

## IMPACT OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND CONFLICT: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

<b>Issue/Problem</b>	<b>The consequences of the conflict on the mental health of young people in Northern Ireland</b>
<b>Evidence Base (Equality &amp; Inequalities Report)</b>	<p>The consequences of the Troubles on young peoples' psychological wellbeing are not clear and an understanding of the long-term effects of such violence poor. The effects of the Troubles seem to be associated with problems relating to underachievement and behavioural adjustment. However, behavioural problems are also associated with gender, poverty and deprivation which are also factors closely related to the levels of experience of political violence.</p> <p><i>Ref: Muldoon et al (2000) cited in "Equality and Inequalities in Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland: A Statistical Profile" (DHSSPS, 2004:38).</i></p>
<b>Evidence Base (Literature Review)</b>	<p>Main themes emerging from the literature review include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Concern over the lack of support, particularly psychological support and services, for children and young people affected by conflict;</li><li>▪ The under funding and ad-hoc nature of child and adolescent psychiatry services and the lack of child and adolescent inpatient provision in NI;</li><li>▪ The stigma amongst some people in using mental health services;</li><li>▪ The differential impact of the conflict on different groups of children (i.e. the children of political prisoners and ex-prisoners, the children of members of the security forces, children living in conflict areas); and,</li><li>▪ The gender and geographic dimension of the conflict (e.g. young males more likely to be perpetrators and victims of the conflict, young people living in violent interface areas most affected).</li></ul> <p><i>Ref: Smyth, M., Fay, M., Brough, E. &amp; Hamilton, J. (2004) The Impact of Political Conflict on Children in Northern Ireland. Belfast: Institute for Conflict Studies.</i></p>

Is the issue/problem being addressed by current or proposed strategies and policies? On what level?

On an **interdepartmental level**, the draft [Strategy for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland](#) and the appointment of the [Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People](#) are significant developments for young people affected by the conflict. One of the draft actions of the draft Strategy, for example, is the inclusion of measures to reflect the additional needs of children and young people arising from the conflict. Other draft actions cover issues such as counselling support services and counteracting the influence of paramilitaries. The Commissioner for Children and Young People is tasked with protecting and promoting the rights and best interests of children and young people in Northern Ireland. The mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people affected by the conflict, and the mental health of children and young people in general, is one of the Commissioners' main priorities. There is also a regional [Victims Unit](#) to co-ordinate activity on issues affecting victims of the Troubles and a [Family Trauma Centre](#) funded by the DHSSPS.

The impact of the Troubles on Mental Health is also a key issue covered by the [Investing for Health Strategy](#). Other key interdepartmental developments, which are not directly aimed at addressing the mental health of children and young people affected by the conflict, but which are likely to have a positive impact include the "[Shared Future](#)" policy for improving community relations and the proposed [Anti-Poverty Strategy](#) and [Victims Strategy](#). An increase child/young person-focused structures in Government (e.g. the [Children and Young People's Unit](#) in OFMDFM) may also have a positive impact upon policy and service development for young victims of the Conflict.

On a **departmental level**, the five year [Mental Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan](#) outlines an integrated interdepartmental approach to addressing the issues of mental ill-health and suicide (particularly suicides amongst young people). This strategy is aimed at addressing the needs of vulnerable groups including those affected by the Troubles. The regional [Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability](#) also provides an important opportunity to influence the future of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in Northern Ireland.

An [Evaluation of Health and Social Services for Victims of the Conflict](#) has also been conducted by the DHSSPS and a number of recommendations for future service development have been identified.

On other levels, HSS Boards and Trusts through their [Investing for Health Partnerships](#) develop policies and programmes to take into account the needs of all vulnerable groups including victims of the conflict. Multi-agency [Trauma Advisory Panels](#) have also been

**Inequalities and Unfair Access Issues Emerging from the DHSSPS (2004) “Equality and Inequalities in Health and Social Care: A Statistical Overview” Report**

established in each of the 4 HSS Board areas to provide advice and co-ordinate the provision of services for victims in response to local need.

A range of bereavement services for children and young people are also provided by both the statutory and voluntary sector.

**Is the problem amenable to further intervention by the DHSSPS or other?**

Suggested interventions emerging from research:

- In allocating resources and locating services it should be recognised that certain geographical areas of Northern Ireland (e.g. North/West Belfast, the border regions etc) and certain sub-populations (e.g. working class deprived communities) have been more affected than others.
- More research should be commissioned in order to understand particular populations of children at risk and engage with them proactively in preventative programmes.
- Special assistance and support programmes should be provided for certain groups of children and young people who have been affected by the conflict (e.g. bereaved children, the children of members of the security forces, the children of prisoners and ex-prisoners etc).
- The gender differences in level of need should be reflected in provision and that all provision must be gender sensitive, particular attention should be paid to young adult males in communities severely affected by the Troubles.
- An investigation should be conducted into how the problems of stigma in using mental health services can be addressed.
- Trauma Advisory Panels should conduct audits of the way in which the needs of children and young people affected by the Troubles are met in their geographical area.
- The Victims Unit and the Victims Liaison Unit should conduct a general audit of provision for young victims, and children of victims.

*Source: Smyth, M., Fay, M., Brough, E. & Hamilton, J. (2004) The Impact of Political Conflict on Children in Northern Ireland. Belfast: Institute for Conflict Studies.*