

R-011 Identifying and understanding inequalities in child welfare intervention rates: comparative studies in four UK countries – QUB

The aim of this study is to examine the role of deprivation in explaining differences in key children's services outcomes between and within local authorities in four UK countries – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. A recent pilot study (the Coventry study) funded by the Nuffield Foundation examined child welfare intervention rates within the midlands region in England. This study found new evidence that very large differences in a child's chance of being on a child protection plan (or register) or being 'looked after' in state care between and within local authorities, and between ethnic groups, are strongly associated with social disadvantage. It proposed that these differences in intervention rates are examples of child welfare inequalities with close parallels to those found in health and education. This new study seeks to test this hypothesis by accessing national data sets to extend the English study and replicate the investigation in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This research is important: child welfare systems in the UK are under profound stress because of growing demand and the current squeeze of austerity measures; child welfare services are expensive but provide a crucial investment in our children's future; and protecting children's safety and development is a core function of the state. Understanding child welfare services and the role that deprivation plays will contribute to primary and secondary prevention planning. This study also seeks to contribute to the evidence, theory and methodological gaps in child welfare inequalities.