

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Ymchwiliad i Addysg Heblaw yn yr Ysgol

EOTAS 26

Ymateb gan: Dr Gail John

National Assembly for Wales

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Inquiry into Education Otherwise than at School

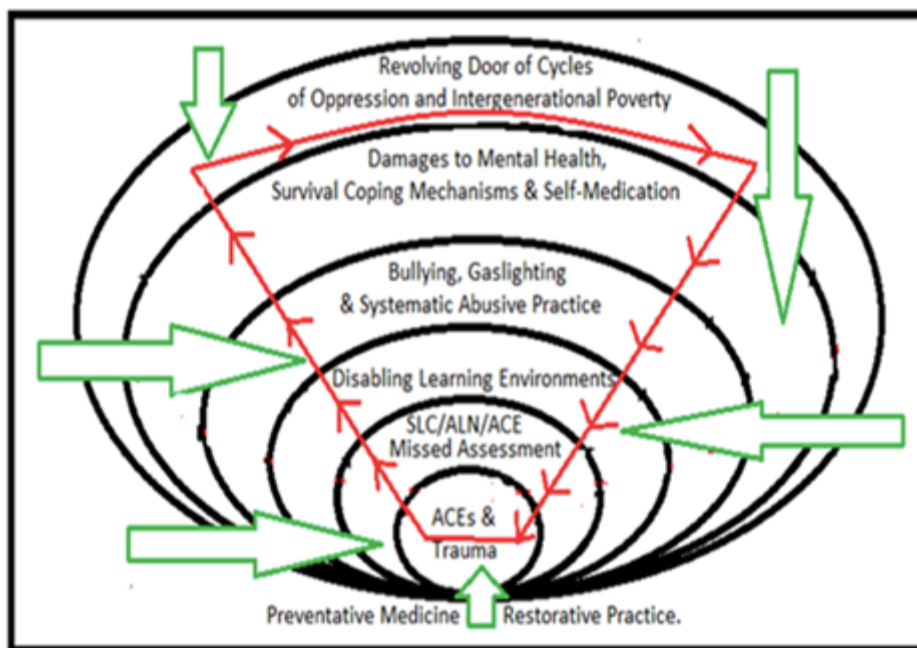
EOTAS 26

Response from: Dr Gail John

The key findings and recommendations from this study (John, 2019) are set against a background of the urgent national preventative public health, education and NHS priorities. Therefore this six year research study (published by the University of Sheffield, 2019) has already been recognised by the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) who has awarded the researcher FRSPH (Fellow Royal Society Public Health) and emerges from a university which has a world leading ranking of 59 for it's international social research impact. **This research is currently being disseminated and extended by postgraduate researchers across three international universities - University of London Goldsmiths (Adverse Childhood Trauma), Middlesex University (Government Project Moving towards a National Accountability Act for SEN/D) and Leeds Law School (Trauma, Educational Failure and Future Negligence Claims).**

The key findings of this study (John, 2019) show that there is a strong inseparable link between the effects of trauma (ACEs and intergenerational trauma), missed assessments, sleep deprivation, disabling learning environments, bullying (both teacher bullying and peer mobbing), damages to mental health and educational failure, along with far-reaching consequences of the revolving door of intergenerational poverty affecting future generations.

Figure 1: Breaking the revolving cycle of educational inequality and intergenerational poverty.



1) Participants' interviews and trauma histories reveal adversity was experienced from more than one setting which impacted upon their educational experience. Along with the participants' own trauma, the findings also revealed that intergenerational trauma was prevalent among participants' accounts and trauma histories. Some participants explained how their parents and grandparents' adversity had deeply affected their responses despite not directly experiencing their trauma themselves. Thus, the findings from this study suggest that the long-term effects of trauma can be held in the body carrying a 'psychological sequelae' to the third generation (Yehuda et al, 2007). It is known that parental traumatization or any parent with PTSD carries an increased risk of depression in offspring, along with the close association with an increased risk of anxiety and related disorders in offspring. This study's findings indicate that the

trauma/fear response, whether birth trauma, intergenerational trauma or personally experienced ACEs, is significantly linked to educational failure or exclusion.

2) Participants accounts show how sleep deprivation because of a lack of sleep on a regular basis appears to be connected to negative educational consequences as the ability to perform well became impaired, along with health difficulties that spiralled across the life-span. This study also found how night owls (approximately 83% of participants in this study compared with 30% of the general population) were often misjudged as being lazy or sluggish. However, many were physically unable to perform at their optimum learning capacity in the unequal traditional school system which has fixed early start-times leaving them sleep deprived on a daily basis and setting them up to fail (Walker, 2017). Furthermore, a lack of consistently deep NREM sleep which takes place right at the end of a full sleep cycle, would impact upon the child's eye muscle development, as their left to right/right to left eye tracking ability which is one of the essential skills required when learning to read will almost certainly be impaired, as automatic left to right eye tracking is used consistently by fluent readers. Additionally, a lack of NREM sleep also impairs the natural restorative process, as rapid eye movement which takes place at the end of sleep is also an effective natural restorative soother for trauma (Shapiro, 2013).

3) Findings in this study show that along with misdiagnosis, the traditional "wait to fail" and fail to assess with appropriate intervention teaching model (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014), not only became a barrier to participants' learning potential but contributed significantly to their educational failure. Findings also show that the participants who received a diagnosis found that they were viewed through the lens of their disability or diagnosis, which also became a barrier to their learning potential as any strengths and abilities were ignored. In some cases, opportunities to develop specialist skills became denied and discouraged. Thus, findings suggest that individuals should be able to access the most suitable educational provision for their own personal needs, instead of forced to conform to a set of criteria that may, or may not, be suitable for them. Findings demonstrated how missed

assessments have serious implications, especially as diagnosis often comes with intervention and medication which can cause even more harm if the diagnosis is incorrect

4) This study revealed how trauma histories might be a useful tool in helping individuals and practitioners uncover missing key information to aid assessment. The findings demonstrate how a 'one-off categorical labelling' or having one 'label for life' should be treated with extreme caution, especially as no two dyslexic, autistic, dyspraxic, ADHD, PDA, GAD or neuro-typical person is the same, nor will they present with the exact same needs. With correct diagnosis and early intervention, gaps can be closed and needs can change. Therefore, it is important for practitioners to ask the child/service user about their symptoms or difficulties, such as if there are certain situations, places, times, memories, people or triggers that make their symptoms/difficulties worse. This will provide key information to help illuminate where the real root cause of their difficulties lie and point them towards the most effective interventions at school and beyond. The study revealed the 'similarities in the symptoms between auditory processing disorder (APD) and other disorders, including dyslexia, ADHD, ASD and specific language impairment, and similarities in symptoms between PTSD and ADHD, bipolar disorder and GAD (general anxiety disorder) and epilepsy and non-epileptic seizures or dissociative seizures which are often missed by specialists themselves.

5) Given the findings relating to the gaps between educational need and provision, it appears that teacher bullying towards children is a serious problem in schools, it appears to have one purpose, which is to hide professional inadequacy and incompetence. The findings from this study found that much of the teacher bullying was directed towards children who already had heightened trauma responses, communication difficulties or ALN (Additional Learning Needs), so were unable to defend themselves against their teacher adult bullies and peer tormentors. ALN or different-ability students are often subjected to punishment when they exhibit characteristics of their differences, as due to a failure to adequately assess and close gaps. Teachers lack of awareness of student difficulties often gave rise to misconceptions and negative reactions. All the participants in this study

noted that their learning needs were not being met at school, as there was a mismatch and clear discrepancy between provision and their needs, which appeared to trigger a bullying response from teachers who felt inadequate in their own teaching abilities/training to adequately meet these young people's learning needs. This study reveals that teachers who lack the training and skill have a tendency to engage in public humiliation towards these young people with unmet educational needs, using a scapegoating psychological response. Unfortunately, this response attracts further bullying and mobbing towards their target from pupils. Furthermore, findings show that teachers who participate in public bullying send a clear message to all pupils that bullying towards these children is 'acceptable'. Consequently, it appears that missed assessments and the lack of early intervention created disabling learning environments lead to young people of difference becoming targets of bullying, gaslighting and systematic abusive practice. The effect of continuous bullying at school, being in an 'unescapable' unsafe environment, being unable to speak up, escape or initiate their fight or flight response, will push them towards experiencing symptoms of PTSD.

Since statistically a person with an ACE score of 4 or more is 1,220% more likely to attempt suicide than someone with an ACE score of 0 (Nakazawa, 2015), the results from this study demonstrate the importance of safeguarding children from all forms of bullying at school and beyond.

6) Findings highlighted a lack of professional awareness or knowledge about current trauma research and current evidence based mental health interventions.

The research highlighted four main groups affected by educational exclusion by the factors documented above, :

- **Group 1:** Stayed at school (with the support of John's trauma informed strategies (2019) to remove barriers to learning) and completed GCSEs with access arrangements in place, achieved 6+ GCSEs and could access any further education course.

- **Group 2 :** Became forced-home-educated during comprehensive years due to struggles with bullying/decreased mental health. With no support from the local authorities and decreased mental health, this group of participants were able to access John's (2019) trauma informed fast-track (anxiety friendly) neuro-divergent GCSEs across multi-modals, which enabled some of these participants to gain up to 8 GCSE against the odds.
- **Group 3:** Participants (aged 19+) had remained at school and despite coping with huge adversity alone without any support or intervention for emotional needs, completed GCSEs without support. However, it appears that since this group were not able to activate their fight or flight response, they appear to have gone into a state of almost 'permanent' freeze and numbing of pain; this self-coping response produced the effect of 'normalising their abuse'. Consequently, this group became particularly vulnerable to experiencing further reoccurring re-victimisation due to the violation of acceptable boundaries and also appeared to experience a lot of physical illness (concurring with leading trauma expert Mate's research (2019). This group disclosed using self-harm as a coping strategy and admitted attempting suicide to relieve their pain. Since engaging in trauma informed research (John, 2019) and responding positively to motivational interviewing techniques, two thirds of these adult group of participants went on to study and successfully completed their chosen undergraduate degrees (with outstanding results, including a first and a 2.1), and are now studying at postgraduate levels. All credit of these achievements is to be given to these participants who themselves found the strength to overcome their learning barriers against all the odds set against them, whose fragile lives at the time of their interviews were but hanging on by a thread.
- **Group 4:** These participants (age 17 plus) had no support for their ALN whilst at school, activated their flight response by truanting and left school before completing GCSEs/with no GCSEs. This group of participants went on to make up the health harming statistics related to substance abuse, homelessness, crime, opioid use, later psychiatric episodes including multiple suicide attempts and removal of their own children into the care system. This group

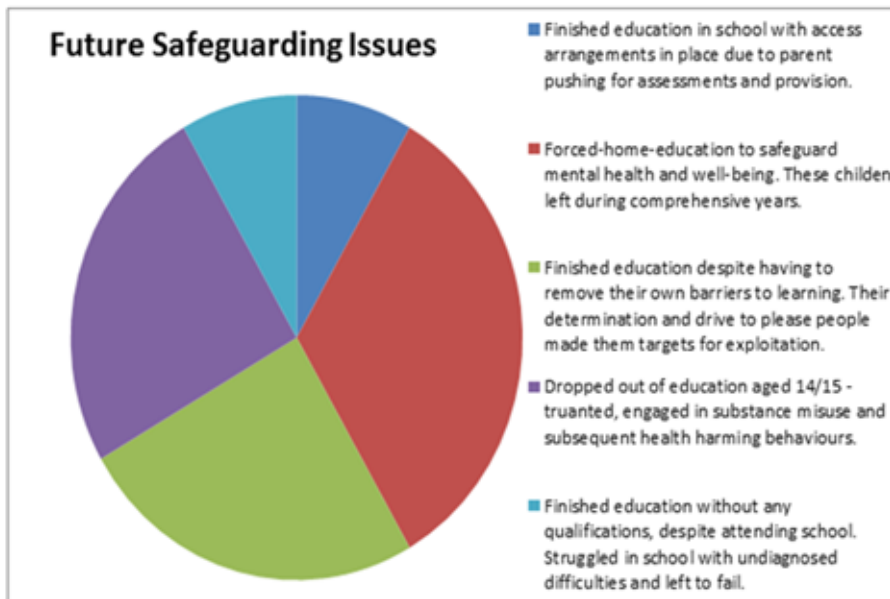
document the lack of knowledge, understanding, interventions and support from a variety of public sectors and multi-agencies, which led to cycles of intergenerational trauma at a high cost to the government and tax payer. One participant in this group has gone onto higher education, while another is in full-time employment. However, many in this group are still battling with addiction and the stigma associated with being involved with the criminal justice and psychiatric system as young people. There are also those who are still fighting to see their children with evidence that shows that their children were unlawfully removed by professionals, many of whom were unqualified for their roles, who not only acted outside their professional capacity, but who also fabricated evidence against those who had already been educationally failed (as they were perceived as being easy-targets and vulnerable). This resulted in contributing to rising suicide statistics (McEvoy, 2019). Many of these participants did not have a fair trial (Article 6, Human Rights Act 1998).

Furthermore, this research concludes that all participants in this Swansea study had their right to an education breached (The First Protocol, Article 2, Human Right 1998) by public sectors and professionals who were in a position of a duty of care towards them but instead did not take 'reasonable' care to avoid 'foreseeable' harm. Furthermore, this research provides substantial evidence that great foreseeable harm was wilfully ignored by those in authority, who had a duty of care towards protecting the educationally failed from harm. In accordance to the Law of Tort (Donaghue and Stevenson, 1932, AC 562), three questions for a successful negligence case need to be established:

- a) Was the person owed a duty of care? YES.
- b) Was the breach of duty breached? YES
- c) Did harm occur as a direct result of the breach of duty? YES

Since Wales is the only country in the UK with rising suicide rates, with female suicides in Wales increasing by 45%, (Samaritans, 2018), this research provides evidence for the government to urgently act to prevent further harm and financial loss. Unless urgent action is implemented, the current ineffective and harmful

educational practices in Wales will continue to result in substantial rises in suicides, along with unnecessary tribunal and negligence claims in court. Thus, if the preventative measures documented within my thesis are implemented without delay, this would act as a safeguard to protect our young people, public money and the public's confidence in the Welsh Labour Government as 'Education' in Wales is a devolved matter (The Government of Wales Act 1998).



Therefore, the research calls for the urgent need for preventative measures and educational reform.