

The abused to abuser cycle? Truth or myth.

There is a belief system that those who have been abused will go on to abuse their own children. There is a belief system that those who have been in an abusive relationship will continue to get involved with abusive partners. During this report the belief system that surrounds the abused becoming the abuser will be investigated via the responses gathered from the freedom of information requests put to the 207 council areas that are covered by child social services throughout the whole of the UK. Out of these 207 council areas 74 outright refused to answer the questions as these were part of the 44 questions asked.

This report is part of a series of reports surrounding different aspects of difficulties faced by families in our society. The myths that go hand in hand with some of these issues and the results of these belief systems. One of these results has been councils refusing to answer the questions put to them because they believe we are trying to get them to validate a pre-set belief or premise. The question then becomes not why they refuse to answer but why do they automatically believe they are being attacked by these questions?

Admittedly, these questions could have been phrased in a less dramatic or judgmental way. They could have been sugar coated to aid in more council responses and they could have been phrased more diplomatically. However, as with everything we do at Family lives matter we phrased the questions as closely as possible to the questions raised with ourselves. Playing politics with councils, organisations or governmental bodies can generally result in good relations and more answers. Yet, at the same time it can alienate those who have asked the questions to start with and lower the trust they have built in us. By asking the questions in different ways whilst keeping as close to the wording others use as possible it is hoped to gain more accurate answers without upsetting either side of the equation.

Why ask questions that will meet resistance? Because when people stop asking questions to understand things, things stop changing. As humans we ask questions in order to evolve. Electricity wouldn't exist, car's, planes and trains wouldn't exist, the internet wouldn't exist if no one asked questions and thought about impossible possibilities.

Each question asked will be set out below along with the answers received, the myths surrounding each question and a conclusion.

Is there any connection between childhood experiences and future parenting abilities. Can you supply evidence to back up your response.

Historically speaking there was a school of thought that stated if a child was abused they would grow up to be an abuser. The idea behind this was that the child learnt the behaviour of the abuser and would be more likely to use this learnt behaviour as an adult. Before long people stopped questioning this belief and it became a stigma against the abused. This is basically an urban myth which is used as an excuse by the perpetrator to explain their behaviour.

Do we as a society believe that if a child grows up in the same house as a murderer that they will themselves become a murderer? Or that a bank robbers children will automatically rob banks once old enough? Of course not, because we understand that this is not an hereditary condition.

It is hard to believe that this is still seen as fact unilaterally across the board where child abuse survivors are concerned. True, there have been many studies conducted that showed a high percentage of abusers were themselves abused as children. However, there have also been studies that prove categorically that not all children who were abused grew up to become abusers. The premise did not and does not hold as unilaterally correct in all incidents.

The ONS (office of national statistics) conducted a study and found that if a child is abused they are more likely to become the victim of domestic abuse and that this likelihood is increased if they were subjected to more than one type of abuse. So, if studies such as this, which, are more up to date prove that child abuse victims tend to remain victims as adults, why do people insist on stating that child abuse victims become abusers.

The FOI (freedom of information) answers varied and of course the majority of councils refused to comment because they do not hold statistics regarding this question.

One council told the reporter to start with the work of Freud. Freud believed that victims of sexual abuse had either imagined or fantasised about being abused and that it all boiled down to a desire to replace the same sex parent where the other parent was concerned. So a boy wanted to replace his father and a female wanted to replace their mother. M

As so many of Freud's theories have been debunked the reporter does not understand why they were told to look at Freud where this question is concerned. This would seem to prove that at least some council areas have not move on from outdated belief systems.

Most of the councils explained that each case is dealt with on its own merits and that as there are generally two parents and extended family all of this is taken into consideration when they are dealing with a family. They went on to say that extensive research has been conducted in this area and that they do not hold statistics in regards to this subject.

The reporter was also told that this question was subjective, was not a request of information and that childhood experiences do not always have either a positive or negative affect on the persons abilities as a parent. Basically that not all abuse survivors go on to abuse and not all children with stable upbringings go on to be good parents.

How can asking a question not be a request for information?

In conclusion to this question it would appear that although childhood experiences can play a part in future parenting abilities it is not as simple as saying negative childhood experiences create bad parenting abilities. As a society we tend to generalise answers that make sense, so we end up believing that negative childhood experiences create negative parenting abilities. Yet, it seems that we have only come to that conclusion because the negative parenting abilities in some adults have been excused by due to their negative childhood experiences. Just take a moment to think about this question for a moment, how often have you read about an abusive parent who had a good, stable upbringing? Isn't it more sensational when these abuse cases are reported to discuss the parents who were abused as a child, or not mention their childhood experiences at all.

The only time an abusers childhood is mentioned is when it was bad and the reports indicate that they didn't know any better. Excuse the abuse because they were abused. When we excuse the abusers behaviour, no matter what the abuse we perpetuate a victim blaming culture and remove the blame from the perpetrator. However, if child social services kept statistics on cases we would have empirical evidence in regards to this question and would be able to understand the percentages involved.



How often does child social services get involved with families where at least one parent was known to child social services during their childhood? Do the percentages change if the parent was once a looked after child

Surprisingly, only one council explained that 33% of the families they receive referrals for will have one parent who was referred to child social services as a child. This council took the time to check around a years worth of referrals to give the reporter an answer and as such I thank that council for supplying this information.

More surprisingly, most of the responses were either a refusal to answer, that this was not a valid FOI request or that they do not collate data in this way.

Others told me that they look at all historical information, including childhood experiences when they are investigating a family and that they follow the government guidelines.

Although, this information is useful it does not actually answer the questions posed. This makes the reporter wonder if there is a reason that child social services do not collate this information. Especially as this would be a very good record of information when it comes to the success rate of looked after placements.

If foster placements are working correctly the reporter would imagine a very low percentage of looked after children needing more help once they have children themselves.

Some of the responses stated that children who have been in the care system will need continued help from other services for the majority of their lives. This raises the question as to why this would be the case.

The one council who did supply statistics was encouraging. 33% is a lower figure than the reporter expected to receive. When dealing with a system steeped in negative belief systems the reporter expected to find that the majority of cases would include a parent who had been known to the services as a child. What is unclear is how this percentage would change overall if more councils had taken the time to supply data. The reporter has spoken to many families who have had child social services involvement with their children and understands that the level of care, involvement, belief systems etc. can differ significantly depending upon the area spoken about. Some areas receive more negative reporting than others. Does this have an impact on the percentages in relation to this question?

In conclusion this question is an area that requires a lot more study to understand the dynamics of the system and establish which council areas are doing the best in this regards. If there is a connection between child social services involvement during childhood and future child social services involvement once these looked after children become parents, it is imperative that the reasons for this become known so that new guidelines, protocols and procedures are put in place to keep these statistics to a minimum.

How often is previous family court paperwork used again at a future point against the original parents in the case?

How often if at all are parental family court proceedings used against the child/ren of that case later on in life? Statistics / reports from 2010 per calendar / financial year appreciated.

Although these two questions are very similar in context, which is why the reporter is covering both questions simultaneously they do cover two different aspects of the same issue raised by families. The first of these questions relates to just the adults who have been through family court with the children social services and the second relates to the children from the same case.

Most people look at any court proceedings as resulting in a guilty or not guilty result when questions relating to behaviour are concerned it appears that there is no such thing as being found not guilty or innocent during parents vs local authority cases in family court. The reporter has been constantly told that these cases are based on probability and not guilt or innocence. It has also been established that family court cases do not work the same as criminal cases and that the burden of proof needed in family court or children cases is much lower than criminal courts. Scotland for example do not have family courts in the same respect as England etc. Yet, they do have a similar process when it comes to the removal of children from parents.

The issue comes when the parents believe they've been found innocent of an allegation within the family court system and when the issue they believe they were found innocent of comes up again via the local authority they do not understand why this can happen. If something is found to be untrue in family court you can understand the parents disbelief when it is brought up again, sometimes years later as if it is a fact.

In regards to the second question there have been reports by parents that their parents court cases have been spoken about in conversations with child social services. This is like using the grandparents information against the grandchild, or using the parents case against the child once the child becomes a parent.

Example. Parent A has child B. Parent A goes to family court against the local authority in respect of child B. Child B becomes adult B and has child C. Adult B has involvement from the local authority in regards to child C and information regarding parent A is brought up in relation to adult B and child C.

This can also happen in respect to custody or contact disputes in relation to child C. Parent A believes this is unfair to Adult B and child C. Adult B does not understand how Adult A has any bearing on custody or contact relating to child C and furthermore adult B has no way to fight information, allegations etc. in respect of adult A.

This is what the reporter refers to in regards to the phrase used against.

The responses from Scotland explained that they do not have family courts like England and Wales and as such this type of question was not relevant to them and that they deal with each case on a case by case basis within their government guidelines. However, they did say a parents past experiences are taken into consideration.

The remaining responses were not very helpful either. From this is a subjective question, the

questioner is trying to validate a preconceived premise, we do not use information against people to the go to line of we work within government guideline and historical information helps to work out what help is needed. No statistics were supplied because data is not collated in this area.

Whereas the reporter can understand the reasons behind the necessity of retaining information that has been upheld or accepted as probability within the family court where the parents are concerned in the future where their children are concerned. The reporter does not understand the necessity or reasons behind bringing up information ruled on as unfounded or without probability in the future where the parents children and or grandchildren are concerned as it was ruled unfounded.

There have been many reports from families in relation to unfounded allegations of abuse, which have been ruled on as unfounded by a judge in family court brought up as if they are facts or upheld by a judge in family court time and time again by the local authorities. They have also reported that when working with child social services they are told to leave past involvement in the past and start again with a clean slate towards child social services and yet any and all previous involvement they've had with child social services is brought up under historical information and feel that this leaving the past behind, clean slate situation is very one sided.

The reporter believes this reusing unfounded information could be down to a system data recording error within the department where all information is stored. If this system is set up to only record information without context then it is easy to see how unfounded allegations are brought up in the future, or if the record of the allegation being unfounded is not inputted on each child's records then again it is easy to understand how this information is reused. If this is the case and the reporter has no way of knowing one way or the other then wouldn't it be helpful if unfounded allegations, which have been proved unfounded were kept on a different database to avoid them being brought up again or there was a way to update all records, including the children's when updating the parents.

In conclusion more research regarding this issue is needed to establish how often this happens and if there is some way to separate factual information from unfounded allegations to ensure there is no further incidents of unfounded allegations being taken as facts.

It would also be beneficial to understand how previous information is used and when it is appropriate to reuse this information. Should allegations against the parents be taken into consideration when the child is an adult and have children of their own? The reporter believes not. Unfortunately, the local authority councils seemed reluctant to answer these questions instead of taking the opportunity to set the record straight and debunk any myths about how they use information.