

Trust in the community: case studies of children's safeguarding in three Welsh neighbourhoods

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Contents of paper

- Context
- Introducing the three neighbourhoods
- Safeguarding spheres
- Community parenting
- Conclusions

Political Context

Welsh Assembly Government

'promoting...greater acceptance of adult responsibilities towards all children including the shared responsibility to develop safe communities.' (p.14).

Every Child Matters – England

Emphasis on children's safety becoming 'everybody's business'



Three sites: 1. Newtown Common, 2. Bryndwr and 3. Caegocho



Research questions and methods



How do residents of specific neighbourhoods understand, perform and experience the safeguarding of children in their locality?

- Participant observation
- Unstructured and semi-structured interviews (some mobile)
- Documentary analysis (media and official records)

Research design was been adapted to local conditions during the course of the fieldwork.

Safeguarding spheres



Community Parenting

Irresponsibility. Selfishness.

Behaving as if your choices
have no consequences.

Children without fathers.

Schools without discipline.

Reward without effort.

Crime without punishment.

Rights without
responsibilities. Communities
without control'

David Cameron August 2011



Community parenting

Our definition

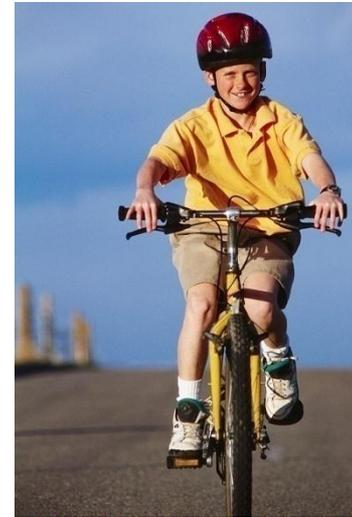
the collective and often collaborative actions of residents, within a self-defined geographical or social community, which aim to care for and protect children who are part of that community



- Individual acts between adults and children
- Collective actions
- Formal and informal acts of care and concern

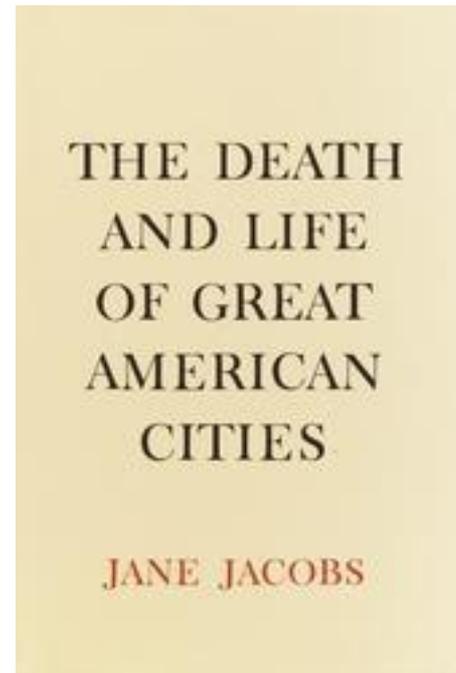
Community parenting characteristics

- Reinforcement
- Regulation
- Sharing knowledge about risk
- Exclusion



Eyes on the street

Communities that use or are enabled to use pavements and shared spaces can develop a *watchfulness*, tracking people's comings and goings and fostering a safer neighbourhood



- Jane Jacobs: (1961)

- She [*mother*] knows if they are up to trouble on the estate as **people will always tell her**. Once her son was climbing scaffolding a few streets away. ‘before he had reached the top I was on my way to pull him down’. Someone had seen him, phoned her next door neighbour who had come round straight away (Interview: Claire, Caegoch)
- and you don’t know who people are in the streets anyway so it’s not like you could say to somebody ‘are they up there?’, because you don’t know ‘em. (Graeme, Bryndwr)

I think **in other communities** if, she could go out and if something happened, you know, **someone would... come and tell you**, whereas if she could go to the park and **no one would know who she was...**you don't see the same children there all the time (Jenny, Newtown Common)

Well my friends would be looking out for my kids...but in general passers by who were not, uh, had kids, **would not say anything**, because, people don't, you know, you don't ever say anything to anybody about anything because **they might sue you (Lisa, Newtown Common)**



**we're starting to know now who lives
in the street** and where they live, and the
children, and we look out for people
(Shirley, Newtown Common)

Sharing knowledge

A friend mentions about the same boys from last Saturday, saying that they watch unsuitable violent and sexual films, and that her daughter has heard some unpleasant things from this boy, and that he keeps kissing her friend's child. She tells me this so I can make sure (*daughter*) is aware of right and wrong. (Diary: Sarah, Caegoch)

A visible culture

In this street if we are sat talking outside and there is a car comes down and we know whose cars are who, and who comes in the street and who belongs in the street, and if you see a car that you don't know – 'well who is that?' And everybody will say the same, 'who's that?' And you watch them until they're gone (Interview: Deborah, Caegoch).



Invisible parenting in a visible community: a paradox

- they (in Caegoch) all sit around drinking and having a barbeque and the kids are over the park playing, which, you know- but then that's going, if they're all drinking, who's looking after the kids? (Interview: Lauren, Bryndwr).
- ...just the chavviness, whatever you want to call it, I don't stand around corners...and smoking and (not) do anything else and scream and swear and ... yes, I have got a bit of education and I do feel I've got a bit of brains there so I wouldn't class myself as a typical Caegoch (person), but saying that, I'm not embarrassed or ashamed to say that I'm from Caegoch. (Interview: Sian, Caegoch).

- I wouldn't leave them. They are allowed to go out in the garden. If I am out in the garden they can go to the end of the street to my sister in law's or across the road to their godmother's or my niece's across the road but otherwise they are not allowed to go out on the street (Interview: Melissa, Caegoch).

Residents
seeing and
doing
safeguarding

Active

Petitions for services
Vigilantism / community justice
Statutory service visits
Police street patrols
Community workers doing
street and house to house work

Anonymous direct
referrals to social
services
Passing on concerns to
school / community
workers
Watching out for
neighbours 'kids
Street camping trips
and BBQs for children
and parents

Public

Private

Lack of *seen* social work
response to referrals
Lack of social work
proactive presence on
estate

Passive

Poor experiences— why
bother?
Baseline distrust in officials
Fear of reprisals
Stigma: Suspicion that
some streets targeted by
social workers
'No grassing' in our street

conclusions

- Stark contrasts in collective parenting styles and engagement with collective spaces between neighbourhoods
- Safeguarding facilitated by relationships and familiarity
- Most safeguarding of children done by semi-formal and informal spheres (enhancing wellbeing and preventative work). Probably much underestimated.

Policy implications?

- Enhancing voluntary and community sector role
- Empowering individuals and communities to look out for and engage with other people's children
- Recognising value of informal care and support – friendships, grandparents, neighbours, clubs.
- Involve ordinary residents in planning local safeguarding strategies.

Contact details

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