



Speaking up for Scotland's children: the NSPCC's helpline in Scotland

A year in review April 2012–March 2013



The NSPCC's helpline helps adults from Scotland, and the rest of the UK, who are seeking advice about the welfare and safety of a child. The helpline protects children by providing advice and information to adults and professionals, and by making referrals and passing information to social work services and the police when necessary. People can get in touch by telephone, text, email or online. Those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can make contact by textphone or webcam.

In 2012/13¹, almost 51,000 people across the UK reported concerns about children, a 15 per cent increase on the previous year. This report, however, explores the data available for Scotland.

It identifies the numbers of adults in Scotland who contacted the helpline, the nature of the concerns they had about children, the length of time they waited before getting in touch, and the number of cases the helpline had to refer to social work services or police.

These top line statistics have been supplemented by an in-depth review of a sample of contacts from Scotland that resulted in a referral to social work services or police. This report features anonymised quotes from some of these contacts, to provide the reader with a sense of the nature and content of these cases.

NSPCC research indicates that nearly one in five secondary school children in the UK have been severely abused or neglected during childhood.² However, given that abuse and neglect are both under-reported and under-recorded, the vast majority of children are not getting the protection and support they need.

Any adult and professional coming into contact with children must be alert to indicators of potential abuse and equipped to respond promptly. Trained NSPCC counsellors³ offer support and advice where there are concerns about a child.

Anyone who has concerns about a child or wants advice can contact the NSPCC for free 24 hours a day, by calling 0808 800 5000, emailing help@nspcc.org.uk, or texting 88858. They can choose to remain anonymous if they wish.

¹ 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013.

² www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/child_abuse_neglect_research_wda84173.html.

³ Helpline practitioners are referred to as counsellors. They come from a range of backgrounds including social work, education, police, counselling and psychotherapy.

Key findings

- In 2012/13 the helpline responded to 1,920 contacts from people in Scotland.⁴ This is an increase of 30.2 per cent on the previous year.
- 1,166 of the contacts in 2012/13 resulted in referrals - involving 1,807 children – to social work services or the police in Scotland (4.4 per cent of all referrals made by the helpline across the UK).
- 754 were contacts where helpline counsellors provided information or advice, helping an estimated 1,508 children (4 per cent of all advice calls dealt by the helpline where regional/international information is available).
- Sexual abuse accounted for 13 per cent of calls resulting in a referral (133) and 26 per cent of advice contacts (196). Compared with 2011/12 this showed a 68.4 per cent increase in referral figures and 83.2 per cent increase in advice contacts.⁵
- 26 per cent of advice contacts during 2012/13 were made for sexual abuse (196). This is higher than the UK average, which was 19 per cent.
- Neglect was the leading cause for referrals (487 cases, 46 per cent). This is higher than for the rest of the UK, which was 41 per cent. 23 per cent of referrals (245) and 11 per cent (84) of advice calls concerned physical abuse. These were broadly similar to the rest of the UK.
- 50 per cent of people calling from Scotland reported that they had concerns for more than a month in contacts that resulted in a referral.
- In 24 per cent of calls from Scotland resulting in a referral, callers had waited more than six months.
- 750 children (46 per cent) involved in referrals were under six years old.⁶ 91 children (6 per cent) involved in referrals were under one.
- 59 per cent of those contacting the helpline resulting in a referral were members of the public.



⁴We are able to identify which contacts came from people in Scotland when people contacting us for advice give sufficient identifying information, or contacts lead to referrals to social work services or police in Scotland. Information from Scotland is not available for advice emails, online forms or texts. However, this only accounts for a small minority (15.3 per cent) of contacts to the helpline. UK-wide regional information was not available for 3,754 advice emails, online forms, and texts

⁵Sexual abuse accounted for 10 per cent of calls resulting in a referral (79) and 17 per cent of advice contacts (107) in 2011.

⁶For 176 children in Scotland, the age was not known. Overall 1,807 children were the subject of the concerns in referrals made to local authorities in Scotland.

Callers from Scotland described many situations where they have had concerns for children and contacted the helpline for support. The following are examples.

“I always hear the mum’s threats and screams at the child, who is very young. I’ve heard her hit the child at least twice. I usually hear the shouting late at night when there’s no TV on. The child is always screaming asking for her mum, and this goes on for ages. The mother swears at the child to get to bed - it’s usually after ten - she tells her to go or she’ll get hit. The mother just ignores her crying; the child is neglected.”

A woman called, worried about a child next door

“I’m concerned about my baby, I was changing her nappy today and noticed she’s a bit inflamed and red around her private parts. Each time I change her she sounds as if she is in pain. Someone else I know was looking after her yesterday and now I am worried something happened. There are reasons I am concerned about this person. I don’t know what to do, and I don’t want to talk to anyone I know about it.”

A parent called with worries about their child

“The baby doesn’t seem to be healthy, I know what a healthy baby looks like - I have family myself. The parents don’t seem to have bottles or nappies or anything for the child. I am really worried. They don’t pay the baby any attention and they take it out in all weathers not covered up.”

A caller got in touch to discuss concerns about a baby in their neighbourhood

“The father is always swearing at the kids and my kids have seen him hitting them. The other day he came out into the street and shouted at all the kids but he grabbed his youngest and started hitting him. Neighbours have seen him through the window hitting all the children.”

A neighbour called, worried about the children of a family next door

“I am concerned about a child aged about eight. I felt I had seen enough to contact you. During the dark nights the child wanders on her own for ages in the streets quite far from her home. She looks for food off neighbours. No one looks out for her and I think she could be very easily led off by anyone. She looks uncared for. I’ve seen her being shouted at and manhandled on occasions by her mother coming back from school if she’s not walking fast enough.”

A caller worried about a child in her neighbourhood

How the helpline protects children

People can contact the helpline in a number of ways. Aside from calling, people can contact us with concerns about children by text, email and online. This is why we refer to 'contacts' rather than calls.

The helpline receives two main types of contact, which we categorise as 'advice' or 'referrals'.

Advice contacts

Last year our counsellors provided advice without making a referral in response to 24,573 of the contacts we received. Advice contacts in Scotland accounted for 754 (4 per cent) of these. The NSPCC estimates that each advice contact involves a minimum of two children. On that basis, we helped 1508 children through the advice contacts received in Scotland last year.

Advice contacts fall into three categories. The first two, in particular, demonstrate the helpline's role in providing effective early intervention.

1) The person contacting the NSPCC is seeking guidance

People contact us for guidance on a range of matters including online safety, bullying, and when it would be appropriate to leave their child at home alone.

2) The information provided does not need to be referred

Sometimes people may not be sure whether something they have seen or heard is a problem. We always encourage people to contact the NSPCC because our counsellors have the expertise to make an informed assessment of what the caller has seen or heard. On the occasions when our counsellors feel a referral is not necessary they provide guidance to the person – advising them on what to look out for, and what they can do if anything further happens to cause concern about the child.

3) There is insufficient information to make a referral

These are cases where the counsellor identifies there is a child at risk requiring support from children's services or the police but the person contacting us does not share enough detail to identify the child.

Referrals

Last year we made 26,416 referrals to children's services, the police, and other agencies including the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP).

Scotland referrals accounted for 1,166⁷ (4.4 per cent) of these, involving 1,807 children.

Our helpline counsellors make referrals when the information they receive warrants further assessment or investigation. In order for this to happen, we must have enough identifying information about the child. We will also make a referral when we learn important information that we feel local professionals or agencies need to know for their case records and which may not require a follow up investigation.

⁷We are able to identify which contacts came from people in Scotland when people contacting us for advice give sufficient identifying information, or contacts lead to referrals to social work services or police Scotland. Information from Scotland is not available for advice emails, online forms or texts. However, this only accounts for a small minority (15.3 per cent) of contacts to the helpline. UK-wide regional information was not available for 3,754 advice emails, online forms, and texts



Who contacts the NSPCC?

In 2012/13, the helpline made 1,166 referrals for Scotland involving 1,807 children (4.4 per cent of all referrals made by the helpline across the UK). Additionally, the helpline dealt with 754 advice contacts from Scotland (4 per cent of all advice contacts dealt by the helpline throughout the UK).

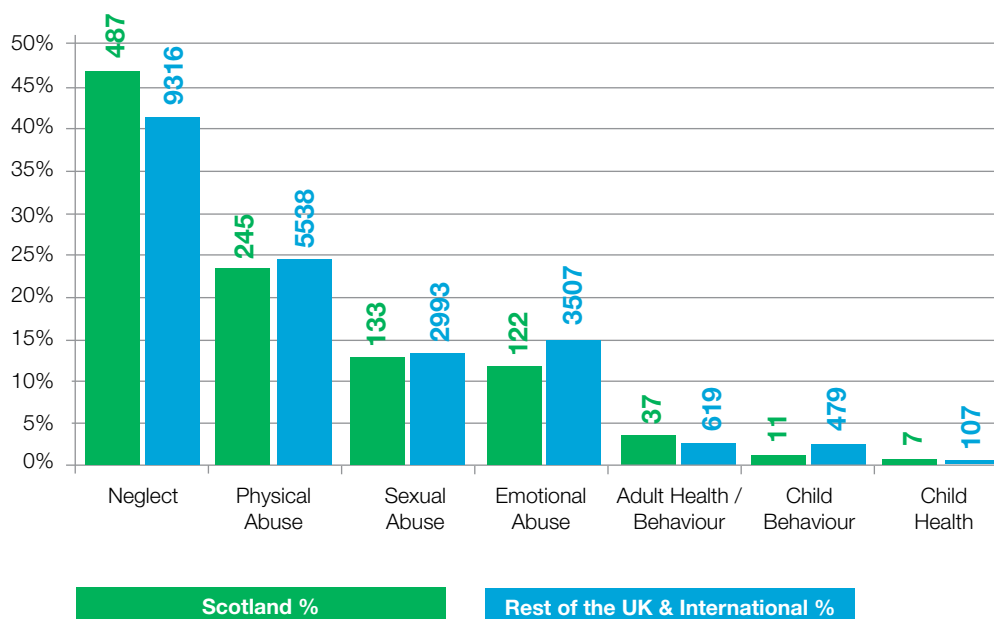
The NSPCC estimates that each advice contact involves a minimum of two children⁸. On that basis in Scotland 1,508 children were helped through the advice contacts received last year. The total number of contacts from Scotland (1,920) in 2012/13 reflected a 30.2 per cent increase on the previous year.

Referral contacts to the NSPCC helpline from Scotland

The total number of referrals made to local authorities in Scotland reached 1,166 in 2012/13 increasing significantly from 807 referrals made during the previous year (44.5 per cent increase from 2011/12 to 2012/13). These referrals involved 1,807 children demonstrating an increase of 318 children compared to 2011/12 (1,489). This increase highlights the importance of the helpline in identifying families and children in need of support in Scotland.

Figure 1: Referrals

What concerns do people contact us about?



⁸The data on the number of children involved in advice calls is not collected but we can assume that each call or contact involves an average of two children; this is based on evidence from existing helpline advice contacts.

The majority of people (615) whose contacts resulted in a referral were members of the public. 126 contacts were from relatives and 92 contacts were from parents or carers. These figures and patterns suggest that the helpline continues to enable and encourage members of the public to report their child protection concerns. In addition, it is encouraging that relatives and parents or carers are also contacting the helpline to discuss concerns.

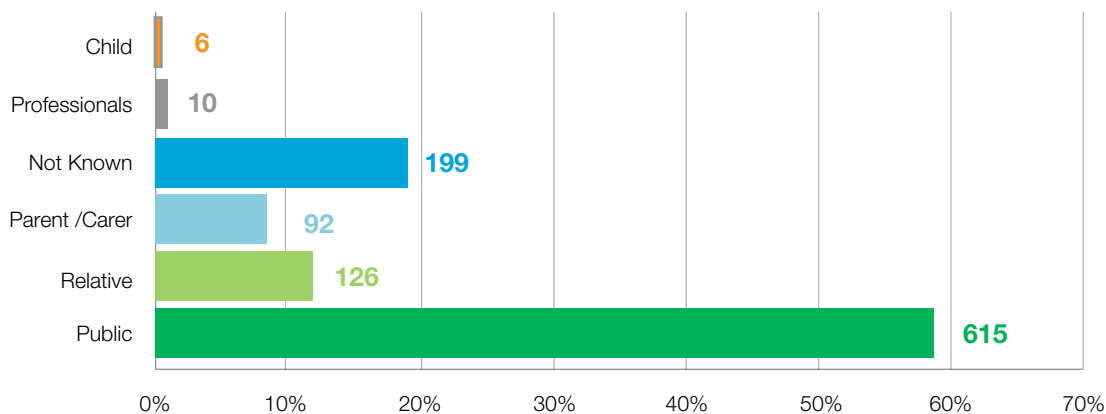
There is a significant increase in the number of adults contacting the helpline who have chosen to remain anonymous from 4 per cent (35) during 2011/12 to 19 per cent (199) during 2012/13; this increase is in line with patterns of reporting to the helpline across the UK. Helpline counsellors tell us that the reasons for people choosing to remain anonymous may include fear of repercussions from the families they are making contact about, or that the children and adults are members of their own family.

Of the 1,048 Scotland referrals where concern was recorded⁹, neglect was the main concern (46 per cent, 487 contacts), followed by physical abuse (23 per cent, 245 contacts), sexual abuse (13 per cent, 133 contacts), emotional abuse (12 per cent, 122 contacts), adult health/behaviour (4 per cent, 37 contacts), child behaviour (1 per cent, 11 contacts) and child health (1 per cent, 7 contacts).

The proportion of Scotland referrals relating to neglect was slightly higher, 46 per cent, than the rest of the UK (41 per cent), whilst referral for physical abuse was broadly similar. However such comparisons should be treated with caution given the small samples sizes in Scotland.¹⁰

Figure 2: Referrals – Scotland

Who contacts us?



⁹For 118 helpline referral contacts for Scotland, concern is not recorded as these contacts were updates on existing cases.

¹⁰For 1,796 advice calls across all regions, concern is not recorded as the information was not available. Additionally, the helpline dealt with 3,754 advice emails, online forms or texts, but regional information is not available for these contacts.

Age of children

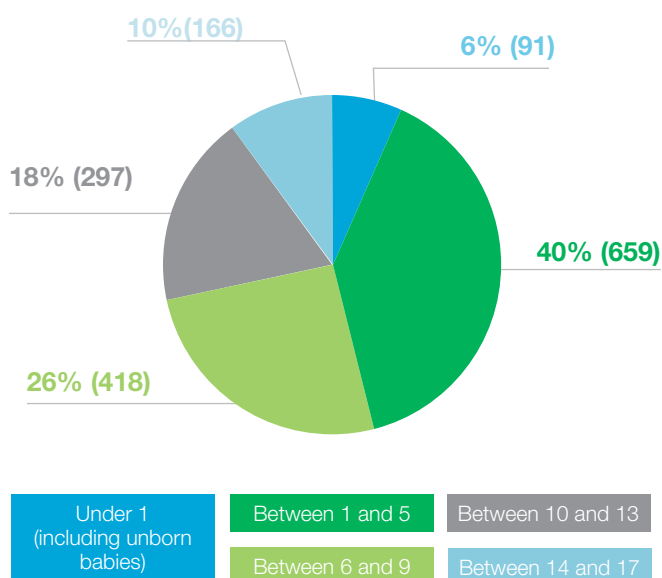
In terms of referrals, of the children whose age was known¹¹, almost half (750) were under six. 91 were under the age of one. The age of children in referrals made by the helpline in Scotland during 2012/13 is broadly similar to the data recorded for Scotland during the previous year 2011/12.

Neglect was the most common concern across all age ranges, with a significant number of concerns raised about neglect for children aged 0-5.

Age of the children in referrals				
Top 3 primary concerns	Between 0 and five	Between 6 and 9	Between 10 and 13	Between 14 and 17
Neglect	380	196	116	62
Physical abuse	183	108	83	39
Emotional abuse	105	55	36	15

Figure 2: Referrals – Scotland

Age of children in referrals - Scotland



¹¹For 176 children in Scotland, the age was not known. Overall 1,807 children were the subject of the concerns in 1,166 referrals made to local authorities in Scotland.



//// Breakdown of referrals by local authority areas Scotland 2012/13:

2012/2013 data	
Local Authority Area - Scotland	Number of referrals (voice and non -voice)
Glasgow City	176
Fife	94
Edinburgh City	78
North Lanarkshire	68
Aberdeen City	60
Aberdeenshire	54
Highland	50
South Lanarkshire	49
Dundee	42
Dumfries and Galloway	40

The figures to the left indicate the spread of contacts resulting in referrals from the top 10 localities in Scotland. Given the small numbers in the sample this is presented merely for information purposes and not for commentary or comparative review of referral patterns from localities within Scotland.¹²

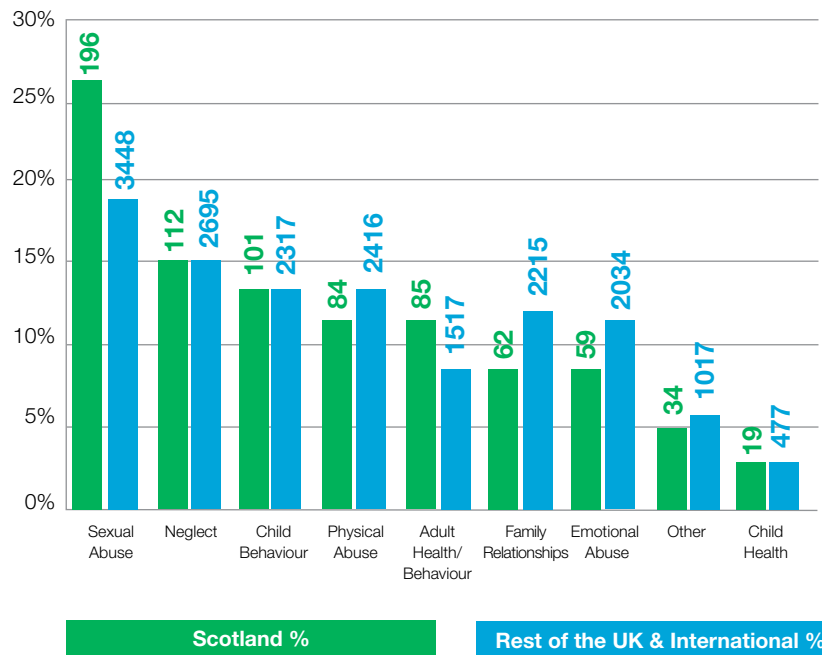
¹²The regional information for Scotland figures does not include referral updates. On a few occasions a referral is sent to more than one local authority area.

What do people contact us about?

Of the 754 Scottish contacts categorised as advice, sexual abuse was the main concern (26 per cent, 196 contacts), this represented an 83 per cent increase (107 contacts from the previous year). This increase is in keeping with increased contacts to the helpline across the UK regarding sexual abuse. The remaining categories resulting in an advice contact during 2012/13 included neglect, child behaviour, physical abuse, adult health/behaviour, family relationships, emotional abuse and child health. The figures for these categories of advice contacts remained broadly similar to advice contacts in Scotland during 2011/12.¹³

Figure 3: Advice calls

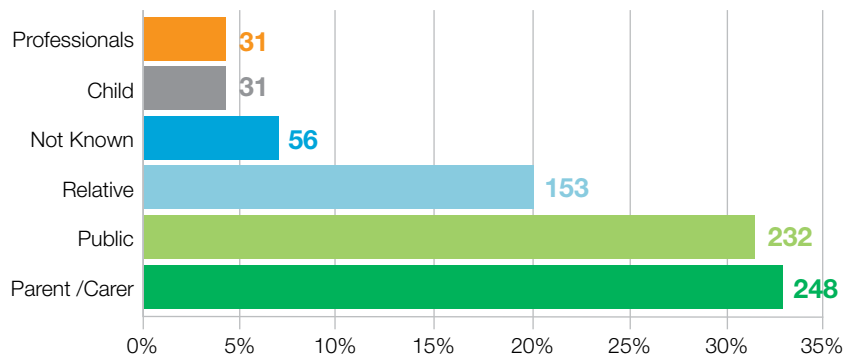
What concerns do people contact the NSPCC about?



The majority of those contacting the helpline resulting in an advice contact were parent or carers (33 per cent, 248 contacts). This was followed by members of the public who accounted for 31 per cent of advice contacts (232), whilst relatives made up 20 per cent of advice contacts (153). The remainder of contacts included contacts from children (4 per cent, 31 contacts) and professionals (4 per cent, 31 contacts)¹⁴. The pattern of who contacts the helpline resulting in advice contacts remains broadly similar to the helpline data recorded for Scotland during 2011/12.

Figure 4: Advice calls

Scotland Who contacts us?



¹³NSPCC helpline in Scotland April 2011-March 2012: A briefing paper. NSPCC.

¹⁴Professionals include: other official; trainer; consultant; advisor; researcher; academic; university student; NSPCC; and teacher.

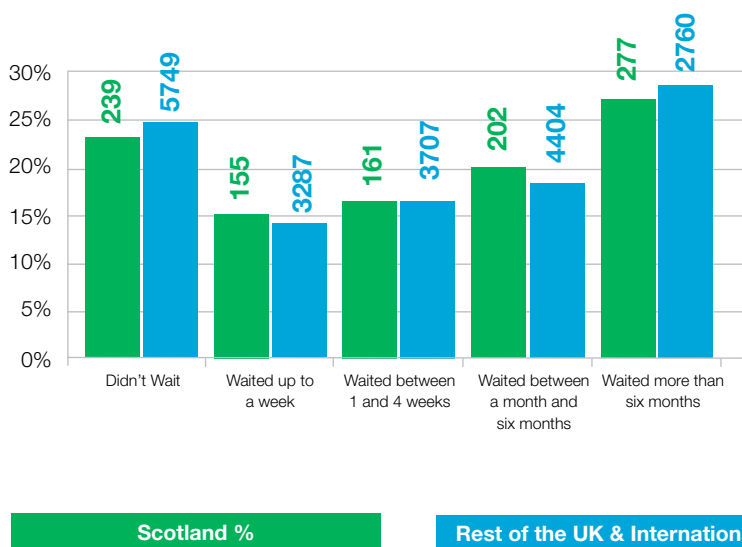
Waiting times

The length of time that people in Scotland wait before contacting the helpline with their concerns is similar to the reporting pattern across the UK during this period and is broadly similar to figures recorded for Scotland during 2011/12. However, it continues to be of concern that 20 per cent (202) of those contacting the helpline had waited between one and six months and that 27 per cent (277) people had waited more than six months. With approximately 61 per cent of all contacts in Scotland resulting in a referral (1,166 contacts), this percentage of adults who are not confident enough to pass on vital child protection information for quite a significant period of time is worrying and we will continue to promote the message ‘Don’t wait until you are certain’ in Scotland.¹⁵

The impact of abuse can be profound, and the longer it continues the greater the risk of long-term physical and emotional damage. Taking action as soon as there is a concern can have a significant impact on outcomes for children, while waiting – perhaps assuming that the responsibility to report lies with someone else - puts children at risk. We need to intervene early to prevent abuse from taking place. Where it is already occurring, we must stop it in its tracks as early as possible.

The NSPCC helpline seeks to achieve both of these aims. It provides advice on how to protect children, as well as serving as an entry point to the child protection system for those worried about the welfare of abused and neglected children.

How long people wait – all contacts Scotland



¹⁵http://www.nspcc.org.uk/news-and-views/our-campaigns/current-campaigns/dont-wait/dont-wait-campaign_wda88525.html

Neglect as most common reason for referral

Concerns about neglect were the main reasons for referring a contact to social work services or police. This is true across all age ranges, although a significant number of referrals about neglect concerned children under five.

The high incidence of neglect in contacts to the helpline mirrors official child protection registration statistics. Neglect is also the main reason for children to be placed on the child protection register in Scotland.¹⁶

Rise in contacts about sexual abuse

The total number of contacts with sexual abuse as a main concern from Scotland (329) in 2012/13 reflected a 76 per cent increase on the previous year.

It seems highly likely that the increase in calls experienced this year was, in part, as a result of the plethora of child abuse cases – both current and historic – in the public eye. The most high profile of the abuse stories of course related to the exposure of the late Jimmy Savile as a prolific predatory paedophile. The realisation that Savile was able to perpetrate his crimes precisely because those who knew or suspected he was abusing children stayed silent, seems to have brought home how crucial it is that adults speak up as soon as they have concerns.

Acts of child sexual abuse are committed by men, women, teenagers, and other children. Sex offenders are found in all areas of society and come from a variety of backgrounds. 9 out of 10 children know their abuser - they are likely to be a relative, family friend or person in a position of trust, rather than a stranger. A child may not say anything because they think it is their fault, that no one will believe them, or that they will be teased or punished. The child may even care for an abusing adult. They will want the abuse to stop, but they may fear the adult will go to prison or that their family will break up.

Children who have been sexually abused may show a variety of signs. They may try to tell you about abuse through hints or clues, may suddenly start to behave differently, avoid particular adults, display sexually inappropriate behaviour, and have physical symptoms.

High proportion of referrals about young children

Almost half (750) of the referrals we made in this period concerned children aged five or under, with 91 referrals being made about babies aged under one.

Pregnancy and the early years are a critical time for a child development. Abuse and neglect which takes place during this time can have a significant negative impact on a child, the effects of which can cast a long shadow, through their later childhood and beyond. However, effective intervention in the early years can help to prevent child maltreatment from occurring in the first place, or take action to stop abuse quickly and enable children to recover and live healthy, safe lives.

Our youngest children are not able to help themselves and so depend on adults to be alert to their needs and intervene where necessary. The helpline plays an important role in providing members of the public and professionals a space to share their concerns.



Conclusion

The helpline is an essential service for people who have concerns about the wellbeing and protection of children. It is a significant source of referrals, largely from adults who might otherwise contact no other agency. Most of the referrals made by the helpline concerned neglect, physical abuse and sexual abuse.

During 2012/13, there was a 30 per cent increase in contacts from adults in Scotland to the helpline compared to the year before. Over 1,100 of these contacts resulted in referrals to social work services or the police in Scotland.

Neglect was the leading cause for referrals, with a significant number of referrals relating to concerns about the neglect of children under the age of five. There was also an increase in contacts about sexual abuse during this period.

Many of the contacts to the helpline do not lead to referrals, and instead result in our counsellors providing child protection advice and guidance to members of the public. This suggests that the helpline has a crucial role to play in early intervention.

Useful links for child protection in Scotland

NSPCC Scotland provides services across the country to identify children at risk of abuse at an early stage and to provide support for them and their families to prevent abuse or stop it from intensifying. Alongside the NSPCC helpline for adults we also provide ChildLine – a helpline for children to raise their worries and concerns and get support to stay safe from harm in addition we are delivering our ChildLine Schools Service which will visit every primary school in Scotland by 2016 and every two years after to make sure that every child understands and knows how to protect themselves from abuse. From our service centre in Glasgow we provide services, based on best practice from across the world, which work directly with children and families across over eight local authorities in Scotland to prevent and reduce child abuse.

By sharing the learning from our work with children and families, providing child protection consultancy services and campaigning and influencing we want to bring about a lasting reduction in child abuse in Scotland.

www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/policyandpublicaffairs/scotland



For more information please:

Call: **0808 800 5000**

Email: **help@nspcc.org.uk**

Text: **88858**

Visit: **nspcc.org.uk/helpline**

Child protection resources for anyone working to protect children in Scotland can be found at:

www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/policyandpublicaffairs/scotland

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NSPCC 
SCOTLAND
Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.