What does the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and current cost-of-living crisis tell us about the connections between poverty, inequality and child protection?
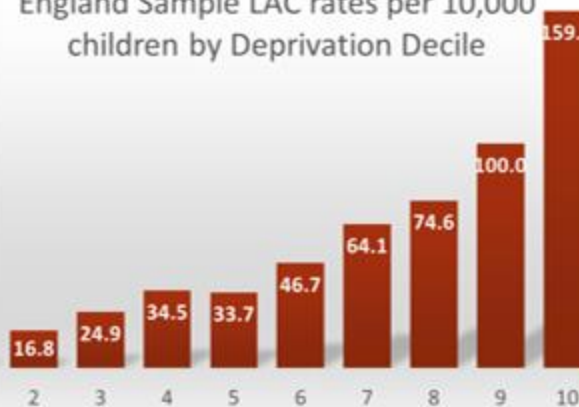
A CELCIS Emerging Insights Series Webinar

Prof. Anna Gupta

ROYAL HOLLOWAY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

A wider perspective on protecting children from harm

We need to tell another story from the current child protection story:

- One that moves away from individualised notions of risk to children of parents' actions or inactions

- To one that recognises the social determinants of harm and the economic, social and cultural barriers faced by most of the families.

- As well as the protective capacities within families and communities and how these can be mobilised.

Intersectionality and poverty

'Structural inequalities – including along lines of gender, race or ethnicity, disability and nationality or migration status – have intrinsic connections to economic disadvantage.

These factors shape how wealth and prosperity is shared across Scotland, and how and where poverty is concentrated.

Intersectionality is the idea that these different factors are not separate single issues but rather interconnected forms of injustice – creating distinct experiences of privilege and oppression'

[An intersectional approach to poverty and inequality in Scotland - Digital Poverty Alliance](#)

Structural inequalities exacerbated
From the individual to the social

- Then comes COVID-19. Far from the great leveller, mortality from COVID-19 follows the social gradient. COVID-19, of course, is caused by a virus. But the 'causes of the causes' are the same social conditions that give rise to the social gradient in health, more generally (Michael Marmot, 2020)

Build Back Fairer: The COVID-19 Marmot Review | The Health Foundation

- The disproportionate death toll among Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities has fast forwarded recognition of the inter-related nature of inequalities with evidence that such communities were 'under protected and over exposed' due to the nature of their occupations, living in overcrowded housing, health inequalities and racism .

https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Runnymede%20Covid19%20Survey%20report%20v2.pdf.

Crisis, What Crisis?

- Cost-of-living crisis has, like COVID-19, exposed and intensified deep fault lines in our society

- Many people are struggling but this is not an 'equal opportunity' crisis!

- Indeed the term 'crisis' is problematic - after 12 + years of austerity and the 'hostile environment'

Co-POWeR: Consortium on Practices of Well-being and Resilience in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Families and Communities

Work Package 2

WP2: Children, Young People and their families investigates significant implications for children/young people in BAMEFC who experience COVID-19 negatively due to disproportionate socio-economic and psychosocial impacts on their families and communities (ADCS 2020).

Prof Claudia Bernard
Prof Anna Gupta
Prof Monica Lakhanpaul
Dr Teresa Peres
Dr Anita Sharma

Work Package 2

Focus groups and interviews with:

66 children and young people aged 12 – 19

55 parents or carers

19 professionals

Birmingham, Leeds, London, Cardiff, Milton Keynes

Hybrid - online and face-to-face
 Included workshops with Co-POWeR's creative team

Photobook and on-line photography exhibition:
(https://www.pahus.org/co-power)

Co-POWeR

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory

- Belief that racism is normal or ordinary, not aberrant, in UK society;

- Race as a social construction;

- Intersectionality and anti-essentialism;

- Importance of voice or counter-narrative

Cultural wealth theory

Cultural wealth theory provided a means for us to search for non-deficit ways of understanding how individual, family, community and environmental factors impact how participants nurture their emotional resources, in an environment where their self-esteem and self-worth is constantly undermined by racism (Yosso, 2005).
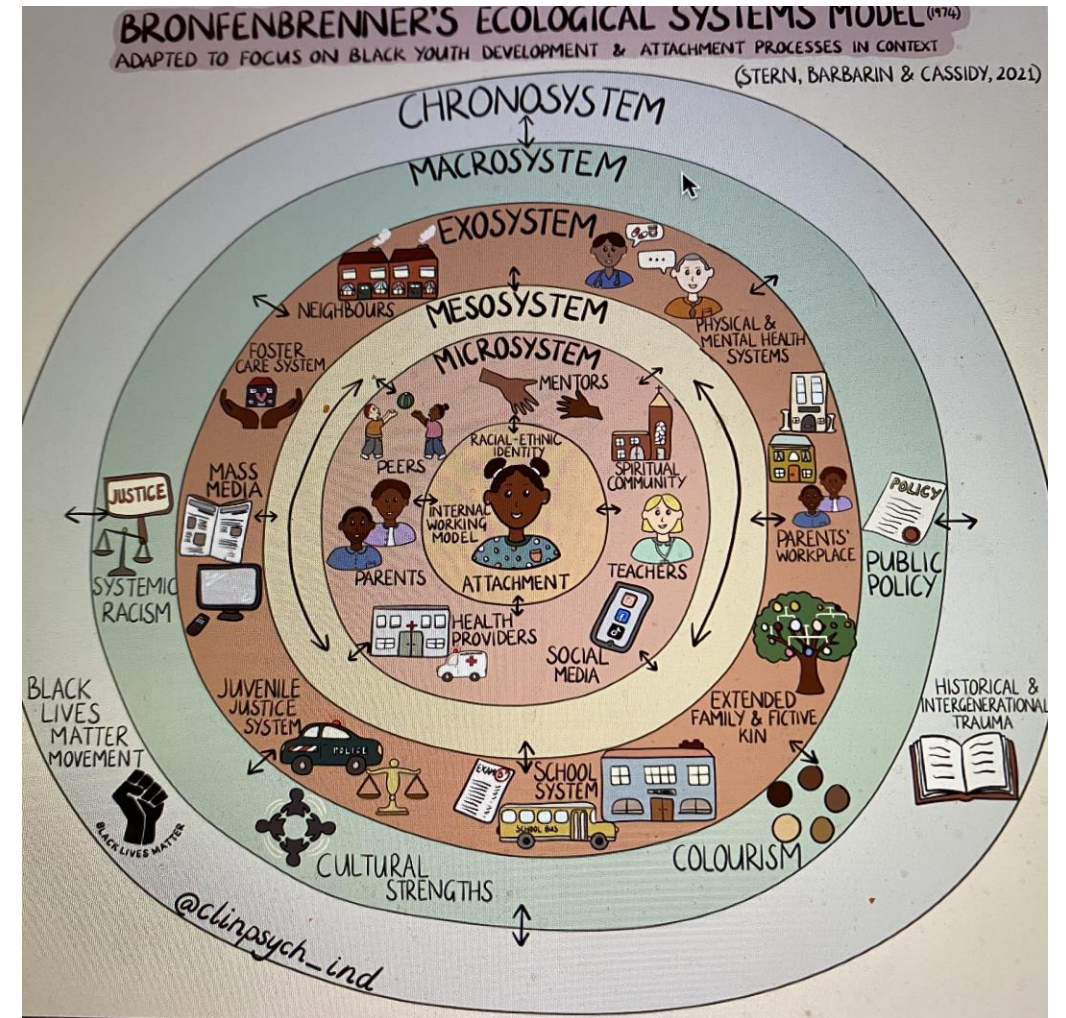
Socio-ecological approach

Some key findings – living with racism before, during and after the pandemic

Lack of trust – police but also for some education, health and social services

Black Lives Matters – re-evaluating relationships, building connections and engaging in activism

Intersectional impacts – poverty, housing, digital exclusion….

Second-class citizens – treated with suspicion and 'less deserving'

Young people told many stories of how the pandemic negatively impacted their mental wellbeing

Impact on education

- Varied access to laptop schemes,

- Lack of space in home,

- Access to internet,

- Parental ability to support education…

- Uncertainty over assessments, happy not to sit exams, previous relationship with teacher / racism influencing grades

- Varied support from school, BLM reading group, counsellors

Impact on relationships

- Anxiety about parents going to work / or not

- Worries about family abroad

- Supporting friends remotely, coping with sudden loss of contact

- Connecting differently, digital divide

- Re-evaluating friendships – especially in connection with discussions about Black Lives Matter

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Over - policing disproportionately impacting on young Black men

I told them I was going on a run, I thought they were going to be calm and then they were like 'oh yeah, go off, go on, do your run.' So I started running and I swear the car just followed me for 10 minutes. Because they thought I was lying. So they were just like, 'okay just go on your run' and then they trailed behind me for 10 minutes in their car.' (Black African, M, 17, Cardiff)

Some policeman came up to me and put me in handcuffs and they said that I was being a very bad boy and they accused me of stealing an electric scooter off a man and I wasn't in the wrong.... I felt very discriminated against and dehumanised- because I was just a normal kid walking on the street and ...'
(Black African, M, 13, London)

When you bring things up such as George Floyd they're like, yeah, that's just the police, that's just how they are. So we try to challenge them and try and engage them, hold on, this is not normal, this is not how people should behave'
(Youth worker)

KARTIK@PAHUS.ORG

COVID-19 exacerbated the racialised access of Black males to public spaces

The prominence of the **Black Lives Matter movement** and amplification of racial injustices during the first lockdown, encouraged many young participants to speak candidly about racial identity and belonging and engage in local, national and global activism aimed at tackling systemic racial discrimination

– but also re-evaluation of friendships

Naming race and racism

"And many of them [peers] would call like me the "P" word and stuff like, I had a few white friends, and they were really nice people. They just, they used slurs that's all. But, I say that's all but it's very bad... But now it's [calling out racism] like, it's more defensible, especially because like race is not talked about as much as we think...it's just little microaggressions, and like, sometimes many of us like look past that because we don't want to create a commotion.." (Bangladeshi female, 17)

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Parenting in a Pandemic– Combating Structural and Societal Inequalities

Anticipating and receiving support – impact of racist assumptions, stereotypes and the 'hostile environment'

- **Treated with suspicion** – being questioned by the GP receptionist before being able to access NHS services

- **Seen as less 'deserving' -**

"And it's not right and we are not asking to have it special, but because we live in this society as…and we're participating in it, they should look at us and say 'look, they have a need, that needs to be fulfilled as well'…adapt services" **Fear of being stigmatized and judged a bad parent – lack of trust**

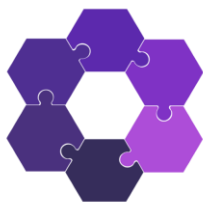- **Fear of a hostile response (NRPF)**

"things were very rough and people advised me 'go to job centre, go and meet them, tell them you need help or Citizens Advice.' What they told me they said, 'we can't help you because the visa you have says no recourse to public funds. ***But we can take your children away from you.' I said 'Are you insane? You are going to take my child away from me?*** *…You are just clearly intimidating me and taking advantage of my colour, and doing all sorts of things, which is very wrong.'"*

Community

Impact on relationships outside of home

- **Importance of support from community** hubs, youth groups, church, mosque, sports clubs

- sense of safety/ place of belonging

- providing for basic needs of marginalized families.

- providing information cross cultural / linguistic groups

-

'We are both [he and his brother] quite lucky in the sense that we know quite a lot of shop owners as well. So we could buy things that are often cheaper prices maybe, because they like to help the community…we live in a Tamil community, and we generally have a connection with all the Tamil people, and quite a lot of them do own shops … So connections with, like, friend groups, or families and stuff like that really did help us' (Asian male, 17).

'I would like to say that throughout the days that the youth club is open, I really enjoy the bonding time between our fellow students and our staff ….we get to meet new people and it's just very fun because there's a range of activities you can do here and the people are very respectful and they respect each other's choices and we often listen to each other and what we want' (Black African, F, 14, London).

"they [the school] ran out of laptops, and then, you know, they had to make me wait for months and obviously that made me slack on my work… I'm just using the one from the boxing gym, they helped me out out a lot" (P67 Arab, male, aged 18)

Co-POWeR

Changing the future for children, young people and families

Building trust and safe spaces

- The need for safe spaces to support mental health and wellbeing was a consistent theme running through the participants' accounts. They powerfully articulated their challenges by foregrounding issues concerning justice and fairness and the ways in which their experiences were impacted. Importantly, their narratives elucidated a deep mistrust of public services, including the police, the justice system, and social services; most worryingly, schools were not necessarily experienced as safe spaces.

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Professor John H. McKendrick

What does the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and current cost-of-living crisis tell us about the connections between poverty, inequality and child protection?

GCU
Glasgow Caledonian University

SPIRU
SCOTTISH POVERTY & INEQUALITY RESEARCH UNIT

CELCIS Insights Webinar
University of Glasgow
October 5th, 2023

Children in poverty in Scotland (2019-22)

250,000

Two thirds living in a household with an least one adult in work (69%)

GCU
Glasgow Caledonian
University

SPIRU
SCOTTISH POVERTY & INEQUALITY
RESEARCH UNIT

Brighter futures begin with GCU

Coping Strategies Deployed in Scotland

Doing it yourself, not paying for services	Re-use [clothing] within family	Seek bargains and bulk buy	Prioritise	Don't pay
Travel distances for cheaper goods	Use black market	Spend wisely/carefully	Cut back	
Ring-fence saving of small sums	Seek interest free credit	Sell goods to raise money	Budget for end of month shortage	
Delay purchase	Use cheaper outlets	Co-ordinate family buying of presents	Focused shopping	
Doing without	Use charity shops	Buy cheaper products	Forward planning	Forego quality goods

Low Income Households With Children in Scotland
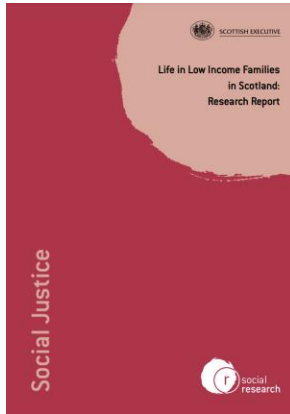
- Back in 2003, I published a literature review and research report for the then Scottish Executive on the topic we are discussing today (https://webarchive.nrscotland.gov.uk/3000/https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2003/09/18143/26158)

- Hopefully, we won't be meeting again in 2043 to discuss the issue again

The research was full of powerful and harrowing extracts of the lived experience of not having enough in Scotland, for example: *My son's away at school today with sewn up trousers because I can't afford to buy him a new pair of trousers at the moment, because he's wrecked all his other ones. And **my trainers are filthy because my daughter had them on … [the] ones that she usually wears were wet, so she couldn't wear them, so she had to wear mine**. (Peripheral housing estate in a large rural town)*
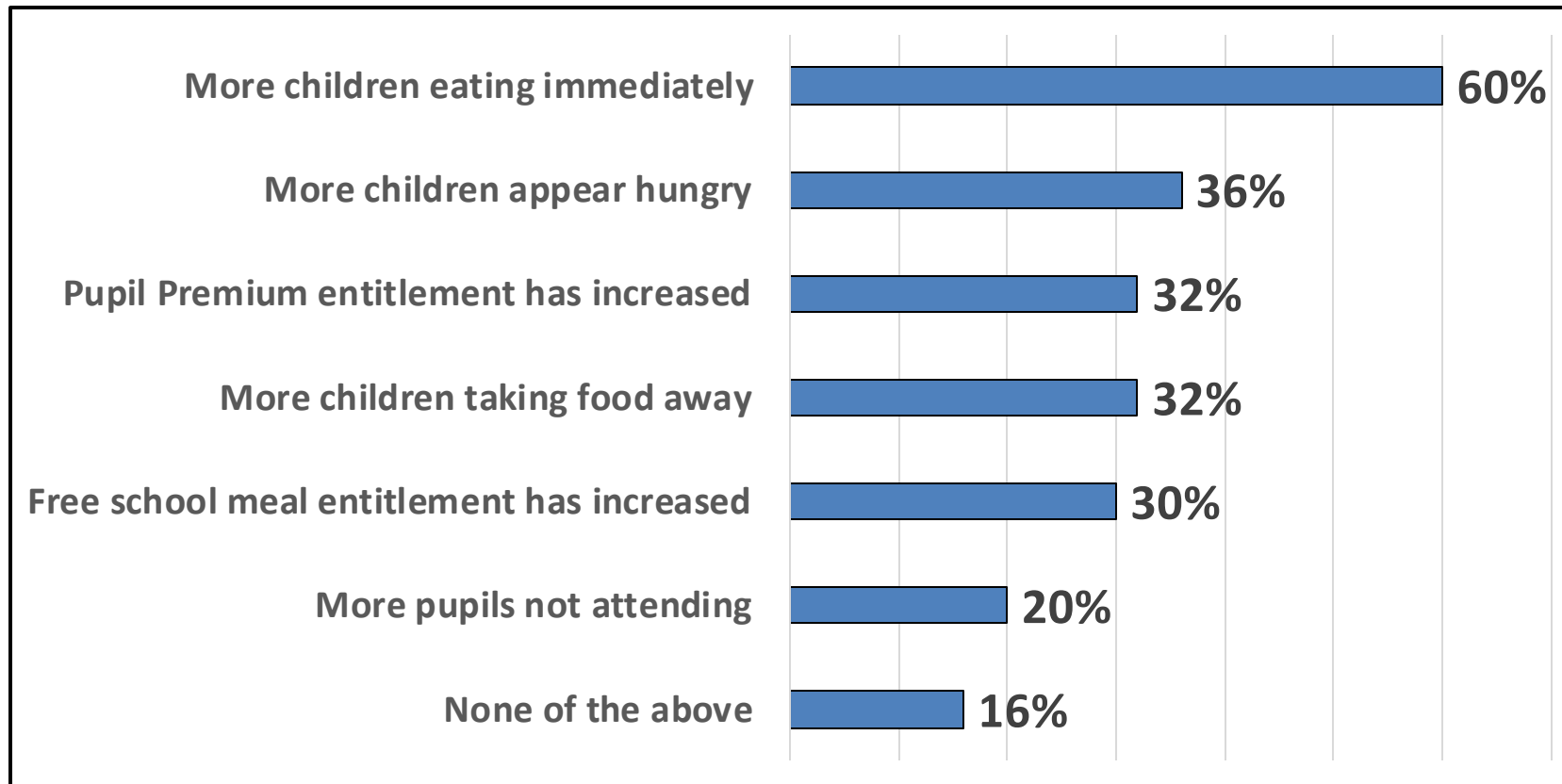
Basic needs are not being met in 2023

wee guy in particular who would go into school in the morning because they'll give him his lunch and by the time he's got to us which is say 10 o'clock, he's ate his lunch because he gets no breakfast and he's absolutely starving by the time he gets here and so his ability to focus is minimal. … we actually started a breakfast club.   We've got boys trying to steal loaves of bread and stuff from the breakfast club because it goes home to feed their 4 wee brothers that all lived in the one house, you know.   Their level of poverty is unbelievable.

Could we do more? Absolutely. We could do loads more. I would love to see a lounge opened up continually just churning out food for people, because food insecurity is probably the biggest issues. Malnutrition is one of the biggest issues

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More children hungry in class this year?

Category	Percentage
More children eating immediately	60%
More children appear hungry	36%
Pupil Premium entitlement has increased	32%
More children taking food away	32%
Free school meal entitlement has increased	30%
More pupils not attending	20%
None of the above	16%

More: *N.I.(11%),* England (33%), Scotland (46%), *Wales (52%)*

Extension of the child protection ecosystem

- Public health approach to policing.

- Fit and food projects from SPFL Trusts and other community groups.

- Schools extending their wrap-round provision of food.

An ecosystem under strain: 2023

we are in a situation now where we just can't fulfil everything and you know years ago it was very much we'll jump at anything to get ourselves out there and that, and now we are at a stage where we just have to be careful of what we are committing ourselves to.

The impact of the cost-of-living crisis extending its social reach

- Solidarity.

- Ephemeral solidarity.

- Emergent divisions.

- Deepening divisions.

Calls for poverty-stricken Scots criminals to escape punishment amid cost-of-living crisis

John Holland McKendrick, professor of social justice at Glasgow Caledonian University, hopes the police and prosecutors will go easy on desperate offenders.

Bookmark   SHARE   Comments 11   By
Rory Cassidy Reporter
04:30, 19 SEP 2022
UPDATED 15:21, 22 SEP 2022

Jigsaw · SEPTEMBER 19, 2022

What we saying here? He wants the authorities to say we won't care about any shoplifting you intend to do thru the winter? Let me know if this gets the thumbs up, I'll grab myself a trolley.

REPLY   👍 2

thomas111 · SEPTEMBER 19, 2022

Go Easy on desperate offenders forgod sake yea let them off with stealing/ robbing what a load of pish you break the law then u get delt with next the prisnors in the jails will be saying it's a against their human rights or mental health being locked up the law needs to toughen up   EDITED

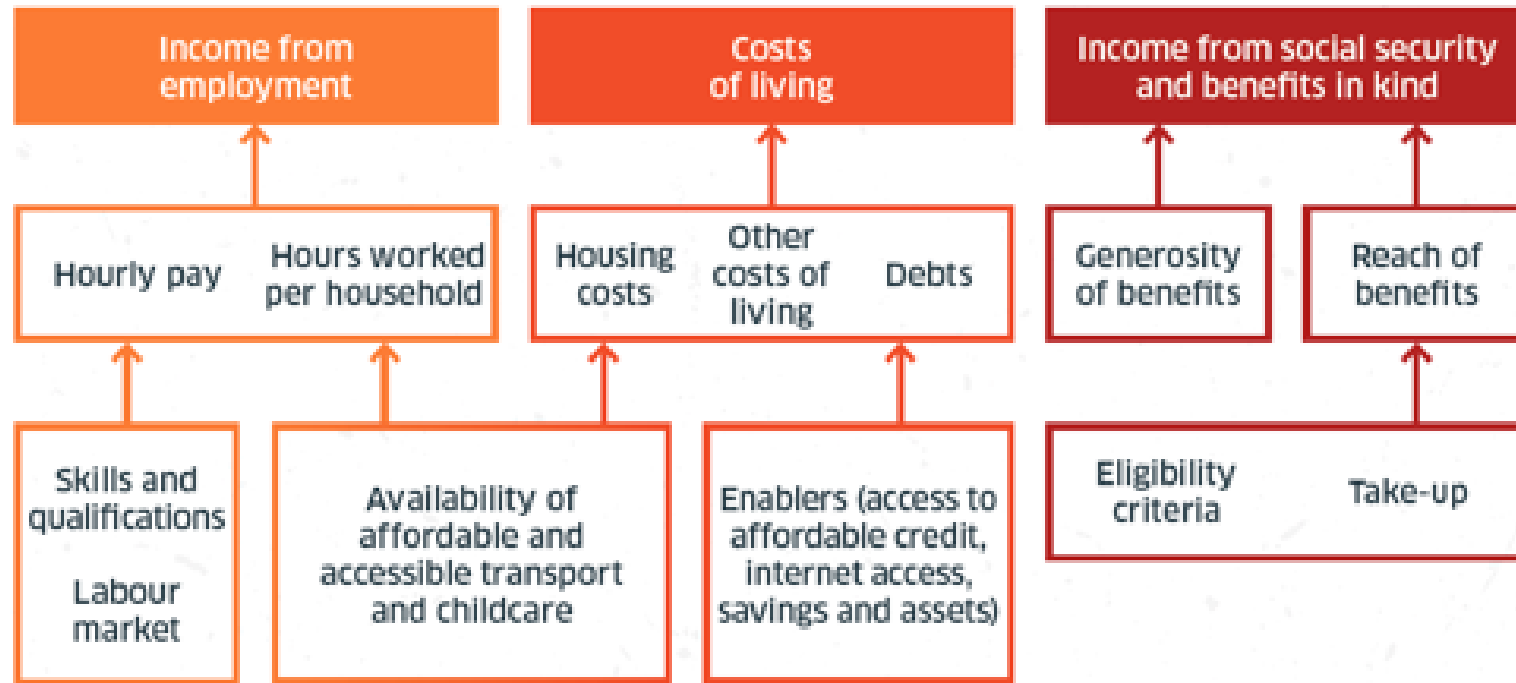REPLY   👍 6   SHARE   REPORT

Friend or foe?

Priority actions locally

CHILD POVERTY MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK

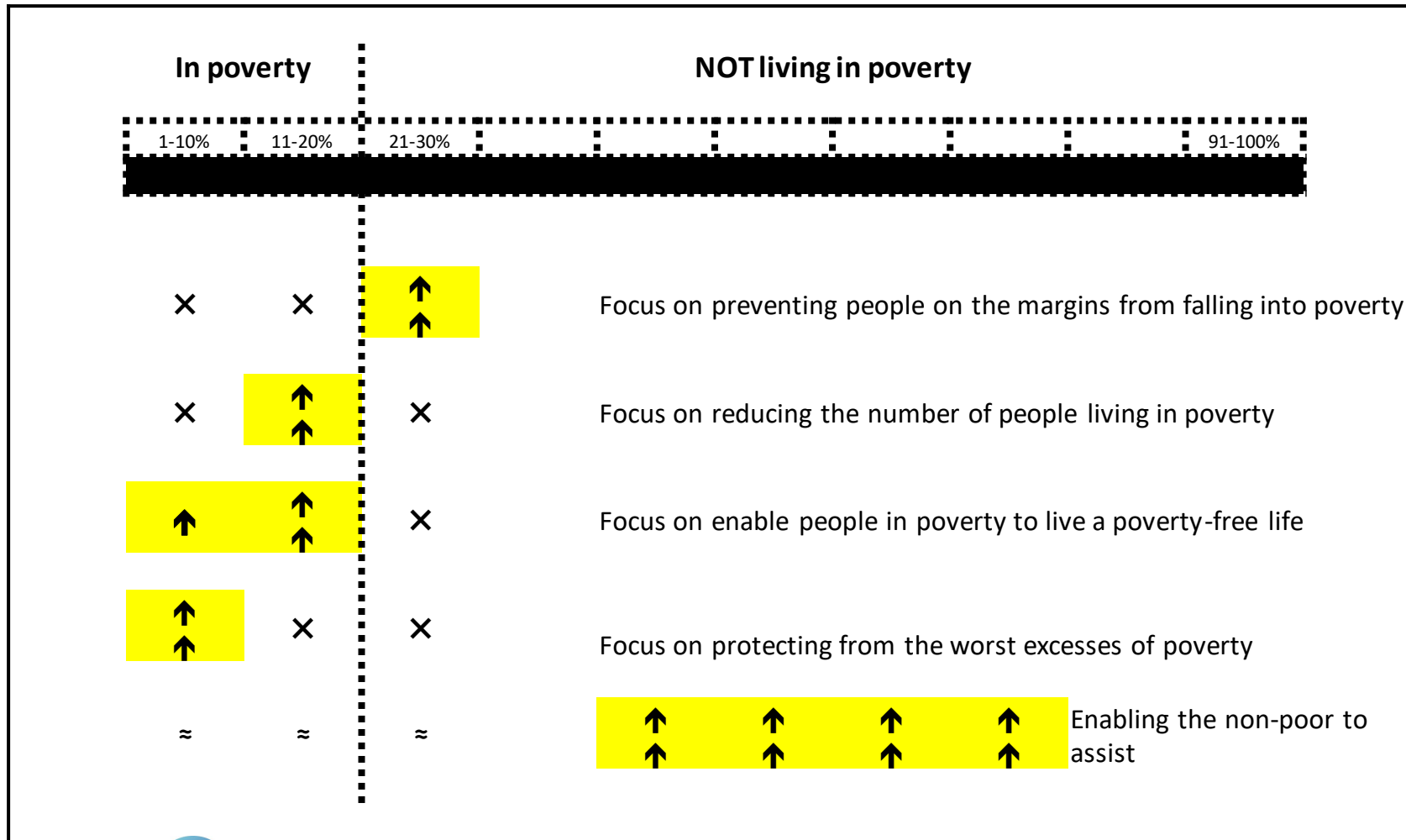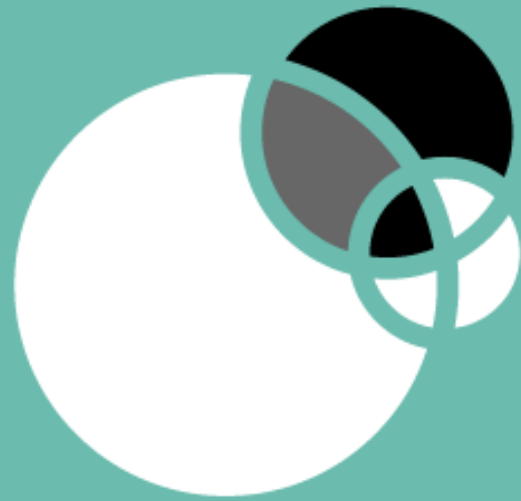| Income from employment	Costs of living	Income from social security and benefits in kind
Hourly pay — Hours worked per household	Housing costs — Other costs of living — Debts	Generosity of benefits — Reach of benefits
Skills and qualifications / Labour market — Availability of affordable and accessible transport and childcare	Enablers (access to affordable credit, internet access, savings and assets)	Eligibility criteria — Take-up

Strategic priorities: the options

- **Enabling people not living in poverty to increase the opportunities for more people to live a poverty-free life**

- **Reducing the number of people living in poverty**

- **Preventing people on the margins of poverty from falling into poverty**

- **Enabling people living in poverty to increase their chance of living a poverty-free life**

- **Protecting those living in poverty from the worst excesses of living with poverty**

Who is targeted by each option?
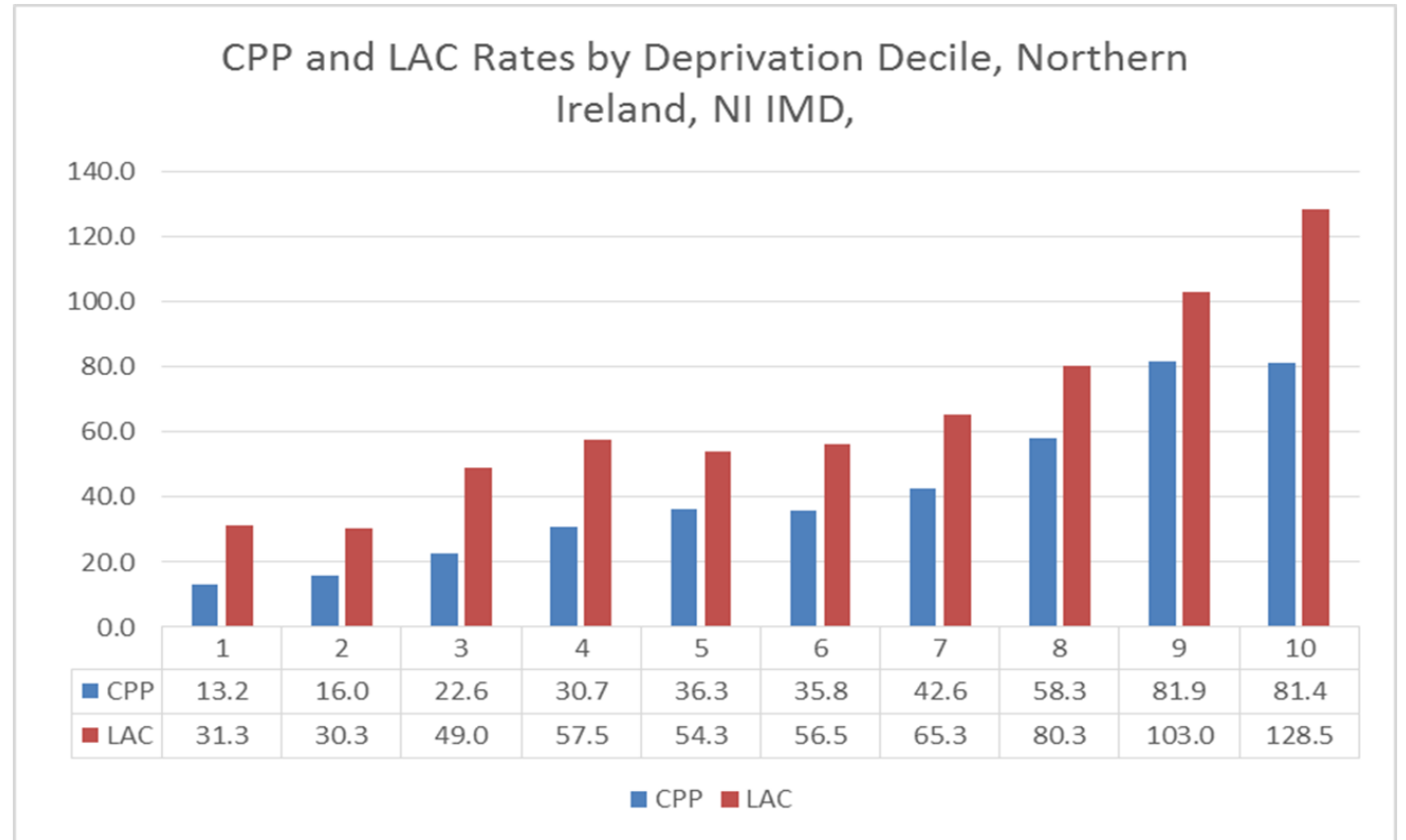
Project Overview

- **ESRC/ADRC funded 5 year project**
- **Administrative Data Research Centre – Northern Ireland (ADRC-NI)**

  - a partnership between Ulster University and Queen's University, Belfast.
  - part of the wider ADR UK network, a partnership between universities, government departments and agencies, national statistics authorities, funders and the wider research community
  - access to safe, secure and unidentifiable government administrative data such as education, census and health and social care data, researchers to understanding improve policy and improved public services.

Aims

- **Examine the changing relationship between disadvantage and child welfare interventions in Northern Ireland**

- **What do we mean by child welfare interventions?**
  Children in contact with child and family social work as: children in need referrals (CiN); children subject to child protection registration (CPR); or Looked after children (LAC)
- **What we mean by inequality?**
  when children and/or their parents face unequal chances, experiences or outcomes of involvement with child welfare services that are systematically associated with structural social disadvantage – area level deprivation

Rationale

- Builds on previous work of the Child Welfare Inequalities Project (CWIP, 2015; Bywaters et al., 2020)

- Identified an association between area level deprivation and increased risk of a child being on a child-protection plan or becoming looked-after across the four UK countries

- The relationship was less marked in NI (CPR x 6, LAC x 4)

- Longitudinal research in England and Wales has identified increasing inequality in child welfare interventions, particularly with respect to LAC (Elliott, 2020; Bennet et al., 2020).

CPP and LAC Rates by Deprivation Decile, Northern Ireland, NI IMD,

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
CPP	13.2	16.0	22.6	30.7	36.3	35.8	42.6	58.3	81.9	81.4
LAC	31.3	30.3	49.0	57.5	54.3	56.5	65.3	80.3	103.0	128.5

■ CPP ■ LAC

Northern Ireland data

- SOSCARE data (2010-2021) accessed via the Honest Broker Service

- Social Services Care Administrative and Records Environment – records all requests for service, assessments and intervention

- Postcode of family of origin at time of referral linked to Super Output Area (SOA)

- SOAs are a small area geography - 890 SOAs with an average population of 2,000 people

- SOA converted to deprivation decile based on NI Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM; NISRA, 2010; NISRA, 2017.) This is an area-based measure that assesses seven different domains. Each of 890 SOAs are ranked from most deprived (1) to least deprived (890)

% Child Population 0-19 years by deprivation decile (2017)
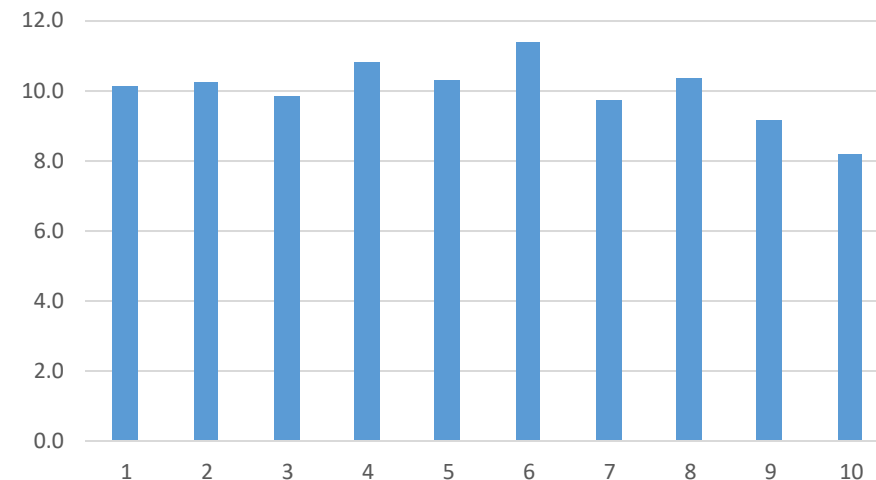
Trend Analysis

- Identified numbers of children subject to different levels of intervention in individual years by deprivation decile for referrals, CP investigations, CP Registrations (2010-17) and looked after children (2010-2020)

- Produced various comparative measures of inequality:

  - **The Relative Ratio of Inequality (RE)** – a relative measure of inequality based on the number in decile 1 divided by the number in decile 10.

  - The Slope Index of Inequality (SII) – an absolute inequality measure that represents the absolute difference between the top and bottom decile while accounting for the variation in the entire distribution using regression modelling and cumulative population proportions

  - **The Relative Index of Inequality (RII)** – a relative measure of inequality that is based on the SII. It is presented as the % by which the most deprived decile is higher than the NI average for that intervention

Data Quality

- Not all HSCTs use SOSCARE, some use PARIS and there is planned move to ENCOMPASS ongoing

- NI wide data re referrals, investigations and registrations only available from 2010-2017 - only 2 HSCTs currently still use SOSCARE and there are no plans to transfer PARIS data to the HBS

- LAC data remained on SOSCARE for the longest so can use data up until 2020, although it should be noted that this does not include the BHSCT from 2018/19 onward

- HBS figures rarely track official statistics exactly, this is primarily due to data migration to PARIS, as well as changes in recording practices implemented in different HSCTS at different time periods

- However, NI-wide figures tend to be within 5-10% and follow the same trends evident in the official data.
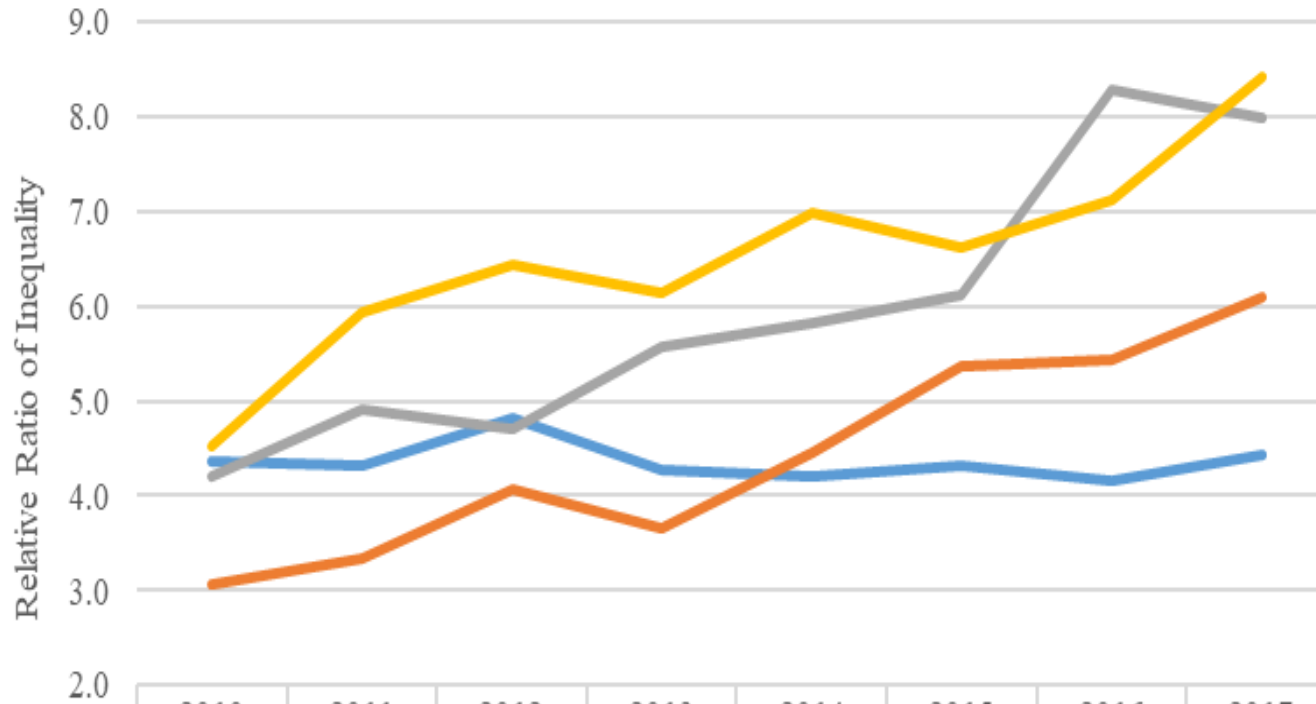
NI Children's Social Care Trends (2010 – 2022)
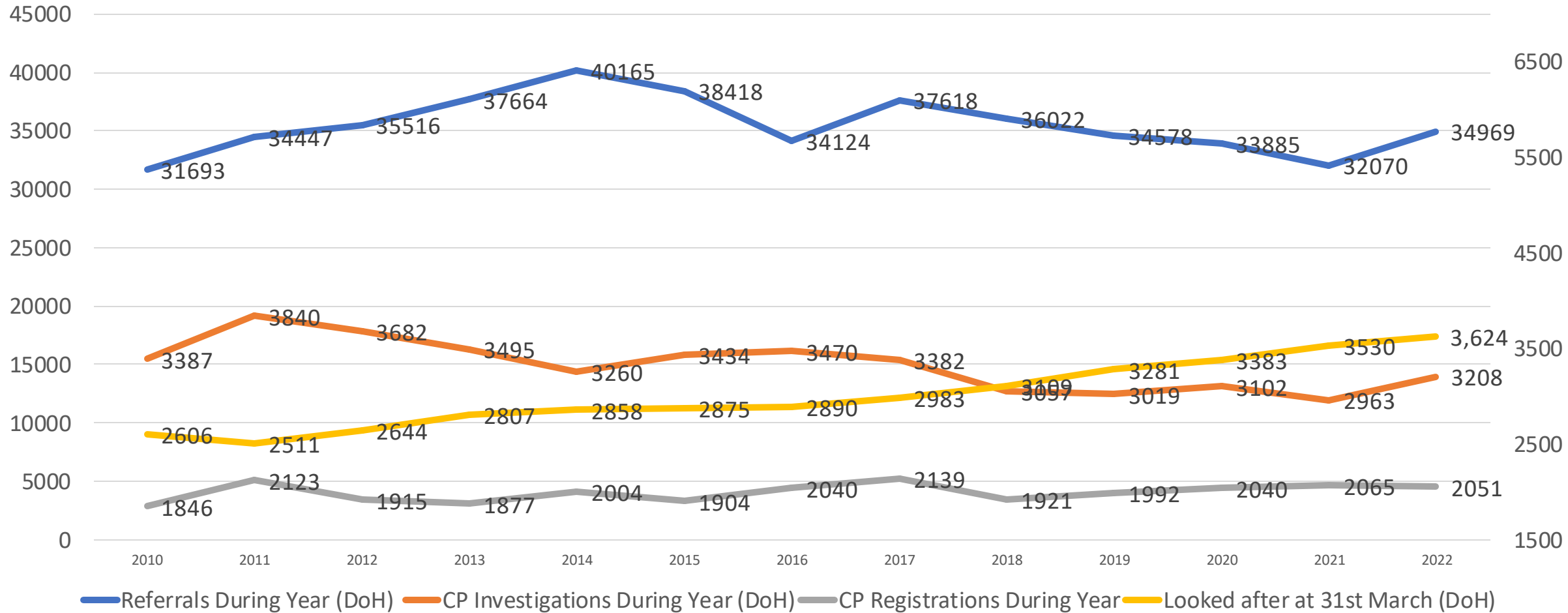
- **Referrals increasing 2010-2014, downward trend since 2014**
- **Investigation rate relatively steady and trended slightly downward**
- **Increasing child protection registrations**
- **Increasing LAC rates at 31st March, although annual admissions rates have declined slightly**

The Relative Ratio of Inequality (2010 -2017)

a relative measure of inequality based on the number in decile 1 (most deprived) divided by the number in decile 10 (least deprived)

Figure 3 - The Relative Ratio of Inequality (2010 - 2017)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Children Referred	4.4	4.3	4.8	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.2	4.4
Children Investigated	3.1	3.3	4.1	3.7	4.5	5.4	5.4	6.1
Children Registered	4.2	4.9	4.7	5.6	5.8	6.1	8.3	8.0
Children Looked After	4.5	5.9	6.4	6.1	7.0	6.6	7.1	8.4

Children Referred 4 to 5 times more likely to come from the 10% most deprived

Children investigated during 2010 were 3 times more likely to come from the 10% most deprived areas, rising to 6 in 2017

Children registered during 2010 were 4 times more likely to come from the 10% most deprived areas rising to 8 in 2017

Children looked after during 2010 were 4.5 times more likely to come from the 10% most deprived areas, rising to 8.4 in 2017

The Relative Index of Inequality (2010 -2017)

a relative measure of inequality that is based on the SII which takes account of the variation in the entire distribution using regression modelling and cumulative population proportions

Figure 4 - The Relative Index of Inequality (2010 -2017)
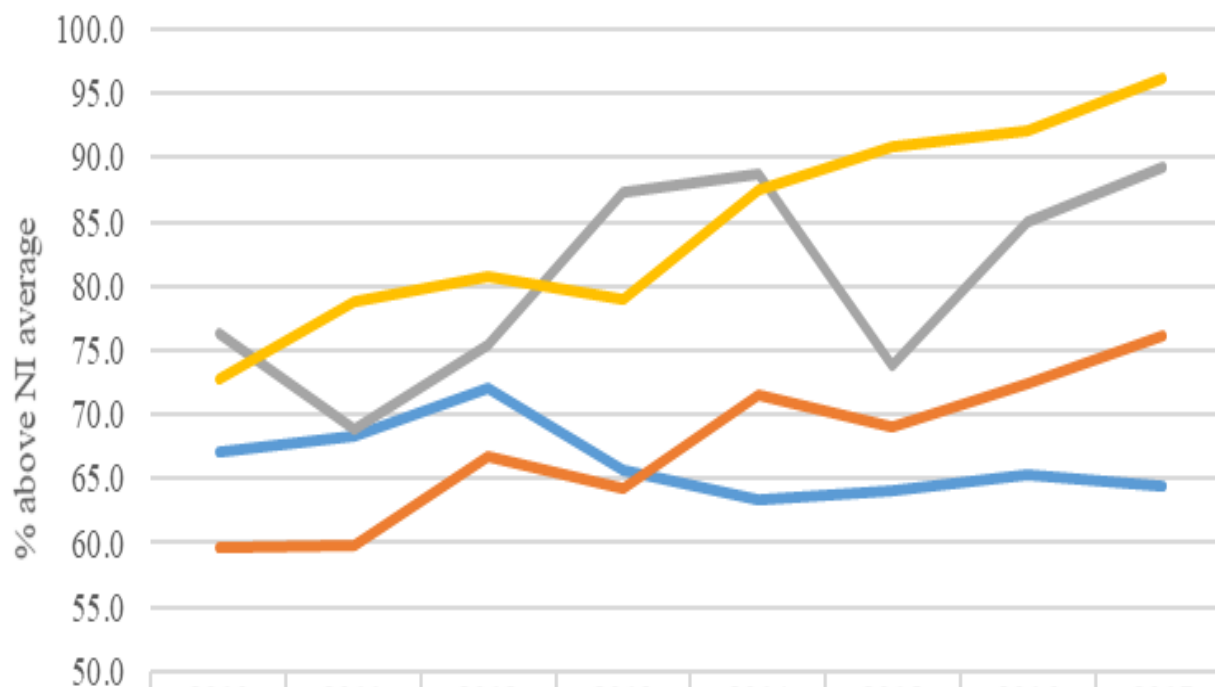
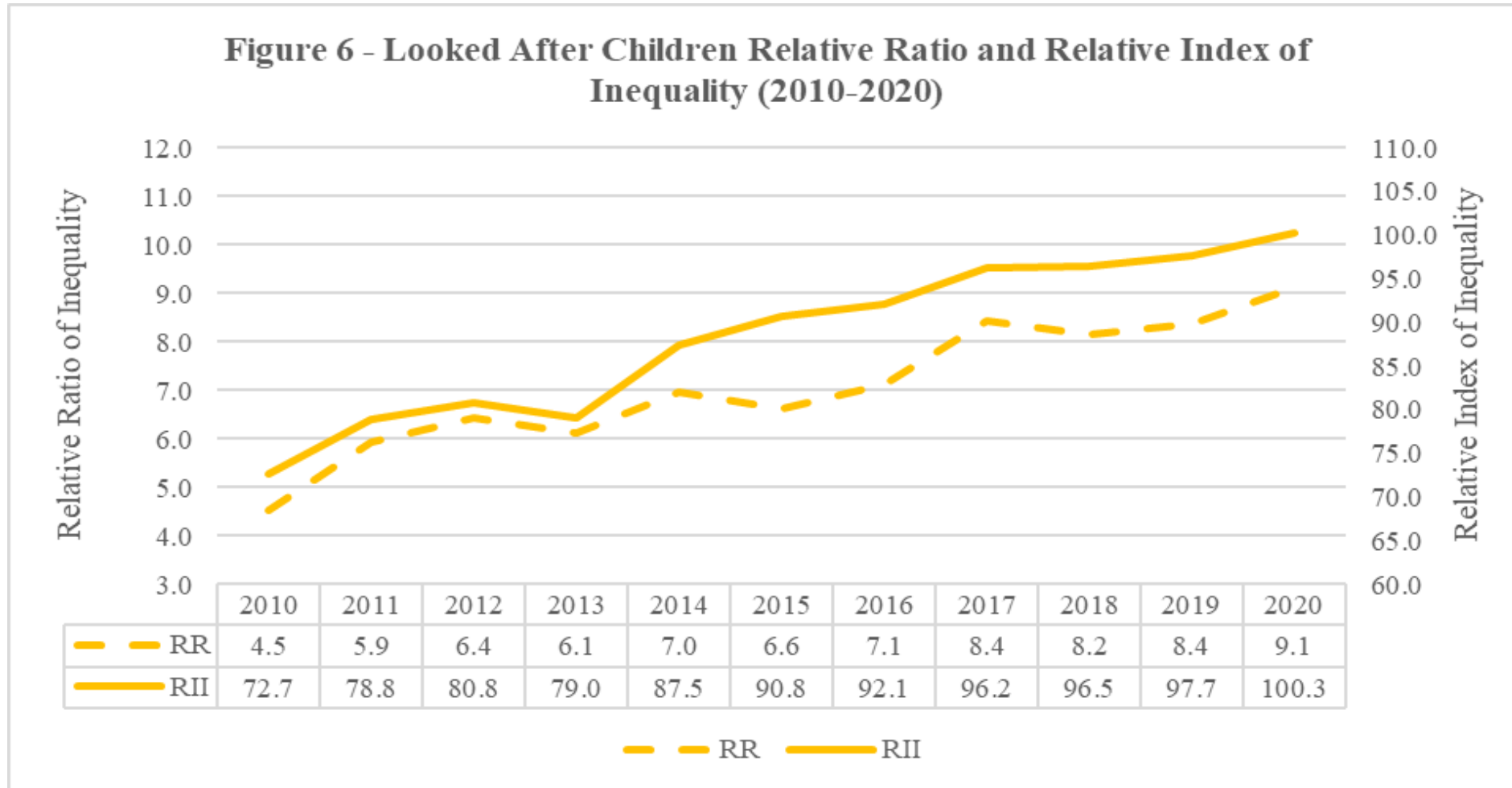|	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Children Referred	67.1	68.3	72.1	65.6	63.4	64.0	65.3	64.4
Children Investigated	59.5	59.7	66.7	64.3	71.5	68.9	72.4	76.2
Children Registered	76.3	68.9	75.5	87.2	88.8	73.9	85.0	89.2
Children Looked After	72.7	78.8	80.8	79.0	87.5	90.8	92.1	96.2

Referral - relative stability and with a slight downward trend with numbers from the most deprived areas being 67% high than the NI average, compared with 64% in 2017

Investigation - rising inequality with numbers from the most deprived areas being 59% higher than the NI average, compared with 76% in 2017

Registration - fluctuates but an overall upward trend with the numbers from the most deprived areas in 2010 being 76% higher than the NI average, compared with 89% in 2017

Looked after - rising inequality with numbers from the most deprived areas being 73% higher than the NI average, compared with 96% in 2017

Looked Children Relative Ratio and Relative Index of Inequality (2010-2020)

Figure 6 – Looked After Children Relative Ratio and Relative Index of Inequality (2010-2020)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
RR	4.5	5.9	6.4	6.1	7.0	6.6	7.1	8.4	8.2	8.4	9.1
RII	72.7	78.8	80.8	79.0	87.5	90.8	92.1	96.2	96.5	97.7	100.3

Gender and Age

- Trends in referral inequality between males and females tended be similar but at a slightly higher for females than males across all interventions

- The RII data for the different age groups showed an increase in the 0 to 4 age across intervention levels. This was especially clear in comparison with other age groups re referrals and LAC. Although registrations fluctuated, the 0-4 group showed an overall increasing trend

Figure S16 - RII - Looked after Children by age band (2010 - 2020)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
0 to 4	95%	89%	101%	95%	102%	114%	117%	117%	112%	110%	109%
5 to 9	75%	98%	90%	96%	96%	96%	85%	84%	86%	86%	86%
10 to 14	79%	95%	99%	93%	103%	100%	100%	100%	87%	85%	80%
15 to 19	67%	88%	98%	85%	95%	85%	89%	83%	87%	84%	81%
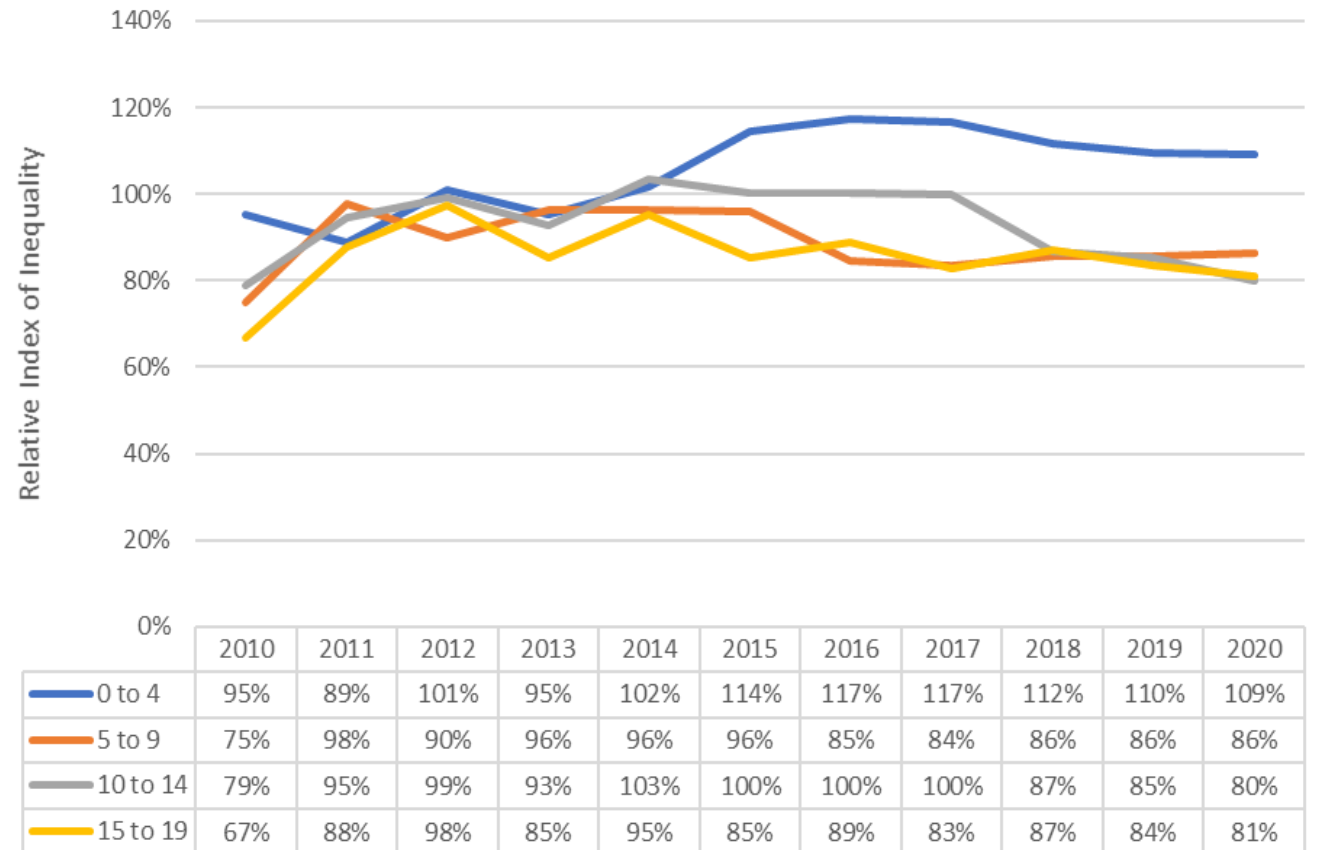
Key Points

Limitations

- availability of more current data; use of family of origin postcode only captures deprivation at one time point and does account for changes over time; deprivation is an area measure rather than individual measure of deprivation.

- **Summary**

- Across various measures of inequality, there is a clear and increasing social gradient in child welfare interventions over time, particularly at the higher levels of intervention

- Findings mirror research in England and Wales (Elliott, 2020; Bennet et al., 2020) and show that widening inequality is not simply a function of the wider system trends

- Similar to Elliott's Welsh study (2020), widening inequality amongst looked after children was largely driven by increasing numbers of children in care aged 0-4 age years from the most deprived 10% areas.

- As with Hood and Goldacre (2021), this trend re age was not just apparent for looked after children, but across all levels of intervention, including referrals.

Implications for Policy and Practice

- Independent Review of Children's Services in NI (Jones, 2023)

  - Recognised between poverty and deprivation

  - Recommended removal the two-child benefit cap and introducing a £20 child payment as an addition to a range of social security entitlement.

- Inclusion of deprivation in the annual children's social care statistics produced by the Department of Health would be of benefit in monitoring NI-wide changes over time and maintain focus on poverty/deprivation.

- Routine analysis of caseloads and outcomes by area level deprivation by team leaders and senior managers within HSTC

  - a way to better understand caseload distribution, monitor changes over time and, importantly, start conversations about why such variation might exist and what can be done to address this.

  - used to consider how assessment takes accounts of resources and in supervision to discuss AOP issues

  - BHSCT is currently using 'heat map' to explore local differences and service p;rovision