

**Press Release, 30 November 2016**

## **New Research Exploring Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief**

Only 33% of professionals and members of community and faith-based organisations are confident they could identify indicators of faith or belief linked child abuse, a new study has revealed.

A survey questioned over 1,300 professionals and members of community and faith-based organisations on their understanding of faith or belief linked child abuse specifically looking at their ability to identify instances of this type of abuse and their ability to respond and deal with cases professionally.

The results illustrate the need of frontline professionals to be properly prepared and equipped to respond and deal with cases.

The research commissioned by the National Working Group on Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief and undertaken by Manchester Metropolitan University in partnership with the Victoria Climbié Foundation UK (VCF) and the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS) investigates current knowledge of child abuse linked to faith and belief and helps raise awareness of the issue.

Internationally, cases of child abuse linked to faith or belief continue to cause concern. In the United Kingdom, high profile cases such as Kristy Bamu, a 15-year-old boy who was tortured and murdered after being accused of witchcraft, and the murder of Victoria Climbié, an 8-year-old who was tortured by her guardians, have raised awareness of the need to develop child protection in this area.

Dr Lisa Oakley and Dr Kathryn Kinmond, Senior Lecturers in Abuse Studies and research leads, said that the study is extremely timely and important in providing a foundation on which to build more effective identification of abuse cases, policy and intervention.

### **Effective identification**

Dr Oakley said: “There are relatively small numbers of recorded cases and this could be due to underreporting and a lack of recognition of such cases. The respondents reported wide variety of definitions and understandings of child abuse linked to faith or belief – from witchcraft and spirit possession to female genital mutilation.”

Although 61% of respondents were confident they could define child abuse linked to faith or belief, only 33% were confident they could identify indicators of this form of abuse. Just over half of respondents were confident that they would know how to respond professionally.

The results suggest that there is a clear call for specialised and targeted training in this area. Of the respondents, only 25% had received training on this issue and many had a limited experience working on abuse cases, limiting effective identification of incidents.

### **Policy and procedure**

Understanding how to deal with faith or belief linked child abuse was seen as essential. There was a call for information on procedure to become more readily available.

Only 12% of respondents stated that they were familiar with the [National Action Plan](#) on the issue and 77% did not know if their Local Safeguarding Children’s Board included policy and procedure on this form of child abuse.

Dr Kinmond said: “Professionals and faith communities are keen to engage with the issue of child abuse linked to faith or belief and recognise and work with child protection agencies to prevent it. This study shows that raising awareness of faith or belief linked child abuse is crucial.”

The results illustrate the need for frontline professionals to be properly equipped. Among respondents, there were multiple requests for a toolkit and resources that enable the early identification of this form of abuse and detail the effective response and intervention.

### **Notes to editors**

To access the summary results of the research, please visit <http://vcf-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CALFAB-Results-Interactive-E-Leaflet-FINAL.pdf>

For further information, please contact Dr Lisa Oakley at Manchester Metropolitan University at [l.r.oakley@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:l.r.oakley@mmu.ac.uk)

- The Victoria Climbié Foundation was established by Mr and Mrs Climbié (Victoria’s parents) to campaign for improvements in child protection policies and practices and to ensure effective links & coordination between statutory agencies, care services and communities. [www.vcf-uk.org](http://www.vcf-uk.org)
- VCF currently leads and chairs the National Working Group on Child Abuse linked to Faith or Belief; comprising representatives from statutory, voluntary, community and faith sectors, and individuals with specialist knowledge and expertise <http://vcf-uk.org/about-2/national-working-group-on-child-abuse-linked-to-faith-or-belief/>
- Voices from the front line: supporting our social workers in the delivery of quality services to children – a research paper by the Victoria Climbié Foundation and HCL Social Care to explore the current social work system and its ability to achieve the expectations of the Children and Families Act 2014. <http://vcf-uk.org/vcf-calls-for-urgent-action-in-new-research-voices-from-the-front-line/>
- ‘Engaging children and families; the role of advocacy within child protection – a pilot study’ in collaboration with the UEL Centre for Social Work Research offers an evaluation of VCF advocacy casework <http://vcf-uk.org/vcf-offers-a-genuine-approach-to-engaging-with-children-and-families/>
- ‘My Languages Matter; the multilingual outlook for children in care – A White Paper. The Victoria Climbié Foundation UK and Mothertongue explore the impact of linguistic and cultural heritage through child protection work. Are we effectively considering the relevance of these themes when we are making decision in the best interest of the child <http://vcf-uk.org/my-languages-matter-the-multilingual-outlook-for-children-in-care/>