



## **Partnership and Regulation in Adult Protection: *the effectiveness of multi-agency working and the regulatory framework in Adult Protection***

### **Background**

This study examined partnership working arrangements in adult protection across England and Wales and explored perceptions of the impact of regulation (and regulatory practices) on adult protection. An important issue in adult protection is the way in which different regulatory authorities, professionals and providers of care and support engage with each other to ensure the protection of vulnerable adults. The study examined the extent and nature of inter-agency work in this field and explored perceptions of regulation and legislation pertinent to the area. This research provides a firm evidence base from which to develop policy and practice in adult protection.

### **The study**

In the first phase of the study, a postal survey of social services departments in England and Wales (84% response rate n=144) determined views about working arrangements in adult protection, partnership working and also perceptions of the regulatory framework covering this area. This was followed by two further phases, the second phase consisted of focus groups with adult protection committees in 26 case study sites across England and Wales to

obtain the views of the different partner organisations involved in adult protection. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were held with a range of social services staff, from front-line practitioners to senior managers, in the case study sites. Analysis of data, both quantitative and qualitative, was undertaken in relation to phases 1 and 2 and a number of common themes, including benefits and barriers to partnership working and concerning perceptions of regulation and legislation, were identified.

The final phase of the study involved service users, carers and their supporters in focus groups and interviews in 16 different areas across England and Wales, to establish perceptions concerning abuse and protection. In a number of instances, experiences of adult protection systems and processes were also obtained. The qualitative analysis of the data from phase 3 identified a number of further themes in addition to those developed in the first two phases of the study. There were also several themes that were congruent with those from the first two phases, as well as some views in common.

## Research Questions

The key questions explored were:

- How prevalent is partnership working in the adult protection field among agencies?
- What are the 'strengths', 'barriers' and 'disadvantages' of a partnership approach?
- What measures are taken to monitor and evaluate adult protection?
- Which agencies adhere to adult protection policy and procedures as part of their compliance with agreements (or contracts)?
- To what extent has multi-agency adult protection training been developed in adult social care and which agencies participate?
- Which regulatory frameworks are considered to be the most useful in relation to adult protection?
- What is the perception of the balance of regulation in this area?

## The Findings

The first two phases of the study revealed that the partnership approach was seen as the most appropriate framework from which to help protect vulnerable people.

### The benefits of partnership working included:

- Information sharing
- Sharing of skills, knowledge and expertise
- The fostering of shared decision-making, shared ownership and shared responsibility particularly in drawing up joint procedures and strategies

- Co-ordination of responses and incorporation of differing agency perspectives

### The barriers included:

- Some lack of commitment to partnership working
- Agencies not providing the resources required (financial or human resources) with little evidence of joint-funding arrangements
- Lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of each agency
- Insufficient information sharing
- Different priorities in relation to adult protection amongst agencies
- Delays in decision making at both strategic and operational levels, which were often linked to differing priorities between agencies.

## Inhibitors

The respondents identified four major inhibitors to their work:

- The lack of adequate resources (human and financial) for adult protection work
- The lack of statutory legislation to protect vulnerable adults
- A concern that some agencies do not view the '*No Secrets*' / '*In Safe Hands*' policy guidance as a 'must do' but a 'may do' and in some ways as optional
- Uncertain commitment from all agencies at local levels to undertake adult protection work and participate fully in partnership working.

## Regulation in Adult Protection

Participants said they coped with the demands of the regulatory framework in their daily work. In relation to regulation, survey respondents identified *No Secrets/In Safe Hands* and *Criminal Records Bureau* checks as having the most impact on adult protection and also as the easiest to use. However, *No Secrets/In Safe Hands* were also perceived as amongst the most difficult policies to implement, together with the *Protection of Vulnerable Adults List* and legislation relating to youth justice (the study was undertaken not long after the POVA List was introduced in a period of uncertainty about its implementation). Professionals reported both *Criminal Records Bureau* checks and the *Protection of Vulnerable Adults List* as having the most potential impact in improving systems of protection for vulnerable adults, whilst many users, carers and their supporters also indicated broad support for these schemes.

## Legislation

Most respondents from phases 1 and 2, and some from phase 3, called for specific legislation relating to adult protection. Reasons for this clearly stated view were:

- Standardisation of policy and practice needed nationally
- The need for a system to hold agencies to account and to clarify their roles and responsibilities
- The need for a statutory requirement for agencies to participate in order to ensure that sufficient priority is accorded to adult protection issues
- The need to give adult protection equivalent status to child protection.

These findings provide evidence concerning partnership working and perceptions about the regulation of adult protection. Following data analysis, full technical reports concerning the different elements of the analysis have been produced; these are available on request from the research team.

## Phase Three Findings

The third phase of the study, undertaken with service users, carers and their supporters (including representative organisations for service users) identified significant issues. These included differences in views from those held by professionals about the meaning of the term 'adult protection', with little overall awareness of the systems relating to adult protection that exist. For those people with experience of adult protection systems, the lack of involvement of service users and their carers within adult protection systems was emphasised, as were problems around the apparent lack of inter-agency work in this area, with information sharing, communication and delays. These concerns reflect points raised by the professionals interviewed in this study.

## Recommendations

**These relate to three main areas:**

### Improving practice in adult protection:

- More training for those involved in adult protection is required, this should be multi-agency in nature and scope
- The guidance documents *No Secrets and In Safe Hands* should be reviewed to ensure that they remain up-to-date and fit for purpose

- Effective models for service user participation and involvement need to be developed and disseminated

### Developing more effective services in adult protection:

- The development of Specialist Adult Protection teams requires further exploration and evaluation
- Annual reports on adult protection activity, including data collection, should be sent to, disseminated and monitored by the Department of Health and Welsh Assembly Government
- Consideration needs to be given to the development of specific legislation in adult protection, including a duty to cooperate for all agencies involved in this area of work

### In order to reduce the occurrence of the problem, the following should be addressed, in addition to the development of legislation:

- Public awareness of the problem and the profile of adult protection nationally should be higher to change existing culture so that adult abuse is not tolerated.

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### Early publications from this study

Manthorpe, J, Penhale, B, Perkins, N, Pinkney, L, and Kingston, P. (2005) Modernising Adult Protection: An Inside or an Outside Job?, *Journal of Integrated Care*, 13, 6, 26-33

Manthorpe, J, Perkins, N, Penhale, B, Pinkney, L, and Kingston, P. (2005) Select Questions: considering the issues raised by a Parliamentary Select Committee into elder abuse, *Journal of Adult Protection*, 7, 2, 19-32.

Pinkney, L, Manthorpe, J, Perkins, N, Penhale, B and Kingston, P. (2005) The Many Guises of Elder Abuse, *Community Care*, 10-16 March, 36-37.

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