



**The
Children's
Society**

Troubled Teens

A study of the links between parenting and adolescent neglect

Policy and practice briefing

Introduction

Child neglect has become topical in recent years with the creation of new policy and practice initiatives, including parenting support for families with pre-school-aged children as part of early intervention services. There is now a widespread acceptance that poor parental care of younger children limits life chances and is bad for society in the long term.

Parental neglect of adolescents has, by contrast, remained low on the agenda. Although it is generally accepted that raising adolescents is a test of parenting skills, there is little formal support available and a lack of sympathy for those who may struggle with its complex demands – especially if their children become problematic for society (eg by becoming involved in crime or anti-social behaviour).

The new research summarised in this briefing provides evidence that:

- parenting adolescents is challenging, and this can be exacerbated by household circumstances, including by deprivation
- adolescents' problem behaviours – and the personal issues they face – may often be linked to neglect
- neglect of adolescents is more commonplace than might be expected
- adolescent neglect is poorly responded to, partly because of incorrect assumptions that teenagers are naturally resilient and because safeguarding responses do not differentiate between younger and older children.

The implication of this is that understanding of the needs of adolescent children should be promoted widely and more support should be offered to families with older children, and that adolescent neglect should be taken seriously and better responded to.

Summary

For our new research study, 'Troubled Teens?' we conducted an online survey of a representative sample of around 2,000 young people aged 12–15 in 70 schools asked them about their experiences of being cared for by their parents. The survey had questions on educational support, emotional support, physical care and supervision, and also on subjective well-being (eg life satisfaction), behaviours (including drinking alcohol and truanting from school) and other issues (eg health, deprivation).

Key findings (for 14–15 year olds) included:

- Most young people were well cared for, but significant numbers reported neglect – eg 8% for educational support and the same proportion for supervision. Around 1 in 7 young people (15%) had been neglected in relation to at least one form of parenting.
- Context played a part in neglect – eg twice as many boys reported supervisory neglect than girls, and young people who were materially-deprived were more likely to be neglected than their peers.
- Neglect was linked to risk-taking behaviours and poor well-being – eg 33% of those who were neglected for educational support had truanted at least once in the past month (compared to 13% of those who had not been neglected); young people who had been neglected in relation to emotional support had a mean score of 7.0 (out of 20) for life satisfaction (compared to 14.4 for those who had not been neglected).

What needs to change?

More must be done to reduce the likelihood that adolescents will face neglect, and to improve outcomes for those who do. As a starting point, The Children's Society believes that:

- National policy should be adapted and local service provision improved to address the support needs of all families with adolescent children.

- Parenting education programmes that are tailored to understanding and meeting the needs of adolescents should be developed.
- Education and awareness-raising should be done with adolescents about the nature of neglect and its potential consequences eg in schools through PHSE classes.
- The context for parenting makes a difference and material deprivation can make parenting more difficult. The Government should pay attention to this when changing policies which will significantly affect family income, such as freezing child benefits and tax credits.
- Training should be available for frontline professionals to equip them to understand the needs of adolescents, the challenges in identifying neglect, and the significant negative outcomes it can lead to.
- Support for neglected young people should be made available – including online information, advice and forums alongside directly-accessible, flexible services which are non-judgemental and young person-centred in their approach.
- Where neglect is a concern comprehensive assessments should be conducted which include consultation with the adolescents in a family in order to ensure their perspective is incorporated in planning and decision-making.
- Interventions for adolescent neglect should use a 'whole family approach' to ensure that all family members have a stake in resolving problems. Where appropriate, a 'team around the family' should be deployed to draw in the support required from different services to fully address the factors contributing to parental neglect.
- Data collection and analysis at a local and national level should be improved – especially in relation to 'children in need' – to allow for better understanding of the scale and nature of adolescent neglect and the responses families receive, to inform local early intervention strategies.

Research methodology and findings

How neglect was measured

'Neglect' is a complex concept, especially when used in relation to the care of older children who have their own agency, are maturing towards independence and have changing needs. Measuring its scale and effects has proved to be difficult for researchers, and assessing it a challenge for professionals.

Neglect was not pre-defined for this study. Instead a methodology was employed which compared young peoples' reports of the parental care and support they experienced at home to what they said about other aspects of their lives – to try to determine when parenting became neglectful by association. For example, we looked at whether young people who had lower input from their parents engaged in more risk-taking behaviours (eg whether they had truanted from school or had got drunk recently), or whether their well-being was worse than those who had experienced more parental care.

Firstly, in order to capture experiences of being cared for at home, a new self-report measure of parental behaviours was developed which included questions on different categories of parenting – educational support, emotional support, physical care and supervision – and how often a young person had experienced these inputs (see Figure 1, next page). The measure was then deployed in a survey administered online to around 2,000 students aged 12–15 years old in 70 schools in England, using a questionnaire which also asked about demographics, household resources, subjective well-being (eg life satisfaction), behaviours (including drinking alcohol and truantiing from school) and other issues (eg health).

The responses of Year 10 students on their experiences of parental care were then compared with the other answers they gave. It was found that lower levels of parental input – where parents rarely or never supported their children – were linked to poorer or more negative responses for the other items. Three categories of care were calculated:

- 'Neglected' - young people in this group consistently gave 'negative' responses to the other questions (eg they had lower well-being).
- 'At risk' - the group where a small reduction in the frequency of parenting would lead to a young person becoming neglected.
- 'Cared for' - the group where there was at least enough care for young people to consistently give positive responses to other questions.

(Details of the scores for these groups for each form of parenting and how they were generated are given in the full report).

The dataset was further analysed to assess the scale of neglect of 14–15 year olds and to consider the contexts for neglect and the problems and difficulties experienced by neglected young people.

A summary of findings and a discussion of their implications follows on pp 6–8.

Figure 1. Measure of parenting behaviours

In the last year how often did your parents, or the adults you live with...

...show an interest in what you were doing at school? ...attend parents' evenings at school? ...keep track of how you were doing at school – by doing things like reading reports?	EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT
...help you if you had problems? ...support you if you were upset? ...tell you when they thought you had done something well?	EMOTIONAL SUPPORT
...make sure you saw a doctor if you needed one? ...take care of you if you felt ill? ...support you to look after your teeth and go to the dentist?	PHYSICAL CARE
...ask you where you were going when you went out? ...like to know where you were after school? ...expect you to call or text to let them know if you were going to be home late?	SUPERVISION

Response options and scores

Never (0) Hardly ever (1) Sometimes (2) Often (3) Always (4)

Key findings

All the findings reported here – aside from one age group comparison – are for 14–15 year olds, as the dataset for the Year 10 sample was the most detailed and complete.

The scale of neglect of 14–15 year olds

Most young people were well cared for – stating that their parents ‘always’ exhibited all the behaviours asked about in the survey – but significant numbers reported neglect:

- 8% of young people reported neglectful levels of parenting in relation to emotional support. The same proportion had experienced supervisory neglect. 5% of young people reported neglect for physical care, and 4% for educational support.
- Around 1 in 7 young people (15%) reported at least one form of neglectful parenting. Of this group, more than half (58%) had experienced one form in isolation (most often this had been supervisory neglect).

The contexts for adolescent neglect

- More boys reported lower levels of parental supervision than girls (11% of boys were neglected in relation to this aspect of parenting compared to 5% of girls).
- Young people who were materially-deprived (lacking a number of possessions, resources or experiences which were common to their peer group) were more likely to be neglected than their peers.
- More young people living in lone parent families were neglected in relation to educational support (though not for emotional support, physical care or supervision) than those living in other family forms.

Links with risk-taking behaviours, poor well-being and health

- Neglected young people were significantly more likely to behave in ways which risked their health or jeopardised their future opportunities – eg for emotional support, 27% had truanted at least once in the past month, compared to 13% of cared for, and 46% had got really drunk in the past few months compared to 22%.
- Young people in neglected groups for each form of parenting had significantly lower scores for well-being than the cared for groups – for example, for emotional support, neglected young people had a mean score of 7.0 (out of 20) for life satisfaction, compared to 14.4 for cared for young people.
- There was an association between any experience of neglect and lower well-being, but young people who reported multiple forms of neglect (ie neglect in relation to two or more categories of parenting behaviour) had significantly worse levels of well-being than their counterparts who were neglected in relation to one type of parenting in isolation. For example, for life satisfaction, young people who reported multiple forms of neglect had a mean score of 7.6, those who reported one form of neglect of 10.4, and those who had not been neglected 14.2.
- Many neglected young people also had bad health. For example, 28% of those whose parents had not been supportive around their education said their health was ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’ (as opposed to 3% of those who were ‘cared for’ in relation to this type of parenting) – and 21% of those who had been physically neglected gave the same response (compared to just 3% of the ‘cared for’ group for this parenting category).

Discussion

The scale of neglect

The majority of 14 and 15 year olds indicated that their parents 'always' exhibited all the behaviours that were asked about, with the largest numbers reporting high levels of physical care and supervision, and a lower proportion recording the same frequency for educational or emotional support. However, reported scores for parenting inputs also indicated that significant proportions had been neglected:

- 8% of young people were neglected in relation to emotional support or supervision.
- 5% reported neglectful levels of physical care from their parents.
- 4% of young people were experiencing neglect around their education.

Overall, around 1 in 7 – 15% of the sample – reported at least one type of parental neglect.

More than half of those who had been neglected (58%) had experienced one form of neglect in isolation, but there were variations around how often they reported particular types (eg almost half the young people who had experienced only one form of neglect were poorly supervised). Of the group who had experienced at least two forms of neglect during the past year, the type most often reported was emotional neglect (experienced in combination with another form of neglect by 84% of those who recorded multiple types). These more detailed findings should be treated with caution due to the relatively small sub-sample of neglected young people used for this analysis (100 young people). Further studies are needed to authoritatively establish how often adolescents experience different forms of neglect.

However, the broader findings on the scale of neglect are likely to be an underestimate because

the sample was limited to students in mainstream schools (excluding, for example, young people who were not in education – a common situation for disadvantaged young people by the time they reach the ages of 14 or 15, and a group whom other studies have suggested may be more likely to experience neglect).

Family structure and neglectful parenting

Research has suggested that family structure can be an important factor and that children are more likely to be assessed by professionals as being neglected in households headed by a female lone parent. Links between larger family size and neglect have also been identified. The implications of family structure (and re-structure) for neglect of adolescents have been identified in research on runaways. For example, older adolescents (ie those closer to becoming independent) may be particularly prone to feeling 'pushed out' if a new parent and/or step-siblings are introduced to the family.

Analysis of the survey data showed that one type of family structure – lone parent households – did have a link to lower reported frequencies of experiencing educational support, but that there were no significant differences between experiences of supervision, physical or emotional support regardless of family form.

These findings suggest that some lone parents may struggle with meeting some of the needs of their adolescent children in relation to particular aspects of care (eg those linked to time and capacity, such as keeping track of how they are doing at school) – though there is a need for more research to explore these issues in detail.

Material deprivation and neglectful parenting

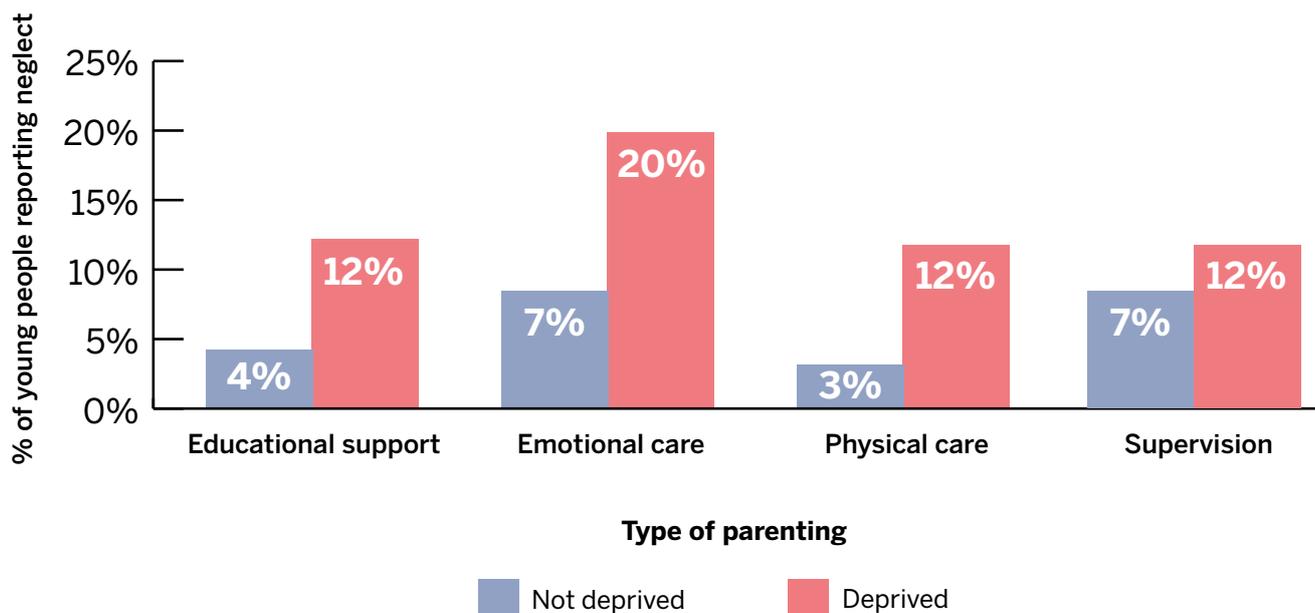
Analysis of low scores for parenting behaviours indicated that many young people who were neglected also reported material deprivation, and that this applied across all the different categories of parenting.

A comparison of the proportions of young people who were materially-deprived (lacking three or more items or experiences out of a list of possessions or experiences) with their non-deprived peers showed that those who were deprived were at least twice or, for some forms of parenting, four times more likely to have been neglected (Figure 2, next page).

It is important to acknowledge that 'deprivation'

was based on a measure of a young person's own experience of deprivation. Whilst it is likely that in many cases this reflects the economic situation of the household, this may not always have been the case, which means that it is difficult to interpret this finding. It is likely that some of the young people reporting deprivation were living in poor households – but others may have had parents who could afford the items in the measure but who elected not to spend money on them (evidence of another different parental behaviour which was neglectful). Other research has shown that poverty can undermine some parents' capacity to parent well because they become more stressed, depressed or irritable.

Figure 2: Percentages of young people who were deprived or not deprived in relation to different types of parenting



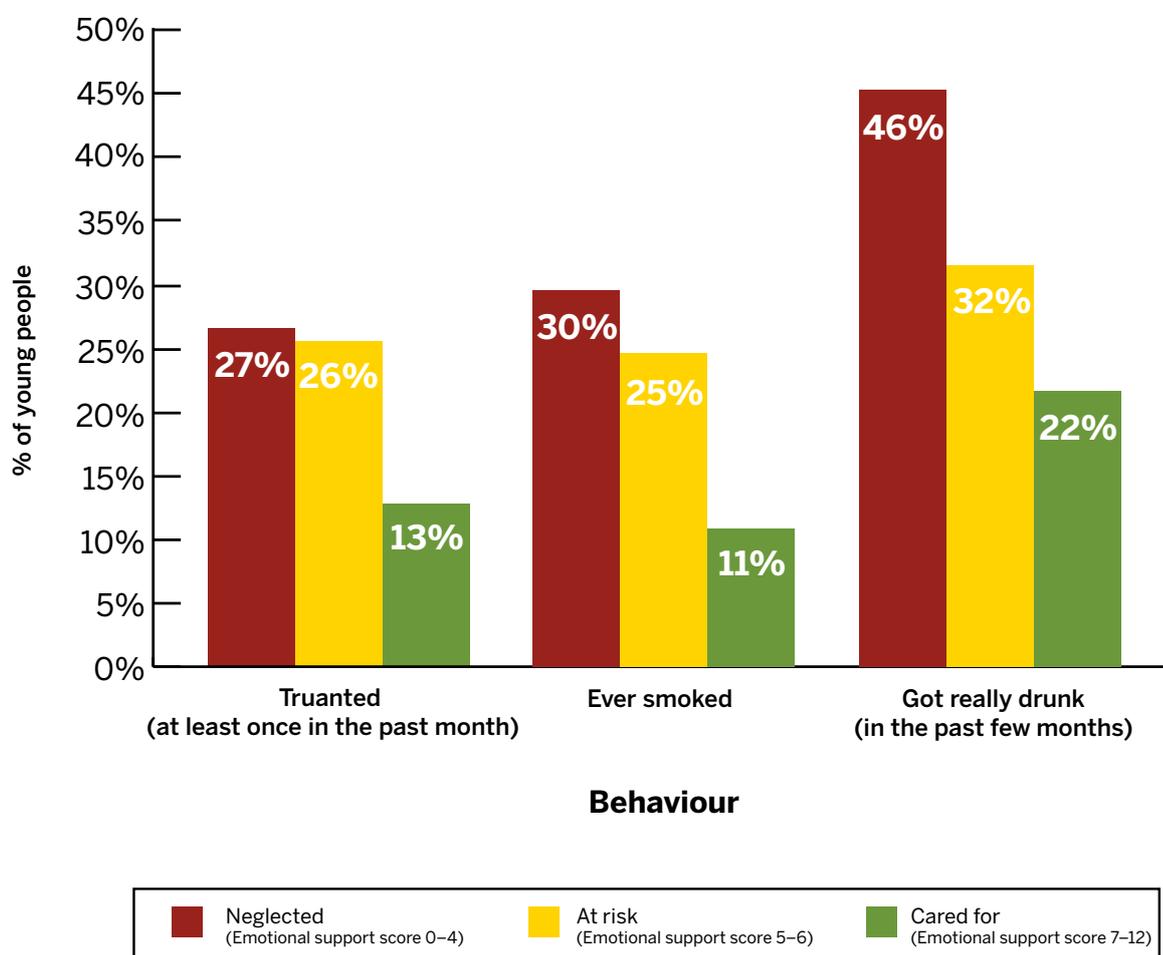
Links to other issues in children’s lives

Adolescent neglect and risk-taking behaviours

In young people’s responses to questions in the survey there were consistent associations between neglectful levels of parenting and a higher likelihood of behaving in ways that might jeopardise future health or life chances. To give just one example, as shown in Figure 3 below, 14–15 year olds who had experienced neglectful parenting in relation to emotional support were:

- almost three times more likely to have ever smoked than their cared for peers (30% as compared to 11%)
- around twice as likely to have recently missed school without permission, or to have ‘got really drunk’.

Figure 3: Differences in behaviours between young people who experience varying levels of emotional support



Adolescent neglect and well-being

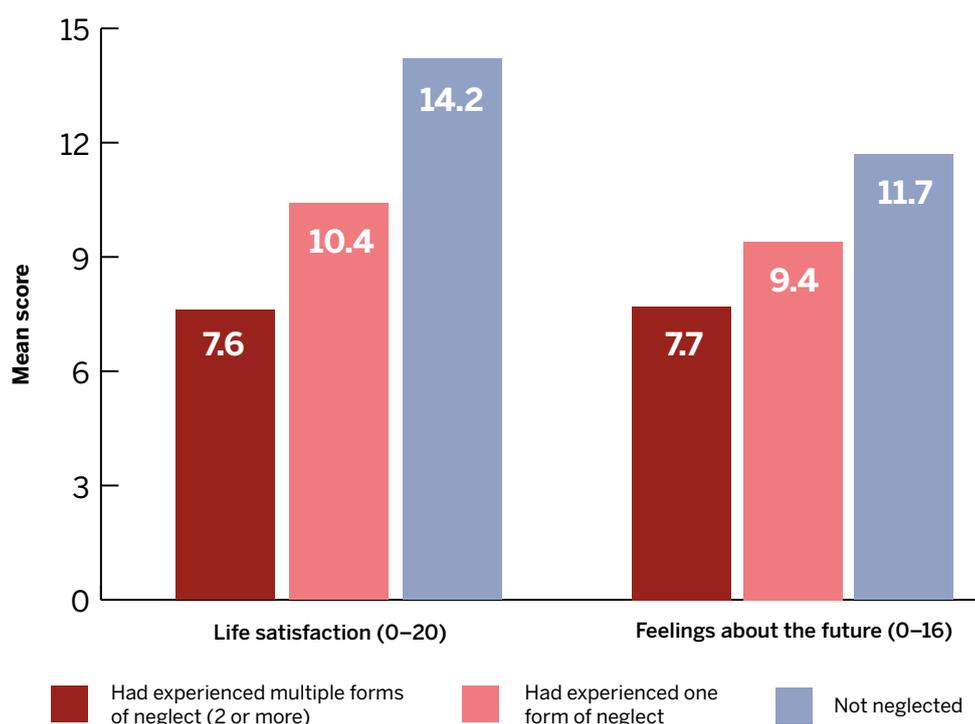
An impediment to professionals' (and other adults') understanding of the significance of adolescent neglect – and a factor hindering a better response to it – has been the absence of physical 'symptoms' or a lack of acute events. Findings from our survey show that many neglected adolescents are suffering hidden harm in relation to their well-being. At a time when most teenagers are enjoying life and looking forwards, neglected adolescents are much more likely to feel pessimistic about the future. They have doubts about their competence, little faith that anyone cares about them, and are very dissatisfied with their lives overall.

Neglected young people consistently reported lower scores for well-being than those who were cared for –eg for educational support, those in the neglected group had a mean score of 7.9 out of 20 for life satisfaction compared to 13.9 for young people in the cared for group. And a comparison of

mean well-being scores for young people who had not been neglected, had experienced one form of parental neglect in isolation, or had experienced multiple (two or more) forms at the same time, revealed that where different forms of neglect had combined, young people reported significantly lower scores for all the domains of well-being which were asked about in the survey (see Figure 4 below). Two examples of this were as follows:

- The subgroup who had experienced multiple forms of neglect reported a mean score for life satisfaction which was 2.8 points below those of the subgroup who had experienced one form of neglect, and 6.6 points lower than the subgroup who had not been neglected.
- For feelings about the future, the mean scores for the multiply-neglected young people were 1.7 and 4 points lower respectively.

Figure 4: Differences in well-being for 14–15 year olds who had experienced multiple forms of neglect

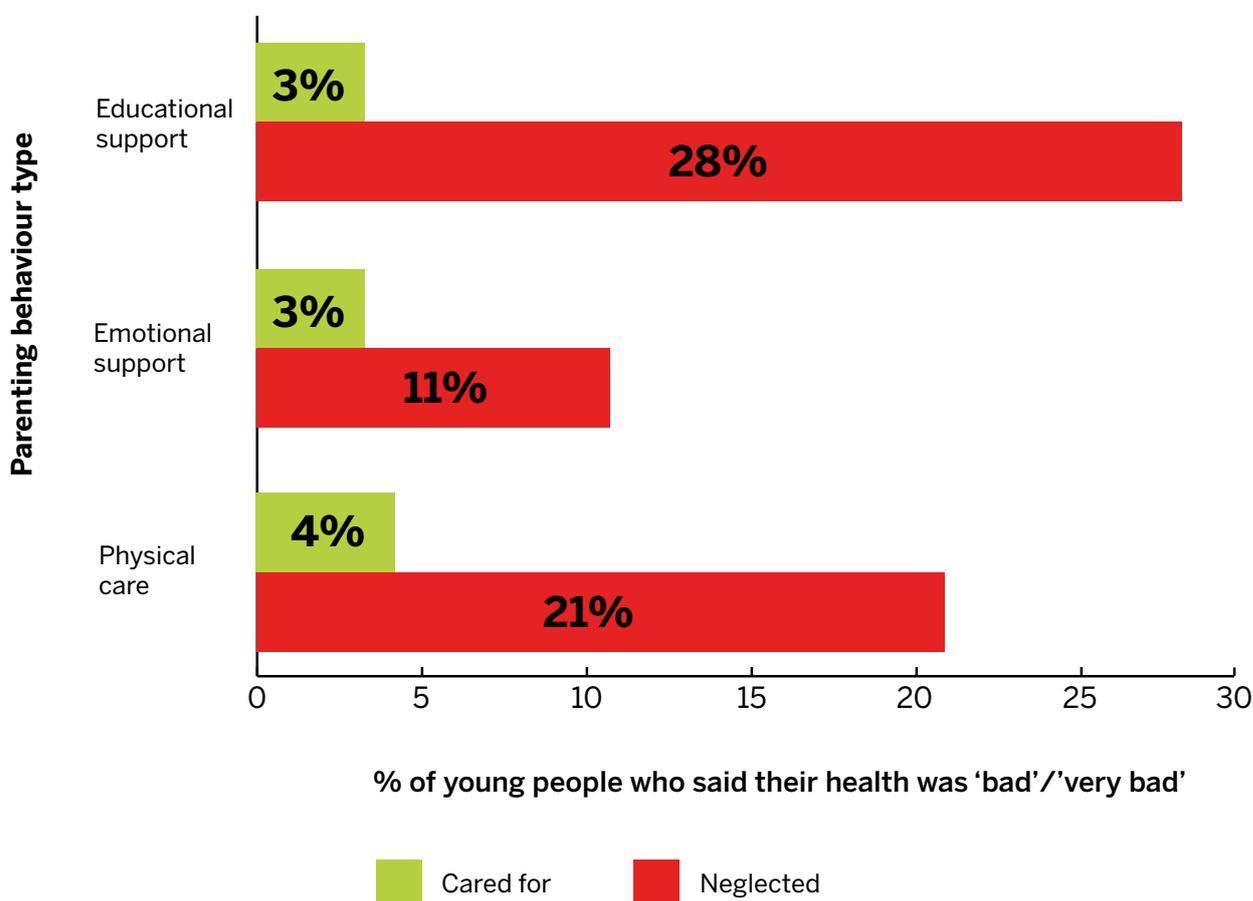


Adolescent neglect and health

14–15 year olds were asked a short series of questions related to their health. As shown in Figure Five (below / next page) their responses revealed large disparities between those who had reported neglectful parenting and those who were cared for:

- 28% of those neglected in relation to educational support said that their health was 'bad' or 'very bad', as opposed to only 3% of those in the cared for group.
- More than 1 in 5 (21%) of young people neglected for physical care reported 'bad' or 'very bad' health, with just 3% of the cared for group giving this response.
- Around 1 in 9 (11%) of young people who reported neglectful emotional support said that they had 'bad' or 'very bad' health. (The relationship between supervision and self-rated health was not statistically significant).

Figure 5: Differences in self-reported health between neglected and cared for young people



The complexity of parenting adolescents

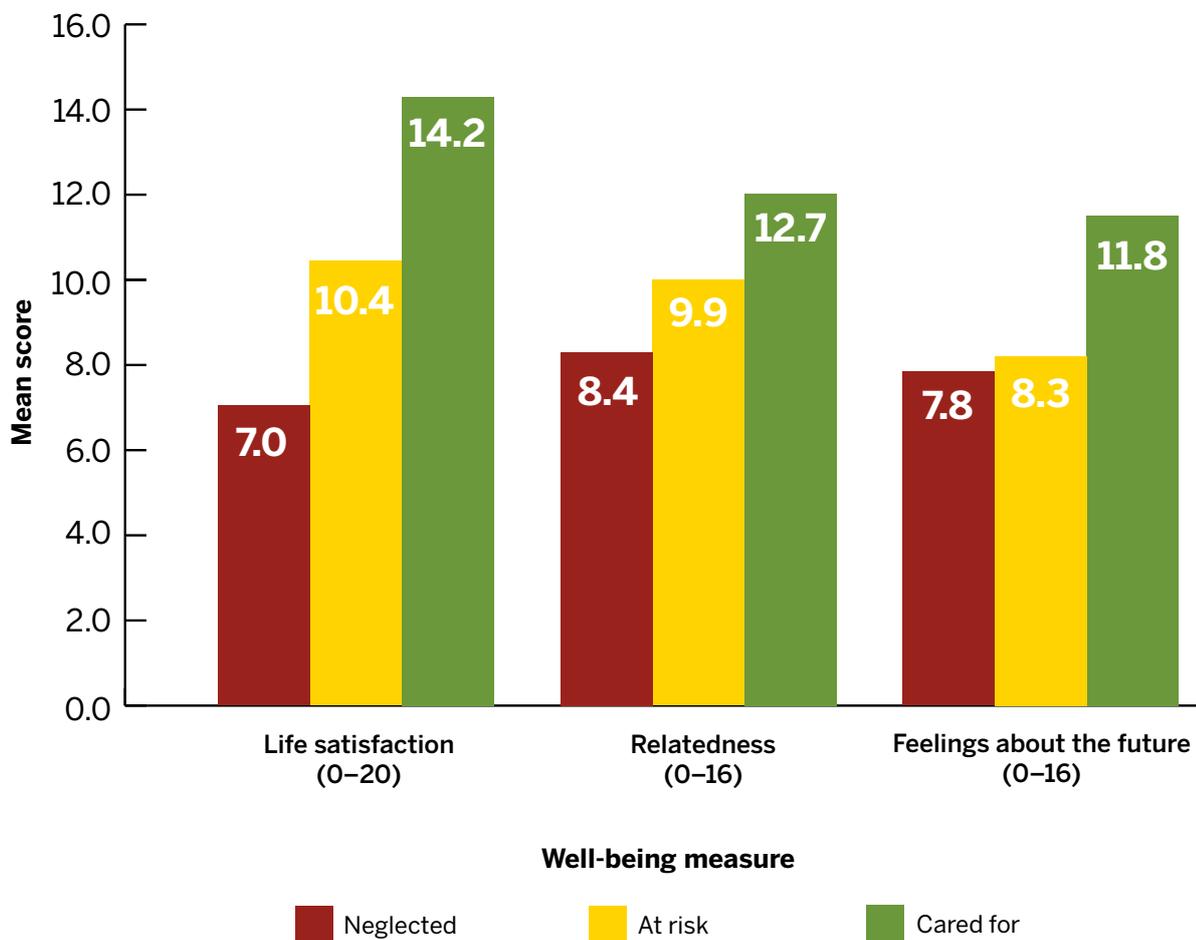
Two findings which were revealed in analysis of the wider dataset pointed to the challenges of bringing up adolescent children. Variations in the associations between parenting inputs and some of the indicators suggested that 14–15 year olds may benefit more from higher levels of some types of care and support than others. For example, a 'medium' level of educational support or supervision was linked to high life satisfaction for a majority of young people, demonstrating the need to allow adolescents in their mid-teens a degree of autonomy and choice.

And there were a number of findings that highlighted the importance, but relative lack of, emotional support for young people in their mid-teens. A comparison of responses by the Year 10 students with the responses from their 12–13 year old counterparts showed that far fewer of them were frequently ('always' or 'often') receiving emotional support. This perhaps indicates that parents reduce their efforts in relation to this form of care as their children become older. On a similar note, in the more focused analysis of neglect, more 14–15 year olds reported emotional neglect, or levels of parental input that put them in the 'at risk of neglect' group, than for any other category.

However, for those who did report high levels of emotional support there were strong links to positive well-being, as shown through a comparison of the mean scores for different well-being domains for young people who were 'cared for' or 'neglected' for this form of parenting. For example there was a difference of 7.4 points for life satisfaction between these groups, or 4.3 for 'relatedness', a measure of how much someone feels the people around them will be supportive (see Figure 6 next page).

These findings suggest that emotional support to teenagers is critical to ensuring that they have a positive outlook on life and sense of their own potential – and that some parents may not be aware of this – though more research would help to understand how these issues relate to each other.

Figure 6: Differences in levels of well-being for 14–15 year olds who had experienced different levels of emotional support



What needs to change?

Although this study related primarily to one age cohort – 14–15 year olds – the findings point to the extent of neglect of adolescents in England, and to links to poor well-being and problem behaviours, strengthening the case for a better response to the issue of adolescent neglect. When read alongside other research on the maltreatment of adolescents these findings suggest that adolescent neglect should be a concern for society and an issue to be taken seriously by policymakers at both national and local levels.

Our findings demonstrate the need for a focus on preventative work and early help for adolescents who have been neglected, and on support for their parents.

Prevention

- Although programmes targeting teenagers do exist, the majority of universal parenting programmes in England have been focused towards the parents of younger children in their early years. There needs to be a re-balancing of this through national and local policies and services, improving support to parents of older children to ensure that they understand and feel equipped to meet their children's needs throughout the long transition of adolescence.
- The content of parenting programmes for families with adolescents needs to be carefully designed. This study suggests that for this age group different aspects of parenting behaviour need to be 'geared differently' when caring for adolescents – some inputs kept at a consistently high level (eg emotional support) whilst others are gradually reduced (eg supervision). This corroborates the findings of other research which has shown that a key to success in the parenting of teenagers is appropriate extension of autonomy as a young person matures.
- Local authorities' early intervention work should include targeted parenting advice and support for families going through relationship breakdown or divorce (transitional points when both parenting capacity and material resources can become reduced as one partner leaves the household).
- More needs to be done to enable young people to recognise neglectful situations and know what help is available. There is conflicting evidence on how well young people understand the concept of neglect and wider debate around these issues with all young people, and the sharing of information about the effects of missing out on appropriate care and support at home could help raise awareness. This could be done in schools (eg via Personal, Social, Health and Economic – PSHE – sessions) and in other settings where young people spend time together (eg youth groups). The four-fold classification of parenting used for this research could offer a useful platform for discussions about neglect, although research suggests that young people would extend this to other areas (eg to the need for parents to teach adolescents skills for independence).
- This study found that adolescents who reported material deprivation were more likely to have experienced neglect. Evidence from research has confirmed a 'core association' between poverty and maltreatment, suggesting that deprivation can present a barrier to effective parenting (although the links are complex). Many families in the UK have seen incomes fall in recent years, particularly as a result of reductions in social security provision, and it is a concern that poverty rates are expected to increase substantially in coming years. Reversing this trend could play a significant role in avoiding the kind of tensions which can disrupt parenting behaviours.

Early help

Adolescents tend to be viewed as being resilient to the effects of poor parenting, but adults need to understand that this is not the case. This study shows that neglected young people are more likely to suffer poor well-being rather than develop emotional strength, and to behave in ways which jeopardise their health or their future opportunities. Other research has shown that adolescent neglect can have significant, harmful outcomes.

- To improve general adult awareness of this there is a need for a more evidence-informed popular discourse, appreciating the complexities of parenting adolescents and the merits of more community and societal support for families with adolescents (especially those facing difficulties and disadvantages).
- To improve frontline responses, training programmes for social workers, teachers and other professionals should be introduced which promote a full understanding of the developmental needs of adolescents and a specific focus on adolescent neglect – both its scale and its links to low well-being and negative behaviours. These should form a part of initial career training and also become part of ongoing safeguarding training commissioned by Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs), to ensure early identification and a timely response when neglect is suspected.
- There are very few ways for young people to seek help and support if they are neglected at home. An appropriate range of options should be developed which are accessible and safe. These should include online resources, advice and help, alongside the availability of trusted adults to talk to (online or by phone) who can link young people to other services as necessary. Well-moderated online fora – where young people can safely 'meet', 'talk' and offer mutual support – may also have an important part to play, especially given the potential isolation of neglected adolescents. Learning from approaches used to support young people with mental ill health could be applied in developing this.
- The provision of local services young people can self-refer to that offer family mediation, mental health support and advocacy for young people and their families could help prevent neglect developing further. Direct support to young people and their families should be designed to meet the developmental needs of adolescents. Research suggests that they particularly value regular contacts, being listened to, being kept informed and having their views taken into account, a stake in decision-making and a consistent relationship over time with one professional whom they can trust.
- Professional assessment processes which consider the needs of families rarely, if ever, adequately include the views of young people. One aspiration for the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) when it was introduced – to promote the voice of young people during an assessment – has rarely been met according to recent studies, but this should be prioritised in all cases where adolescent neglect may be occurring.
- Services which work with families or individual young people do not tend to focus on parental neglect and may struggle to link-up the complementary support necessary to fully address neglect. There is evidence to support the merits of a 'team around the family' model, including a lead professional with relevant experience, capacity and resources (and who is known and trusted by the adolescents in the family) as a way to provide early help in relation to adolescent neglect. This approach can bring in appropriate inputs from multiple agencies (as necessary) to address varying needs within a family.

Adolescent neglect in our practice: How services run by The Children's Society work with families to address neglect

The Children's Society delivers a range of services for disadvantaged adolescents, and staff report the commonality of parental neglect as a feature in the lives of the young people they work with. We may have first met a young person because they have run away, been involved in anti-social behaviour, or for many other reasons, but we usually find that there are problems with care at home.

As Joanna Manning, National Lead on Substance Misuse, explained about the work of Explore Family, a service in Nottingham which supports family members affected by substance misuse:

'Neglect is the biggest issue in the families we work with...in terms of basic physical neglect, but also there's emotional neglect.'

She added that often other agencies fail to acknowledge the significance of this, instead seeing an adolescent's ability to deal with a lack of adequate parental care as a strength, a sign of resilience:

'We have less referrals for older children. People perceive that they can look after themselves and can more easily remove themselves from a situation...but they become at greater risk outside the home. Young people can be more vulnerable to others who might want to exploit them, to the "wrong groups" of people. They're out of parental control.'

The Explore Family service uses a 'whole family approach' whenever possible to include everyone in working out how to solve the issues they have.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Victoria Bowen, Service Manager of Early Family Support in Lancashire. The service works with some families who have 'gone off track' (for example because parents have separated) and others who have more serious, ingrained problems (including domestic abuse). Often, because of their own difficulties, parents have lost sight of the need to preserve routines and rules for their older children, and relationships have broken down:

'Near enough all the adolescents we see have experienced neglect from their parents – and for the majority (it's) not intentional. In many cases parents don't necessarily realise; they're not able to look past their own needs.'

For most of these families, children's physical needs are being met, but other types of parental input have reduced or ceased altogether:

'Lots of the parents we've got have their own mental health issues and their own physical health issues. We see them just trying to get through the day themselves...and some parents don't recognise the level of support that teenagers still need.'

Early Family Support works with parents to understand how they can gradually reintroduce rules, rewards and encouragement – to show they care and to rebuild positive relationships with their adolescent children which lead to sustainable improvements for the whole family.

Conclusion

Whilst the majority of adolescents in England are well cared for, this research shows that around 1 in 7 of the country's 14–15 year olds experience low levels of parenting, with some groups at higher risk of parental neglect as a result of the contexts and circumstances of their lives. The study reveals how closely-linked the experience of neglect is to low well-being, to risk-taking behaviours and to poor health. Our 'Understanding Adolescent Neglect' programme will develop more research projects to improve knowledge around neglect – but clearly much more needs to be done now to reduce the likelihood that adolescents will face neglect, and to improve outcomes for those who do.

As a starting point we believe that:

- National policy should be adapted and local service provision improved to address the support needs of all families with adolescent children - eg parenting classes provided in ways that are non-stigmatising and widely-accessible, with additional support available for those who feel they need it. This should form a key part of the Government's 'Life Chances Strategy' to complement support for families with younger children.
- Parenting education programmes that are tailored to understanding and meeting the needs of adolescents should be developed.*
- Targeted services should be provided, offering parenting support and advice to families that are in transition and where parenting capacity may temporarily be reduced eg when parents are separating.*
- Education and awareness-raising should be done with adolescents about the nature of neglect and its potential consequences eg in schools through PSHE classes.
- The context for parenting makes a difference and material deprivation can make parenting more difficult. The Government should pay attention to this when changing policies which will significantly affect family income, such as freezing child benefits and tax credits, and cutting support for many disabled children under Universal Credit.
- Better professional pre-qualification training (eg for teachers and social workers) should be in place for professionals to become equipped to understand the needs of adolescents, the challenges in identifying neglect, its associations in the short term with reduced well-being and the significant negative outcomes it can lead to.
- Training in local areas should be commissioned by LSCBs to improve the knowledge and understanding of all frontline workers (in education, health and youth justice services) who have a role in safeguarding on adolescent neglect and its links to low well-being and risk-taking behaviours, and to its potential longer-term harm if not responded to adequately.
- Support for young people themselves should be made available – including online information, advice and forums alongside directly-accessible, flexible services which are non-judgemental and young person-centred in their approach. This should include provision of services that can mediate or advocate on the young person's behalf (with their parents, and in terms of linking to other services as appropriate). Such services could be based within or outside schools to meet the different needs and circumstances of different young people.*
- Where neglect is a concern, comprehensive assessments should be conducted which include consultation with the adolescents in a family in order to ensure their perspective is incorporated in planning and decision-making.
- Interventions for adolescent neglect should use a 'whole family approach' to ensure that all family members have a stake in resolving problems. Where appropriate, a 'team around the family' should be deployed to draw in the support required from different services to fully address the factors contributing to parental neglect.*

- Data collection and analysis at a local and national level should be improved – especially in relation to ‘children in need’ – to allow for better understanding of the scale and nature of adolescent neglect, and the responses families receive to inform local early intervention strategies.

(*In relation to all the proposed services, there is an overarching need for thorough and robust evaluation to better establish what works in preventing adolescent neglect or providing early support to adolescents and families where neglect is present and may escalate).

By putting changes like these in place, we can begin to make real headway towards reducing the impact that adolescent neglect has in England today.

Acknowledgements

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It is a painful fact that many children and young people in Britain today are still suffering extreme hardship, abuse and neglect.

The Children's Society is a national charity that runs crucial local services and campaigns to change the law to help this country's most vulnerable children and young people.

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