

Abstract

An up to date and accurate picture of the evidence on the impact of poverty is a necessary element of the debate about the future direction of children's social care services internationally. The purpose of this paper is to update evidence about the relationship between poverty and child abuse and neglect (CAN) published since a previous report in 2016 (Bywaters et al., 2016). A systematic search was conducted, identifying seven reviews. Poverty was found to be consistently and strongly associated with maltreatment, be that in terms of familial or community-level poverty, or in terms of economic security. Findings demonstrated that both the type and the quantity of economic insecurities impacted child maltreatment. Certain economic insecurities: income losses, cumulative material hardship, and housing hardship, reliably predicted future child maltreatment. Likewise, as families experienced more material hardship, the risk for maltreatment intensified. In some studies, the relationship between poverty and maltreatment differed by abuse type. Future reviews need to investigate individual papers and their findings across different CAN measures, definitions, samples, abuse types and conceptualizations of poverty to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current research base and the directions which need to be taken to further understand and prevent CAN.

Key Practitioner Messages

- Poverty should be a central theme in work with families, and visible in assessments, case conferences and court reports.
- Research indicates that child protection practices need to move away from a narrow focus on parental risk to harmful contexts and ways of addressing these in which society, communities and families can provide environments where harm is minimised, and children enabled to flourish.
- Further research is needed to better understand the relationship between poverty and CAN.

**A Review of the Relationship Between Poverty and Child Abuse and Neglect: Insights
from Scoping Reviews, Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses**

Introduction

The COVID-19 Pandemic has thrown into sharp focus the impact of poverty on family life and, in particular, child abuse and neglect (CAN). Indeed, globally, there is a growing demand for child welfare and pressures on services (Berger & Slack, 2021).

However, as Dyson stated in 2008: “Although there is a vast amount of research on the impact of poverty and of maltreatment, little work has been done to explore the relationship between the two” (p. 2). The context at that time was one in which the role of poverty was being substantially downplayed, or even denied. Other factors, mainly focused on the individual behaviours of parents, were foregrounded, with poverty being seen as one of a list of factors associated with the incidence of CAN without evidence of a causal relationship. At the time, central obstacle to understanding was the paucity of high-quality research and reliable comprehensive data about the relationship between poverty and child maltreatment, compounded by inconsistent definitions and measures.

Bywaters et al. (2016) sought to fill this gap, conducting a systematic review which sought to identify and discuss evidence about two key aspects of the relationship between poverty and CAN: the impact of poverty on a child’s chance of being abused or neglected and the impact on adult poverty of abuse or neglect in childhood. It also explored the economic costs of child abuse and neglect and outlines broad policy implications, with a particular focus on the UK. This review identified 16 papers, concluding that there was a sufficient weight and variety of evidence to support the position that ‘poverty is a contributory causal factor in CAN’ (Bywaters

et al., 2016, pp.33), and that adverse events in childhood, including abuse and neglect, are associated with a negative effect on adult economic circumstances.

Bywaters et al.'s (2016) report also emphasised the connections between poverty and other factors influencing CAN. Poverty was conceptualised not just as one factor amongst others, one of a list, but as inextricably connected to other factors which influence the experience and outcomes of family life (Lacey and Minnis, 2020).

In 2022, this position has achieved a degree of acceptance in the UK, and internationally. For example, in 2019, the Scottish Independent Care Review stated in 'The Promise' (p.17) that, 'It is impossible to review Scotland's 'care system' without properly considering the pervasive impact of poverty. Children growing up in poverty are overrepresented on the child protection register and are more likely to be removed from their families.'

This degree of acceptance is reflected in a substantial amount of new research of relevance. These include publications of the UK-wide Child Welfare Inequalities Project (see Bywaters et al., 2020a) and the special issues of the journals. For example, 'Children and Youth Services Review', edited by Slack, Berger and Noyes (2017) on 'The Economic Causes and Consequences of Child Maltreatment', and of 'Social Sciences', edited by Bywaters, Featherstone and Morris (2019) on 'Child Protection and Social Inequality'.

The growing body of research on the influence of socio-economic factors in childhood is reflected in several systematic and narrative reviews of evidence, for example, covering socio-economic factors influencing adverse childhood experiences (Courtin et al., 2019; Lacey and Minnis, 2020), the effect of household income on children's outcomes generally (Cooper and

Stewart, 2020) and the relationship between socio-economic status and child psychopathology (Peeverill et al., 2021).

However, in Bywaters et al.'s 2016 review accessing pre-2016 evidence, and in other work to date, no systematic reviews or meta-analyses exist with a specific focus on the relationship between poverty and CAN. It is therefore important to investigate whether Bywaters et al.'s (2016, pp. 2) conclusions, namely that associations between poverty and CAN '...have been an insufficient focus of official data-gathering, research or policy-making' still rings true in 2022. This paper therefore sought to systematically report on whether any reviews or meta-analyses have been published since 2016 which synthesize evidence on this important relationship.

Methods

Search Strategy

Our research questions were addressed through a comprehensive systematic review of international literature. We conducted an initial search in 4 computer-based literature indexes using a TITLE-ABSTRACT-KEYWORD strategy within Web of Science (including SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, A&HCI, CPCI-S, CPCI-SSH, BKCI-S, BKCI-SSH, ESCI, CCR-EXPANDED, IC), Embase (Ovid), PsycINFO and PubMed (including MEDLINE) through 2016-June 1st 2022 published in English. Keywords were developed through searching relevant papers already known to us and extracting their stated keywords. Keyword variations were then trialled through a series of searches within the four search engines. Please see Supplementary Material 1 for an outline of this process.

Individual experts in the field from a number of countries were also contacted directly. They were sent a list of papers identified for inclusion and asked to detect missing research. Based

upon these recommendations, and our own identification of key papers, further specific journal papers were subject to reference section checks, Google Citation and Connected Papers searches. Grey literature searches were conducted by the NSPCC into materials held in their archive. See Supplementary Material 2 for a list of specific papers identified through these mechanisms.

Eligibility and Inclusion Criteria

To be included in our final sample, papers had to provide novel empirical evidence that was directly relevant to the focus on poverty and CAN in children under the age of 18. Because this report builds upon a previously published report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2016 (Bywaters et al., 2016), only new work published after 2015 was considered. Papers eligible for this review were therefore published in English between 1.1.2016 and 01.6.2022.

To be included, research needed to provide evidence of the nature, strength and temporality of the relationship between different aspects of poverty and various forms of CAN; provide evidence which bears on theoretical accounts of the relationship between poverty and CAN; or provide evidence about the short-, mid- and long-term outcomes of policies and interventions that are designed to address the interaction of poverty and CAN. Figure 1 provides a flow diagram of our selection process.

In terms of methodological approaches, only systematic reviews and meta-analyses were included. Individual papers addressing the relationship between poverty and CAN have been published elsewhere (Bywaters et al., 2022). Due to this focus on recent work investigating the relationship between poverty and CAN, work of a purely historical nature was excluded. Work which focused on low- and middle-income country samples were excluded, on the grounds that

the cultural, economic and social policy contexts were not sufficiently comparable with developed Western economies that are the focus of this report. Abuse topics typically associated with low- and middle-income countries, such as child labour or child marriage, were also excluded.

All other types of child abuse and neglect (physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect, and sub-categories) were included using whatever measure was determined by the authors. For example, this measure may have reflected an official process of substantiation, such as a decision (in England) to put a child on a protection plan, non-substantiated abuse as reported by a social worker or as a self-report by an alleged victim, or a separate measure developed or applied by the authors.

When establishing a prevalence threshold for including a study, it was decided to include analyses of populations where all children were victims of CAN on the measures outlined above and populations of children in out-of-home care, known as looked after children (CLA) in England. Child maltreatment is the key factor, internationally, leading to children being separated from their birth families and placed in out-of-home care (Perlman and Fantuzzo 2013). Out of home care populations contain a large proportion of children and young people who have experienced CAN. For example, in the UK, the latest Government statistics (UK Government, 2020) show that in 2019/20 65% of children were looked after because of 'abuse or neglect'.

A further 22% were looked after because of family dysfunction or stress. The value of these need categories has been questioned because social workers who input the data have to select a single category from a prescribed list in situations which are usually multi-factorial.

However, the English evidence suggests that a minimum of two thirds of all CLA are in care because of CAN. As a large number of studies utilise samples of this nature, we felt it was important to include both direct measures of CAN and CLA as an indirect measure. Studies were excluded if they reported CAN or CLA as an outcome, but did not distinguish or define results sufficiently to separate maltreatment or neglect from other kinds of work that do not necessarily include maltreatment or where there is an undefined proportion of cases where maltreatment is an issue, for example, referrals, early help, or children in need.

Multiple studies use Adverse Child Experiences (ACEs) as a measure and the standard lists of ACEs include maltreatment, so papers relating poverty to ACEs were considered in-depth. However, our judgement was that, within our search results, all papers utilising ACEs included more non-CAN than CAN related variables. These ACE papers were therefore excluded (For ACE meta-analyses see: Lacy et al., 2020; Walsh et al., 2019).

No distinction was made between definitions of poverty. All were included and are detailed within our summary tables. For example, poverty may have been based on composite family economic variables (income, education, unemployment), neighbourhood disadvantage variables, Census data, being in receipt of Income Tax Credits, measures of food insecurity, income insecurity, or housing insecurity. The heterogeneity of these variables will subsequently be discussed.

Study Selection

Review of Poverty and CAN

Eligible publications obtained via database, hand, author and citation searches were exported to EndNote™ (V20) Referencing Management Software. A shared EndNote file was then created. Duplicates were removed by this software with assisted manual discretion, totalling $N=3,731$ duplicates. Results were then transferred to Rayyann, a specialist screening tool. A further duplicate search was conducted within this software, removing a further $N=1,942$ references, with manual confirmation of each item. All results were screened according to the abstract for general relevance to the review aims. Each prioritised item was read by one research associate and findings recorded on a proforma. For each study the following information was extracted: research aims; methods; population/country/ies; definitions of poverty/CAN; details on types of CAN and links to poverty; and key findings. A summary of key findings was produced, tabulated and used as the basis for the relevant elements of this report. In total, 7 papers were identified.

Data analysis and synthesis

For all studies, important elements of study context, relevant to addressing the review question and locating the context of the primary study were considered; for example, the study setting, population characteristics, participants and participant characteristics, the intervention delivered (if appropriate). The methodological design and approach taken by the study; methods for identifying the sample recruitment; the specific data collection and analysis methods utilized; child abuse/maltreatment measure(s); economic outcomes measure(s); control variables; and any theoretical models used to interpret or contextualize the findings were also key pieces of information we sought to review.

Reliability Coding

The reliability of coding of included papers was established using an independent coder and encompassed 20% of the sample. In cases of discrepancy, the full text of the paper was screened in order to make a final decision. Cohen's Kappa was high across all paper types, $K = >0.80$.

Appraisal of Quality

We intended to discuss all relevant peer reviewed review papers since 2016. As described above in the data analysis and synthesis section, we discussed multiple aspects of each study with a critical lens. Although not a formal approach to appraising the quality of studies, this should inform a judgement of comparative quality of the datasets and methods used within each paper. As a set of guiding principles, we utilised several key domains Cochrane adapted from Noyes et al. (2019) and Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009), these included the studies having: clear aims and research question(s); congruence between the research aims/question and research design/method(s); rigour of case and or participant identification, sampling and data collection to address the question(s); appropriate application of the method(s); richness/conceptual depth of findings; and exploration of outliers and alternative explanations.

Results

As seen in Table 1., Van IJzendoorn et al. (2019; p. 272) found socioeconomic status was a predictor of elevated risk for child maltreatment within a global umbrella synthesis of meta-analyses examining 'two core elements of prevention, that is, antecedents for maltreatment and the effectiveness of (preventative) interventions'. Of their 19 meta-analyses identified, only one reported low socio-economic status as risk factor for child maltreatment (Mulder et al., 2018). Mulder et al. (2018)'s meta-analysis contained 36 studies, 19 of which reported on 'low family SES'. Unfortunately, Mulder et al. (2018) do not identify the individual papers included

within their 'low family SES' sub-analysis, but their overall sample focused on US sample (n=33) with only 1 study coming from South Korea, Vietnam and the Netherlands. It should also be noted that some effect sizes reported in this report from reviews published post 2016, may reflect studies that were published pre-2016.

Hunter and Flores (2021), conducting a systematic review of 33 USA based studies, found that a number of key social determinants of health including: poverty, housing instability, food insecurity, and being uninsured were associated with child maltreatment. Poverty was found to be consistently and strongly associated with maltreatment, with all but three studies identifying a significant association between either familial or community-level poverty and child maltreatment. In some studies, the relationship between poverty and maltreatment differed by abuse type. For example, one study found that neighbourhood poverty was associated with all forms of child maltreatment, but to different degrees.

A further US-based systematic review (Chandler et al., 2020) highlighted the relationship between housing stress and child maltreatment within 21 studies, indicating that housing stress was associated with an increased likelihood of caregiver or child self-reported maltreatment, child protective services (CPS) reports, investigated and substantiated CPS reports, out-of-home placements, and maltreatment death.

Again, searching for papers worldwide, Conrad-Hiebner and Byram (2020) identified 26 longitudinal studies investigating economic insecurity and child maltreatment. Nearly all studies indicated an association between child maltreatment and the economic insecurities under review. The findings demonstrated that both the type and the quantity of economic

insecurities impacted child maltreatment. Certain economic insecurities: income losses, cumulative material hardship, and housing hardship, reliably predicted future child maltreatment. Likewise, as families experienced more material hardship, their risk for maltreatment intensified. Finally, employment served an important buffering role for families: when parents were employed, their maltreatment risk decreased, even in the absence of cash assistance and controlling for income.

Jonson-Reid et al. (2019), conducting a scoping review of US studies of factors influencing repeat reports of maltreatment, also found differences between abuse type in their sample of 28 studies. Fourteen studies found increased risk of recurrence for neglect, compared to other types of maltreatment, within the context of poverty, 12 found no association, and two reported a lower risk. When significant, the effect size ranged from 10% to over three times higher risk for neglect. Poverty or material need was the most commonly included control (15 studies), with two thirds finding that lower resourced families had higher risk. Another study within Hunter and Flores's (2021) systematic review indicated that financial problems were strongly associated with neglect and abandonment, but the association was less pronounced for sexual abuse.

Interestingly, in a scoping review of economic supports for working parents, Maguire-Jack et al. (2021a) found mixed evidence the impact welfare receipt can have on reducing child maltreatment. Comparing four economic support programs: the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Childcare Subsidy, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC), Maguire-Jack et al. (2021a) found evidence that these four programs may provide some preventive benefits against child maltreatment, but the overall

take-up of benefits ranges considerably across the four programs, hindering their potential beneficial impacts.

Associations between poverty and maltreatment also varied by race/ethnicity. Landers et al.'s (2019) content analysis of 8,782 articles published over the last decade in US social work journals, concluded that the racial disproportionality that persists in child welfare is a key subtheme in the relationship between poverty and CAN, in addition to risk and protective factors associated with child maltreatment.

From these high-level reviews, we can see clear evidence of the relationship between poverty and CAN. However, although evidence informing a relationship between poverty and increased prevalence and risk of CAN is now abundant, it is important to consider the specific, heterogeneous and complex methodologies utilised to investigate this important area, in addition to the definitions of poverty being used, and distinctions between types of maltreatment.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to update evidence about the relationship between poverty and child abuse and neglect published since a previous report in 2016 (Bywaters et al., 2016). The value of this review lies not in re-running the core question of whether there is a causal relationship but in building on that foundation to explore evidence about the nature of the relationship: the complex connections between poverty, other factors and CAN. What can that evidence tell us about how better to understand those connections and how to intervene to

reduce poverty and its impact on children's chances of maltreatment, and its consequences? These questions have immediate relevance to practitioners and policy makers in this field.

Overall, there has been a notable increase in the number of papers investigating the relationship between poverty and CAN over the last decade and particularly since 2016, albeit from a low base (Landers et al., 2019). This is reflected in the availability of seven reviews and meta-analyses, compared to none in 2016 (Bywaters et al., 2016). These reviews provide a high-level picture of the relationship between poverty and CAN, finding poverty to be consistently and strongly associated with maltreatment, be that in terms of familial or community-level poverty, or in terms of economic security.

Economic hardship is likely to lead to psychological distress and, in turn, to relationship problems and disrupted parenting and, ultimately, an increased likelihood of CAN. Some studies have suggested that parents under pressure and in distress may be more likely to parent harshly and insensitively, implying that parental behaviours and attitudes are a key mechanism (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020). Others argue that parents' capacities and choices are constrained by poverty, for example, when the time available to spend with children conflicts with the needs of work that is vital to the family finances, or when the disciplinary control options are reduced because there are no treats to withhold or separate rooms to which a child can be sent (Cooper and Stewart, 2020).

There is also not a simple binary divide between those in poverty and those not in poverty (Bywaters et al., 2020; Hood et al., 2021). Across the social continuum, having greater financial resources allows parents to buy goods and services which enable children to thrive and succeed

in ways which often depend on the distribution of resources within societies. Families who are destitute or homeless lack the resources to meet some of even the most basic of their children's needs for food, shelter, clothing, and warmth. Wealth will also allow parents, if necessary, to purchase legal advice to contest accusations of abuse and neglect. In other words, wealthier families are likely to have greater access to a range of forms of human, social and cultural capital, the accompaniments of money as well as money itself but what can be learnt about the role of material resources and social status in child protection from studying better off families remains almost entirely unresearched (Bywaters et al., 2020).

Neighbourhood level factors are also hypothesised to exert an influence on families, in terms of safety, criminality, resource availability, job prospects, social capital, walkability, social norms, and interactions between neighbours - over and above the effects of family level poverty (Maguire-Jack et al., 2021b). This additional dimension can compound the material hardship that families in poverty face, making resources stretch less far and exacerbating stresses on family life.

What is also clear, is that poverty is not a stand-alone factor in CAN. Rather, it is one of a number alongside others, but inextricably connected to these other contributory factors, such as parental mental health, substance misuse or domestic abuse and violence (Skinner et al., 2020). Poverty increases the chances of such troubles and is also often a consequence of them, making them harder to leave behind or resolve, in order to build a solid foundation for family life.

However, the 7 reviews we identified are very heterogenous, making critical comparative discussion challenging. Large and significant gaps in knowledge remain. Although systematic reviews now exist synthesizing the relationship between poverty and CAN, there is a real need for more specific systematic reviews targeting different conceptualizations of poverty, for example individual/family level; neighbourhood; quasi-experimental studies, and not just single conceptualisations, such as ‘low family SES’. Furthermore, as Slack, Berger and Noyes’s (2017) collection of papers identifies, income alone does not seem to be a sufficient focal point for efforts to understand the poverty-maltreatment relationship. Indeed, when considering international evidence, it is important to attend to the full spectrum of socioeconomic markers, both at the individual (or family) level as well as the neighbourhood and societal level. Moreover, future work should investigate different conceptualizations of poverty, SES and inequality, across the social gradient, through an ‘intersectional’ lens, exploring differences between genders, age, disability, parental factors and ethnicity.

Within our systematic review, only one meta-analysis was identified investigating the relationship between poverty and different forms of CAN. Future work using meta-analytic techniques to establish both the direction and strength of relationship between poverty and CAN, and indeed between different measures of poverty and types of abuse, are needed. Future research should pool effect sizes from the current evidence base, producing robust estimates of the relationship between poverty (conceptualised in a variety of ways, for example: family level, quasi experimental, neighbourhood level, inequalities) and CAN. Where heterogeneity between studies in a particular domain is too great, data harmonisation methods should be explored to facilitate secondary level data analysis.

Building on Maguire-Jack et al.'s (2021) scoping review, future studies should use experimental designs, such as Randomized Control Trials or quasi-experimental designs, to evaluate the potential economic support programs can have on reducing CAN. Qualitative and mixed methods studies that incorporate parents, children, and young people as co-producers will also be important methodologies to utilise, enhancing our understanding of the effect poverty has on CAN.

In order to address these future research needs, and conduct comparative research effectively, more work needs to be done to produce internationally recognised definitions and measures of CAN and poverty. This harmonization of definitions also needs to be conducted within new data collection systems. Currently, across countries, the data needed to examine the questions posed by the relationship between poverty and CAN are only partially available. In England, for example, there is a lack of individual level data about parents and their circumstances – with the exception of a single study (Department for Education, 2022). While some data will and should be collected as part of individual studies, the creation of long-term sets of administrative data and links between them would be a much more efficient and valuable way forward. Policy makers would benefit from international discussions about what data would be valuable, to inform future national research infrastructures.

Implications for Practitioners

Despite these limitations, evidence from these 7 reviews shows that poverty is consistently and associated with maltreatment. Therefore, child protection practitioners should incorporate ways of talking with families about complex and emotive issues surrounding poverty or to help families deal with or exit poverty (Saar-Heiman and Krumer-Nevo, 2021). Social workers'

attitudes reflect the range of those in wider society with repeated examples of unhelpful narratives reinforcing a focus on individual responsibility. Too often, families' socioeconomic status is not seen as core business, with agency priorities, structures and models of practice shown to be an obstacle to poverty aware practice. As a result, parents too often feel a lack of recognition, that their concerns and priorities are not understood or heard, and view services as a source of threat rather than help (Saar-Heiman, 2021). This review suggests that poverty-aware practice may contribute to reducing child maltreatment.

The work of Krumer-Nevo (2016) in developing the 'Poverty-Aware Paradigm' (PAP), and subsequent evaluation work by Saar-Heiman and colleagues, provide several useful insights concerning child protection practice in relation to poverty and CAN. Reflecting on examples from the authors' research and practice within their critical framework for policy and practice, Saar-Heiman and Gupta (2020, pp. 1180-1181) list several ways practice should be adapted and focused in contexts of poverty:

- Undertaking an audit, ideally with families, that aims to 'poverty-proof' local policies and practices (as noted above for national policies). For example, ensuring all families have access to income maximisation, debt management, employment and housing advice.
- Poverty being made central to work with families and visible in assessments, reviews, case conferences and court reports, including the material and affective impacts on their lives and relationships.
- Making the provision of financial and practical support to help children and families more timely, with carefully developed safeguards about the ways in which such assistance is applied.

- Developing a poverty-aware workforce, which includes critically reflecting on practitioners' own values and assumptions regarding poverty and risk.
- Recognising the importance of standing-by families and the symbolic capital and emotional benefits to families of having a professional bear witness to and challenge the injustices that many face in dealings with public institutions and wider society.
- Understanding what life is like for a specific child and his/her family, in his/her home and his/her community. This can provide more detailed and nuanced pictures of how families both struggle in poverty, but also actively resist on a daily basis.
- Reflective and effective supervision to recognise the inherent challenges of child protection work, as in some cases there will be a need to remove children from their families.

However, these suggestions are largely untested, especially in relation to their ability to improve outcomes for children and their families. Moreover, they address the individualistic and case-by-case approach which characterises contemporary child protection practice and the power imbalance between service providers and families requiring help. What these examples do highlight is the complexities practitioners face in the context of poverty and CAN.

Implications for Policy Makers

Although more research is needed, there is sufficient evidence to make three recommendations for policy makers in relation to poverty and CAN. Firstly, national policies which reduce inequalities which cut family poverty and address insecurities in income, housing and employment would be expected to reduce CAN. In many countries, policies on areas such as benefits, housing and migration are sometimes in conflict with the principle that the welfare of children should be paramount (Bywaters et al., 2020b). Secondly, the children's social care system needs to engage more effectively with the material needs of children and families. Too

often families feel misunderstood, blamed, mistrusted, and threatened rather than helped (Saar-Heiman and Krumer-Nevo, 2021). Thirdly, as noted above, there needs to be a major programme of research. This will require a national strategy for collecting, analysing and co-producing data, in addition to a programme of funding linked to key research questions about poverty, inequality and intersectionality.

Conclusion

Overall, this body of work provides strong evidence that poverty, measured in multiple ways, is associated with increased levels of one or more forms of CAN, using multiple definitions and drawing on data from numerous developed countries with varied legislative and policy approaches (Chandler et al., 2020; Conrad-Hiebner and Byram, 2020; Hunter and Flores, 2021; Landers et al., 2019; Van IJzendoorn et al., 2019). While there are few detailed, precise replications, the fact that a common overarching outcome is apparent from such a diverse body of work gives confidence in the validity of the relationship between poverty and CAN.

The recent work reviewed here not only sheds light on the relationship between poverty and CAN, but raises questions about the focus, priorities and discourse surrounding child protection social work. This requires a reprioritisation of the rights of families in child protection practice. It also requires the state to address its responsibilities in shaping political, economic, and social systems which facilitate conditions that reduce inequalities between families and in children's life chances and outcomes. It is important that future research agendas and systems investigate upstream national policies that frame family life, including policies that have contradictory consequences for CAN, as well as downstream local policy making and practice.

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