

Safeguarding implications of Personal Budgets

Outline of a research project
funded by the NIHR School
for Social Care Research



Improving the evidence base for
adult social care practice

Do personal budgets increase the risk of abuse and neglect for people using social care services and support?

Personalisation is about tailoring services to the needs of the end user, often through greater choice and control for the service user. One of the main mechanisms for personalisation is personal budgets, whereby people are given real budgets (direct payments) or virtual budgets with which to arrange their own services. However, there are fears that people using personal budgets may be at greater risk of abuse and neglect than people using conventional services if they purchase unregulated care, or rely on relatives to manage their budget. The policy of 'safeguarding' is about enabling people to maintain independence, well-being and choice, while also securing the right to live a life free from harm.

Not enough is understood about the relationships between personalisation and safeguarding and how these two different strands of policy actually work alongside each other in practice. This project seeks to improve the evidence base in this area.

This project

- will investigate the consequences for practice, and the outcomes for service users and carers, of personal budgets, particularly in the form of direct payments, in respect of safeguarding.

It aims to

- investigate whether abuse and neglect are more or less likely among personal budget holders than non-personal budget holders and, if so, whether this is linked to care group, age or socioeconomic group
- examine the extent of awareness and understanding among safeguarding practitioners and care coordinators in local authorities about the practice implications arising from personal budget holders' rights to safeguarding
- assess the extent, availability and quality of help offered to personal budget holders (in particular direct payment users), or their proxies, in relation to safeguarding when planning how to use their budgets
- establish what practitioners, budget holders and their carers consider 'best practice' in minimising risks of abuse and neglect.

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WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

Safeguarding and personalisation have both changed social care practice with adults over the last decade. In England, the introduction of direct payments, followed by a pilot of individual budgets and more recently the implementation of personal budgets, has been seen as a resolution to the problems associated with delivering personalisation. Although the evidence base is limited, the National Evaluation of the Individual Budgets Pilots (the IBSEN study) found that having an individual budget was associated with greater choice and control and found some evidence of better outcomes for some groups at little extra cost.

However, the IBSEN study also found that many practitioners and managers had concerns about the negative consequences, for some people, of individual budgets. Fears were expressed that using unregulated care workers or relatives may leave disabled or older people at greater risk of abuse (including neglect, physical and financial abuse and/or exploitation) or of receiving poorer quality support than people in receipt of conventional services.

Budget holders are permitted to pay relatives to provide care and support and relatives can act as proxies by holding the budget when the adult concerned is not able to do so (for instance for reasons such as dementia). The resulting change in family relationships may increase vulnerability to financial and other forms of abuse. For example, a 2007 community based study of elder abuse found that financial abuse ran at about 4% per annum and that most abuse was carried out by close relatives (the study was not able to include people with dementia so overall figures are likely to be conservative).

However, the evidence is not clear cut and other research suggests that people (with mental capacity) using direct payments and employing personal assistants may report less abuse or poor quality care than those using conventional, council-commissioned services. Some commentators have proposed that safeguarding – the policy of protecting people from risk of harm – is in fact enhanced by greater choice and control.

The Coalition Government's target is for 100% of those eligible to use personal budgets by 2013, preferably as direct payments. In this context, and given the uncertain evidence base, a better understanding is required of the implications of the large scale implementation of personal budgets on risk and safeguarding practices among social care professionals across the public, private and third sectors.

To this end, the study will empirically explore the concerns raised by local authority and other professionals in earlier studies and consultations. It will also contribute to addressing some of the 'gaps' in the research evidence in relation to risk practice in adult social care. Findings from the study will contribute to the convergence between personalisation and safeguarding, as it evolves from what the IBSEN study identified as operating largely on 'parallel tracks'.

HOW WILL THE PROJECT WORK?

STAGE 1: Analysis of local safeguarding reports

The project will review publicly available local quantitative data, including a sample of up to 20 Annual Reports from Adult Safeguarding Boards, to produce a preliminary short report on issues around safeguarding and personal budgets. Researchers will use reports from the 13 pioneer individual budget sites and a selection of other sites with high and low usage of direct payments. These sites will be identified using information from the Local Government Association (LGA) and Dementia Choices. During this initial stage, the project will also design the research instruments – questionnaires and other data collection schedules – that will subsequently be used.

STAGE 2: National data analysis

Building on the Stage 1 work, researchers will carry out a focussed review of national data collections (for example Abuse of Vulnerable Adults (AVA) returns), to profile the extent of reported and alleged abuse and other safeguarding concerns. Data will be collected from published sources. By focussing on people using personal budgets in the community, this

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review will complement earlier work at the Social Care Workforce Research Unit, at King's College London, which investigated potential data sources suitable for secondary analysis on the abuse, mistreatment and neglect of vulnerable older people in care homes and hospitals in England. The current project will also use data covering the take up of personal budgets and direct payments, such as Community Care Statistics, Social Services Activity collated by the Health and Social Care Information Centre.

The aim of this quantitative analysis is to provide empirical evidence about the patterns of reported abuse among personal budget holders in comparison to other people who receive publicly funded social care support. Where possible, it will also identify any differences in relation to the prevalence of certain types of abuse, the profile of the alleged perpetrator, and characteristics of alleged victims. The analysis will not estimate the overall prevalence of abuse among all DP users as the main data sources (AVA returns) refer to cases where abuse was already suspected. However, some inference may be deduced from the surveys of progress with personalisation. The analysis will indicate, where possible, any changes in safeguarding statistics that might be associated with personal budget usage in the three years since their introduction.

STAGE 3: Local authority fieldwork and data analysis

Fieldwork will be carried out in three local authorities. These will be selected to ensure the representation of shire, metropolitan and unitary councils, and a geographical spread across London/South East, the Midlands and the North. The authorities will also have different levels of safeguarding referrals, as identified in Stage 1. The research will focus on people who take their budgets as direct payments.

In each of the three authorities, the project will explore relationships between direct payment use and safeguarding by analysing anonymised local authorities data on safeguarding referrals/outcomes and numbers of people using direct payments, including proxy budget holders.

In each authority, researchers will also conduct semi-structured interviews with 22 staff and budget holders (66 interviews in total) including:

- The safeguarding lead manager from each authority and two other members of each safeguarding team. Interviews will cover views about the potential risks and opportunities with direct payments and the extent to which safeguarding issues are addressed within support plans. The interviews will be based around discussions of anonymised cases. Details of the link between safeguarding and personalisation will also be explored.
- For each authority, an elected member with responsibility for social care and a senior manager. Interviews will cover strategic links between personalisation and safeguarding policy.
- For each authority, 10 budget holders who are service users and 7 proxy budget holders, if possible where issues about safeguarding or use of the direct payment have been raised by, or drawn to the attention of, the local authority. Interviews will cover the support offered in making decisions about using direct payments (with specific reference to risks of abuse), what was helpful and views about the potential risks involved.

The analysis will focus on the perspectives of different groups across sites (eg carers), rather than treating each site as an individual case study.

Project publications

The project will disseminate its findings through several publications and channels in addition to those specified by the SSCR. These will include: posting project details on a number of open access social care research websites and databases; paper and web-based outputs targeting UK-based social care practitioners; through the ADASS Network; presentations including via the Making Research Count collaboration or a Research in Practice for Adults learning event, and to ADASS regional safeguarding networks and conferences such as those held by Action on Elder Abuse.

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HOW DOES THE PROJECT FIT THE AIMS OF THE SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH?

The project will bring together statistical evidence with the perspectives and accounts of people receiving direct payments, their carers/relatives and practitioners to generate robust evidence for clear practice messages.

These will be aimed at those working in safeguarding roles in the areas of support planning, monitoring and reviewing people who use personal budgets. Other ways of developing good support for people with personal budgets and their families, and of identifying poor practice and finding ways of responding, will also be explored.

The study will be relevant not only to practitioners, but also assist budget holders, their relatives and carers in making decisions about how to use personal budgets to meet their choices and needs while also managing risks of harm.

In addition to evidence at the individual level, the project will also add to current levels of knowledge about the overall impact of personal budgets on safeguarding, thus informing the general development of social care policy and practice.

The Research Team

Dr Martin Stevens, Research Fellow, the Social Care Workforce Research Unit (SCWRU) at Kings College, is the Principal Investigator, with responsibility for fieldwork in one of the sites.

Dr Kate Baxter, Research Fellow, Social Policy Research Unit, University of York will be responsible for the fieldwork in one of the sites and for primary analysis of collected data.

Dr John Woolham, Research Fellow, Faculty of Health & Life Sciences, Coventry University, will negotiate access to local authority sites, lead on stakeholder engagement for all the sites and be responsible for collecting data from one of sites.

Professor Jill Manthorpe, Director of SCWRU, will provide expert advice and be involved in the production of reports and outputs.

Dr Shereen Hussein, Senior Research Fellow at SCWRU, will design quantitative methods and statistical analyses, and coordinate with Analytical Research (quantitative analysis and associated data manipulation).

Dr Kritika Samsi, a SCWRU Research Fellow, will support the qualitative aspect of the project at the SCWRU site.

Project title:
Risk, safeguarding and personal budgets: exploring relationships and identifying good practice

Timescale:
1 May 2012 to
30 April 2014

Budget:
£226,468

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