



Safeguarding & Mental Health in Childhood (1880-1920) and the Legacy of the Deserving/Undeserving Paradigm

*Dr Wendy Sims-Schouten, University of
Portsmouth, UK*

(funded by the Wellcome Trust)

Historical & Contemporary Research

- o The starting point for this research is the notion that many of the issues that concern contemporary practices regarding child safeguarding and child protection have a historical trajectory that inform the present (see also Gradock, 2014; Hacking, 1991; Stainton-Rogers and Stainton-Rogers, 1992).*
- o Yet, as it stands there are few or no studies which compare past and current practices and related conceptualisations simultaneously.**



TYPE OF SLOWS FROM WHICH OUR CHILDREN ARE TAKEN.

The Current Study

- o *Historical data and practices* of children in care in the UK, encompassing 1881-1918 versus contemporary data and practices, through the lens of the deserving/undeserving paradigm (Poor Law 1834).
- o With a focus on '**Victims**', a term used (Stein, 2006) for *the most disadvantaged children who have spent time in care, have complex (mental health) needs and have had the most damaging pre-care family experiences*. Their time in care is characterised by further difficulties, instability and disruption.



Critical Realism

Taking historical and contemporary perceptions regarding safeguarding and child protection as a starting point, the approach adopted here works at what Bhaskar (1989) calls the 'real' level (exploring causal mechanisms that generate events, such as the availability of services), the 'empirical' level (experienced events, e.g. in relation to trauma, abuse and stigma) and the 'actual' level (events and processes in relation to child protection and safeguarding).

Child Safeguarding & Wellbeing, England (late 1800s)

Institutions/services: Industrial Schools (caring for neglected children), 1857-1933; Waifs & Strays Society established in 1881; Asylums (no age limit); No specialist children's services.

Social policy/Social work: NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children), 1884; The Prevention of Cruelty to and Protection of Children Act, or 'Children's Charter', 1889; Charity Organisation Society (1869).

Psychology/Psychiatry: Growing understanding of the multiple factors involved in the development of childhood psychiatric disorders, although the emphasis was on heredity (e.g. Maudsley, 1895).

Child Safeguarding & Wellbeing, England (current)

Institutions/services: Charities, delivering services for children in care and young care leavers; Local authority responsibility to provide services for care leavers (e.g. health and wellbeing); 'Staying put arrangement', supporting young people to continue to live with their former foster carers once they turn 18 (Children and Families Act, 2014).

Social policy/social work: Working together to Safeguard Children legislation (2015); Children and Social Work Act 2017; Council spending on early intervention services designed to spot signs of abuse and neglect are cut by 40% between 2010/11 and 2014/15; Cuts to Children's Services (between 2010/11-2014/15); cuts to services in the South by almost a quarter (23%).

Psychology/psychiatry: Transition from CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) to Adult Mental Health Services.

Deserving/Undeserving Paradigm

- o *Spending on poverty relief and family support was drastically reduced from the second half of the 19th century, and this coincided with the establishment of the Charity Organization Society in 1869, who worked with the Poor Law authorities in developing a system of personal social work (Hurren, 2015; Thane, 2012).*
- o Currently, traditional goals of social justice and collective responsibility for public services have been abandoned *in favour of individual achievement and neoliberalism* (Harvey, 2007). This focus on individual accountability and responsibility strongly resembles the **'deserving/undeserving' criteria introduced by the Poor Law 1834.**



‘Victims’ – then and now

There is evidence that at present and in the past, certain children miss out on support and interventions *due to complex needs, financial cuts, and ever changing thresholds* (e.g. see Beito, 2011; Fong et al, 2018; Morrison, 2016; Rivett & Kelly, 2016). Yet, underlying causal factors (material and institutional, such as budget cuts and lack of joined up working) are all too often ignored here in favour of a focus on **‘deservedness’**.

Worthy/unworthy victims

- o Thresholds.
- o Cuts to services.
- o 'Bad behaviour' – 'Out of control'
- o 'Man Up' - resilience.
- o 'Not my job'





Young people as victims?

- **Evidence of the** *ambiguity of meanings, understandings and interpretations around behavioural problems, learning ability and mental health and wellbeing.*
- **Young people have to** negotiate these conflicting viewpoints, **be resilient and in essence fit in with society's rules and regulations.**
- Trouble and confusion around conceptualisations of mental health and wellbeing (e.g. as a diagnosis, a 'learning disability' or 'stress'), highlights that this is a complicated and misunderstood issue.

Two data sets

1. Children's Case files, containing correspondence from practitioner and children (Waifs and Strays Society, 1881-1917), N=108; 69 females, 39 males.

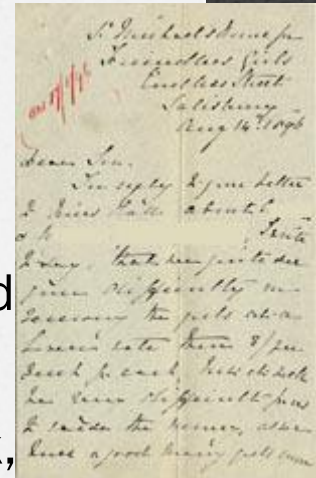
2. Young Care Leavers (N=24; 11 males, 13 females; aged 16-25 years old; mean age 18) and safeguarding practitioners (N=22).

> For parity and in line with Stein's (2006) definition of 'victims', the focus of this study, only participants with complex (mental health) needs and damaging (pre and/or post) care experiences were included in this research.



Sampling

- o **Data set 1:** Through a search of the online database (<https://www.hiddenlives.org.uk/>) and visits to the Children's Society archives in London. Examples of keywords: 'mental', 'asylum', 'insanity', 'assault', 'hysterical', 'wretched', 'dysfunctional', 'abuse', impure.
- o **Data set 2:** Through interviews with care leavers; all had been in the care system from an early age and had received support through CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health services) and other agencies (social work, care workers and additional counselling services) in the past. All participants were living in supported accommodation at the time of the interview and all had an unstable care trajectory (in line with Stein's definition of 'victims').



Research aim & purpose

To investigate causal factors (individual, material, institutional) and social structures that impact on the continued legacy of the 'deserving/undeserving' paradigm, i.e. the notion that interventions and approaches towards safeguarding, mental health and wellbeing in childhood are variable and obtuse, favouring some and not others.

Drawing on Bhaskar's (1989; 2014) critical realist ontology, I argue that to fully understand the lasting impact of the 'deserving/undeserving' paradigm it is imperative to place this in a stratified discursive and non-discursive context, taking account of causal mechanisms at three levels – personal; material and institutional.



Methodology

Three Phases:

- 1.** Focus on 'discovery' or 'retroduction' (in line with critical realism) in terms of the notion that the research seeks to develop as broad as possible an understanding of what factors (through policy documents, research) might be relevant and then to test this iteratively against new information.
- 2.** Applying thematic content analysis to the data (both the historic and contemporary data), in order to identify themes within each data set and compare patterns and contrasts within and across the sets.
- 3.** Introducing the critical realist aspect, by examining the data in terms of how participants' personal, material and institutional contexts may provide the conditions for sense-making.

Data from Safeguarding officers and practitioners

Themes	Dataset 1 - Waifs & Strays Society, 1881-1918; Correspondence about the child, N=108.	Dataset 2 - interviews with safeguarding practitioners, N=22
'Unsuitable' for Services	46% (N=50)	50% (N=10)
Child/family needs as central	19% (N=20)	50% (N=11)
'Problematic children' (behavioural and mental health issues)	76% (N=82)	59% (N=13)

Data from Young People

Themes	Dataset 1 - Waifs & Strays Society, 1881-1918; Correspondence from the child, N=18.	Dataset 2 - interviews with care leavers, N=22.
'Grateful'	44% (N=8)	68% (N=15)
I used to be 'bad'	33% (N=6)	41% (N=9)

'Unsuitable for Services'

Data set 1: *'In consequence of the above fellow's mental condition he is unfit to remain in the Home, and under the circumstances am afraid that the Union is the only alternative. (1906, 12 years old)*

Data set 2: *'We are finding now, that there are a lot more complex families coming to us, that's not what XXX was originally for, but it feels like now that there are gaps in the other services. So when we then turn up and find out about the domestic and the history of sexual abuse and there's a man in the house that we don't know about, then that's a situation we're not happy to work with.'*

Child/Family needs as Central

Data set 1 *'I always feel that it is important for a young person to be kept in personal touch by the authorities and that the girl would hardly have proved so unsatisfactory had she been kept in personal touch with the Authorities of the School to which she was committed'. (1914-1924; girl born in 1904)*

Data set 2: *'We have taken feedback from families recently, and some research that has been done broadly around the multiagency teams, is that families would prefer to have a team around the worker and just have one worker to themselves'. (Family Service Manager)*



'A Problematic Child' - Mental health issues and Behavioural issues

Data set 1: *'I can assure you that everything possible has been done for the girl and neither time, trouble or expense has been spared on her behalf, but it is very evident that she has strong hereditary tendencies of an unsatisfactory type' (1918, girl aged 14 years old).*

Data set 2: *'We have one young person who has had ninety one criminal offence. And that's a way beyond a good kid doing one thing bad, sometimes these are criminal children doing criminal activities repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly.'*

'Grateful for Support'



Data set 1: *'Your humble servant Harry E. takes the opportunity and think it his duty to write and let you know how I am getting on, and also to thank you for the many kindness you have done for me, I am getting on very well in my new place and I like it very much'*
(1899, 19 years old)

Data set 2: *I'm being honest when I say that if it wasnt for my worker I genuinely think I'd be dead by now, probably killed myself or at least on the streets and probably a crackhead. There are times I have been really low and depressed, but I have my worker who I can talk to and the listen and support me to keep going. They've never let me down and have gone of their way for me and given me the time when I've needed it (21 years old).*

'I used to be bad'

Data set 1: *I have been a naughty girl again for the last three days, but the mistress has given me one more chance. I am going to church, going for walks and am working in the mistresses kitchen .(1904, 14 years old)*

Data set 2: *I used to be quite aggressive and quite horrible and stuff like that and needed to learn to speak properly and not get wound up and say things in the right way (18 years old).*

Material Context

The previous accounts which construct the young people as being grateful and appreciative of the (albeit limited) availability of care and support could be understood on the basis of a material context, which places them on the margins of society with no privileges at all. The participants social position could, therefore, be understood as providing the ‘scaffolding’ for their positive construction of the input of the care worker, as it reflects their (real and perceived) lack of entitlement.



Generative mechanisms

- o Focus on and stigma related to 'problem families' and 'immoral girls' - have influenced the responses of child welfare and protection professionals then and now, as recent scandals in Oxford and Rotherham show.*
- o Practice is fragmented and lack of funding*
- o In both data sets there are examples of lasting psychological, institutional, social policy/social work factors.*



References

- o Gingell, K. (2001), The forgotten children: children admitted to a county asylum between 1854 and 1900, *BJPsych Bulletin* DOI: 10.1192/pb.25.11.432.
- o Sims-Schouten, W. and Hayden, C., (2017) Mental Health and Wellbeing of Care Leavers: Making Sense of their Perspectives, *Child & Family Social Work*. DOI: 10.1111/cfs.12370.
- o Sims-Schouten, W. and Edwards, S. (2016), 'Man Up!' Bullying and Resilience within a Neoliberal Framework, *Journal of Youth Studies* 19(10), 1382-1400. DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2016.1171831.
- o Sims-Schouten, W. and Edwards, S (2016), Bullying and resilience within a Neoliberal framework: implications for mental health and well-being? In: Cowie, H. and Meyers, C-A (Eds.), *School Bullying and Mental Health: Risks, Intervention and Prevention*, London: Routledge.
- o Sims-Schouten, W. (2015), Bullying in Early Childhood and the Construction of young Children as Premoral Agents: Implications for Practice. *Pastoral Care in Education: An International Journal of Personal, Social and emotional Development*, Vol 33, Issue 4, 234-245. DOI:10.1080/02643944.2015.1094121.