

Dear Stephen,

We are sending you our response to the recent letter sent by Tom Perry, Alana Lawrence and Jonathan West from the organisation Mandate Now. Please can you pass this on to the Inquiry Chair Baroness Jay. We have sent a copy of the response to Tom, Alana and Jonathan. In the letter Mandate Now set out their concerns about our research report *What can be learnt from other jurisdictions about preventing and responding to child sexual abuse* and our evidence presented to the Inquiry on April 12th. The main issue of concern is the suggestion that the UCLAN research team misinterpreted the research findings on mandatory reporting.

To clarify the key issues of concern, we will start by setting out the points made in the letter from Mandate Now which are in fact areas of agreement with findings presented in the full research report. Briefly these are:

1. That there is much child sexual abuse that goes unreported and we need better methods to identify and protect children. The difficulties in identifying and reporting, including under reporting, are discussed in many parts of the research report and particularly on pages 60-61 where the points made by members of Mandate Now about systemic under reporting are covered. The problem of poor identification and the fact that so much child abuse goes unreported has been a theme of the UCLAN research team's work for many years. These were key findings of major studies on children's and young people's experiences by Radford et al. (2011; 2013) and by Barter et al (2009). The research literature supports the conclusion that methods of identification and reporting need to improve so that more children and young people can be safe and given help earlier.
2. That mandatory reporting can increase reporting rates. This point is also supported in our review of the research in the report on pages 62-64.
3. Mandatory reporting is not a 'magic bullet', meaning that alone it would not overcome the problem of poor identification and reporting rates. The variety of strategies from other jurisdictions that might be considered to improve identification and reporting are covered in chapter 4 of the report.
4. The introduction of mandatory reporting in Australia, as evaluated by Mathews, Ju Lee & Norman (2016), was followed by increases in cases of child sexual abuse reported, in cases of child sexual abuse investigated and also not investigated, and in cases of child sexual abuse substantiated and not substantiated.

The following information is directly taken from p.68 of the Mathews, Ju Lee & Norman (2016) paper:

There was a marked increase in total reports after the introduction of the mandatory reporting laws in 2009, a further smaller increase in 2010, and then a plateau from 2010 to 2012. (Table 2 page 70 shows total reports grew from 551 in 2009 to 2719 in 2012).

The number of reports that were investigated increased in 2009 and each year from 2009 to 2012. (Table 2 page 70 shows Investigations increased from 366 in 2009 to 2040 in 2012).

The number of reports that were not investigated increased in 2009 and 2010 and then declined. (Table 2 page 70 shows those not investigated increased from 185 in 2009 to 679 in 2012).

The number of investigated reports that were substantiated increased in 2009 and increased again each year from 2009 to 2012. (Table 2 page 70 shows substantiated cases increased from 131 in 2009 to 380 in 2012).

The number of investigated reports that were not substantiated increased in 2009 and each year from 2009 to 2012. (Unsubstantiated cases increased from 235 in 2009 to 1660 in 2009).

The two key points of concern raised by members of Mandate Now in their letter are:

1. That the UCLAN researchers should have concluded that the Mathews, Ju Lee & Norman research findings on the introduction of mandatory reporting for cases of child sexual abuse were 'highly positive'.
2. That the UCLAN researchers only stated the need for additional resources to support policy change with reference to mandatory reporting.

Regards the overall conclusion that could be drawn from the paper by Mathews, Ju Lee & Norman, the issue the UCLAN research team aimed to address was whether or not the increased reporting that can result from the introduction of mandatory reporting is helpful or unhelpful for children. A finding that this was helpful for children would have been indeed highly positive. It is here that we found a lack of evidence on impact to support or reject mandatory reporting as so few researchers, Mathews, Ju Lee & Norman included, have actually looked at the outcomes for children. Indeed on page 73 of the paper it is said:

The study does not explore individual case characteristics and their outcomes by other methodologies. Accordingly, it is not possible for this study to draw firm conclusions about the quality of these CSA reports and their outcomes in lived experience, whether or not they were screened in, and substantiated after investigation (Mathews, Ju Lee & Norman 2016, p73).

Members of Mandate Now are not disputing that the research findings from this paper show an increase in cases of child sexual abuse not assessed and in cases investigated and subsequently unsubstantiated. The proportion of cases substantiated declined following the introduction of mandatory reporting (from 27% of all reports made in 2009 to 14% of all reports made in 2012). The proportion of unsubstantiated cases increased (from 43% of cases reported in 2009 to 61% of cases reported in 2012). They argue that children reported are likely to have a service and imply this is likely to be helpful for children. However the authors of the Australian paper note that there are limitations to the research on mandatory reporting and whether or not children get any helpful services once reported because the research that exists has not specifically considered outcomes for children reported for child sexual abuse.

the strength of the application of these general findings to the subset of CSA reports is not entirely clear. It is plausible that these findings could apply to the subset of CSA reports, given that a report of suspected CSA is frequently based on the reporter observing the child's adverse health symptomatology, behaviour, and social context, with the child's symptomatology and hence health and welfare need as the basis of the report being unaltered even where the report is unsubstantiated. Nevertheless, further research into this question is necessary to clarify the situation. (Mathews, Ju-Lee & Norman, 2016 p73)

Members of Mandate Now argue that substantiation is a flawed measure of the existence of child abuse and that 'numerically' cases unsubstantiated are more likely to get a service response than substantiated cases. While we note on page 200 of the report in conclusion that:

Opinion is mixed among academics and practitioners about the need for mandatory reporting, with concerns about unhelpful over reporting creating additional pressure on services and harm to families put through unnecessary investigations (Wallace and Bunting 2007; Gilbert et al, 2008). (Radford et al 2017, p200)

The following point is also made:

There is however no agreement that a referral and assessment by social care is necessarily harmful. Indeed, some researchers have argued that going through an assessment 'front door' is an essential part of early help, enabling families who fall below the threshold of intervention for child protection services to get access to support across the continuum of need (Mathews, Ju Lee and Norman, 2016; Wekerle, 2013). (Radford et al. 2017 p200)

To conclude on this point, it can be said that the UCLAN research findings support the conclusion of the Australian researchers that further research is needed.

With reference to the second concern raised in the letter that the phrase 'resources are needed' is only used with reference to mandatory reporting, it can be said that there are several places where resources are discussed. On pages 31, 64-65, resources required to implement national plans are discussed. On page 60, there is a discussion of resources needed to support parents from diverse communities. On page 144, resources needed for cultural change and public awareness are discussed. On page 149, the point is made that resources are needed to support training. The lack of resources to support child victims of sexual abuse is an issue covered in more detail in chapter 6 of the research report. The findings on support for victims and survivors will be presented to the Inquiry in July.

Yours sincerely

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