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## **Sure Start and the 're-authorization' of Section 47 child protection practices**

### *Abstract*

In a recent Sure Start evaluation report (Barnes et al. 2006) it was argued that an increase in Section 47 enquiries and registrations on the Child Protection Register in Sure Start Local Programme Areas was an achievement, reflecting better and/or earlier identification of need and enhanced collaboration between agencies to identify and support families. This paper critically engages with these conclusions, arguing that they are in danger of encouraging practices at a discursive and practical level that in many ways represent a retrograde step back to child protection policies that predominated in the pre-*Messages from Research* (Department of Health 1995) period. In this sense, it is argued that the evaluation report represents the potential re-authorization of Section 47 work through its endorsement of practices skewed towards investigative child protection. The paper concludes that if a broader range of agencies are drawn into child welfare's more forensic practices, this may exacerbate the social exclusion of poorer working class communities and women, ignoring the socio-economic determinants of child 'abuse'.

### **Key words:**

children's services, collaboration, evaluation, inequality, investigation

## **Introduction**

Sure Start was introduced in 1999 as a flagship policy for the tackling of social exclusion through improving the life chances of children. The focus was upon improving the social and emotional development of children, their health and ability to learn, and strengthening their families and the communities in which they live (Sure Start, 2002). With the introduction of Sure Start, an evaluation programme was also introduced, led by a team of researchers from the Institute for

the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues at Birkbeck College. Reports have regularly been published since 2002, outlining the success (or otherwise) of the Sure Start programme (for instance, Ball, 2002; Barnes et al., 2005; Meadows and Garbers, 2004; Tunstill et al., 2002). This paper is concerned with the findings of the latest of the Sure Start evaluation reports (Barnes et al., 2006) (hereafter referred to as the NESS report) with regards to child protection issues, more specifically, its reporting of Section 47 interventions in Sure Start Local Programme Areas (SSLPs). The observations of the evaluation team on Section 47 activities and child protection registrations represent only a very small proportion of the latest report's findings; however, they are worth focusing upon because they are an area of concern that has been neglected in critical evaluations of the Sure Start initiative (for example, Clarke, 2006; Gustafsson and Driver, 2005). The claims made by the NESS (National Evaluation of Sure Start) team, that an *increase* in Section 47 activity and child protection registrations in the SSLPs are indicative of effective early intervention, have potentially profound implications for the development of child welfare services in England and arguably highlight contradictions that appear to structure the Sure Start initiative.

We examine these issues by critically engaging with the NESS report's observation of trends in Section 47 work in SSLPs. We explore three themes that are crucial to understanding the potential impact of the NESS report on child welfare policy and practice. In the first section we underline the importance of considering the activity of reporting evaluative findings as a form of social action which, rather than being ideologically neutral, helps construct and sustain particular practices. The danger, we argue, is that the preferred, 'successful' practices will be conservative in nature, restricting the move at a discursive and practical level towards a child welfare paradigm of intervention.

In the second section we explore the implications for the NESS report findings of the evidence from the 1990s that found practices skewed towards investigative child protection as ineffective in terms of providing holistic support for children and families. In this context, we point to the contradictions between the available evidence on investigative child protection and the NESS report's support for such practice, and its lack of engagement with Section 47 referrals as a categorization of professional practice informed by discursive constructions of childhood, 'neglect' and 'abuse'.

In the third section, we caution against the possible re-authorization of Section 47 investigative practices, given the powerful symbolism associated with child protection and child 'abuse'. Here we draw attention to the potentially negative impact of increased child protection activities upon the disadvantaged families and communities that Sure Start serves. We point to important social divisions around gender and class to highlight the role that policies such as Sure Start have in the governance and criminalization of poor working class families, mainly headed by single mothers.

### Evaluation and the construction of effective practice

The NESS report notes that in Sure Start areas there has been an increase in the 'rate of Section 47 enquiries (children thought to have suffered or likely to suffer significant harm)' (Barnes et al., 2006: 6). This increase is reported for children both under 5 years and under 16 years of age. The rate for children under 16 is highest, with the report stating that there has been an increase in Section 47 enquiries in SSLPs for this group of children and young people of almost twice that of the most comparable rate (under 18s) for England. The rate of registrations on the Child Protection Register is also reported as significantly increasing in the SSLPs compared to the English average for both age groups.

It is argued that the increase in Section 47 enquiries and registrations on the Child Protection Register:

... may be related to better or earlier identification of need. These findings may be an indication of an increasing impact of joined-up working and multi-agency working in the areas. In particular they may represent enhanced inter-agency collaboration to identify and support families. (Barnes et al., 2006: para. 10.4.3)

It is important to consider the potential impact of the above claims that appear to re-authorize child protection practices premised upon forensic practices. In England there has been a move away from such practices that focus narrowly on child protection, towards a child welfare paradigm framed by preventative and holistic approaches (Beecham and Sinclair, 2007; Garbers et al., 2006).

On one level, the Sure Start programme may be interpreted as part of this trend. After all, it is a programme that is supposed to prevent social exclusion through multi-agency collaboration. However, on another level, the recent findings appear to contradict the idea of preventative policies. As was highlighted in a recent editorial in *Community Care* (2006: 5):

Considering the preventative focus of Sure Start, it is at first sight surprising that the researchers [Barnes et al., 2006] count the rise in child protection enquiries and registrations as another achievement.

While the NESS report makes no speculation as to future trends in Section 47 work, the editorial of *Community Care* argues that in the longer term there should be a fall in the number of child protection enquiries as early interventions come to fruition in the SSLPs (2006: 5). However, this claim arguably understates the representational authority of the NESS report and team, as a consequence of not only the significant financial investment in the Sure Start programme, but also the investment in the evaluation itself and, thus, the social position of the evaluation team.

Drawing on the concept of 'symbolic capital' from Bourdieu (1991), it can be seen that the NESS team are particularly well positioned, given their relationships to the fields of government and the media, to exert influence on the direction of child welfare practice. The NESS team are the selected and designated 'official' evaluators of the Sure Start programme; in this context they can be considered powerful spokespersons who are authorized to speak on the basis of their social roles and who have privileged access to networks of dissemination. From Bourdieu (1991), symbolic domination requires and depends on influential networks of communication that give voice to certain claims and not others. New findings are quick to circulate among key players. Amy Taylor (2006: 16), for instance, notes that the NESS report was 'a boost' for the government's Sure Start policy. In the same article she quotes comments from key actors such as Pip O'Byrne, chair of the children's charity, 4Children, as saying that 'an increase in referrals to social services is to be expected because of Sure Start's focus on early intervention with families experiencing problems' and Peter Liver, Director of the NSPCC for the Midlands and West, who claimed that the increase in enquiries is 'probably a

result of increased investment' (A. Taylor, 2006: 16–17). Peter Liver is also quoted as suggesting that 'local authorities should use their experience of what has proven successful in Sure Start areas to shape services as they develop the multi-agency children's centres' (A. Taylor, 2006: 17). Such responses indicate that key actors accept the equation drawn in the NESS report between increased child protection activities in SSLPs and effective early intervention. This example serves to illustrate our point that the NESS team are well placed to 'authorize' the direction of practice. In addition, the responses of these key players also indicate the existence of a policy climate conducive to accepting the NESS team's re-authorization of a child protection discourse and practice, rather than a discourse of child welfare.

Evaluations are commissioned to inform future developments; the continuation of certain forms of intervention 'that work' and the cessation of those that 'don't work'. Evaluation is not, however, an objective activity involving the collection of 'hard' evidence. It is always ideological (Rossi and Freeman, 1982) because, in contrast to having simply a functional or instrumental role, it is central to the social construction of practice. For example, the very selection of 'indicators' of good practice is in itself a form of social action that authorizes and draws attention to certain aspects of practice and not others. The referents of practice in children's services, such as Section 47 or Section 17, provide for easy measures/indicators. However, these indicators are not ideologically neutral. The NESS report highlights increased Section 47 activity as a success, but such activity is based on particular ways of viewing harm to children that locate 'harms' in the private sphere of families with registration making relevant the categories physical, sexual and emotional 'abuse' and 'neglect'. As Thorpe (1994: 198) notes, 'abuse' is a 'decontextualised and highly emotive signifier' that fails to take into account the circumstances, particularly socio-economic, in which children fail to thrive. It is somewhat surprising, given the extensive critical discussion of the discourse of child protection underpinned by notions of 'abuse', that Barnes et al. (2006) selected to count Section 47 activity as a measure of success.

David Taylor (2006: 245), in discussing approaches to evaluation, describes the current pursuit of 'hard' evidence and functional approaches to evidence collection as an 'uncritical engagement with the empirical'. The approach taken in the NESS report is indicative

of this trend, in which counting easy measures of practice has more to do with 'suggesting levels of success' than any critical examination of the practice (D. Taylor, 2006: 246).

The main problem with this is that indicators that achieve the status of good practice through evaluations become part of the self-referential systems that provide the everyday, common-sense frameworks dictating how ways of working with service users are organized (Ayre, 2001). Recent research suggests that whilst there has been an attempt to enact a paradigm shift in children's services towards services with a family support ethos, the hegemonic discourse of child protection continues to influence grass-roots practice (Jack, 2004). There is a tension between discourses of welfare and protection and this continues to hinder a move towards a child welfare paradigm (Beecham and Sinclair, 2007). The busy practitioner, when faced with responding to a case framed as high risk or a family in need, will generally be compelled to respond to the former. Such work of categorizing and prioritizing, grounded in the language of risk and harm, continues to organize thinking on the ground and inhibits alternative ways of working with families (May-Chahal and Broadhurst, 2006). In this context, it is important to understand the contribution that high profile evaluations such as the National Evaluation of Sure Start make to the construction of particular discourses that structure particular ways of working.

The danger in reporting the 'success' in SSLPs of increasing Section 47 work *and* explaining this trend through inter-agency co-operation is that systems of support which might facilitate increased help-seeking from those in need (Broadhurst, 2003, 2005), will remain under-developed, with a preference for collaborative systems of surveillance that have increased panoptical potential (Jack, 1997; Parton, 2006; Penna, 2005) for instance, warns of the potential of services that might be considered to have a broader welfare ethos being drawn into the child protection web. Inter-agency working needs to be more than simply the latest, 'bigger' infrastructure for the identification of risk and harm. Collaborative practice should be concerned with placing the service user centrally and facilitating access to preventative services. In this sense, it is crucial that agencies are not drawn into prior ways of working that have been found to be wanting, something that we focus upon by examining the literature from the 1990s on child protection investigations.

## Back to the future? Sure Start and Section 47

The 1990s witnessed close and critical scrutiny of both referrals and investigations under Section 47. A number of studies, prompted by international concern regarding what has been described as an explosion of child protection referrals in the USA, UK and Australia, found that disproportionate resources were allocated to investigations and that in a large number of cases, concerns about significant harm were unsubstantiated (Ainsworth, 2002; Cant and Downie, 1994; Gibbons et al., 1995; Parton et al., 1997; Thorpe, 1994). In addition, and of considerable importance for our purposes, Gibbons et al. (1995) concluded that for almost half the families investigated, the referral did not result in the provision of family support services, *even when support was requested* by the families involved. Similar findings were reported in Australian studies (Cant and Downie, 1994). In a key report from the UK's Audit Commission (1994) the conclusion was drawn that much investigative work could be reduced and replaced by family support services. The Audit Commission noted how too many families were being inappropriately picked up by the child protection 'net', an argument echoed in the much-cited document, *Messages from Research* (DoH, 1995). More recently, Ainsworth (2002, 2006) examined mandatory reporting of child protection concerns in Australia and found a continued mismatch between referral and substantiation. The conclusions drawn in the NESS report are worrying because it is unclear how they reach the conclusion that the increases in Section 47 work in SSLPs represent an improvement in the identification of need. Evidence of this is not provided and if it were it would be at odds with that found in the literature that suggests that Section 47 activity can impact negatively on initial engagement between parent and social worker (Cleaver and Freeman, 1995; Farmer and Owen, 1995; see Turnell and Edwards, 1999 for an overview of international literature), and in addition, that it also structures the assessment process a priori around the forensic activities of 'evidence gathering'. This is an approach that has been widely reported as acting against the effective and holistic identification of need and support based upon those needs (Platt, 2006; Thoburn et al., 1993). In fact, Berg (1994) claimed that social work organized via child protection had the potential of simply stimulating a list of 'what is wrong'. The conclusion drawn from this literature is that Section 47



is not a particularly useful vehicle for the 'better' identification of need as suggested in the NESS report. It may be that *The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (DoH et al., 2000) has had an impact on how social workers now make enquiries under Section 47. However, without the detail of this process, the suggestion made by NESS, that increased Section 47 activity can stand as an indicator of 'better' assessment of need, is deeply problematic.

As we have seen, the NESS report also suggests that increased Section 47 activity and registrations may be indicative of 'enhanced inter-agency collaboration to identify and support families' (Barnes et al., 2006: para. 10.4.3). This claim is also problematic. The work of Gibbons et al. (1995) clearly highlights the problems of extrapolating from 'counts' of Section 47 activity, claims about effective family support. It cannot be assumed that because a family has been subject to enquiries under Section 47, that they have then received effective family support services. A referral under Section 47 necessitates enquiries, but there is a clear body of evidence in the UK that suggests support services do not necessarily follow (Beecham and Sinclair, 2007; DoH, 1995; Gibbons et al., 1995). Similar conclusions have been drawn in Australia (Ainsworth, 2002, 2006; Cant and Downie, 1994). Recent work in the UK (CSCI, 2006) also documents parents' negative experiences of investigations in terms of provision of effective support. CSCI found that despite the significant impetus during the late 1990s towards re-focused child welfare services, parents experienced social work intervention as narrowly focused on risk with few helping services offered according to parents' own perception of needs.

This research evidence needs to be considered in relation to recent studies that have examined the implementation and impact of *The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (DoH et al., 2000). This framework, designed to support the government's Quality Protects agenda, advocates a new approach to assessment based on an ecological model (Jack and Gill, 2003). In the context of re-focused family support services, a referrer may request help for families not just on account of a child being 'at risk of significant harm', but, as an alternative, that a child is 'in need'. Thus, the framework opens up the possibility of an alternative framing of cases at the point of referral, introducing at an operational level, the category of 'in need'. The framework aims to shift assessment away from narrow risk-based practices that focus on incidents of child maltreatment, towards a more holistic understanding of the needs of children

and their families (Horwath, 2002). There is some evidence that suggests initial assessments prompted by referrals of children categorized as 'in need' provide a better starting point for work with families (Platt, 2006). Platt's conclusions are tentative, but if they are considered in light of those of Spratt and Callan (2004), and Cleaver and Walker (2004), then it can be suggested that services with a child welfare focus may have the potential to offer a more accessible alternative to the adversarial investigative practices that tend to characterize social work practice with children. In addition, there is some evidence that suggests the child welfare approach may also lead to better outcomes for children. Brandon et al. (1999), for example, found that 43 per cent of children in their study would have been better protected *without* investigation and registration. In the context of these studies, the equation that NESS suggests between increased Section 47 activity and enhanced collaborative practice to identify and support families is problematic and contradicts trends in the governance of child maltreatment through *The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (DoH et al., 2000) and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

Furthermore, the NESS report findings on Section 47 are decontextualized from research that suggests there is significant local variation in terms of how problems are 'framed' for referral purposes and that diagnostic inflation impacts on the referral process (Cleaver and Walker, 2004; Horwath and Morrison, 2000). Cleaver and Walker (2004) found that whilst child protection concerns accounted for the largest proportion of referrals the nature of concerns that prompted child protection referrals differed significantly between authorities. This led the authors to conclude that local authorities might be 'operating different thresholds for accepting/categorising referrals and that local context influenced the way in which a range of professionals sought help for families from social services' (Cleaver and Walker, 2004: 85). In local contexts where resources are rationed evidence suggests that both parents and children inflate their concerns in order to prompt a social work response (Broadhurst, 2005). In choosing to draw conclusions based on counts of Section 47 referrals, the NESS report appears to have overlooked the fact that a Section 47 referral is simply *a decision* made by a professional at a particular point in time, often with a particular practical purpose in mind, such as raising the profile of a family in a context of rationed resources. As has been well rehearsed in the childcare literature Section 47 is a

*categorization* based upon varying constructions of childhood and 'abuse' (Parton et al., 1997; Thorpe, 1994). Cleaver and Walker (2004) suggest that this process of categorization differs between authorities and between professional groups also. To treat such categorizations as 'truths' is to ignore the situated nature of decision making and the practicalities of local context that demand that one action or another is taken with regard to getting help for children and families (Taylor and White, 2001; Wattam, 1996). The outcome measures that are favoured in the NESS report may give some crude count of practices in the SSLPs, but without detailed analysis of how collaborative family support services are working, the evidence suggests that the evaluators' conclusions about the 'benefits' of Section 47 are premature.

### Imagining 'abusive' communities and families

Child protection activities are not just practical activities but involve the translation of a very powerful moral agenda to do with 'victims', 'perpetrators' and 'child abuse' (King, 2005). The investigation of (potentially) 'abusing families' and the 'protection' of vulnerable children are social actions underpinned by moral ideologies legitimated via images of children as victims rescued from 'abusers, molesters, batterers and exploiters' (King, 2005: 65). Whilst we might consider that child welfare services have attempted to move beyond this ideology in enacting a new child welfare agenda in the post *Messages from Research* era, Section 47 investigations and registration continues to make relevant 'harms' to children and, in particular, evoke images of 'abuse' within the family. This is because welfare interventions are structured through concerns with the governance and regulation of populations that are premised on, and reflexively constitute, social divisions (Daniel and Taylor, 2006; O'Brien and Penna, 1998; Penna, 2005; Rose 2001). 'Deprived' communities, such as the SSLPs are subject to area based and targeted initiatives and, thus, higher levels of welfare governance. Children across all socio-economic groups can be victims of neglect and physical, emotional and sexual maltreatment. However, it is those from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds that come to the attention of social services (Cawson et al., 2000). More specifically, those people targeted for interventions are mostly lone female-headed house-

holds living in conditions of poverty and social exclusion (Cleaver and Walker, 2004; Daniel and Taylor, 2006; Farmer and Owen, 1995; Jack, 2004; Spratt and Callan, 2004; Tunstill and Aldgate, 2000). This gender disparity has not been well addressed in child protection work (Daniel and Taylor, 2006; Featherstone, 2004; Lister, 2006; May-Chahal, 2006), while recent policy and legislative developments have rendered more of these vulnerable women at risk of criminalization. Through, for instance, the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act parents can now be held criminally responsible for the socially unacceptable behaviours of their children (Goldson and Jamieson, 2002). As Scourfield and Drakeford (2002) note, however, in practice the term 'parents' means mothers. The Sure Start initiative is not immune from this critique and is actively involved in the moral construction of motherhood. Clarke, for instance, notes that users of Sure Start are frequently mothers, and that as a consequence of this, and an enduring traditional ideology about gender roles, Sure Start is an initiative that is 'primarily aimed at mothers' (2006: 716). This is problematic because of its inherent conservatism, but also because of its location in New Labour's moral discourse concerning the responsibilities of parents (mothers), no matter how poor their material circumstances are, to their children and wider society. The difficulty with this is that policies, such as Sure Start, structured through such concerns are, in the final analysis, 'mother-blaming'.

This is especially pertinent to our study because the moral discourse framing Sure Start conjoins with the category of 'neglect' which is also 'mother-blaming' (Daniel and Taylor, 2006). However, as Cawson et al. (2000: 370) observe, mothers whose children become subject to the surveillance apparatus of child protection are not intrinsically 'different from many others [who are] often struggling to protect themselves and their children from the harm that results from living their lives in disadvantaged communities'. Such observations, however, become lost in practices organized in and through Section 47 investigation and the categorical framework of the Child Protection Register, because they focus too narrowly on issues of parenting deficiency or culpability, thereby ignoring the contextual aspects of harms to working class children to do with poverty and social exclusion (Jack, 2004; May-Chahal, 2006).

The relationships that exist within the child protection network perpetuate the wider relations involved in the regulation and governance of poor families (Bourdieu, 1991; Cleaver and Freeman, 1995; Jack

and Gill, 2003; Jack, 2004). The implications of poverty are not well addressed in social work practice and this leaves the service user feeling powerless, with issues of low self-esteem and hopelessness being exacerbated, rather than ameliorated, by involvement with services (Brophy, 2006). As Sayer has noted in his work on the moral significance of social class, 'how others value us and respond to us . . . in turn affects our sense of self-worth' (2005: 1). The symbolism of 'child abuse' does nothing to help disadvantaged families, who are already struggling with the consequences of poverty. That poor families want practical and financial support, rather than surveillance, is now well documented (Broadhurst and Pendleton, 2007; Brophy, 2006; Penn and Gough, 2002).

As noted, the last 10 years have seen significant policy and legislative changes aimed at shifting the incident driven focus of child protection in England. However, despite the introduction of *The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need* and its 'third dimension' (i.e. the consideration of social and environmental factors), the effect of social inequalities and 'community level' disadvantage continues to be given insufficient attention (Jack and Gill, 2003). Belsky (1993) identified the important ways in which community factors interact with those at micro level to contribute to 'significant harm', but much of this appears to go unheeded. Although there is a clear commitment to preventative work in both Sure Start and other government programmes, a clear focus on what services aim to prevent remains elusive (Clarke, 2006; Wattam, 1999). Clarke (2006: 716) notes that Sure Start, despite its explicit inclusion agenda, has focused on the 'proximal causes' of social exclusion, rather than tackling structural inequalities.

The Sure Start initiative is an example of the present government's use of 'branding' which as Garrett notes, is 'incessantly deployed to . . . blur, or render porous, the distinction between the public and private sectors' (2006: 8). The programme is frequently cited as testament to the present government's commitment to fighting poverty and improving the lives of children in Britain. However, like so much of Labour's modernizing agenda, beneath the supposed radical preventative exterior lies a neo-liberal agenda based on a confusing and contradictory social inclusion agenda that has resulted in increased regulation and surveillance of poor families, rather than addressing the root causes of disadvantage.

If disadvantage and its impact on families is to be taken seriously then strategies for working constructively with families are needed. This requires a reworking of the aims of the Sure Start programme to clearly define and position its services within a framework that accepts 'community level child protection' as its focus (Jack, 2004). We might look to the definitions of harms to children that reflect broader concerns about the welfare of children and families in society, such as those controversially adopted by NCIPCA in 1996<sup>1</sup> or Wattam's (1999) concept of 'avoidable harm'. Such approaches would clearly place policies pertaining to social deprivation centre stage in the search for the prevention of child maltreatment. Sure Start is clearly committed to providing family support, but currently social work operated via Section 47 is based on a very narrow definition of what this actually is. Once again, this highlights the tensions in the Sure Start programme between providing effective family support and the measures of its success defined in terms of increased Section 47 work.

## Conclusion

Child welfare policy and practice in the UK has been undergoing significant transformation in the past decade or so. Central to this change has been the development of effective collaboration to support families within a child welfare paradigm. The Integrated Children's System and CAF having been piloted in some local authority areas are now being rolled out across England and Wales. The importance placed on multi-agency working is not new. However, the introduction of processes such as CAF and The Lead Professional through the Every Child Matters programme of reform indicates a changing emphasis where practitioners from all professional groups working with children and their families are responsible for the identification and assessment of need. This has the potential to drastically reduce the number of referrals to local authority social care services as other childcare professionals are given direct responsibility for assessing *and* addressing the needs of children. Pithouse, for instance, shows how CAF arrangements (specifically the development of a pre-referral common assessment protocol) have the potential of ensuring that more appropriate referrals of children under the category of 'in need'

are made to social services, 'whereby child protection is one part of a continuum of provision to meet need rather than the dominant element' ensuring better targeting of resources (2005: 354). Drawing upon *The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (DoH et al., 2000), what appears crucial to the success of such new initiatives is the shared commitment and ownership across agencies of a 're-focused' agenda for children's services, firmly rooted in a child welfare paradigm.

The infrastructure and associated technologies for increased collaborative practice to families can be seen as providing the mechanisms for rolling out across agencies improved and accessible preventative services to families. However, the opening out of assessment practices through processes such as CAF also has the potential to 'expand the purview of "child abuse" and "risk of abuse" [rather] than reduce it which may lead to more enquiries under Section 47' (May-Chahal and Mason, 2006: 242). If the message from the NESS report – that increases in Section 47 enquiries are synonymous with 'success' of the operation of Sure Start and enhanced collaboration in identifying and supporting families – is accepted then such concerns about net widening might well be realized because it represents what amounts to the discredited provision of services under Section 47. In this sense, the NESS report represents a re-authorizing of an approach that will not lead to substantial changes in the lives of children and families that are currently desired under the social inclusion agenda (Jack, 1997). In contrast, it will simply subject more working class families, mainly headed by women, to unhelpful state surveillance and draw a broader number of agencies into this activity.

## Note

1. NCIPCA (National Commission of Inquiry into the Prevention of Child Abuse) defines child abuse as 'anything which individuals, institutions or processes do or fail to do which directly or indirectly harms children' and concludes that dealing with social exclusion could be a key element in tackling this (NCIPCA, 1996: 4).

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