Report of an Audit of Child Protection Research in Ireland 1990-2009

An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
Children Acts Advisory Board

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REPORT OF AN AUDIT OF CHILD PROTECTION RESEARCH IN IRELAND 1990–2009

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An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
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Table of Contents

Foreword

One of the key strategic objectives of the Children Acts Advisory Board is to 'strengthen the knowledge base of the Irish child care sector'. The starting point for this work is to identify what is already known. In our work we have often heard the view expressed that there is no Irish literature available. In this report the Board has endeavoured to provide for the sector a complete audit of the most appropriate child protection research literature undertaken in Ireland over the last 20 year period. As well as identifying some 190 research documents the authors have also summarised the key points covered in the research, provided information on funding sources and drawn appropriate conclusions.

A significant benefit of this study is the identification of key gaps in our knowledge of Irish child protection that could be filled by future research. I hope that this report will be helpful to all who have an interest in better understanding our current system of child protection and its outcomes and to those who commission and undertake research in this area in the future.

The CAAB is grateful to the Children's Research Centre and the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin for their work I also want to thank the CAAB staff and in particular Jim McGuirk, Advisory Officer, under the direction of Head of Research and Information, Robert Murphy for steering the project skilfully to conclusion.

Aidan Browne
Chief Executive
Children Acts Advisory Board

Research Quality

Two important elements of the CAAB's research quality assurance are the use of a steering committee to 'guide' a project and the use of an independent peer review process – see below.

Membership of the Steering Group

Robert Murphy, Head of Research and Information, Children Acts Advisory Board
Jim McGuirk, Advisory Officer, Children Acts Advisory Board

Peer Reviewer

Paul Harrison is a qualified social worker with over 30 years practice and management experience in child welfare and protection with Eastern Health Board, Northern Area Health Board and HSE nationally. He was national specialist in the Office of CEO 2007-2009 with responsibility for child protection. Paul currently works within Integrated Service Directorate nationally on performance management and service improvement in child care services. He is author of 'Managing Social Care; a Guide for New Managers' (Russell House Publishing Ltd., 2006) and 'Managing Child Welfare and Protection Services' (Russell House Publishing Ltd., 2009).

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

The Children Acts Advisory Board (the CAAB)[1] is responsible for advising the Minister for Health and Children and the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on policy issues relating to the co-ordinated delivery of services to children and young people at risk under the Child Care Act, 1991 and the Children Act, 2001.

In 2009 the CAAB commissioned the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin to conduct an audit of Irish child protection literature. The study has two keys outputs, a database containing information from the research included in the audit and a report summarising the key points from the analysis of the database, information on funding sources and appropriate conclusions.

The methods used to identify relevant research were database and internet searches and stakeholder consultation. This included searching academic journal databases and relevant organisational databases, and internet searches using key terms and words, collating literature already known to and held by the research team, formally communicating by email and telephone with stakeholders and inviting them to suggest relevant literature, reading the bibliographies/reference lists of relevant books, book chapters, journal articles, policy documents, and reports of commissions/inquiries to identify research that met the inclusion criteria. Information on the allocation of funding for child protection research in the Republic of Ireland in specified years was obtained by contacting research funders directly.

2. Key Findings

A total of 190 research documents were identified in line with the criteria agreed between the researchers and the CAAB, and are included in the audit. The key findings from the analysis of the audit are as follows:

■ Research identified in the audit has tended to focus on child protection and the child protection system generally, as well as sexual abuse. This research has primarily been undertaken by clinicians and academics, and spans across sectors.

■ Over half, (110 or 58%) of the research falls under the heading of policy/practice reviews/analysis. This is further reflected in the fact that the research most commonly focused on operating

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[1] Formerly the Special Residential Services Board (SRSB)

procedures, followed by practice issues and the policy framework, both in studies with a single focus and those with multiple foci.

■ The most common type of publication was peer reviewed article (74 or 39%), with commissioned research accounting for just 7% (13). This is in line with the findings that 68% (128) of commissioning/publishing bodies and 74% (139) of research bodies were in the academic sector.

■ The research published and/or commissioned by the statutory sector follows the pattern found in the audit generally, with the most common type of study being policy/practice review/analysis (27 or 48%) and the most common focus being operating procedures (22 or 39%).

■ Information sources rarely incorporated primary research with children, with only 14 studies (8%) citing direct contact with children and young people. Information on children was more commonly gathered from case files, professionals and family members.

■ The topics covered in the identified research were very wide-ranging but closely related to the primary subject area (type of abuse) and the sector in which the research was located.

3.   Gaps Identified in the Research

The Extent to Which Research is Available on the Different Areas of Child Abuse

The audit shows that the main focus of research appears to be on cross subject research followed by child sexual abuse. It should be noted here that the vast majority of cross subject research does not refer to the study of the combination of specific forms of abuse (such as physical *and* sexual abuse). Rather it refers to research that is located in the broad area of child abuse and child protection and does not address specific forms of abuse but instead these studies critically examine or review the child protection system. While neglect is the most commonly reported form of child abuse, the proportion of research on the topic is quite low when compared with the proportion of research on child sexual abuse. Physical and emotional abuse are each reported marginally less often than child sexual abuse but appear to be under-researched as specific topics.

The Extent to which Research Provides Cross Sectoral Coverage of Child Abuse Issues

There is a clear emphasis in child protection policy on inter-agency and inter-disciplinary working, as evidenced in policy and strategy documents. It would appear desirable, therefore that a cross sectoral approach is taken in relation to child protection as this can contribute to and draw on inter-agency and inter-disciplinary working, as well as providing more comprehensive and holistic analysis of issues and potential solutions. However, the audit shows that inter-agency and inter-disciplinary research on child abuse is relatively limited.

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Children Acts Advisory Board

The Extent to Which Research Answers Key Questions for Policy and Practice

Examining the factors most commonly associated with child abuse reports and placement of children in out of home care shows that the most frequently reported type of concern is child neglect but the audit shows that only 3% (5) of the research materials focused on this. Child sexual abuse is the third most frequently reported type of child abuse about which the highest amount of research material is published. However, it is not possible to judge whether the materials are adequate or sufficient without a comprehensive assessment of the needs of policy makers and practitioners. Nevertheless, it could be reasonably inferred that the comparatively low number (7) and percentage (4%) of material on physical abuse and the lack of material on emotional abuse are inadequate to answer key questions for policy and practice.

Furthermore, only 6% (12) of the materials offer profiles of victims of child abuse, only 5% (9) of the materials focus on the experiences of children and families who are users of the child protection services and only 6% (12) of the materials identified in the audit covered programme and service evaluations. There is a shortage of research on 'what works' and sources of information on the most useful interventions and programmes with which to address the identified problems in the Irish context.

The Degree of Research Quality and the Extent of Confidence in Research

The quality of the research in the audit appears to be somewhat uneven. While it was not always clear that a piece of material, apart from journal articles, had been peer reviewed, it could be estimated that up to 50% of the content had not been subject to external quality assurance. There are particular shortcomings in statistical data on child protection and welfare in Ireland, as follows:

- There is no single source, publication or website that gives comprehensive information about the incidence and prevalence of child abuse, including the gender and ages of the children, the causal or associated factors and the numbers of children that died from child abuse.
- Data recorded on child abuse reports are not recorded consistently.
- Published service level indicators give very limited scope for analysis, e.g. the broad sources of reports of abuse and service outcomes for children in terms of immediate results and medium term impacts.
- National statistics reveal no epidemiological trends, merely the number of new reports year on year and they give no sense of the prevalence, or recurrence, of different types of child abuse, the length of interventions or the resource implications of service provision in different types of cases. They do not make any linkages between social factors affecting families and the incidence of child abuse and thereby do not identify vulnerability factors.

■ Restricting the collection of data about child protection to reports made to the statutory child protection system is limiting and consequently the comprehensiveness of these data is questionable.

The Extent to Which Research is Accessible

While a number of research databases already exist in Ireland and elsewhere, the entire content is not always available for viewing or downloading. Of the materials in the current audit, approximately 75% (approximately 140 documents) are not available without purchase at individual or institutional level.

4.   CONCLUSIONS

Based on the available material our conclusions are as follows.

1.   While the audit has identified an amount of material on child protection from a number of disciplines, **the volume and coverage** of Irish research does not appear to be commensurate with the current national concern about this problem and the challenges being faced by policy makers and service providers in the following respects.

■ There is a shortage of good quality, robust research on child protection practice in the statutory sector, particularly in respect of social work, which is acknowledged to be central to child protection.

■ There is a shortage of child protection-focused research on the factors that cause and perpetuate child abuse, such as homelessness, addiction, parental mental illness and domestic violence. The need for material on these areas is demonstrated by the nature and scale of reports to the child protection system and the removal of some children from their families into out of home care as a result of the above mentioned adversities.

■ There is a shortage of research on the profile and characteristics of child victims or studies that involve children as active participants in, as opposed to objects of, research.

■ The audit illustrates a shortage of evaluative studies that demonstrate the impact of interventions and 'what works' in child protection.

2. There have been some very useful developments in research dissemination and supporting access to research, particularly by the OMCYA and the HRB, but this audit shows that the **majority of the Irish research material is not publicly accessible beyond abstract formats, a factor that limits its usefulness.** The lack of professional peer reviewed journals and outlets for publication in Ireland, particularly for social work research, also limits dissemination. The production and public availability of systematic reviews of existing research, by topic, would facilitate greater take-up and utilisation.

3. While a number of relevant and important topics have been the subject of commissioned research, there is currently **no integrated research agenda on child protection** although the OMCYA is currently developing a children's research agenda. The current lack of such an integrated agenda reflects the ad hoc funding arrangements that have existed to date. National statistics on the nature of child abuse reports indicate that neglect and associated problems should take priority in this agenda. The implementation of *The Agenda for Children's Services* and the creation of the HSE as one body under which health and welfare services operate provide more opportunities for co-ordinated research commissioning and dissemination.

4. Available statistical data on child protection, which are vital for planning services and allocating resources, **require further development and analysis to improve accuracy and to provide a more comprehensive picture of child protection issues and activities.** For instance, the source of referrals, the type of adversities being experienced by families, the interventions being made and their impact on children.

The above conclusions are based on the objectives underpinning this project, which were to identify and develop a database of Irish child protection literature, identify the main sources of funding and identify gaps in research as demonstrated by the audit of literature available. The database that has been developed will require updating to reflect new additions and hopefully will provide a useful resource to policy makers and service providers. While this audit revealed a number of shortcomings in the availability and accessibility of Irish research, the project represents an important step in bringing together existing material and should provide a starting block for the development of a national agenda for research on child protection. Such a task will require a wider scoping exercise that encompasses the views of all stakeholders in the sector, reflects international developments on the topic, and considers child protection as one dimension of the wider context and continuum of child welfare, from prevention to out of home care.

1.   INTRODUCTION

In December, 2007 the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) launched *The Agenda for Children's Services*, a principal aim of which is to promote a whole child/whole system approach to meeting the needs of children and a focus on better outcomes for children and families. The agenda seeks to assist policy makers, senior managers and front-line workers in engaging in reflective and evidence informed practice. A vital component in the accomplishment of these aims is knowledge about issues affecting children.

The issue of child protection, in particular, has been given increasing prominence in Ireland over the past two decades. A number of factors have merged to underline its current importance. Firstly, understanding of child abuse has increased to encompass the diverse nature and impact of different types of harm to children in a range of situations. Secondly, the number and types of services tasked with addressing the problem has expanded considerably over the past two decades in Ireland. Thirdly, there is greater awareness of the complexities involved in delivering services in such a sensitive and uncertain area of work. Fourthly, in keeping with developments in all human services, assumptions about the ability of policy makers and practitioners to address the problem of child abuse have placed increased pressure on services to function effectively and efficiently. Finally, the number of child protection concerns reported to the statutory authorities has increased significantly over recent years.

All of the above factors, which reflect trends in a number of jurisdictions across the world, emphasise the necessity for policy makers and service providers to operate in a manner that is informed by expert information on identified problems. Increasing pressure on services as a result of public concern and rising numbers of reports highlight the need to target services effectively in terms of both protecting the most vulnerable and getting the best value from limited resources. Child protection services in Ireland face a number of challenges, many of which have been highlighted in recent inquiry reports. However, inquiry reports are not based on empirical research, are frequently focused on events in a unique set of circumstances, such as the death of a child or children in one family, and are usually constrained by the terms of reference given to the investigators, the time allowed for completion, and legal issues relating to the identification of key personnel. The often singular perspective of such reviews can mean that the broad context in which concerns and risks to children arise and are addressed by the services is not considered. For these reasons, although there are undoubtedly important lessons for practice and messages for policy in child abuse inquiries, their value in terms of contributing to the overall knowledge base on child protection in Ireland is restricted and further empirical research is required.

In line with the above, the importance of knowledge transfer and exchange has been recognised at a global level (Jack & Tonmyr, 2008) and considerable investment is being made in processes to enhance the diffusion of information in a number of areas, including social care. The concurrent drive towards evidence informed practice is also part of an international trend, and has provoked much discussion on the nature of research and its relevance in different cultural contexts.

In Ireland, the Child Care Act, 1991 (Section 11), contains a provision whereby the Minister or the Health Services Executive (HSE) may conduct research into any matter concerned with the care and protection of children, thus facilitating the production and dissemination of knowledge about policy and practice. However, a recent study involving practitioners in the Irish child welfare sector (Buckley & Whelan in association with the CAAB, 2009) found that research evidence was somewhat under-utilised in day-to-day service design and delivery. Lack of access to research, and a perceived lack of Irish research were both identified as barriers to its use, and the study identified some criticism of a perceived tendency to rely on imported materials that did not always fit well with the manner of service delivery in this country and which had limited usefulness in terms of informing service design or provision. The study identified a need for a database of Irish research on child welfare issues. This aspiration synchronised well with developments that had already been initiated by the OMCYA and the Health Research Board (HRB), where the compilation of databases and the mapping of research evidence in specific subject areas such as child health and family support had already commenced.

One of the strategic objectives of the Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB) is to strengthen the knowledge base of the child care sector and this project was commissioned by it in consultation with the OMCYA and the HRB.

The aims of the project, upon which this report is based, were:

- to produce an audit of Irish child protection literature;
- to identify the main funding sources for research on this topic;
- to formulate appropriate conclusions about the main gaps in research literature on child protection.

Chapter 2 of this report describes the methods used in the audit. Chapter 3 provides an analysis of the audit. Chapter 4 identifies gaps in research using a number of different benchmarks, while Chapter 5 outlines the conclusions reached in the process of developing the audit.

2   METHODOLOGY

2.1   Chapter Introduction

This chapter details the methodology used in undertaking the audit of research on child protection. It identifies the scope of the audit, inclusion and exclusion criteria, the procedures used by the research team to meet each of the objectives of the project and some of the challenges encountered in identifying and locating relevant literature.

2.2   Audit Scope

The initial scope of the audit of Irish child protection literature was laid down in the invitation to tender issued by the CAAB, where it was suggested that the audit should:

- cover Irish child protection research, defined as literature on:

  responding to alleged or actual physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect of children;

- exclude research on general disadvantage and youth justice matters unless they are directly linked to child protection issues;
- focus on research conducted between 1990 and 2009.

'Children' is defined as persons aged between 0 to 17 years of age inclusive.

The Children's Research Centre, in its response to the invitation to tender, extended the definition of child protection to include **children's exposure to domestic violence** on the basis that living with the abuse of a parent or carer can be considered a form of emotional abuse, and is an important indicator of risk of direct harm to children as there is a clear link between the presence of domestic violence and the co-occurrence of child abuse (Buckley *et al.* 2006).

The CAAB's initial request for tenders provided the researchers with the following definition of research:

  Research is defined as the process of answering questions and/or exploring phenomena using scientific methods; these methods may draw on the whole spectrum of systematic and critical enquiry.

An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
Children Acts Advisory Board

The invitation to tender also stated that in order to be considered research, literature had to be of an analytical as opposed to a descriptive nature.

Types of written publications could include:

- articles in academic journals (peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed);
- conference papers;
- commissioned research undertaken by consultants and researchers;
- systematic research undertaken by government departments, agencies or independent public bodies;
- PhD studies of a significant nature.

These parameters informed the development of audit inclusion and exclusion criteria.

2.3   Audit Criteria

2.3.1 Overview

One of the first steps undertaken by the researchers was to develop audit criteria that would better communicate the project objectives to stakeholders and guide the researchers in their decision making on whether the literature identified fulfilled the project scope, aims and objectives.

2.3.2 Inclusion Criteria

To be included in the audit of child protection research:

- documents were required to be research-based, in line with the definition of research previously described, and be analytical in nature;
- the research must have been commenced and/or completed between 1990 and 2009;
- the research had to relate to the Republic of Ireland;
- the research had to be concerned primarily with children and have as its primary focus one or more of the following: physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, neglect, exposure to domestic violence;
- research that addressed the issue of the profile or treatment of offenders was considered to be within the scope of the project;
- the research could be based on qualitative or quantitative research methods;

■ documents could include service/intervention evaluation as a form of research, but only the child protection-focused aspects of adult or family services were taken as relevant.

2.3.3 Exclusion Criteria

The following documents were not included in the audit:

■ non-evaluative descriptions of programmes or projects;
■ evaluations of generic family support or health programmes *unless* child protection is a specific target of such programmes and this aspect can be clearly identified and separated from the broader programme;
■ research focused on child and family welfare rather than protection;
■ research that is focused on adults who were the victims of child abuse.

In line with the project scope as set out in the request for tenders, only dissertations leading to the award of PhD were included in the database. While the literature search did unearth relevant research leading to doctorates in clinical psychology, doctorates in psychotherapy, and master's degrees by research, these dissertations were not included in the database.

Irish research on children in residential/out of home care was excluded from the search on the basis that the CAAB has developed a similar but separate database of research on this issue. It is also the case that the thematic analysis of Irish research on residential/out-of-home care identifies knowledge gaps consistent with those identified in this report,

As already indicated in Chapter 1, and while undoubtedly very important to our understanding of child protection policies, procedures, practices, and outcomes in Ireland, the reports of inquiries into responses to alleged or actual child protection concerns were not included in the audit on the basis that in the main they do not meet the definition of research set out by the CAAB for this project. Governmental and organisational child protection guidelines and policies were also generally not included for the same reason, unless they partially contained research literature that sat within the scope of this project.

2.4 Method for Each Study Objective

2.4.1 Overview

The methods used to identify relevant research were database and internet searches and stakeholder participation. The method used to identify funding allocated to child protection research in the Republic of Ireland in specified years was direct contact with research funders.

The project commenced on the 29th of September 2009 with a short time frame of three months. The database and internet searches and the database entry were undertaken from the 29th of September to the 26th of November 2009. The final child protection research database was received by the CAAB on the 30th of November 2009. The final report analysing Irish child protection research gaps using the database and describing the findings in relation to funding available for child protection research in Ireland was received by the CAAB on 18th of December 2009.

2.4.2 Method for Objective 1 – Identifying Relevant Irish Child Protection Research Literature

Overview

The identification of relevant literature was achieved by:

- searching academic journal databases and relevant organisational databases using key terms and key words;
- collating literature already known to and held by the research team;
- conducting internet searches using key terms and key words;
- formally communicating by email and telephone with stakeholders, inviting them to suggest relevant literature;
- reading the bibliographies/reference lists of relevant books, book chapters, journal articles, policy documents, and reports of commissions/inquiries to identify research that meeting the inclusion criteria.

The following sections describe the strategies and procedures adopted in database and internet searching and in seeking stakeholder participation.

Database and Internet Searches

The development of search terms and words and the choice of databases and website were guided by the scope of the project and the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

A variety of search terms and words were used in various combinations. They included: 'child', 'children' and 'Republic of Ireland', 'Ireland', 'Irish' and 'abuse', 'protection', 'sexual abuse',

'maltreatment', 'neglect', 'domestic violence', 'exposure to domestic violence', 'emotional abuse', 'psychological abuse', 'shaken baby', 'battered baby', 'physical abuse', 'fabricated illness', 'injury', 'non-accidental injury', 'Munchausen's by proxy'. When using Google, Google Scholar and Google Books, the keyword 'research' was also used to narrow the search.

Online organisational catalogues and databases searched included the following.

- The Trinity College Dublin (TCD) Library catalogue. The TCD library is a copyright library, meaning that all literature published in Ireland should be lodged there once it has received a library classification number. The researchers could access hard copies of the literature deemed possibly relevant through the TCD library.

- Other Irish academic online library catalogues were searched, including: University College Cork, University College Dublin, NUI Galway, Waterford Institute of Technology, Sligo Institute of Technology, Carlow Institute of Technology, and Dublin Institute of Technology.

- The OMCYA database available at www.childrensdatabase.ie. This website was helpful as it indexes Irish non-peer reviewed published research and published Irish policy documents. The database does not include peer-reviewed research. It does not provide abstracts for reports/articles, nor does it provide direct access to documents. Once references to possible relevant literature have been identified using the database, the documents themselves must be sourced elsewhere.

- The HSE's www.lenus.ie database, which is a repository of key Irish health reports. This website provides direct access to health and health services research, policy and strategy documents relevant to health services, official statistics, and the reports of relevant Government commissions and inquiries. It contains a limited amount of peer reviewed literature. This website is updated regularly.

- Barnardos Ireland, as part of its training and information service, provides an online searchable database of non-peer reviewed publications. The database provides an index of publications and an abstract, and hard copies of the publications on the database are held in Barnardos' head office. This database was useful in that publications could be identified there, and sourced elsewhere.

- The All Ireland Electronic Health Library, www.aiehl.org, is a network of websites across the island of Ireland. Each member site contains a range of resources related to health and well-being taken from grey literature.[2] It includes policy and strategy documents, data (quantitative and qualitative), research reports, and details of programmes and interventions.

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2 Grey literature includes materials such as dissertations, census and statistical data, reports of research, and conference papers. Grey literature can be peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed. Citations of these outputs are usually left out of the major bibliographic databases (Tieman et al. 2005).

An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
Children Acts Advisory Board

■ Childlink, www.childlink.co.uk, a Belfast-based online database focusing on legislation, policies and practices, regarding children, young people and families who live in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. It includes newspaper articles, research and statistics.

Academic online databases were also searched. These databases generally index and provide abstracts to peer-reviewed articles in academic journals, although some also include trade journals, books, grey literature and conferences. TCD library holds a subscription to electronic versions of many journals, and so online access was available to the researchers in many, but not all cases.

Figure 2.1 Academic Online Databases

Database	Coverage
Legal	
Legal Periodicals	An index of Irish legal periodicals from 1997. Links are provided to articles available online with the consent of the copyright holder – not all articles are available online. Some, such as the Irish Bar Review are available only to members of the Bar or in an academic library.
Westlaw	Westlaw IE includes online content from the Irish law publisher (Round Hall).
Medical	
PUBMED	Database containing citations for biomedical articles from MEDLINE and life science journals. Citations may include links to full-text articles from PubMed Central or publisher web sites.
OVID Nursing Database	Exclusive combination of 45 premier journals from Lippincott Williams & Wilkins and the nursing subset of MEDLINE.
Education	
ERIC	World's largest digital library of online education literature, including journal articles, books, research syntheses, conference papers, technical reports, policy papers.
PhDs	
Index to Irish Theses	An index to theses with abstracts from universities on the island of Ireland and the Dublin Institute of Technology.
Index to Theses	A comprehensive listing of theses with abstracts accepted for higher degrees by universities in Great Britain and Ireland.

Psychology	
PsychInfo	**Contains abstracts of scholarly journal articles, book chapters, books, and dissertations, is the largest resource devoted to peer-reviewed literature in behavioral science and mental health. It contains over 2.5 million citations.**
General Sciences and Social Sciences	
Scopus	The largest abstract and citation database containing journal articles from scientific, technical, medical, social sciences and arts and humanities fields.
Web of Knowledge	Includes Web of Science, which takes in journals covered by Science Citation Index Expanded, Social Sciences Citation Index, and global coverage of proceedings from conferences and meetings in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities.
JSTOR	Includes archives of over 1,000 academic journals across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences, as well as select monographs.
Zetoc	Provides access to the British Library's Electronic Table of Contents of around 20,000 current journals and around 16,000 conference proceedings published per year.
Factfinder	Indexes Irish publications and information sources, including Irish broadsheet newspapers.

The websites of organisations with a role in child protection in Ireland were searched, including:

- www.garda.ie (An Garda Siochana);
- www.alcoholactionireland.ie (Alcohol Action Ireland);
- http://www.nota.co.uk/branch.php?id=9 (National Organisation for the Treatment of Abusers, Republic of Ireland branch);
- www.rcsi.ie (Royal College of Surgeons Ireland);
- www.ispcc.ie (Irish Society for the Protection of Children);
- www.oco.ie (Office of the Ombudsman for Children);
- www.courts.ie (Irish Courts Service);
- www.iasw.ie (Irish Association of Social Workers);
- www.nswqb.ie (National Social Work Qualifications Board);
- www.crfr.ie (Centre for Child and Family Research, NUIG).

An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
Children Acts Advisory Board

Generic search engines searched include:

- Google;
- Google Scholar;
- Google Books.

It was hoped that books and book chapters, grey literature and conference presentations might be identified using these search engines and organisational websites.

A series of issues arose that impacted on the extent to which Irish child protection research could be identified by the researchers using academic databases and organisational websites.

First, there remain difficulties in finding citations for grey literature using these databases. Grey literature is defined earlier in this report and includes materials such as dissertations, census and statistical data, reports of research, and conference papers. Grey literature can be peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed. The difficulty is that citations of these outputs are usually left out of the major bibliographic databases (Tieman et al. 2005).

While organisational websites were found to be helpful to this project, not all organisations make publically available the research that they undertake or commission. Very often conference and seminar papers are not disseminated. Databases designed to provide access to grey literature, for example, the Irish Children's Database developed by the OMCYA, certainly help, but they are dependent upon database developers and administrators being able to identify such literature in the first place, and then on whether or not the database allows for research citations and documents to be submitted by researchers or research commissioners/publishers to keep the database current.

Second, it is difficult to identify current or ongoing research projects using databases and organisational websites. The researchers were reliant on stakeholder participation in this regard.

Third, the journal titles and abstracts of some publications are not available online either because they are out of print and the journal is no longer produced, for example the *Journal of Child Centred Practice* that was published by the Irish Society for the Protection of Children, which is only available in hard copy from the Trinity College library repository; or, because they are publications available only as a subscriber/member of a particular organisation, for example the Irish Association of Social Workers and access to its magazine *The Irish Social Worker.* The Irish social policy journal *Administration* is not available online at all, and accessing a hard copy is by subscription only, or through a library. In some cases the citation is available online, but the full article is not, for example

The Bar Review is available online only to members of the Bar, but is available in hard copy from the Trinity College Library. The implication for this project was that more time was spent trying to identify and then find a copy of the research output than anticipated. Clearly, there are even greater difficulties for the public who are without university library access and researchers outside the university system in trying to find and read such research.

Stakeholder Participation

Relevant stakeholders were also invited to participate in identifying all relevant research material. There is no single public database or directory that identifies the range of sectors, organisations, and individuals that commission, fund, undertake, participate in, utilise or have an interest in Irish research on child protection. One of the early tasks in the project for the researchers was to identify relevant stakeholders and their contact details. To ensure that a comprehensive contact database was developed, the researchers drew on:

- the contact databases held by the CAAB and the Children's Research Centre;
- professional relationships between the researchers and stakeholders;
- the researchers' knowledge of Irish children's policy and children's services;
- internet searches undertaken by the researchers using organisational websites and databases.

It was decided that email contact would be made with stakeholders for speed and efficiency reasons.

Two hundred and thirty eight individual emails were sent at the beginning of October 2009. Figure 2.2 indicates the organisations contacted.

Figure 2.2 Stakeholders Contacted

Statutory Bodies	OMCYA; HRB; Dept. of Health and Children; Dept. of Education and Science; Dept. of Justice, Equality and Law Reform; all HSE Childcare Managers; HSE Population Health; HSE Social Inclusion; HSE Child and Family Services Directorate; The Probation Service; CAAB; National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence; Youthreach; National Social Work Qualifications Board; An Garda Síochána; National Disability Authority; National Educational Welfare Board; Adoption Board; Irish Youth Justice Service; Crisis Pregnancy Agency; National Council for Special Education; Family Support Agency; HSE Suicide Prevention Office; Health Information and Quality Authority; Office of the Ombudsman for Children; Eastern Vocational Enterprises Ltd.

Academic Bodies	Schools of Social Studies, Sociology, Social Work, Social Policy, Nursing, Health Science, Medicine, Psychology, Law and Education in Trinity College Dublin; University College Dublin; University College Cork; NUI Galway; Mary Immaculate College, Limerick; Dublin Institute of Technology; Waterford Institute of Technology; Letterkenny Institute of Technology; Sligo Institute of Technology; Dundalk Institute of Technology; Carlow Institute of Technology; NUI Maynooth; Queen's University Belfast; specialist research centres/groups: Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway; Centre for Social and Education Research, Dublin Institute of Technology; Childhood Studies Research Group, Carlow Institute of Technology; Geary Institute, UCD; Centre for Effective Services.
Professional Associations	The Irish Association of Social Workers; The Irish Association of Social Care Workers; The Psychological Association of Ireland; Royal College of Physicians; Irish National Teachers Organisation; Irish College of Psychiatrists; Royal College of Surgeons; National Organisation for the Treatment of Abusers.
Voluntary Bodies	Barnardos; ISPCC; The Irish Association of Young People in Care; National Youth Council of Ireland; Alcohol Action Ireland; Children's Rights Alliance; Women's Aid; One Family; One in Four; Women's Aid; Crosscare; Headstrong; Irish Youthwork Centre; Foróige; National Youth Council of Ireland; Treoir; National Parents Council; Border Counties Childcare Network; Irish Pre-school Playgroups Association; Pavee Point; Focus Ireland; Irish Sports Council; AMEN; MOVE; AIM Family Services; Rape Crisis Network Ireland; Children at Risk Ireland; Fatima Regeneration Board.
Others	Irish Youth Foundation; Atlantic Philanthropies; One Foundation; Katherine Howard Foundation; relevant legal practitioners; COPINE (UCC); private consultancies; hospitals (paediatrics, psychiatry, and Stay Safe, Cherry Orchard); Programme for Early Intervention and Prevention – Northside Partnership; Tallaght West Child Development Initiative; Youngballymun; Internet Providers Association of Ireland; child sexual abuse assessment centres.

Considerable time was devoted to ensuring that the list of individuals and organisations contacted was as comprehensive as possible. The majority of those contacted were not personally known to the researchers, although many were known by virtue of their professional reputations and work.

The strategy adopted was that, where possible, the direct email addresses of the most relevant individual(s) in organisations were used, rather than the central organisational email address. It was anticipated that this strategy should have encouraged a good response rate. It is the researchers' experience that emails arriving at general organisational email addresses – i.e., info@organisation.ie – may not always reach their target recipients, and can get lost in the barrage of emails arriving daily at such addresses. Therefore the strategy was to identify specific people within organisations, and some who were not affiliated with organisations but were independent actors, who were known or believed to have an expertise in child protection and child protection research, using the four-fold approach described previously. Often, more than one person in each organisation was emailed to ensure comprehensiveness, particularly in larger organisations with multiple layers and types of expertise. The email recipients were encouraged to forward our email to others.

A letter on the project detailing the request for research was attached to the email, with a much shortened version in the body of the email. The letter is reproduced in Appendix D to this report.

The letter:

- set out the child protection areas being covered in the research audit;
- detailed the inclusion and exclusion criteria guiding the research audit;
- clarified that different kinds of research outputs that could be included in the audit;
- invited people to submit full reports/papers in hard copy or (preferably) electronically. Where the research is available online the relevant website details were requested;
- emphasised the value of the exercise and the final outputs;
- invited letter recipients to disseminate the request for child protection research literature to people who they believed could be helpful;
- invited recipients to give the researchers their views on which areas of child protection they considered to be under-researched in Ireland, based on their knowledge and experience;
- communicated the short time frame for the project and the end of November 2009 deadline for completion of the audit and database.

A follow-up telephone call was made to individuals whom it was believed had particular knowledge of this area.

A 'read receipt' was attached to the email in order to monitor the email delivery to the intended recipient and try to ensure that the email was opened. A total of 25 recipients replied to the request for research, just over 10% of all of those to whom the letter of invitation was sent. Those replying either forwarded documents, suggested literature that potentially fitted with the inclusion criteria, or indicated

An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
Children Acts Advisory Board

that they were unable to suggest relevant literature or had not undertaken research that fitted with the inclusion criteria.

It is unclear why the response rate was not higher. There may be many and a combination of reasons: time constraints; those identified not actually undertaking/funding/commissioning child protection research; lack of knowledge within organisations about which personnel carried responsibility for research; or simply the lack of research activity generally.

Inclusion or Exclusion of Material in the Audit Database

The researchers regularly adjudicated on the eligibility of some child protection literature for inclusion in the audit database and concluded that the contents did not appear to meet the research definition set out by the CAAB, i.e., they did not systematically answer questions and explore phenomena using scientific methods, and were descriptive rather than analytical in nature. However, there is more than one definition of research and the research team bore this in mind. For example, research has been defined as 'a form of structured enquiry capable of producing generalisable knowledge' (Marsh & Fisher, 2005).

Such definitions, and the definition used by the CAAB, share a view that knowledge should be produced through systematic or structured enquiry using robust research methods. Using these definitions some of the research sourced, including some peer-reviewed journal articles, was not considered research because the conclusions it reached were based on the personal opinion of the authors, although these opinions may have been research-informed. However, an implication of not including such literature is that some influential thought pieces, sometimes written by prolific and respected commentators and experts in child protection are not included in the database. Other literature sourced did not meet the research definition on the basis that it was descriptive rather than analytical, describing relevant services and interventions or child law and legal cases. Nevertheless, the researchers applied the research definition reasonably generously so as not to neglect significant outputs, particularly as the scarcity of Irish child protection research was apparent.

The researchers used the following procedure to determine whether or not literature was eligible for inclusion in the database:

- firstly, on retrieval, scanned the abstract/introduction/executive summary of the publication to determine whether or not the research met the inclusion criteria set out previously;
- secondly, where necessary or appropriate, the researchers read the document in more detail in order to extract the relevant data for inclusion in the database;
- finally, the researchers added the relevant data for each document to the database as it was reviewed.

An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
Children Acts Advisory Board

In total, 190 pieces of research are included in the audit. One of the principal outputs of the audit has been an Excel spreadsheet detailing these that will be converted by the CAAB into a searchable online database. This will be publically available. For this reason a complete listing of the 190 pieces of research is not provided in this report.

2.4.3 Method for Objective 2 – To 'Audit' Irish Child Protection Literature

The first process undertaken in auditing the Irish child protection literature for inclusion in the database was agreeing the meaning of the headings to be used in the audit database. This was an essential step to ensure consistency in data entry across team members and to facilitate an agreed understanding between the researchers and the CAAB.

The initial request for tender required the following headings to be used in the database.

- The sector, e.g. health and welfare, education, juvenile justice etc.
- Title, title of publication or research material.
- Author, name of author.
- The focus of the research and the main topics examined in each report.
- The type of publication, e.g. a peer reviewed journal article, another form of peer reviewed publication, etc.
- Broad category of research body, e.g. academic sector, community and voluntary sector, cross sectoral, private sector, statutory sector.
- Actual commissioning body/publisher, i.e. name of commissioning body or publisher.
- Broad category of commissioning body/publisher, e.g. academic sector, community and voluntary sector, cross sectoral, private sector, statutory sector etc.
- Year of publication.
- Information sources and research methods, i.e. the sources of information for the study, e.g. children, parents, literature, data etc.
- Link to website for download, i.e. if the report or research material is available to download from a website, a link to the relevant website would be provided.

It was requested by the CAAB that a distinction be made between peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed material.

The request for tender suggested that details on the literature identified as being within the scope of the project should be entered onto an Excel spreadsheet using the above as column headings. The request for tenders also indicated that the database would be part categorised and part annotated.

An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
Children Acts Advisory Board

Two headings – 'information resources' and 'topics covered' – were annotated rather than category-based as it was anticipated that the research identified would vary widely in terms of methodology and topics covered. The headings used make this child protection research database compatible with two other related databases that have been developed for the CAAB: the Inter-agency Database and the Children in Detention and Out of Home Care Database.

There was dialogue between the researchers and the CAAB in the early stages to ensure that the headings and categories used were unambiguous and mutually exclusive. A further heading, 'type of study', was added by the CAAB, while the researchers suggested that a heading called 'primary subject area' be adopted to differentiate the research by type of child protection concern, which would be useful to database users, and would also facilitate the analysis of gaps in the research.

The researchers developed categories within most but not all of the database headings. These categories were initially developed through a familiarity with both child protection policy, practices and procedures and the child protection research literature. The categories continued to be refined and added to so as to reflect the findings of the research audit.

Explanations and definitions of these headings and categories are provided in Appendix B.

2.4.3   Method for Objective 3 – Identification of the Main Funding Sources/Organisations

One of the objectives of the project was to establish the amount of funding made available for child protection research in the Republic of Ireland in 2008, 2009, and estimates for 2010.

A limited number of organisations make funding available for research in the child protection field. Again, there is no public national database of child protection research funders, and so the decision on which organisations should be contacted was based on the researchers' understanding of the child protection research field, and the funders that became apparent from the research audit. The key potential funding organisations identified and contacted by the researchers are shown in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3 Funding Organisations Contacted

Statutory Bodies	OMCYA; HRB; HSE; Irish Sports Council; Office of the Ombudsman for Children; CAAB; Family Support Agency; National Disability Authority; National Educational Psychological Service; Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS).
Voluntary Bodies	Barnardos; One Family; TREOIR.
Others	St. Clare's Child Sexual Abuse Assessment Unit, Temple St. Children's Hospital; St. Louise's Child Sexual Abuse Assessment Unit, Crumlin Children's Hospital; One Foundation; Atlantic Philanthropies.

Contact was made by email, with a letter attached requesting information on:

- whether or not the organisation had funded research in the area of child protection in 2008 or 2009 and if it intended to do so in 2010;
- if their organisation had funded such research, the amounts allocated to this in 2008, 2009, and their estimated expenditure for 2010.

It was indicated that funding of relevance to this project may have been or will be allocated to activities such as:

- commissioned research;
- support for PhD and post-doctoral research;
- funding for intervention/service evaluations;
- research grants to universities, other educational bodies, NGOs, community and voluntary organisations etc.;
- in-house researchers conducting primary or secondary research on child protection.

Where required, the email was followed up with a telephone call. The letter is reproduced in Appendix D.

Nine organisations replied to the researchers on this information request: five organisations replied but provided no funding information, while four organisations replied with funding information. The results are provided in Appendix C.

2.3.5 Method for Objective 4 – Identification of Current Gaps

The identification of the gaps in Irish literature on child protection was limited by the absence of a current national research agenda or strategy. Within this limitation, it was based on analysis of the audit in respect of a number of benchmarks, as detailed in Chapter 4.

Overall, the methods employed in identifying and auditing Irish research literature on child protection and identifying the sources of funding available for such research – internet and database searches and stakeholder participation – were the most appropriate methods to meet the project aim within the given scope and time frame. However, the invisibility of much grey literature and the inaccessibility of some research outputs, in hard and electronic copy, remains a barrier to the identification and use of Irish research on child protection.

The following criteria were agreed by the researchers and the CAAB to identify the main deficits in the supply of Irish literature on child protection:

- the extent to which research is available on the different areas of child abuse;
- the extent to which research provides cross-sectoral coverage of child abuse issues;
- the extent to which research answers key questions for policy and practice;
- the degree of research quality and the extent of confidence in research;
- the extent to which research is accessible.

2.4.6 Audit Headings and Sub-Categories

The following are the headings used to categorise the research materials included in the audit. More detail on these is provided in Appendix B.

A. Primary Subject Area

The heading 'primary subject area' refers to the type of child abuse covered by the publication. The common categorisations of child abuse normally found in child protection literature are used here and are as follows.

- Physical abuse
- Emotional/Psychological abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Exposure to domestic violence
- Cross subject

B.   Sector

Sector refers to the professional sector or discipline in which the research is located and/or about which the research is largely concerned. The following sectors were identified in the audit.

- Social work
- Sociology
- Law
- Medicine
- Psychology
- Education
- Cross sectoral

C.   Type of Study

This provides information on the type of the study undertaken. The categories used are as follows.

- Service/intervention evaluation
- Historical/archival
- Policy/practice review/analysis
- Official statistics
- Individual case study
- Diagnostic/prevalence/incidence research
- Review of legislation/legal cases
- PhD thesis
- Service users/victims/abusers perspectives
- Victims/abusers profiles
- Literature review
- Analysis of submissions
- Theory to practice
- Mixed

D. Focus of Research

This category classifies the research materials by principal focus.

- Policy framework
- Operating procedures
- Practice issues

- Ideology/values
- Victims/Abusers' profiles and experiences
- Multiple

E. Author

This provides an alphabetical list of the authors of the research and its editors where the research is published in an edited volume.

F. Year

This refers to the year of publication.

G. Title

This provides the full title of the research document and the title of edited volumes where relevant.

H. Full or Partial

This refers to whether the full document or publication is relevant to the subject of child protection or only a part of the document covers child protection.

I. Type of Publication

This refers to the form in which the research was published or otherwise made available.

- Peer reviewed article
- Non-peer reviewed article
- Public policy document
- Conference presentation
- Book
- Book chapter
- Commissioned study
- Independent research report
- Organisational publication
- Official statistics
- Journal volume/edition

J. Broad Category of Commissioning Body/Publisher

This is the broad sector to which the body that commissioned the research or the publisher belongs.

- Academic sector
- Community and voluntary sector
- Private sector

- Statutory sector
- Cross sectoral

K. Commissioning Body/Publisher

In the majority of cases this refers to the publishing body as, in many instances, there is no commissioning body and, where there is such a body, these are not clearly identified.

L. Broad Category of Research Body

This is as for broad category of commissioning body/publisher under J above.

M. Research Body

This details the person or agency who carried out the research.

N. Information Sources

Information provided under this heading relates to the principal sources of information and data used in the research, including the methods used for eliciting the information.

O. Topics Covered

A list of topics covered in the publication is provided here.

P. Link to Website for Download

This provides details of the website where the research may be downloaded free of charge.

Q. Website Where the Material May be Ordered/Purchased

This provides details of the website where the research may be ordered and/or purchased.

3 ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH INCLUDED IN THE AUDIT

3.1 Chapter Introduction

A total of 190 research documents are included in the audit. This chapter provides an analysis of the entries under a number of key headings.

3.2 Primary Subject Area

Research materials were categorised in the first instance by primary subject area, which correspond to type of abuse. Table 3.1 presents the number of documents in each category.

Table 3.1: Primary Subject Area/Type of Abuse

Primary Subject Area/Type of Abuse	No.	%
Cross Subject	111	58.4
Sexual Abuse	57	30.0
Exposure to Domestic Violence	10	5.3
Physical Abuse	7	3.7
Neglect	5	2.6
Total	**190**	**100**

The first and most striking finding this table presents is the predominance of research in two subject areas: cross subject research (58.4%) and sexual abuse (30%). It should be noted here that the vast majority of cross subject research does not refer to the study of the combination of specific forms of abuse, such as physical *and* sexual abuse or exposure to domestic violence *and* neglect. Rather, it refers to research that is located in the broad area of child abuse and child protection. Such research is relevant to more than one area of child abuse but does not address specific forms of abuse. Generally, these studies critically examined or reviewed the child protection system, i.e. policy or legal frameworks, guidelines, trends and service delivery including models of intervention. The preponderance of this type of research reflects a critical concern with the nature of child protection work, its ideological and value base and the adequacy or otherwise of existing service delivery, as well as the reality that one or other type of abuse rarely occurs in isolation (Higgins *et al.* 2005).

The emphasis that has been placed on child sexual abuse in Ireland in the past two decades in the wake of revelations of institutional abuse and a number of high profile family abuse cases has contributed to increased research interest in this area (Lalor, 2001). The relatively high level of

An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
Children Acts Advisory Board

research in this area also reflects the predominance of professionals such as psychiatrists and psychologists in this type of work as well as the clinical settings in which much of the practice is conducted. The career paths of clinicians are linked with publication of research, therefore it is more likely that their utilisation and production of research will be more prolific than that of other professionals in the sector.

There is a notable paucity of research on other specific areas of child protection and abuse, with physical abuse, neglect and exposure to domestic violence accounting for less than 12% of all identified research. It is also noteworthy that no Irish research specifically on the issue of emotional or psychological abuse could be identified.

3.3   Sector

Table 3.2 provides figures on the sector in which the identified research is located. As this table shows, the majority of the research was cross sectoral rather than sector specific.

Table 3.2: Sector of Research

Sector	No.	%
Cross Sectoral	104	54.7
Social Work	29	15.3
Law	23	12.1
Psychology	15	7.9
Medicine	9	4.7
Education	6	3.2
Sociology	4	2.1
Total	**190**	**100**

Over half (54.2%) of the research documents identified fell into the cross sectoral category, indicating that they were not specific to only one sector. Table 3.3 cross tabulates the sector with the primary subject area to provide an overview of the priorities in different disciplines. It shows that the majority of these were also cross subject (70%). This combination of cross subject and cross sectoral studies is potentially due to the multifaceted nature of child abuse and the number of professionals from different disciplines, agencies and services engaged in child protection work.

On the surface there would appear to be no specific research from the social policy sector. However, many of the cross sectoral materials referred to policy but this topic was usually integrated with practice, that is, policy in relation to specific practice issues such as inter-agency working was

discussed. The audit reflects a lack of focus on specific topic areas such as neglect, exposure to domestic violence, and a lack of focus on the practices of specific professionals. The second largest proportion of research fell under the social work category (15.8%), with two-thirds of this again falling under the cross sectoral heading. This presumably reflects the central position occupied by social work in child protection, but could also infer that child protection is not a priority for disciplines such as law, medicine, education and sociology. It is notable that research from the education sector, generally regarded as having a potentially large contribution to make to child protection, represents less than 4% of the total.

Table 3.3: Sector by Primary Subject Area (Type of abuse)

	Physical Abuse No.	Sexual Abuse No.	Neglect No.	Exposure to Domestic Violence No.	Cross Subject No.	Total No. (%)
Cross Sectoral	0	24	1	7	71	103 (54.2)
Social Work	2	1	4	3	20	30 (15.8)
Law	1	10	0	0	12	23 (12.1)
Psychology	0	14	0	0	1	15 (7.9)
Medicine	4	1	0	0	3	8 (4.2)
Education	0	4	0	0	3	7 (3.7)
Sociology	0	3	0	0	1	4 (2.1)
Total	**7**	**57**	**5**	**10**	**111**	**190 (100)**

3.4   Type of Study

Table 3.4 shows the distribution of the research by type of study. Over half (57.9%) of the research fell either wholly or in part under the somewhat broad category of policy/practice review/analysis. What is perhaps most striking, however, about the type of studies undertaken is the lack of service or intervention evaluations, with only 12 such studies (6.3%) identified. This suggests that although there may be an amount of research that critically reviews practice and policy in child protection and a certain amount of material on the nature of child abuse (mainly child sexual abuse) as well as prevention, the efficacy, efficiency and impact of current responses to the problem remains largely unknown. Also striking is the dearth of studies based on the perspectives of service users, victims or abusers, with only nine (4.7%) falling into this category and 12 studies (6.3%) falling under the heading of victim/abuser profiles.

Table 3.4: Type of Study

Type of Study	No.*	%*
Policy/Practice Review/Analysis	110	57.9
Mixed	20	10.5
Review of Legislation/Legal Cases	19	10
Literature Review	16	8.4
Victims/Abusers Profiles	12	6.3
Service/Intervention Evaluation	12	6.3
Service Users/Victims/Abusers Perspectives	9	4.7
Official Statistics	8	4.2
Individual Case Study	7	3.7
Historical/Archival	6	3.2
Theory to Practice	5	2.6
Diagnostic/Prevalence/Incidence Research	4	2.1
PhD Thesis	3	1.6
Analysis of Submissions	2	1.0
*As a number of studies fall under more than one type of study the number here does not total 190 or 100%.		

3.5 Focus of Research

Table 3.5 summarises the focus of the research documents reviewed. This table shows the number of times each issue arose on its own as the sole focus of a research document and the number of times it arose in combination with other issues in a document with more than one focus.

Table 3.5: Focus of Research

Focus of Research	Single Focus		Multiple Focus	
	N	%	N	%**
Operating Procedures	44	38.9	55	71.4
Practice Issues	26	23.0	41	53.2
Policy Framework	18	15.9	46	59.7
Victims/Abusers/Profiles/Experiences	13	11.6	11	14.3
Ideology/Values	12	10.6	14	18.2
Total	**113**	**100**	**77***	
*This total relates to the number of documents that had a multiple focus and not the sum of the total number of incidences of each specific issue. **These percentages relate to the proportion of documents with multiple foci that contained each individual focus. Therefore 71.4% of those with multiple foci included operating procedures, etc. Because of the overlap between cases these percentages do not total to 100.				

The most common focus of the research with a single focus was operating procedures, followed by practice issues and policy framework. In addition, in research with more than one focus, combinations of two or all three of these foci were also very common. This is not surprising given the overlap, in reality, between policy that sets many of the parameters of child protection work, operating procedures that reflect how this policy and work are to be implemented on the ground, and practice issues that deal with how child protection work is managed and organised. Overall, this data reflects a concern with the child protection system generally as opposed to specific forms of child abuse.

3.6 Type of Publication, Sector of Commissioning/Publishing Body and Sector of Research Body

Table 3.6 below shows the distribution of research by type of publication.

Table 3.6: Type of Publication

Type of Publication	No.	%
Peer Reviewed Article	74	38.9
Book Chapter	33	17.4
Non-Peer Reviewed Article	26	13.7
Organisational Publication	17	8.9
Commissioned Study	13	6.8
Book	11	5.8
Independent Research Report	6	3.1
PhD Thesis	6	3.1
Public Policy Document	1	0.6
Conference Presentation	1	0.6
Official Guidelines/Procedures	1	0.5
Official Statistics	1	0.6
Total	**190**	**100**

By far the most common type of publication was peer reviewed article. This is in keeping with the findings in relation to the sector of both the publishing body and the research body, presented in Table 3.7 below. However, it is noteworthy that little of the research identified was externally commissioned, with only 6.8% of the documents identified falling into this category. Peer reviewed articles often drew on data from PhD theses as well organisational/clinical studies and a small number of commissioned studies and it is notable that in a number of cases, there were several articles based on data from a single study.

An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
Children Acts Advisory Board

Table 3.7: Sector of Commissioning/Publishing Body and Sector of Research Body

	Commissioning/Publishing Body		Research Body	
	No.	%	No.	%
Academic Sector	128	67.5	139	73.5
Statutory Sector	56	29.5	44	23.0
Cross Sectoral	2	1.0	2	1.0
Community and Voluntary Sector	2	1.0	1	0.5
Private Sector	2*	1.0	4	2.0
Total	**190**	**100**	**190**	**100**
* One of these was commissioned by the Catholic Church, the other by the Internet Providers' Association.				

There was a lack of clear information in many of the research documents on whether the research was commissioned or not and by whom. Therefore, it is, by and large, the sector of the publisher that is reported here. In line with the finding that the most common form of publications are peer reviewed articles, publishers and researchers/research bodies most often fall into the academic category. Despite the high incidence of research that is both cross subject and cross sectoral, cross sectoral collaboration at the point of publication and actually undertaking research is very low, while the virtual absence of private sector research bodies reflects the dearth of commissioned research as noted earlier.

These findings, when taken in conjunction with the additional finding that the majority of the research identified was conducted by individuals or clinical teams as opposed to research agencies or centres, points to the responsibility carried by academics and clinicians in conducting child protection research, in the context of limited commissioning by organisations.

The research published and/or commissioned by the statutory sector is broken down across type of study and focus in Table 3.8. As with the material included in the audit generally, the most common type of study was found to be policy/practice review/analysis (48.3%) and the most common focus to be operating procedures (39%).

Table 3.8: Research Published/Commissioned by the Statutory Sector by Type of Study and Focus of Research

Type of Study	No.	%	Focus of Research	No.	%
Policy/Practice Review/Analysis	27	48.3	Operating Procedures	22	39.4
Official Statistics	8	14.3	Multiple	18	32.2
Review of Legislation/Law	5	8.9	Practice Issues	8	14.3
Mixed	5	8.9	Policy Framework	6	10.7
Service/Intervention Evaluation	3	5.4	Victims/Abusers/Profiles/Experiences	1	1.7
Service Users/Victims/Abusers' Perspectives	2	3.6	Ideology/Values	1	1.7
Diagnostic/Prevalence/Incidence Research	2	3.6			
Literature Review	2	3.6			
Theory to Practice	1	1.7			
Analysis of Submissions	1	1.7			
Total	**56**	**100**	**Total**	**56**	**100**

3.7 Information Sources and Topics Covered

The CAAB requested that a descriptive approach was adopted in relation to information sources and topics covered (as opposed to a classification system) so that the database that was produced as part of this audit was compatible with other CAAB databases. This means that the information sources and topics were described as they appeared in the studies in order to provide more detail, as opposed to being classified under a set of summary headings. Because of this, it is somewhat more difficult to provide clear summary statistics in these instances.

Nevertheless, particularly noteworthy in relation to information sources is the lack of studies incorporating primary research with children. Direct research methods such as interviews and focus groups with professionals, practitioners, social workers, front-line staff and managers of services, service users and parents and family members were used in 55 (29.6%) of the publications identified. However, only 14 (7.5%) cited direct contact with children and young people as a source of information, with information on children being more commonly gathered from case files, professionals and family members.

A number of the individual studies were conducted in considerable depth and gave clear descriptions of the methodology used, including the PhD theses and the commissioned studies. However these

were the exceptions. The majority did not involve primary or empirical research, and some were extremely small in scale, with unclear or very limited descriptions of methodology, or consisted of selective reviews of the literature.

As indicated above, a descriptive approach to identifying the topics covered in the research was deemed the most appropriate the overall purpose of this study. This approach makes rigorous summary analysis difficult in this area. Nevertheless, a number of summary comments are possible.

First, a very wide variety of topics are covered in the research included in the audit. They range from the collation and presentation of official statistics to the detailed examination of the processes and outcomes of interventions in individual cases of child abuse.

Second, where research is located within a single primary subject area and the sector can be identified, the topics covered appear to be closely related to these. For example, research arising in relation to physical abuse, and in particular from the medical sector, commonly addressed topics related to specific medical conditions or injuries, diagnosis and treatment. Likewise, research located in the educational sector was primarily concerned with topics such as teachers' perspectives and behaviours or child safety programmes operating in schools. Where the research is identified as cross subject and cross sector in nature, the topics tend to be more wide-ranging and include policy, legislation, victim/abuser profiles and the perspectives of a wider range of stakeholders such as parents, children, social workers, managers etc.

Third, some topics are more common than others. Policy, which appears in 13% of the research identified, and legislation, which appears in approximately 10% of the topic descriptions, appears more frequently than most other topics, such as children's perspectives (approximately 2%). This is in keeping with earlier findings in relation to the focus of the research, and information sources used. It is also potentially because the former topics are used to contextualise much research.

3.8   Key Findings

- Research identified in the audit has tended to focus on child protection and the child protection system generally as well as sexual abuse. This research has primarily been undertaken by clinicians and academics, and spans across sectors.

- Over half (57.9%) of the research falls under the heading of policy/practice reviews/analysis. This is further reflected in the fact that the research most commonly focused on operating procedures, followed by practice issues and policy framework, both in studies with a single focus and those with multiple foci.

- The most common type of publication was the peer reviewed article (38.9%), with commissioned research accounting for just 6.8%. This is in line with the findings that 67.5% of commissioning/publishing bodies and 73.5% of research bodies were in the academic sector.

- The research published and/or commissioned by the statutory sector follows the pattern found in the audit generally, with the most common type of study being policy/practice review/analysis (48.3%) and the most common focus being operating procedures (39%).

- Information sources rarely incorporated primary research with children, with only 14 studies (7.5%) citing direct contact with children and young people. Information on children was more commonly gathered from case files, professionals and family members.

- The topics covered in the research were very wide-ranging but closely related to the primary subject area (type of abuse) and the sector in which the research was located.

4   GAPS IN THE IDENTIFIED LITERATURE

4.1   Chapter Introduction

This chapter assesses the availability of Irish research in relation to what could reasonably be required to provide an adequate evidence base for policy makers, managers and practitioners.

There were challenges in identifying child protection research gaps. As previously indicated, more time than anticipated was dedicated to identifying and locating research literature in the two-month period available to develop the database that represents a primary output of the audit. This impacted on the depth of the review that could be undertaken to identify research gaps. However, it was very clear from the review undertaken that the subject of Irish child protection research gaps has not in itself been subjected to any empirical interrogation or analysis; this project appears to be the first to provide such an assessment.

Some of the research reviewed was clearly filling gaps in our knowledge and understanding, and the researchers noted that this was the case. To provide examples, Nolan *et al.* in their paper 'Profiles of child sexual abuse cases in Ireland: an archival study' published in *Child Abuse & Neglect The International Journal* in 2002, note that little research on the behavioural effects of Child Sexual Abuse CSA and factors that mediate these effects has been conducted in Ireland. Their article aimed to contribute to filling this research gap. Marsa *et al.* in their article 'Attachment Styles and Psychological Profiles of Sex Offenders in Ireland' published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* in 2004 identified a dearth of research on the psychological profiles of Irish sex offenders, with the aim of their study being to undertake such a profile. McCormick *et al.* in the paper Investigating Sexual Abuse: Findings of a 15-Year Longitudinal Study published in 2005 by the *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities* identify the dearth of longitudinal large-scale studies on sexual abuse in intellectual disability services.

It was not unusual for authors to recommend further research in the conclusions section of their reports or articles, and we could regard these recommendations as indications of the nature of the research gaps. However, it difficult to assess whether or not these recommendations have been progressed since they were written, and whether or not the recommendations represent the research interests of researchers rather than research gaps. As already noted, it is also difficult to make a judgement on gaps in the research in the absence of a comprehensive assessment of the research needs of the key stakeholders. Nevertheless, it could be inferred that given the apparent national concern about the problem of child abuse, the amount of Irish literature on the topic is relatively small.

The following criteria were identified by the authors in association with the CAAB and are used here to identify the main deficits in the supply of Irish literature on child protection:

- the extent to which research is available on the different areas of child abuse;
- the extent to which research provides cross-sectoral coverage of child abuse issues;
- the extent to which research answers key questions for policy and practice;
- the degree of research quality and the extent of confidence in research;
- the extent to which research is accessible.

4.2 The Extent to which Research is Available on the Different Areas of Child Abuse

The extent to which Irish research material is available on the different areas of child abuse is shown in Table 4.1.To assess its relevance and usefulness to policy makers, managers and practitioners in the child protection sector, it is useful to compare it to the national statistics on reported child abuse.

Table 4.1: Reports of Child Abuse Made to the HSE in 2008 and Percentage of Research Materials on the Different Categories Identified in the Audit

Category of Child Abuse	No. of Child Abuse Reports Made to the HSE in 2008*	% of Child Abuse Reports Made in 2008	No. of Research Materials in the Audit on this Topic	% of Relevant Research Materials on this Topic (N=69)	% of Total Research Materials in the Audit on this Topic (N=190)
Neglect	4,766	40.6	5	7.3	2.6
Child Sexual Abuse	2,379	20.2	57	82.6	30.0
Physical Abuse	2,399	20.4	7	10.1	3.7
Emotional Abuse	2,192	18.6	0	0	0
Total	**11,736**	**100**	**69**	**100**	
Source: HSE Report on the Adequacy of Services for Children and Families 2008 (www.hse.ie)					

Table 4.1 shows that while neglect is the most commonly reported form of child abuse, the proportion of research on the topic is quite low when compared with the proportion of research on child sexual abuse. Research on physical abuse is similarly low in comparison, and it is notable that even though

782 reports concerning emotional abuse were made to the HSE, no Irish material on the topic was identified in the audit.[3]

It is also useful to look at data produced by the HSE in respect of out of home care, which is commonly regarded as the top or final level of the child care continuum, with prevention, early intervention and child protection as the earlier levels. Consideration of the reasons for the admission of children to care in 2008 highlights a number of factors that, it may be assumed, currently pre-occupy staff in the child protection services. The primary reasons for admission to care in the 2008 HSE Review of Adequacy of Services for Children and Families are listed in the following order.

- parent unable to cope/family difficulties;
- neglect of child;
- family member abusing drugs or alcohol;
- child with emotional/behavioural problems;
- physical abuse of child.

The first category (parent unable to cope) is further broken down into the various difficulties that families were experiencing, including housing, finance, addiction to alcohol and drugs, mental illness, disability and domestic violence, most of which are recognised in the literature as linked primarily with child neglect, although they are also associated with other forms of child abuse.[4]

At a very simple level, the two data sets described above illustrate the major challenges and issues that currently occupy child protection policy makers, managers and frontline workers. *The Agenda for Children's Services* advocates the use of evidence by policy makers, senior managers and front line workers, and if this aspiration is to be realised, appropriate research evidence on all the above areas will be required. However, as Table 4.1 shows, when the materials in the current audit are considered, the main focus of research appears to be on child sexual abuse and broader cross sectoral issues with very little specific focus on the topics of major concern to the child protection services. Neglect, physical abuse and emotional abuse, which is normally linked with emotional/ behavioural problems, appear to be under-researched as specific topics.

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[3] Exposure to domestic violence is considered to be a form of emotional abuse, but the definition of emotional abuse in Children First is very much broader (DoHC 1999, Section 3.3 p.32)

[4] These data were not produced in statistical format, therefore it is not possible to present them in a table.

4.3 The Extent to which Research Provides Cross Sectoral Coverage of Child Abuse Issues

There is a clear emphasis in child protection policy on inter-agency and interdisciplinary working, as evidenced in documents including *Children First* (Department of Health and Children, 1999) and *The Agenda for Children's Services* (OMCYA, 2007). The rationales for this include the complex and multifaceted nature of child protection issues and the view that no one discipline or sector can provide all of the services, interventions or expertise required to address these (Duggan & Corrigan, 2009). It would appear desirable, therefore, that a cross sectoral approach is taken in relation to child protection as this can contribute to and draw on inter-agency and interdisciplinary working, as well as providing more comprehensive and holistic analyses of issues and potential solutions.

As Table 2 earlier shows over half (54.7%) of research included in the audit was cross sectoral, indicating that they were not specific to only one sector and are relevant across a number of sectors. In addition, Table 3 indicates that the majority of this cross sectoral research was also cross subject. However, as stated earlier in this report, most of the cross subject research is focused on broad child protection issues or on the child protection system, it is *not* concerned with combinations of specific areas of child abuse such as physical *and* sexual abuse or exposure to domestic violence *and* neglect. Of the 103 cross sectoral studies identified, cross subject and sexual abuse studies account for a combined total of 95 or 92%. This clearly indicates that gaps occur in cross sectoral work in all other areas of child protection research. Only one cross sectoral study was concerned with neglect and no cross sectoral studies were found in the area of physical abuse. This is in part due to the relative lack of research that specifically addresses these areas. In part, it may also be due to the high representation of specific sectors in certain areas, such as medicine in the field of physical abuse. Nonetheless, these areas of child abuse are no less complex than others such as child sexual abuse and the lack of cross sectoral studies represents a gap in the current research where inter-sectoral and inter-agency working to address child protection issues is viewed by many as the way forward.

The analysis also shows that there is limited research from different sectors on different types of abuse. For instance the audit did not uncover any Irish research studies from the psychology, education or sociology sectors on physical abuse, neglect, or exposure to domestic violence. Nor did it identify any Irish research studies from the law or medicine sectors on neglect or exposure to domestic violence.

4.4 The Extent to which Research Answers Key Questions for Policy and Practice

4.4.1 The Factors Most Commonly Associated With Child Abuse Reports and Placement of Children in Out of Home Care

The key factors associated with child abuse reports and placement of children in out of home care as illustrated by HSE statistics are listed above in Table 4.1. The most frequently reported type of concern is child neglect but as Table 4.1 indicates, only 2.6% of the research materials identified in the audit concern this topic. Further, Table 4.1 shows that, even if we exclude cross sectoral and exposure to domestic violence-focused studies, just 7.3% of the remaining research materials focus on neglect. It is generally acknowledged that neglect is associated with the impact on parenting capacity of issues such as domestic violence, parental mental illness, addiction and disability (Stevenson, 1998; Horwath, 2007) and the lack of materials on these specific topics indicates a current gap.

Child sexual abuse is the third most frequently reported type of abuse and is the topic about which the highest amount of research material is published. However, it is not possible on the basis of this audit to judge whether the materials are adequate or sufficient, as it would be necessary to comprehensively assess the needs of policy makers and practitioners in order to reach such a judgment. Nevertheless, it could be reasonably inferred that the comparatively low number (7) and percentage of material on physical abuse (3.7%) and the lack of material on emotional abuse are inadequate to answer key questions for policy and practice.

There are no official statistics on the numbers of children in the population exposed to domestic violence, although it is acknowledged to be a significant national problem (Buckley *et al.* 2006, O'Reilly and Hogan, 2007). The identification of 10 items of research on this topic could be regarded as insufficient to answer key questions for policy and practice.

4.4.2 Victims of Abuse

Only 6.3% of the materials in the audit offer profiles of victims of child abuse. There are a number of possible reasons for this. These include the very sensitive nature of child abuse and protection issues, the desire of victims and their families to maintain their privacy and the difficulty of identifying and accessing victims of child abuse for research studies.

4.4.3 Perspectives of Service Users

As with victims of abuse, few research studies focused on the views of child protection service users. Only 4.7% of the materials focus on the experiences of children and families who are users of the child protection services.

4.4.4 The Effectiveness of Interventions and their Impact

The need for programme and service evaluations was identified in a recent Irish study (Buckley & Whelan 2009 in association with the CAAB). However, the audit indicated that only 6.3% of the materials identified in the audit covered this area. The shortage of research on 'what works' means sources of information on the most useful interventions and programmes with which to address the identified problems in the Irish context is denied to the services.

4.5 The Degree of Research Quality and the Extent of Confidence in Research

The quality of the research in the audit appears to be somewhat uneven. While it was not always clear that a piece of material, apart from journal articles, had been peer reviewed, it could be estimated that up to 50% of the content had not been subject to external quality assurance. There were only 13 commissioned studies and six PhD theses that could be considered substantial pieces in terms of word length, sample size, longevity of project and depth of analysis.

National statistics on child abuse are provided in the HSE annual reports (www.hse.ie), the most recently available of which is the 2008 edition. However, the current Irish data has several shortcomings.

Firstly, although statistics relating to child deaths and injuries, as well as suicides, are available from a number of different sources, and data about children's lives is available from the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth affairs (www.omcya.ie), there is no single-source publication or website that gives comprehensive information about the incidence and prevalence of child abuse, including the gender and ages of the children, the causal or associated factors and the numbers of children that died from child abuse.

Secondly, as acknowledged in the HSE annual reports, data on the numbers of child abuse reports are not recorded consistently. For instance, it is not clear if reports relate to one child, or all the children in particular families. The HSE also acknowledges that decisions regarding categorisation of

cases of 'child abuse' and 'child welfare' are determined by thresholds that differ according to the ability of the individual HSE area to respond to reports.

Thirdly, published service level indicators give very limited scope for analysis. The HSE publishes statistics in its annual reports to give an opinion on the adequacy of current services. It publishes statistics for reports, numbers screened out, initial assessments, and 'outcomes' in terms of whether the reports were confirmed, non-confirmed, inconclusive or still under assessment. However, the sources of the reports are not published, in a way that makes it not possible to identify the numbers of reports made by the public, family members or particular professions. In addition, the categorisation of outcomes in the above terms also means that the medium- to longer-term work of child protection practitioners is not evident (i.e. the outcomes for children in terms of immediate results and medium-term impacts), and the utility of this data would be considerable. Overall, there is a need for deeper analysis of the issue of child protection in Ireland and the impact of services.

Fourthly, national statistics reveal no epidemiological trends, merely the number of new reports year on year. They give no sense of the prevalence, or recurrence, of different types of child abuse, the length of interventions or the resource implications of service provision in different types of cases. They do not make any linkages between social factors affecting families and the incidence of child abuse and thereby do not identify vulnerability factors.

Fifthly, restricting the collection of data about child protection to reports made to the statutory child protection system is very limiting. The review of Children First published by the OMCYA in 2008 raised the possibility that child abuse is under-reported and highlighted a lack of general compliance with the Children First guidelines by a number of organisations and institutions providing services to children and families. Consequently the comprehensiveness of these data is questionable. It has been argued elsewhere that focusing only on reports to the statutory system overlooks the fact that child maltreatment may be quantified in other ways, such as measuring admissions for preventable injuries at hospital and outpatient departments, and collecting information from services such as child and adolescent mental health services (Scott, 2006).

The importance of accurate and comprehensive statistical data cannot be understated as it has the potential to demonstrate not only current trends and activities, but intractable problems and fundamental weaknesses of the system. Accurate data can also highlight the areas where resources should be allocated. For instance, we know from annual reports provided by the HSE that neglect is the most often reported form of child abuse (a fact which is not reflected in the amount of research activity on that topic), and we are also aware from the data that child neglect is less likely than any other form of abuse to reach the thresholds for 'suspected child abuse' operated by child protection

services. We also know that only a very small number of all reports, normally about 20% of the total number, are considered to meet the threshold for 'confirmed' abuse. More qualitative exploration of the context in which reports are made and processed has the potential to explain the reason why so many reports are screened out, a concern raised in the OMCYA Review of Children First (2008).

4.6   The Extent to which Research is Accessible

While a number of research databases already exist in Ireland and elsewhere, the entire content is not always available for viewing or downloading. Of the materials in the current audit, approximately 75% are not available without purchase at individual or institutional level. These include peer reviewed journal articles for which a substantial subscription[5] is necessary, non-peer reviewed journals such as the *Irish Social Worker* that are only available to members and not online, and books that require purchasing or borrowing from libraries. PhD theses may only be borrowed or viewed by students or staff in a university. Although research that has been commissioned by a public body is now normally published on the web, most of the larger studies identified in this audit were either published in book format only, or not available electronically because this was not the norm at the time they were undertaken.

The dearth of research on child protection in Ireland is undoubtedly linked to levels of funding and the lack of opportunities for publication. Researchers are less likely to write journal articles for which there is no outlet. The fact that there is no Irish peer reviewed journal specifically for the social work profession that is central to child protection work is regrettable.[6] Only 31 of the 74 peer reviewed articles in the audit appeared in Irish journals, and the majority of these journals were from the disciplines of law or psychology. The requirements to publish outside the researcher's discipline means that findings specific to that discipline have to be sacrificed in order to make the material more generalisable and acceptable for the principal readership of that particular journal. Publication in international journals requires authors to move outside national boundaries in terms of the legislative/policy contexts and theoretical frameworks applied, so that the link between the research findings and local issues may be obscured and the implications, conclusions and recommendations of the research are not directly applicable.

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[5] For example, the institutional subscription to *Child Abuse & Neglect The International Journal* produced in the US is €1,854 per annum.

[6] *The Irish Journal of Social Work Research* was a peer reviewed journal produced by the Irish Association of Social Workers. It ceased publication after four issues between 1997 and 1998. *The Irish Journal of Child Centred Practice* was published by the ISPCC for a number of years but was taken over by the Child Care in Practice, based in Northern Ireland.

4.7   Key Chapter Findings

This audit of literature on child protection has, for the first time, brought together an identified cluster of literature on child protection in Ireland, which should be of value to all staff involved in the sector and will hopefully impact positively on services for children and families affected by child abuse. The audit has given a picture of the nature of research material, the sectors that have been most research active, the types of studies undertaken, the main subjects covered and the locations from which research may be sourced. As well as identifying relevant material, the audit has attempted to scope the financial investment in this type of research and identify gaps in the current availability of Irish research. The authors are aware that this is not a definitive audit, and that there are materials that have not been found by us or brought to our attention. We are also aware that a number of small and valuable pieces of research have been carried out by students and practitioners that have not been published or otherwise put into the public domain so that they were unavailable to us. The next section of this report presents the key study conclusions.

5   CONCLUSIONS

Based on the available material our conclusions are as follows.

1. While the audit has identified an amount of material on child protection from a number of disciplines, **the volume and coverage** of Irish research does not appear to be commensurate with the current national concern about this problem and the challenges being faced by policy makers and service providers in the following respects.

    ■   There is a shortage of good quality, robust research on child protection practice in the statutory sector, particularly in respect of social work, which is acknowledged to be central to child protection.

    ■   There is a shortage of child protection-focused research on the factors that cause and perpetuate child abuse, such as homelessness, addiction, parental mental illness and domestic violence. The need for material on these areas is demonstrated by the nature and scale of reports to the child protection system and the removal of some children from their families into out of home care as a result of the above mentioned adversities.

    ■   There is a shortage of research on the profile and characteristics of child victims or studies that involve children as active participants in, as opposed to objects of, research.

    ■   The audit illustrates a shortage of evaluative studies that demonstrate the impact of interventions and 'what works' in child protection.

2. There have been some very useful developments in research dissemination and supporting access to research, particularly by the OMCYA and the HRB, but this audit shows that the **majority of the Irish research material is not publicly accessible beyond abstract formats, a factor that limits its usefulness.** The lack of professional peer reviewed journals and outlets for publication in Ireland, particularly for social work research, also limits dissemination. The production and public availability of systematic reviews of existing research, by topic, would facilitate greater take-up and utilisation.

3. While a number of relevant and important topics have been the subject of commissioned research, there is currently **no integrated research agenda on child protection** although the OMCYA is currently developing a children's research agenda. The current lack of such an integrated agenda reflects the ad hoc funding arrangements that have existed to date. National statistics on the nature of child abuse reports indicate that neglect and associated problems should take priority in this agenda. The implementation of *The Agenda for Children's Services* and the creation of the HSE as one body under which health and welfare services operate, provides more opportunities for co-ordinated research commissioning and dissemination.

4. Available statistical data on child protection, which are vital for planning services and allocating resources, **require further development and analysis to improve accuracy and to provide a more comprehensive picture of child protection issues and activities.** For instance, the source of referrals, the type of adversities being experienced by families, the interventions being made and their impact on children.

The above conclusions are based on the objectives underpinning this project, which were to identify and develop a database of Irish child protection literature, identify the main sources of funding and identify gaps in research as demonstrated by the audit of literature available. The database that has been developed will require updating to reflect new additions and hopefully will provide a useful resource to policy makers and service providers. While this audit revealed a number of shortcomings in the availability and accessibility of Irish research, the project represents an important step in bringing together existing material and should provide a starting block for the development of a national agenda for research on child protection. Such a task will require a wider scoping exercise that encompasses the views of all stakeholders in the sector, reflects international developments on the topic, and considers child protection as one dimension of the wider context and continuum of child welfare, from prevention to out of home care.

Appendix A   BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Appendix B   AUDIT HEADINGS AND CATEGORIES

This section describes the headings and categories used in the database that was created as part of this audit. The principal headings used were determined by the CAAB and are in line with the headings used in the CAAB's database on children and young people who are out of home and its database on inter-agency working, with some of the sub-categories developed by the research team in light of the research contained in the audit. Many of the headings used are self-explanatory, such as year of publication, author and website where the material can be downloaded or purchased. However, some of the categories used under the principal headings require elaboration.

A.   *Primary Subject Area*

The heading 'primary subject area' refers to the type of child abuse covered by the publication. The common categorisations of child abuse normally found in child protection literature are used here and are as follows.

- Physical abuse
- Emotional/Psychological abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Exposure to domestic violence
- Cross subject

Exposure to domestic violence: exposure of children to domestic violence is now a reportable category of child abuse in a number of jurisdictions. It can be described as an 'indirect' experience, where a child is not actually the subject of abuse, but is nonetheless impacted by it. Children's exposure to domestic violence typically falls into three primary categories:

- hearing a violent event;
- being directly involved as an eyewitness, intervening, or being used as a part of a violent event (e.g., being used as a shield against abusive actions);
- experiencing the aftermath of a violent event.

Children can be exposed to domestic violence episodes by being used by the abuser to 'spy' or inform on the abused family member, and are often used as pawns or bargaining chips by adults in abusive relationships (see www.enotalone.com).

Cross subject: this category refers to research that is concerned with either (i) more than one specific form of abuse, or (ii) child protection as a discipline and practice that spans a number of non-specified subject areas.

B.   Sector

Sector refers to the professional sector or discipline in which the research is located and/or about which the research is largely concerned. The following sectors were identified in the audit.

- Social work
- Sociology
- Law
- Medicine
- Psychology
- Education
- Cross sectoral – any combination of the above.

C.   Type of Study

This provides information of the type of the study undertaken. The categories used are as follows.

- Service/intervention evaluation: these include evaluations of both widespread services and individual interventions.
- Historical/archival: these studies are based on an analysis of the historical development of child protection work and services in Ireland and/or draw on available archives, policy documents and reports relating to child protection policy, practice and services.
- Policy/practice review/analysis: included here are research studies that critically examine or review child protection policy and/or child protection practice, with many studies incorporating aspects of both.
- Official statistics: this category includes research that is based on the analysis of official child protection statistics produced by various public sector organisations.
- Individual case study: this is research that is based on a case study of one individual victim, family or abuser.
- Diagnostic/prevalence/incidence research: this research addresses issues of diagnosis of various forms of child abuse or particular injuries/conditions arising from abuse, and/or the prevalence and incidence of different forms of child abuse.
- Review of legislation/legal cases: this category includes research on the civil and criminal law covering child protection and child abuse, legal issues in child protection, and the study of individual legal cases and their implications.
- PhD thesis: this refers to competed PhD studies in any relevant discipline.

- Service users/victims/abusers perspectives: this research focuses on the perspectives of service users, victims and/or abusers.

- Victims/abusers profiles: included here are studies that detail the personal, social, psychological and/or familial and other characteristics of child abuse victims and abusers.

- Literature review: this is a study that does not involve primary research but is instead based on a systematic review of the relevant literature.

- Analysis of submissions: this refers to the systematic analysis of submissions made to a public body on any child protection issue.

- Theory to practice: this category includes literature based on the application of a specific theoretical perspective to a practical issue in child protection.

- Mixed: any combination of the above.

D. Focus of Research

This category classifies the research materials by principal focus. The categories are not as self-evident as the others and are drawn from the literature reviewed. The following list provides details of the types of issues addressed by research included under each heading.

- Policy framework: this includes research that is directly related to public policy on child protection as well as research on mechanisms and processes that seek to implement policy such as training, guidelines, vetting and clearance procedures, and protocols.

- Operating procedures: this covers research on key aspects of the operation of the child protection system including reporting, investigating, assessment, intervention, child protection conferences; family welfare conferences, court/legal intervention, and various treatments.

- Practice issues: this includes research on issues that cross the boundaries of individual operational issues and include compliance with policies, guidelines and protocols, human resource issues, inter-agency working, and management issues.

- Ideology/values: this category includes research that is concerned with the development of the ideologies and values underpinning the evolution of child protection in Ireland.

- Victims/abusers' profiles and experiences: research included here is primarily concerned with the characteristics, profiles and experiences of victims and abusers.

- Multiple: any combination of the above.

E. Author

This provides an alphabetical list of the authors of the research and the editors where the research is published in an edited volume.

F.   Year

This refers to the year of publication. In the case of publication series, (i) the individual years are provided where these are not annual publications or where they have been in existence for an insufficient length of time to securely judge them to be a series, and (ii) a range is provided where they are annual publications of longstanding status.

G.   Title

This provides the full title of the research document and the title of edited volumes where relevant.

H.   Full or Partial

This refers to whether the full document or publication is relevant to the subject of child protection, in which case it is designated as full or 'F', or only a part of the document covers child protection, in which case it is designated as partial or 'P'.

It should be noted that this designation relates only to the child protection document under consideration. Therefore, an article that deals entirely with child protection is designated as 'F', even though it may appear in a journal that contains no other relevant articles. The same is true of individually authored chapters in an edited book. This is because it is the individual article or chapter that is referenced and can be assigned to specified authors.

However, a book that is authored by a single author or group of authors working collaboratively but contains only one chapter on child protection is designated as 'P' as the book is the subject of the reference, only part of which is relevant.

I.   Type of Publication

This refers to the form in which the research was published or otherwise made available. The headings here are again largely self-explanatory and in common usage, but a brief note is provided below on those that may be unclear.

- Peer reviewed article: this is an article that has been subject to the external peer review procedures of the publication, usually a journal, in which it is published.
- Non-peer reviewed article: this is an article that has not been subject to external review.
- Public policy document: this is a document that is researched and produced by a public body on a public policy issue and/or which sets out a public policy position.
- Conference presentation
- Book
- Book chapter: this refers to a chapter by an individual author or authors in an edited book.

- Commissioned study: these are research studies that are commissioned by an organisation or group of organisations and are undertaken by an external researcher or research body which may be private, community and voluntary or academic.

- Independent research report: this is a publication that is based on entirely independent research funded by an external organisation that does not seek to promote a specific agenda or position through the research.

- Organisational publication: this is a publication that is written by a staff member of an organisation or agency and that is published by that same organisation. There is no commissioning agent or consultancy contract.

- Official statistics: these are publications that are based entirely on official statistics that are generated by local, regional or national statutory bodies.

- Journal volume/edition: these are publications that are special editions or volumes of journals that are dedicated entirely to the subject of child protection.

J.   Broad Category of Commissioning Body/Publisher

This is the broad sector to which the body that commissioned the research or the publisher.

- Academic sector: this encompasses academic/educational institutions such as university departments or schools, research centres, and 'think-tanks'.
- Community and voluntary sector: this encompasses all non-statutory, not-for-profit and charitable organisations.
- Private sector: this includes all commercial bodies including private research consultancies.
- Statutory sector: all State bodies including Government departments.
- Cross sectoral: any combination of the above.

K.   Commissioning Body/Publisher

In the majority of cases this refers to the publishing body as, in many instances, there is no commissioning body and, where there is such a body, these are not clearly identified.

L.   Broad Category of Research Body

This is as for broad category of commissioning body/publisher under J above.

M.   Research Body

This details the person or agency who carried out the research.

N.   Information Sources

Information provided under this heading relates to the principal sources of information and data used in the research, including the methods used for eliciting the information. Where the research

document exclusively focuses on child protection all of the information sources are listed. Where only part of the document covers child protection, only the information sources relevant to the child protection element are provided where these can be clearly identified.

O.   Topics Covered

A list of topics covered in the publication is provided here. Where the research document exclusively focuses on child protection all of the topics covered are listed. Where only part of the document covers child protection, the general topics covered in the whole document are listed, with greater detail provided on the topics relevant to the child protection part of the document.

P.   Link to Website for Download

This provides details of the website where the research may be downloaded free of charge.

Q.   Website Where the Material May be Ordered/Purchased

This provides details of the website where the research may be ordered and/or purchased.

Appendix C   FINANCIAL DATA

As Chapter 2 has outlined, 17 organisations were contact by email with a letter attached, requesting information about funding for research on child protection during 2008 and 2009, with projected expenditure for 2010. Following a reminder email nine responses were received, five of which confirmed that no sponsorships had been given by the relevant organisations within in the specified time period (these were the OMCYA, NDA, Barnardos, St. Clare's Unit, Temple St. and St. Louise's' Unit, Crumlin). Other responses were received from the HRB, the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS), the HSE and the CAAB as outlined below.

Organisation	Project	Expenditure in 2008	Expenditure in 2009	Projected Expenditure in 2010
HRB	PhD Research	130,904	77,313.41	Not yet decided
IRCHSS	PhD Research	42,000	42,000	21,000 (more grants may be made but not decided yet)
HSE	Support in relation to Domestic Violence project	27,500		
HSE	Support in relation to a Differential Response Model		14,000	
CAAB	Audit of Child Protection Literature		58,000	
CAAB	Literature Review of Inter-Agency Working in Children's Services*	45,000	5,000	
*This study was primarily about children's services in the sectors of child protection and family welfare services, youth justice and education. Only 25% of the content covered child protection.				

As the previous section has highlighted, only 6.8% of the research in the current audit was externally commissioned, and with the exception of the HSE sponsorship above, all of that commissioning took place prior to 2008. Obviously research that was carried out within organisations, either public sector or academic, carried a cost but it has not been possible to ascertain the amount incurred.

An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
Children Acts Advisory Board

While research centres and bodies may have ongoing funding relationships with statutory, private or philanthropic organisations, it was not the objective of this work to ascertain where research bodies obtained their budgets. In addition, and linked to the previous point regarding in-house research, the allocation of such budgets within organisations is often a complicated matter. It is unlikely that many research bodies would be in a position to clearly determine how much of any one sponsorship or funding payment went directly to research on a particular topic, or to research rather than, say, administration or overheads. Even where this information could be disaggregated by research organisations, it is considered unlikely that they would be willing be release it.

Appendix D CONSULTATION LETTERS

D.1   Consultation Letter to Researchers and Research Bodies

Trinity College Dublin, October 2009

Dear Colleague,

Audit of Irish Research on Child Protection

The School of Social Work and Social Policy and the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin have been commissioned by the Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB) to undertake an audit of **child protection research** in the Republic of Ireland. The principal output from this work will be an accessible database that will be publicly available. The CAAB are undertaking this audit in consultation with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, which is also liaising with the Health Research Board in their mapping exercise of research undertaken on child health.

In order to make this audit as comprehensive as possible we are asking relevant professionals and organisations to notify us of any child protection research they are aware of or that they or their organisation has commissioned or undertaken. Research literature may take a number of forms including peer reviewed articles, commissioned studies, conference presentations or books. It may also include Government reports and organisational reports if they are research-based.

We are also requesting that, where possible, this research material is provided to us, either electronically or in hard copy (preferably electronic). Please forward it to Carmel Corrigan or Liz Kerrins at the addresses provided below. Where the research is available online we are asking that

An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
Children Acts Advisory Board

the relevant website details are provided. The audit will cover literature relevant to the following child protection areas:

- Physical abuse
- Emotional/Psychological abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Children's exposure to domestic violence
- Treatment of perpetrators or victims of child abuse
- Professional and practice issues

In addition the following inclusion criteria will apply:

- Documents must be research based and be analytical in nature.
- Research must have been commenced and/or completed between 1990 and 2009 and relate to the Republic of Ireland.
- The research must be concerned primarily with children and have as its primary focus one or more of the following: physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, neglect, exposure to domestic violence.
- Research that addresses the issue of the profile or treatment of offenders will be included.
- Research may be based on qualitative or quantitative methods.
- The term research is taken to include evaluation.
- Evaluations or research on child protection-focused aspects of adult or family services are relevant.

The following documents will **not** be included in the audit:

- Non-evaluative descriptions of programmes or projects.
- Evaluations of generic family support or health programmes *unless* child protection is a specific target of such programmes and this aspect can be clearly identified and separated from the broader programme.
- Research focused on child and family welfare rather than protection.
- Research that is focused on adults who were the victims of child abuse.

In addition to asking for your help in identifying and locating this research literature, we are also asking for your help in identifying gaps in the research in the child protection field. Some of the literature will identify gaps and others will become evident as we gather and review materials.

However, we would appreciate it if you would give us your views on which areas of child protection are under-researched in Ireland, based on your knowledge and experience.

We appreciate that by asking for your assistance, we are adding to the existing pressures on your day to day work and that of your colleagues. However, we and the CAAB believe that this is an important piece of work, the outcome of which will significantly contribute to the child protection knowledge base, and assist all who have an interest in the area, including policy makers, managers and practitioners.

Finally, the time frame for the study is very short with a deadline for completion of the database by the end of November 2009. Therefore we ask for your co-operation as soon as possible. We would also appreciate it if you could circulate this letter to any of your co-workers or wider group of colleagues that may be able to help in this exercise.

If you have any queries please contact one of the members of the research team whose contact details are provided below.

Yours sincerely,

D.2   Letter to Research Funders

Trinity College Dublin, October 2009

Dear Colleague,

Audit of Irish Research on Child Protection

The School of Social Work and Social Policy and the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin have been commissioned by the Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB) to undertake an audit of **child protection research** in the Republic of Ireland. The principal output from this work will be an accessible database that will be publicly available. The CAAB are undertaking this audit in consultation with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, which is also liaising with the Health Research Board in their mapping exercise of research undertaken on child health.

To date, we have asked relevant professionals and organisations to notify us of any child protection research they are aware of or that they or their organisation has commissioned or undertaken. Thank you to those who have assisted us in this work.

An additional objective of the research is to identify the main funding sources for research on child protection issues in the Republic of Ireland. Where possible, the CAAB would like to establish the amount of funding made available to such research in 2008, 2009, and estimates for 2010. We are asking you, if possible, to provide us with the following information:

1. whether or not your organisation has funded research in the area of child protection in the past two years, or intends to do so in 2010;
2. if your organisation has funded such research, the amounts allocated to this in 2008, 2009, and your estimated expenditure for 2010.

Funding of relevance to this project may have been or will be allocated to activities such as:

■   Commissioned research;

- Support for PhD and post-doctoral research;
- Funding for intervention/service evaluations;
- Research grants to universities, other educational bodies, NGOs, community and voluntary organisations etc.;
- In-house researchers conducting primary or secondary research on child protection.

To be included in this project funded research:
- Must be concerned primarily with children and have as its primary focus one or more of the following: physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, neglect, exposure to domestic violence;
- Address the issue of the profile or treatment of offenders; or
- May include evaluation.

The following should **not** be included in your estimates of funding:

- Non-evaluative descriptions of programmes or projects.
- Evaluations of generic family support or health programmes *unless* child protection is a specific target of such programmes and this aspect can be clearly identified and separated from the broader programme.
- Research focused on child and family welfare rather than protection.
- Research that is focused on adults who were the victims of child abuse.

Once again, we appreciate that by asking for your assistance, we are adding to the existing pressures on your day to day work and that of your colleagues. We are grateful for any help you can provide us with.

Finally, the time frame for the study is very short with a deadline for completion of the end of November 2009. Therefore we ask for your co-operation as soon as possible. We would also appreciate it if you could circulate this letter to any of your co-workers or wider group of colleagues that may be able to help in this exercise.

If you have any queries please contact one of the members of the research team whose contact details are provided below.

Yours sincerely,

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