

**PRE-BIRTH SOCIAL WORK;  
A QUANTITATIVE CASE STUDY OF HOW  
A LOCAL AUTHORITY HAS INTERVENED  
FOR CHILDREN REFERRED PRIOR TO  
THEIR BIRTH AND THE IMPACT OF THIS.**

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# WHY STUDY PRE-BIRTH ASSESSMENTS

- Use of time prior to birth to ensure a child's safety is clearly beneficial to all involved (children, parents, services).
- Pre-birth assessments received much less attention than other areas of social work and this is reflected in the wider literature.
- Infant and new-borns are one of the most vulnerable groups and most are represented in serious care reviews and in public law care proceedings.
- The care provided to a child in the first year of their life has a significant impact on their development throughout their life.
- Unborn children are not provided for in the law so how to manage this period of involvement does require additional time, attention and understanding.

## THEMES ARISING IN THE LITERATURE.

- There were system wide challenges to pre-birth assessments including;
  - delay in assessments being undertaken
  - lack of clarity around processes,
  - ethical dilemmas around assessing capacity when child not born
  - Legislative frailty
  - Literature geared towards non-social work professionals ie midwifery services

# RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Explore how the host local authority had intervened for children who were referred prior to their birth in the last 5 years.
- To undertake a statistical analysis in order to better understand the associations between the actions taken by the local authority and the outcomes for children (outcome being measured by the presence of a looked after plan).
- To provide the local authority with feedback to inform their current guidance and procedures for practitioners working with unborn children and their families.

## THE DATA

- Criteria for cases selected was the following;
  - children who had a referral date prior to their DOB
  - AND
  - Children referred between April 2015 and March 2020
- Under these parameters 510 individual children were identified

# VARIABLES

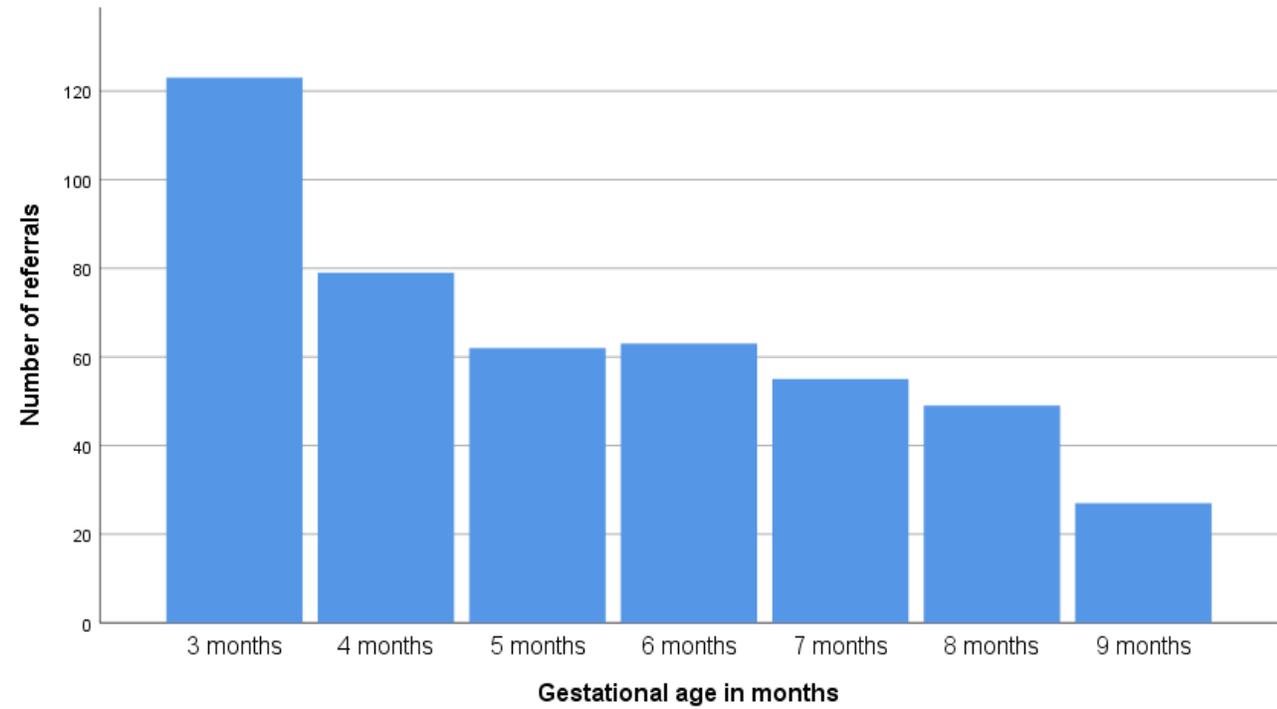
- The number of referrals for each case.
- The dates and outcome of contacts.
- Whether or not Section 47 enquires were undertaken (investigation when harm is suspected to establish whether or not a child is suffering or it likely to suffer significant harm).
- Start and end dates of single assessments and the outcome of these assessments.
- Details of any plans which children were made subject to; including Child Protection Plans, Child In Need Plans and Child Looked After Plans.

# ANALYSIS UNDERTAKEN

- Exploratory aspect of research includes:
  - Calculating frequencies of the data for ;
    - Referrals
    - Referral sources
    - Needs at point of referral
    - Longitudinal analysis to use of plans.
- Understanding the associations between actions taken and a child becoming looked after
  - Bivariate analysis undertaken to highlight statistically significant associations
  - Logistic regression undertaken to understand the associations between actions taken by local authority and child becoming looked after. (dependant variable).

# FINDINGS

- Gestational age at point of referral



# FINDINGS

- Steady decline in use of Children's Social Care following first assessment and greater use of 'referred to other service' which I have deduced to mean preventative services.
- This includes decline in use of Child Protection Plan and Child Looked After plans.

	Role for Children's Social Care after 1 <sup>st</sup> Assessment	Closed/no further action	Referred to other service
April 2015- March 2016	66 (61.1%)	30 (27.8%)	18 (16.7%)
April 2016- March 2017	48 (55.8%)	15 (17.4%)	23 (26.8%)
April 2017- March 2018	57 (54.8%)	13 (12.5%)	30 (28.9%)
April 2018- March 2019	65 (53.3%)	22 (18%)	34 (27.9%)
April 2019- March 2020	35 (38.8%)	15 (16.7%)	21 (23.3%)
*data incomplete for this year			

# FINDINGS

- The use of the CIN, CP and CLA plans.
- This includes decline in use of Child Protection Plan and Child Looked After plans.

Year	No. of Child In Need Plans	No. of Child Protection Plans	No. of Child Looked After Plans
April 2015- March 2016	49 (45.4 %)	59 (53.9%)	26 (24.1%)
April 2016- March 2017	39 (45.3%)	49 (57%)	25 (29.1%)
April 2017- March 2018	42 (40.4%)	51 (49.0%)	19 (18.3%)
April 2018- March 2019	40 (32.8%)	49 (40.2%)	26 (21.3%)
April 2019- March 2020	15 (16.7%)	24 (26.7%)	12 (13.3%)
*data incomplete for this year			

## FINDINGS: CLA PLANS

- Local Authority patterns on initiating care proceedings for new-borns and under ones. Of those referred prior to their birth who went onto become 'looked after' (108 of the 510 pre-birth referrals).
- 50% had plans that commenced within 7 days of the child being born.
- 14% between 7-28 days and a further 12% between 1-6 months.
- Only 16% of the those with a CLA plan happened after their first birthday.

Age of Child Looked After Plan started	Frequency (%)
0-7 days	54 (50%)
7-28 days	14 (14%)
1-6 months	13 (12%)
6-12 months	9 (8%)
Over 1 year old	18 (16%)
Total	108 (100%)

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## FINDINGS (LOGISTIC REGRESSION)

- Variables which made statistically significant contribution to findings were;
  - Children's Social Care involvement following first assessment
  - Presence of a Child Protection – those who had a Child Protection Plan were 9 times more likely to also have a looked after plan.
  - Child In Need Plan – although this was significant, the effect was less than 1.
  - Specific points of referral in pregnancy; 3 months, (3 and a half times more likely to have a looked after plan likely) 4 months (4 times more likely to have a looked after plan) and 6 months. (7 times more likely to have a looked after plan)

## KEY POINTS

- The local authority appears to have resisted national patterns of increasing use of plans and children coming into care for this particular group during the research period.
- Practice in the local authority does appear to accept referrals for unborn children early and this appears well established both in practice and procedurally.
- Findings in relation to practice about how support for unborn children (and their parents) is provided does appear to align with criticisms which are found in the literature regarding a lack of timely support and failure to use the window of pregnancy to provide support once concerns have been identified.
- Use of the local authority's comprehensive pre-birth assessment appears to be ad-hoc and there is no evidence of this being consistently used.

## LIMITATIONS

- Lack of generalisability due to this being a case study piece; however given the remit of the research (identifying findings for the LA) this approach was proportionate.
- Data used was organisations data rather than research data which meant that more searching questions around practice and actions taken was not available.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Local Authority do not record specific information about gestational age/stage of pregnancy at point of referral (for this research this was derived from DOB and date of referral). However this is crucial to monitor practice in relation to procedural process and intervention timescales in pregnancy.
- Further qualitative research around practice which may not have been captured by the empirical data available in this research.
- Greater understanding of the use of PLO if at all given the high numbers of proceedings in the immediate period following a child's birth.
- Observations which support practice in LA and the active use of wider services to support families in the pre-birth period.