facilitate safe and growth-enhancing experiences for youth sport participants (Kerr et al. 2014). Since this study was conducted, public awareness of maltreatment in youth sport has grown significantly, scholarship has expanded, and several new international entities have been created with the purpose of addressing maltreatment.

1.2. Evidence-Based Recommendations for Advancing Safe Sport

Advancing safe sport requires a systemic approach and cannot be solved by solutions implemented in isolation from one another (Brackenridge and Rhind 2014). Two recommendations for confronting existing safe sport challenges consistently advocated by researchers and athletes alike are to create independent, safe reporting structures for athletes and provide evidence-based comprehensive education designed to encourage prevention, intervention, and behavioural change in the sport context (Brackenridge and Rhind 2014; Kerr et al. 2014; Willson et al. 2022).

Researchers and athlete advocates across the globe have called on their respective countries to develop independent reporting mechanisms equipped with the expertise and capacity to receive concerns of maltreatment that occur in sport settings in a trauma-informed, confidential, and accessible manner, independent of the sport organisation (e.g., Willson et al. 2022; Brackenridge 2001; Donnelly and Kerr 2018; Kerr and Kerr 2020). Mechanisms of this nature may provide critical support for sport administrators and other stakeholders who are potentially conflicted, unfit, or unable to effectively facilitate tasks related to concerns of maltreatment thus allowing them to focus on prevention and the development of a positive organisational culture (Gurgis and Kerr 2021). Further, an

accessible and public reporting mechanism may address the lack of awareness reported by parents and athletes about where to seek advice or direct concerns of maltreatment (Brackenridge et al. 2010). In response to these calls, various countries have developed accessible reporting mechanisms (e.g., Safe Sport Netherlands, Council for Safe Athletics Sweden) and/or developed independent entities to receive, investigate, and resolve issues of maltreatment in sport (e.g., Sport Integrity Australia, US Center for SafeSport).

Recommendations have also been made for compulsory and evidence-based safe sport education designed for various stakeholders, including athletes, parents, coaches, volunteers, sport administrators, and integrated support teams (e.g., mental performance consultants, physiotherapists, team doctors; Gurgis and Kerr 2021; Wurtele 2012; Willson et al. 2022). Education is particularly relevant for youth in sport as research shows young athletes may possess a lack of awareness of behaviours that constitute unsafe sport and where to report information when witnessing or experiencing these behaviours (Mountjoy et al. 2020). Topics identified as imperative to preventing and addressing maltreatment include providing a clear philosophy of safe sport; defining all forms of harm and corresponding behaviours that can occur in sport; providing information on how to report concerns; outlining the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in preventing and addressing harm; defining power dynamics and associated vulnerabilities for young people; providing information on the promotion of a positive culture; as well as advancing equity and inclusion (e.g., Cares et al. 2015; Gurgis and Kerr 2021; Brackenridge et al. 2010; Parent 2011; Kerr et al. 2014, 2020; Mountjoy et al. 2015).

1.3. Renewed Efforts to Address Maltreatment in Sport Contexts

In response to ongoing cases of athlete maltreatment globally, increased media attention, research evidence, and athlete advocacy, the last decade has seen unprecedented global efforts to acknowledge and address the full spectrum of maltreatment in the sport context and alleviate some of the critical obstacles to safe sport progress (Brackenridge and Rhind 2014; Brackenridge and Telfer 2011; Kerr et al. 2020). One of the most substantial and positive areas of advancement in international sport is the development of organisations specifically created to provide access to independent reporting and educational materials that address maltreatment and foster more safe, healthy, and equitable environments for sport participants in their respective countries. These organisations include but are not limited to, the United Kingdom's Child Protection in Sport Unit, Sport Integrity Australia, and the US Center for SafeSport. The organisations in Australia and the US originated at different times within the last five years, whereas the Child Protection in Sport Unit emerged more than a decade ago.

The purpose of this study was to assess the extent to which the publicly accessible information regarding education and reporting provided by three child protection in sport organisations aligns with the recommendations provided by researchers and athletes. Specifically, the following research questions guided the evaluation: To what extent does the publicly accessible information provided by these organisations address the reporting and educational needs identified by researchers and athletes?; and, What recommendations could be made to more closely align the publicly accessible information with scholarly evidence? A focus on publicly accessible information was made for several reasons. Previous research indicates that athletes are unaware of their rights and matters pertaining to maltreatment in sport. For example, athletes in Willson et al.'s (2022) study stated, "Athletes need to be educated to know their rights . . . I didn't realize that the way I was being treated was inappropriate (p. 7)" and "Athletes should be made aware of reporting procedures for all sports and the national federation should mandate this knowledge be part of national team induction events" (p. 7). Further, when athletes were asked for recommendations to strengthen their sense of safety in sport, they consistently referred to the need for a third party, an independent body athletes can turn to when maltreatment has occurred (Willson et al. 2022).

Having publicly accessible information may be an effective way of communicating information about athletes' rights and maltreatment, as well as avenues for reporting and addressing concerns about their safety. In addition, parents have also been identified as key stakeholders in children's sports. Researchers have recommended that parents receive education regarding athlete maltreatment to safeguard children in sport (Kerr et al. 2020) and parents are inevitably involved in any case in which complaints about child maltreatment are reported. As such, sharing information in a publicly accessible way may be a valuable way to educate parents about safeguarding in sport and about complaint mechanisms. Finally, the importance of publicly accessible information was heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic when in-person education and reporting processes were limited.

2. Methods

2.1. Sample

To determine the existing international child protection initiatives that deliver educational and reporting or investigation services, we conducted a general search of Google using keywords such as "safeguarding in sport", "safe sport organisations", "national safe sport organisations", or "sport integrity organisations". To specify the search, we also attached country names to each keyword search such as "safe sport Australia" or "safeguarding in sport England". In addition, we canvassed colleagues at international safe sport advocacy organisations to cross-reference the organisations retrieved through our search and confirm any missing information. At the time of the search, approximately 13 potential organisations were identified across the world, including organisations, committees, or councils in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. A total of three organisations were ultimately selected: the US Centre for SafeSport (United States of America), Child Protection in Sport Unit (United Kingdom), and Sport Integrity Australia (Australia). These three safe sport organisations were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: organisation exists as its own formal entity (e.g., it is not a programme/initiative/informal or ad hoc committee or alliance of another organisation); organisation receives public or external funding (e.g., government, national sport bodies, Olympic committees, donations); organisation provides education and engages in safe sport advocacy; organisation receives reports related to athlete protection; and the organisation operates or provides information in the English language. Consideration was also given to selecting organisations of comparable size and capabilities, as well as representing various geographic regions (e.g., inclusion of multiple countries and continents). The remaining ten organisations were excluded because they did not satisfy all of the inclusion criteria above. For the purpose of this paper, we will refer to the three organisations of focus as 'safe sport organisations', which we consider as encompassing the other related terms used by these entities to define their scope of work (e.g., integrity, child protection, well-being, safeguarding).

2.2. Background of Organisations

The following section will provide the background of each organisation selected including their origin, status, and funding partners. According to their website, the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) was established in 2001 as an affiliate organisation of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC; CPSU (Child Protection in Sport Unit) (2022)). The NSPCC is a registered charity in England, Wales, Scotland, and Jersey and serves as the UK's only children's charity with statutory powers that allows intervention with the intention to safeguard children from maltreatment. As an affiliate organisation, the CPSU functions to improve safeguarding and child protection within the sport context through policy development, expert guidance, education, and research. The CPSU is funded by Sport England, Sport Northern Ireland, Sport Wales, and UK Sport. Next, the US Center for SafeSport's website indicates that the organisation was created in 2017 in response to a number of high-profile cases of athlete maltreatment in the United States (US Center for SafeSport 2022). The Center is considered a non-profit organisation

whose scope and authority to resolve maltreatment in sport is grounded in the United States Safe Sport Act legislation. The Safe Sport Act requires the US Center for SafeSport to develop and enforce athlete protection policies and procedures as well as provide education and training to prevent maltreatment in sport. The Center is funded by the US Government, United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee, national governing bodies, foundations, and donations. Lastly, the website of Sport Integrity Australia indicates the organisation was established in 2020 in response to an external review commissioned by the Australian Government of Australia's sport integrity practices (Sport Integrity Australia 2022). As a result of the report's recommendations, Sport Integrity Australia was created with the mandate to serve as a "single nationally coordinated organization" to prevent and address issues of sport integrity through policy, investigation (via the National Sports Tribunal), education, and capacity building. Sport Integrity Australia is funded by the Australian Government.

2.3. Data Collection

A web-based approach to data collection was chosen for the current paper. Given the rise in safe sport issues over the past few years, many initiatives or organisations have relied on web-based platforms and e-learning to provide the sport community with widespread access to relevant and accessible information on safe sport. The focus of the data collection on organisations that provided relevant safe sport education, advocacy, and investigative procedures was informed by the increasing awareness and need for educating all stakeholders and independent reporting mechanisms to advance safe sport. Data collection began with a general Internet search for organisations that provided safe sport reporting, education, or advocacy. The search yielded several international organisations, initiatives, and ad hoc or informal committees that aim to address maltreatment in sport; these initiatives were provided in multiple languages. To refine the search, we developed the inclusion criteria cited above.

In addition to sample refinement, the inclusion criteria were also created to focus the evaluation on full-service safe sport organisations (i.e., education, advocacy, investigation/referrals) that have been developed in recent years to address sport safety issues. Upon meeting the inclusion criteria, data collection was then focused on retrieving information pertaining to three primary areas: the overarching purpose of the initiative/organisation, education (e.g., description of the educational programmes, courses offered, target audiences, methods of delivery), and reporting (e.g., channels to report, types of complaints accepted, potential adjudication processes, support services, etc.). As such, any accessible web-page information and affiliated documentation or modules provided by the safe sport organisations pertaining to these areas of interest were reviewed. Once the three organisations were selected, we identified and evaluated the content of their basic/introductory safe sport courses: Child Protection in Sport and Physical Activity–E-Learning (CPSU), SafeSport Trained Core Course (US Center for SafeSport), and Play by the Rules: Child Protection and Safeguarding (Sport Integrity Australia).

2.4. Data Analysis

An inductive thematic web-based content analysis was chosen for the current study (Braun et al. 2016). This approach was chosen as it is valuable for exploring content and key messages; specifically, it allowed for comparing and contrasting the educational and reporting information available from each organisation, as well as examining the connections between the initiatives (Braun et al. 2016). For example, the various educational courses, target audiences, and modes of delivery were assessed across each of the organisations for similarities and differences. Likewise, aspects of complaint processes, such as reporting, adjudication processes, and support services for stakeholders in sport were assessed. The safe sport literature was used to help inform data collection and analysis procedures. As an example, core concepts of the basic/introductory courses, including whether all forms of harm were addressed, factors impacting harm (e.g., power structures), grooming processes, and information on how to address maltreatment (e.g., reporting) were compared to the ex-

tant literature on recommendations by researchers and athletes in maltreatment education (Brackenridge and Rhind 2014; Gurgis et al. 2022; Kerr et al. 2014; Willson et al. 2022). Collectively, relevant content pertaining to these categories were organised into main themes and summary tables (e.g., Tables A1–A3). The following section will explore the two core evaluative themes of education (e.g., structure and accessibility, learning content covered) and reporting mechanisms (e.g., structure, capacity, and accessibility of reporting, supports, and resources) provided by each organisation.

3. Results

3.1. Education

The findings suggest that the three safe sport organisations possess key similarities and differences in the ways in which they design and deliver educational programmes to prevent and address maltreatment in sport. The following section will review and compare the general structure (e.g., approach to programme development and methods of delivery), access (e.g., intended audience, cost), and educational content of the three organisations with a specific focus on the content covered in the introductory/basic safe sport course.

3.1.1. General Structure and Accessibility of Safe Sport Education

In general, the organisations develop safe sport education in two ways; training content is created solely by the organisation or through partnerships with other entities who specialise in child protection awareness and education (in sport or otherwise). Sport Integrity Australia and the UK's Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) offer safe sport training to sport participants through partner organisations, such as Play by the Rules and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, respectively. Conversely, the US Center for SafeSport produces its own custom maltreatment awareness and prevention courses. Although educational content is predominantly offered through e-learning methods across all three organisations, additional methods of delivery are offered, which include but are not limited to podcasts, face-to-face training, applications, and virtual reality.

The intended audiences for the educational materials are a range of sport stakeholders such as coaches, parents, athletes, committee members, administrators, and volunteers involved in organised sport. The educational programmes usually focus on sport stakeholders' roles, with the CPSU further tailoring course content by the frequency and nature of stakeholders' contact with young people in sport. Specifically, the UK-based organisation brings an exclusive child-focused lens to athlete welfare education and thus, educational content is intended for those who work primarily with children and youth (as opposed to athletes of all ages).

In addition to basic safe sport training for various stakeholders, most entities also offer more specialised courses for specific audiences. For example, the US Center for SafeSport offers courses designed for youth athletes, adult athletes, athletes with disabilities, parents, volunteers, and health professionals. Sport Integrity Australia also offers a course in partnership with Play by the Rules for individuals who are seeking a role as a protection officer.

To access educational materials, all three of the safe sport initiatives require the creation of a member account. Of the organisations, Sport Integrity Australia is the only initiative that does not require a fee to engage with the educational courses. The US Center for SafeSport and the CPSU (UK) require a fee of USD 21 and GBP 25 (USD 31), respectively. However, both of these organisations provide forms of complimentary access to safe sport education including free condensed safe sport modules, webinars, and/or workshops.

3.1.2. Content Covered in Basic/Introductory Safe Sport Courses

Findings suggest that there are shared themes and key differences in the learning content covered in the basic/introductory safe sport course across the three organisations. Specifically, the CPSU and Sport Integrity Australia address the four types of maltreatment (e.g., neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional harm), whereas the US Center for Safe

Sport does not refer to neglect. All three sport organisations refer to power relations as foundational concepts in maltreatment; however, detailed references to the use or misuse of power were specifically lacking in the CPSU and Sport Integrity Australia courses. For example, in the Play by the Rules course, power is briefly mentioned in the section on coaching relationships and the section on sexual abuse in reference to the way that coaches may exploit their position of power and authority over athletes by forming private relationships with younger athletes, or by controlling the athlete's progression in the sport. However, there is no content provided on the definition of power, description of how power relates to other forms of harm, or the potential effects of abuses of power in sporting environments. In another example, CPSU identifies the misuse of authority as a risk factor for abuse and neglect, however, does not provide a definition of power. The course materials include examples of abuse alluding to the misuse of power but do not explicitly provide an example of what power imbalances look like in practice and in the sport environment. Further, the US Center provided content on the trust and power imbalance in a coach–athlete relationship that can leave athletes vulnerable to maltreatment. This includes controlling playing time and team placements, which can reduce the agency of an athlete's choice. Grooming, another foundational concept in maltreatment literature, was also absent in the introductory educational content provided by the CPSU. Across all three introductory courses, examples of maltreatment in the sport context were provided. Providing examples is key to improving stakeholder knowledge and awareness of potential maltreatment.

The most significant limitation in the basic safe sport course content was related to the recognition and integration of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) as necessary components in creating a safe sport environment for participants. Although some organisations offered general insights on EDI, such as increased vulnerability for ethnic minority communities, the content was superficial and lacked depth. Specifically, although the CPSU acknowledged the various social identities of athletes through images related to course content, through case studies, and by identifying various risk factors associated with EDI, the course would have benefited from a module specific to understanding the intersectionality of athletes. This would help to support coaches in understanding how various social identities may relate to power imbalances and in turn result in an abuse of power. In the Play by the Rules course, there are learning scenarios of inappropriate behaviour and in one scenario, a coach belittles an athlete for using discriminatory language in reference to the athlete's cultural background. This is used only as an example of behaviour that should be reported; however, there is no further explanation of discrimination or reference to EDI concepts in the main course content. However, there is information on EDI provided in one section of a downloadable PDF created by the Council of Australian Government on the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. This 20-page document is embedded into the section on promoting a positive culture; however, unless the document is scrolled through or downloaded and read, the section on EDI would most likely not be seen by course users. Despite this apparent gap in EDI content in the basic safe sport course, the US Center for Safe Sport and Sport Integrity Australia provide separate specialised courses on equity, diversity, and inclusion in sport. Please refer to Table A1 for a more specific breakdown of maltreatment concepts covered in each organisation's basic course.

Reporting processes are another key area covered in introductory safe sport courses. Specifically, all three organisations have learning content about recognising the signs and symptoms of maltreatment as well as providing sport stakeholders with strategies or steps for responding to maltreatment disclosures from young athletes, such as ensuring the individual stays safe, being a good listener, and determining when to share concerns with parents or carers. Further, all three organisations provide information on reporting (e.g., where to report and steps for reporting) as well as information on how to create a detailed and comprehensive report of an occurrence of maltreatment (e.g., tips for keeping proper records). Please refer to Table A2 for a breakdown of the reporting processes referenced in the three introductory safe sport courses.

3.2. Reporting Mechanisms

The three organisations also possess independent reporting mechanisms and support resources (e.g., financial, mental health, legal) for concerns of maltreatment witnessed or experienced by individuals in the sport context. The following section will review and compare the organisations' strategies in structure, accessibility, capacity, and provision of support through their respective reporting mechanisms. Please see Table A3 to review and compare each organisation's approach to reporting.

3.2.1. General Structure, Accessibility, and Capacity of Reporting Mechanisms

In general, all three organisations identify mechanisms for seeking advice as well as for disclosing or reporting concerns of maltreatment. The US Center for SafeSport and Sport Integrity Australia receive formal concerns directly. Conversely, the UK's Child Protection in Sport Unit refers the reporting of concerns to the relevant national sport governing bodies or the overarching child protection body (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) for follow-up. To initiate a report, all three mechanisms provide a variety of modalities that may include a phone number or hotline, an email address, or an intake form to submit to their organisation. Examples of the details on intake forms include the role of the individual alleged to have engaged in misconduct, bystanders or co-conspirators, and the dates, locations, and type(s) of misconduct. To enhance the accessibility of reporting, Sport Integrity Australia and the US Center for SafeSport provide the option for intake forms to be submitted anonymously.

The organisations also vary in the characterisation of behaviours that can be reported. The US Center for SafeSport and Sport Integrity Australia accept reports of behaviour that violate specific policies (i.e., US Safe Sport Code, National Integrity Framework), whereas the CPSU adopts a more generalised approach by accepting any reports of "concerning behaviours or abuse in sport." The CPSU (UK) indicates that it accepts reports about any instances where a child/youth is concerned, whereas the US Center for SafeSport is more specific, indicating that reports can be made against anyone in the US Olympic or Paralympic Movement. In addition, Sport Integrity Australia only accepts reports of prohibited conduct from a sport stakeholder if the specific sport's National Governing Body (NGB) has integrated the National Integrity Framework. If an NGB has not signed on to the framework, reports will go directly to the NGB, which manages concerns using their organisational policies and procedures.

In addition to general reporting mechanisms, Australia and the United States have investigation and adjudication capabilities to resolve reported concerns of maltreatment. These countries outline multiple trajectories following the intake of a report, which include informal resolution, investigations, and/or alternative dispute resolutions, including mediations and arbitrations. These processes are outlined on the US Center for SafeSport and Sport Integrity Australia websites so that those who report can understand the next steps or options following an initial report of potential maltreatment. Upon the conclusion of an investigative process, the US Center for SafeSport and Sport Integrity Australia can implement sanctions, whereas the ability of the UK's mechanism to impose sanctions is unclear. Currently, the US Center for SafeSport is the only mechanism that has a public database of sanctioned individuals.

3.2.2. Provision of Support

All three organisations provide information for individuals about accessing support services such as mental health resources, child welfare services, counselling services, children's rights information, legal assistance, and financial support. The organisations' websites provide referral information for individuals, such as links and telephone numbers for support service organisations, as well as toll-free hotlines. For example, Sport Integrity Australia provides information for organisations such as Lifeline, Headspace (mental health resources), and Wellmob Online Counselling. To help individuals navigate the available resources, the US Center for SafeSport has advisors who can be accessed via a 24-h helpline

or anonymous online chat service; these advisors are available to answer questions and connect claimants, respondents, third parties, and witnesses with appropriate support services. The NSPCC (the CPSU's overarching organisation) and Sport Integrity Australia have their own telephone hotlines; however, the support offered through these helplines is not outlined. In addition to general referrals, Sport Integrity Australia and the US Center for Safe Sport also identify the ways in which specific populations may access free welfare-focused support services through external organisations. For example, Sport Integrity Australia provides a link to the Australian Institute of Sport Mental Health Referral Network, which can provide six free sessions to high-performance athletes, alumni, coaches, and support staff members. Similarly, the US Center for SafeSport provides information exclusive to Olympic and Paralympic athletes on how they can access free, confidential advice through the US Olympic Committee Athlete Ombudsman Office.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to review international safe sport progress by evaluating the extent to which publicly accessible information provided by three major international safe sport organisations addresses the reporting and educational needs informed by recent scholarly evidence and athlete advocacy, as well as to identify any remaining gaps. Broadly, the results demonstrated that the organisations' introductory educational offerings adequately addressed most forms of maltreatment, provided tips for recognising the signs and symptoms of these behaviours, and outlined the steps for responding to and reporting disclosures of maltreatment. These results represent an advancement in the comprehensiveness of the content covered in comparison to a 2014 review of educational safe sport programmes (Kerr et al. 2014), which highlighted a predominant focus on sexual abuse. However, information regarding key concepts and issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion remains limited or was not included in the main course content (e.g., only as a downloadable, external resource). As a result, information on EDI requires further attention across the three introductory educational programmes. In terms of reporting, the results showed that each organisation's approach to receiving reports of maltreatment varied; there were important differences in the organisations' ability to directly intake, adjudicate, and sanction instances of maltreatment. The following section will contextualise the results in light of recent safe sport advocacy and interpret the ways in which each organisation addresses systemic cultural factors inherent in the sport environment, minimises barriers to reporting, and attends to challenges in the design, delivery, and evaluation of safe sport education.

4.1. Systemic Cultural Factors in the Sport Environment

Organised sport contexts are often criticised for some of the cultural factors embedded and reproduced in the sport environment, including an overemphasis on performance excellence and 'winning-at-all-costs,' unequal and unquestioned power relations between athletes and those in positions of authority, the normalisation of harmful practices, and the socialisation of key stakeholders (e.g., parents; Jacobs et al. 2017; Roberts et al. 2020; Wilinsky and McCabe 2021; Willson et al. 2022). Over time, these cultural factors can encourage stakeholders to tolerate behaviours that may result in harm to athletes and/or influence sport stakeholders to be less inclined to intervene and/or report cases of inappropriate practices (Roberts et al. 2020; Willson et al. 2022). Further, when these systemic issues are prioritised over the holistic development of young people in sport programmes, the potential for creating safe, healthy, and welfare-focused environments is limited (Jacobs et al. 2017; Roberts et al. 2020; Wilinsky and McCabe 2021; Willson et al. 2022).

Each of the organisations recognises the systemic vulnerabilities present in the sport environment in their introductory/basic safe sport courses through the inclusion of information on power relations or the misuse of power, as well as the hyper-competitive sporting environment. Although it is imperative that educational material addresses these contextual factors that may enhance the vulnerability of young athletes to experiences of

maltreatment, it is important to note that the course information often lacked depth. For example, the educational materials rarely defined power or the factors that contribute to coaches' bases of power (e.g., expertise, age, access to resources, and decision making).

The US Center for Safe Sport and Sport Integrity Australia provide a contrast to the systemic cultural factors by outlining the core components of a positive environment (e.g., kindness, provision of positive feedback and reinforcement, and safety) and emphasising that all stakeholders play a role in creating a positive environment. Educating stakeholders on how to promote and foster a positive sport environment is of the utmost importance; specifically, it has been noted that the advancement of safe sport should move beyond the prevention of harm (what *not* to do) and focus on the optimisation of the sport experience through the promotion of positive values as well (what *to* do; Gurgis and Kerr 2021; Lang and Hartill 2015). Future improvements to this basic course material might include an increased emphasis on 'upskilling' key stakeholders (e.g., coaches) by providing learning content focused on developing holistic, athlete-centred, and rights-based coaching tactics and building strategies that create a foundation for positive relationships with parents, athletes, and other sport practitioners (Jenkins 2021); educating stakeholders about soft skills and appropriate strategies (e.g., communication, motivation) for positively engaging athletes in the modern sport environment (Howman et al. 2021; Bennett 2018); and, incorporating athletes' perspectives in the development and implementation of education (Mountjoy et al. 2022; Willson et al. 2022). Further, recognising that maltreatment in sport is not a "one-person problem", organisations' efforts to design and deliver content for a variety of stakeholders, including parents, athletes, and sport administrators, is needed to challenge the socialisation and normalisation of poor practices (Johnson et al. 2020; Kerr et al. 2020)

4.2. Barriers to Reporting Maltreatment

In addition to underlying systemic vulnerabilities, athletes and researchers have identified barriers to reporting maltreatment as a significant obstacle to safe sport progress. Of particular interest, youth athletes may possess a lack of awareness of behaviours that constitute unsafe sport and may not know where to report information when witnessing or experiencing these behaviours (Mountjoy et al. 2020). Athletes who are aware of unsafe practices and who consider disclosing their experiences consistently describe a reluctance to report maltreatment or unsafe sport practices due to a lack of trust in the sport organisations to which they belong. Athletes report concerns about confidentiality and fairness, unequal power relations, perceived silencing, perceived threats of additional harm. and perceived fear of potential repercussions and/or not being believed (Barrett 2021; Brackenridge et al. 2012; Cense and Brackenridge 2001; Willson et al. 2022). These factors present persistent challenges and obstacles for individuals experiencing or witnessing maltreatment to report unsafe practices to their sport organisations. A recent study provides evidence for these perceived reporting challenges; less than 15% of athlete survey participants who experienced maltreatment in their sport settings formally reported these experiences to their sport organisations (Willson et al. 2021).

From an awareness standpoint, the findings suggest that all three organisations endeavour to educate participants on how to recognise, respond to, and report instances of maltreatment in the sport environment through their basic/introductory course. When maltreatment is witnessed or experienced in the sport context, participants can report concerns to independent, expert-led intake services through both the US Center for SafeSport and Sport Integrity Australia, which may help address concerns related to trust, power relations, and confidentiality in reporting. The US Center for SafeSport further supplements its reporting processes with human resources to assist individuals with the intake of their concerns or follow-up care via a 24-h hotline. Supplementary resources of this nature have been recommended and may further enhance trust and minimise power differentials between the reporter and the receiver of the concerns. Although independent reporting

processes exist in Australia, these apply only to the sport organisations that have signed on to the mechanism.

In alignment with safety and confidence in reporting, recommendations for mandatory external, independent, expert-led investigation and adjudication processes for issues of maltreatment to combat the autonomous, self-regulating nature of organised sport have been advocated by athletes, researchers, and child protection experts (Jenkins 2021; Kerr and Kerr 2020; Willson et al. 2022). Specifically, if decisions about whether investigations are needed, how to initiate investigations, and how to assess or apply penalties remain decisions made by the sport bodies from which the allegations arise, conflicts of interest may occur (e.g., pressures to demonstrate performance success and maintain government funding may conflict with the prioritisation of athletes' needs; (Kerr et al. 2020). Accessible, safe, and confidential avenues to raise concerns about maltreatment are imperative to limit the overarching culture of perceived fear and silence that persists in sport. Entities of this nature may also have capabilities common in regulatory bodies, such as the ability to monitor the development and training of those in positions of authority, ensure compliance with appropriate practices, and enforce sanctions when behaviours fail to meet expectations (Bruyninckx 2011; Kerr et al. 2020). Of the three international organisations reviewed, only the US Center for SafeSport and Sport Integrity Australia have the capabilities to intake, facilitate investigations, and deliver sanctions if necessary. When sanctions are rendered, researchers and child protection experts suggest that this information is made publicly available in a centralised system (e.g., Jenkins 2021) to prevent the movement of sanctioned individuals across clubs, regions, or countries and to limit the risk that these individuals may commit harms elsewhere. To date, only the US Center for SafeSport fulfills this recommendation through their public disciplinary database.

It is also important to note that while the US Center for SafeSport's independent mechanism is mandatory for all NSOs, the reporting mechanisms for Sport Integrity Australia are only available to sport organisations that have signed the National Integrity Framework. Accordingly, the specific stakeholder populations covered and included by the reporting mechanisms and corresponding services are specific to each organisation. The limitations for who does and does not have access to the reporting mechanisms (e.g., certain sport organisations, athlete groups) may be interpreted as a potential drawback to safe sport advancement efforts, creating unequal access by athletes to safe and independent reporting mechanisms. In fact, maltreatment is a systemic issue and no age, sport type, or sport level is immune to instances of maltreatment (Lang and Hartill 2015). It is therefore imperative to consider how organisations may extend and provide equitable access to reporting mechanisms for various stakeholder groups, ages, sport types, and levels.

4.3. Challenges in Design, Delivery, and Evaluation of Safe Sport Programmes

Athlete advocates and researchers also identify challenges and gaps in the design, delivery, and monitoring of safe sport programming as deterrents to safe sport progress. Key barriers to effective culture change include strategic initiatives such as policy development that primarily focuses on sexual abuse (rather than the full spectrum of maltreatment); educational programmes that do not bridge evidence to practice; programmes that have ineffective oversights or evaluations; and challenges in the dissemination of information and the implementation of full-scale safe sport programmes, from grassroots to national levels, in a predominantly volunteer-based community (Kerr and Kerr 2020).

In accordance with the calls to action from athletes, researchers, and other child protection experts, the CPSU and Sport Integrity Australia include all forms of maltreatment (i.e., physical, sexual, emotional harm, and neglect) as well as corresponding sport-specific examples in their introductory/basic course content. Conversely, although the US Center for SafeSport's module includes most forms of maltreatment, it fails to include neglect, which is reflective of both the emerging area of research on neglect in sport and the previously identified gaps in safe sport education (Kerr et al. 2014). The US Center for SafeSport should integrate content on neglect into future iterations of their basic/introductory course

as recent evidence suggests that athletes perceive neglect to be one of the most prevalent forms of maltreatment in the sport environment (Parent and Vaillancourt-Morel 2021; Willson et al. 2021). Failure to provide adequate information on neglect, as well as its potential effects, in educational components may also further normalise common sport practices such as failing to provide adequate medical assistance or appropriate re-entry protocols post-injury. To advance safe sport, stakeholders must have a comprehensive understanding of all forms of harm as well as the potential effects of harm, influences of abusive practices on sport cultures, and available statistics on harm in sport.

In addition, all three of the organisations' basic/introductory safe sport courses would benefit from an increased focus on concepts and issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and the influence of EDI policies and practices on perceptions of safety in the sport environment. An enhanced focus on EDI is important in the introductory course as research shows athletes of equity-deserving groups (e.g., 2SLGBTQIA+, gender-diverse, racialised, athletes with disabilities) reported higher instances of harm (e.g., psychological, neglectful, physical, sexual) than their peers (US Center for SafeSport 2021; Vertommen et al. 2016; Willson et al. 2021). Although some of the organisations have a separate and specialised EDI learning module and the US Center includes some information, all the basic/introductory courses would benefit from an increased emphasis on equity, diversity, and inclusion as fundamental to safe sport environments. Including EDI learning material would also help to denounce discriminatory behaviours in sport and may help EDI-focused content reach a wider audience (e.g., variety of stakeholders, number of participants) than a more specialised or advanced course.

In addition to more comprehensive learning content, improved accessibility to each organisation's training programmes could be achieved by reducing the cost of introductory courses (i.e., US Center for SafeSport and CPSU), expanding participant eligibility (e.g., open to the general population), and/or decreasing technological barriers (e.g., removing the mandatory creation of a member account or specific participation criteria to complete courses). These recommendations may reduce the challenges associated with the widespread dissemination of educational content to a variety of stakeholders in volunteer-based sport communities.

Given the international nature of safe sport efforts, the educational content from all three organisations would benefit from clearer references to theoretical and empirical sources in the course material. A more robust approach to content development could encourage greater consistency in terminology and the corresponding behaviours that constitute maltreatment in the sport context. This could also reduce the role that sport leaders often play in determining what constitutes maltreatment. Accordingly, evidence-based course content is essential for effective change and safer sport.

Finally, previous research has indicated the importance of mandating educational programmes for a variety of stakeholders in the sport environment and ensuring appropriate monitoring and evaluation of the impact of these mandates to determine whether the programmes are decreasing instances of harm and altering behaviours and attitudes in practice (Kerr et al. 2014; Willson et al. 2022). It is unclear from the websites and the academic literature to-date whether these programmes have been empirically evaluated to assess whether the learning outcomes are achieved. Further, the compulsory nature of the educational programmes remains unclear.

5. Limitations and Future Directions

Given the small sample size of initiatives and an exclusive focus on Western countries, future research exploring safe sport developments would benefit from a more holistic, diverse, and international perspective. The scope of the current study (environmental scan of safe sport initiatives) must also be considered when contextualizing the findings; specifically, data gathered were limited to accessible website information and resources available in English. In addition, only the introductory educational modules associated with each initiative were examined. Future research seeking to critique existing safe sport

initiatives and areas of interest, including education and reporting, would benefit from reviewing supplementary information for data collection and analysis, such as additional educational modules and workshops, or related documents and reports offered by the safe sport initiatives. It would also be beneficial to obtain the perspectives of the stakeholders responsible for enforcing safe sport requirements and programming, such as safe sport directors, managers, or safeguarding officers. Understanding these perspectives may provide a more in-depth overview of the functions, operations, challenges, and perceived outcomes of existing safe sport entities.

The current study highlights safe sport advancements within the past few years, yet the processes of implementation, compliance, and monitoring over time remain unclear. Future longitudinal research is needed to examine the transferability and effectiveness of safe sport initiatives in creating lasting culture change in sport practice. Moreover, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of safe sport initiatives, the examination of stakeholder perspectives, including coaches, support staff members, athletes, and parents, is an important area for future consideration. The benefits of such research would be twofold; first, to assess if the needs of stakeholders are adequately accounted for through the content, resources, and support offered by safe sport organisations and second, to assess the extent to which stakeholders perceive that current initiatives contribute to positive, safe, and inclusive sport environments for all participants. Subsequently, such information may highlight the potential recommendations and improvements needed to foster safer sport and inform future safe sport initiatives.

In the current study, it was not possible to determine whether maltreatment survivors were engaged in the development and implementation of the safe sport initiative educational components and reporting procedures. Increased advocacy and literature highlight the importance of engaging survivors and/or athletes in the advancement of sport safeguarding initiatives (Mountjoy et al. 2022; Willson et al. 2022); therefore, this remains an area for future research and practice.

Finally, the current examination of the three safe sport organisations suggests that the issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and information specific to equity-deserving groups in sport, are lacking in the foundational educational modules. Considering the differences in sport experiences for participants who self-identify as Black, parasport athletes, 2SLGBTQI+, gender-diverse, and/or indigenous, inadequate attention to equity, diversity, and inclusion presents a limited and incomplete view of safe sport. Therefore, it remains important to integrate the perspectives of equity-deserving stakeholder groups, who are often absent from discourses of safe sport, in the development of education initiatives and reporting mechanisms.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study explored the publicly accessible information provided by three international sport-specific organisations regarding child protection in sport. From a broad perspective, the findings suggest that significant and positive progress in safe sport has been made in the past decade, particularly with the emergence of independent, specialised entities of this nature; however, a few key gaps in education and reporting remain. Specifically, the findings indicate that these organisations have advanced accessible safe sport education for multiple stakeholders that covers a variety of forms of maltreatment in course offerings. Educational gaps remain with respect to the meaningful inclusion of EDI concepts in basic/introductory safe sport courses. In terms of reporting, the findings suggest that organisations vary in their ability to directly intake, adjudicate, and sanction instances of maltreatment in the sport context. Gaps in the reporting mechanisms, such as limits on the populations covered and an inability or lack of a capacity to undertake investigative and sanctioning processes, were also observed. Future advancements may involve the inclusion of EDI content in basic safe sport education as well as the expansion of access to reporting mechanisms, mandating the mechanisms for all sport organisations in each

respective country, and expanded adjudication services to ensure issues of maltreatment are managed independently by experts from intake to resolution.

Appendix A

Table A1. 1 Concepts Covered in Basic Safe Sport Course by Organisation.

	Physical Harm	Sexual Harm	Emotional Harm	Neglect	Grooming	Power Relations	Cultural Factors (e.g., Normalisation, Win at All Costs)	Promoting Positive Environment	Equity, Diversity, Inclusion
US Center for SafeSport	i. ii. iii. iv.	i. ii. iii. iv.	i. ii. iii. iv.	Not addressed	i. ii. iii. iv.	i. ii. iii. iv.	i.	i. ii. iii. iv.	i. ii. iii.
Child Protection in Sport Unit	i. ii. iii. iv.	i. ii. iii. iv.	i. ii. iii. iv.	i. ii.	Not addressed	i. iii.	i. iii. iv.	Not addressed	Not addressed
Sport Integrity Australia	i. ii. iii. iv.	i. ii. iii. iv.	i. ii. iii. iv.	i. ii. iii.	i. ii. iii. iv.	i. iii.	i. iii.	i. ii. iii.	Not addressed

Table: i.: Is the concept mentioned in the course content? ii.: Does the course content define/describe the concept? iii.: Does the course content provide examples of what the concept looks like in practice? iv.: Does the course content describe the importance of the concept in relation to maltreatment in sport (e.g., effects, influence on inappropriate practice, statistics)?.

Table A2. Reporting Processes Introduced in Basic Safe Sport Courses by Each Organisation.

	Recognising Signs and Symptoms	Responding to Disclosures	Where to Report	Steps for Reporting
US Center for SafeSport	YES	YES	YES	YES
Child Protection in Sport Unit	YES	YES	YES	YES
Sport Integrity Australia	YES	YES	YES	YES

Table A3. General Structure, Accessibility, and Capacity of Reporting Mechanisms.

	Direct Intake of Formal Concerns	Modalities Available to Assist in Reporting	Stakeholders Covered	Independent Investigation Services	Ability to Enforce Sanctions	Public Database of Sanctioned Individuals
US Center for SafeSport	YES	• Detailed intake forms online (secured form) • Call hotline–24 h with an operator (helpline operated by RAINN–support via phone, chat, mobile app)	• Anyone within the US Olympic and Paralympic movement (employee or participant under USOPC)	YES	YES	YES

Table A3. *Cont.*

	Direct Intake of Formal Concerns	Modalities Available to Assist in Reporting	Stakeholders Covered	Independent Investigation Services	Ability to Enforce Sanctions	Public Database of Sanctioned Individuals
Child Protection in Sport Unit	NO (refers to NGB or NSPCC)	• Referral contact information to NGB or NSPCCC • Template incident report form • Safeguarding reporting procedures flow chart	• Youth athletes (no specification on age ranges or sport levels)	NO	NO	NO
Sport Integrity Australia	YES	• Detailed intake forms • Hotline	• All sport stakeholders whose national governing body has integrated the National Integrity Framework	YES	YES	NO

Note

1 For the purpose of this paper, the term 'safe sport' was adopted as it is commonly used in North America and some international regions (Hayhurst et al. 2016).

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