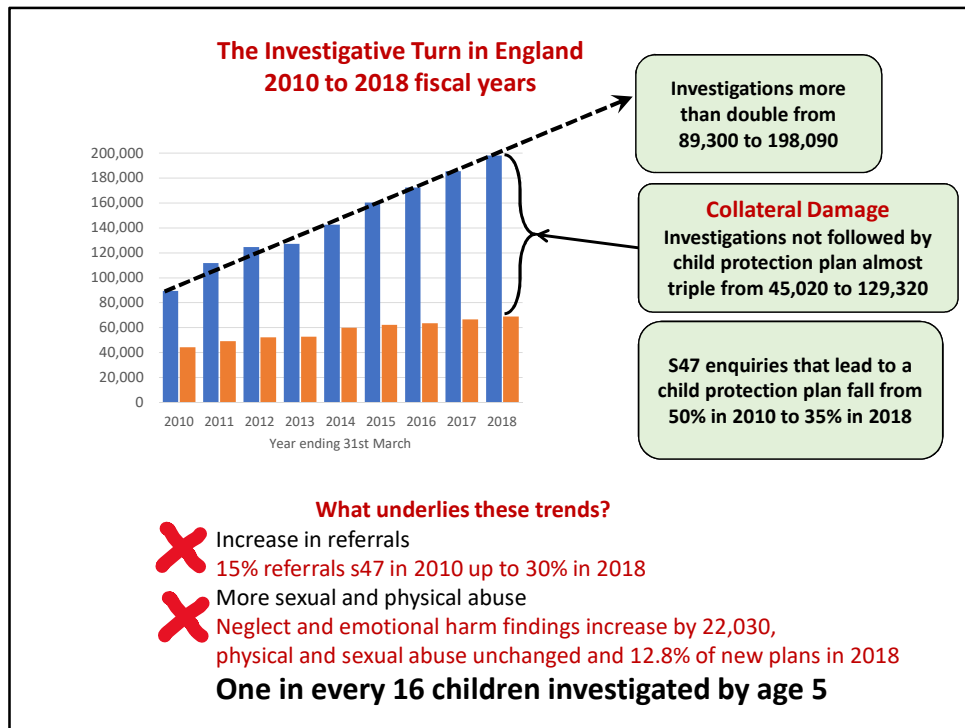


RESPONSES TO RISK & ADOPTION

ANDY BILSON

Responses to Risk & Adoption

In England and other [English speaking countries](#) there has been an “investigative turn” with a huge change in the way that children’s social care responds to concerns for the welfare of children. There have been cuts in support for families and increases in child protection investigations leading to more children separated from parents.



Section 47 investigations rapidly increase to 1 in 16 of all children before the age of five

Section 47 investigations increased every year since 2005. The graph shows this trend between 2010 and 2018. Investigations doubled because the proportion of referrals leading to an investigation increased from 15% to 30%. [One in every 16 children were investigated before their fifth birthday](#) in 2017.

Unwarranted investigations cause collateral damage

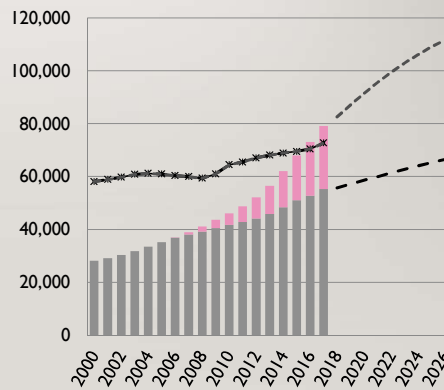
Investigations are much less likely to be followed by a child protection plan. In 2010 50% of investigations led to a child protection plan, this fell to 35% in 2018. The 129,320 investigations not followed by a plan in 2018 cause [collateral damage](#) harming families and children who are unlikely to receive or accept help even where they have difficulties.

Increasing plans for neglect and emotional abuse

Where plans are made there has been no change in those for physical or sexual abuse increases have been in neglect or emotional abuse. [I found](#) that the chance of a parent being found to have emotionally abused their child depended on where they lived.

ADOPTION SOME EARLIER FINDINGS

- Adoption does not replace care
- Local authorities with highest proportion of children adopted care increased 10% and where adoption was lowest care fell by 3%
- In Wales at least 32% adopted children had a father and/or mother in care at age 16



Adoption and special guardianship do not replace care

The numbers [separated from parents have risen](#) due to the rapid increase in the number of children adopted from care and increases in long stays in care.

Numbers adopted or in special guardianship higher than numbers in care

The graph shows how, despite the fall in new adoptions since 2014, the number of children under 18 adopted or placed in special guardianship is now higher than the number in care despite this also having risen since 2008.

[The graph shows](#) how the number adopted and in special guardianship will continue to increase reaching 111,500 of those aged 0 to 17 being adopted or in special guardianship in 2026 if the 2017 rate of placements continues.

One in three adopted children had a parent in care at age 16

In 2014-15 at least 32% of all adopted [children in Wales](#) had one or both parents who were in care at age 16. Many more children had parents who had been in care but left before being 16.

High rates of adoption associated with increases in care and child protection activity

Across [England where rates of adoption from care are higher](#) the numbers of children in care are *increasing* whilst in local authorities with lower rates the numbers are *decreasing* pointing to a **culture of rescue** in some areas. [Also](#)

[where adoption](#) rates before the age of 5 had risen most child protection activity had increased by 96% compared with an average increase of 21%.



Large local differences in rates adopted

The [graph shows](#) that 1.9% of all children in Southampton were adopted before age 5, far higher than any of its statistical neighbours. Differences are due both to [rates of disadvantage](#) and [a culture of rescue](#) in some agencies.

ADOPTION AND THE GROWING CULTURE OF CHILD RESCUE

The combination of cuts in children's services, increasing inequality, the government's promotion of child rescue and the huge increase in child protection investigations has created [a hostile environment](#) for children living in the most deprived communities. This research shows that in just five years the rate of child protection investigations [on children before their fifth birthday] had increased by 35% to a rate of one in every 16 children. These investigations were increasingly unfounded with a 60% increase in the rate of children facing the collateral damage of an unfounded investigation. Alongside this there is a large increase in the number of children separated from their parents. The fact that this is not happening evenly across the country suggests that this is not an issue of reducing parental competence but rather that the chances of a family receiving support or being split up are determined by national and local policies, resources and a growing culture of child rescue responses to family difficulties

The combination of cuts in children's services, increasing inequality, the government's promotion of child rescue and the huge increase in child protection investigations has created [a hostile environment](#) for children living in the most deprived communities. My research shows that in just five years the rate of child protection investigations [on children before their fifth birthday] had increased by 35% to a rate of one in every 16 children. These investigations were increasingly unfounded with a 60% increase in the rate of children facing the collateral damage of an unfounded investigation. Alongside this there is a large increase in the number of children separated from their parents. The fact that this is not happening evenly across the country suggests that this is not an issue of reducing parental competence but rather that the chances of a family receiving support or being split up are determined by national and local policies, resources and a growing culture of child rescue responses to family difficulties