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Sunderland**

Bleasby, Cally (2022) The Experiences of Social Workers Undertaking Pre-birth Assessment: Professional Doctorate Conference Presentation. In: UNSPECIFIED. (Unpublished)

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A hand-drawn question mark is centered on a white rectangular sticky note. The note is placed on a light blue background with several other white sticky notes scattered around it. The question mark is drawn with a thick, black, slightly irregular line, featuring a curved top and a small, solid black dot at the bottom.

# The Experiences of Social Workers Undertaking Pre-birth Assessments

Cally Bleasby



“Pre-birth [assessments] involve social workers and allied professionals in assessing the risk of harm to children who are as yet unborn. Existing child protection processes have been applied to babies in utero, recognising the high vulnerability of newborns.”

(Critchley, 2018)

Why did I choose to research this topic?

# Literature Review: The Headlines

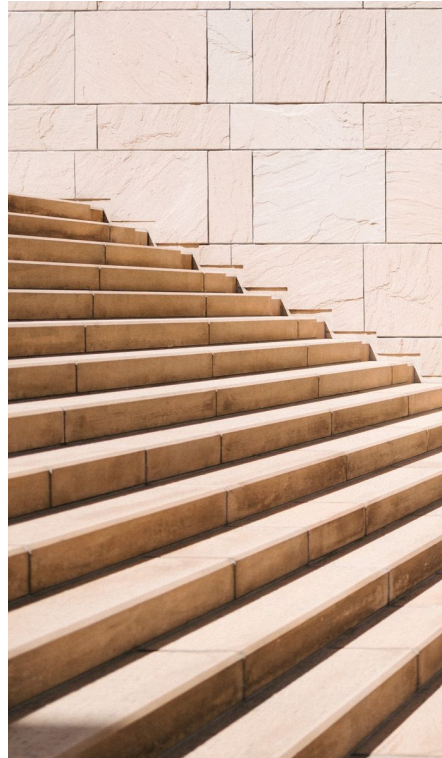
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What is known about pre-birth assessment within social work?



**A lack of research**

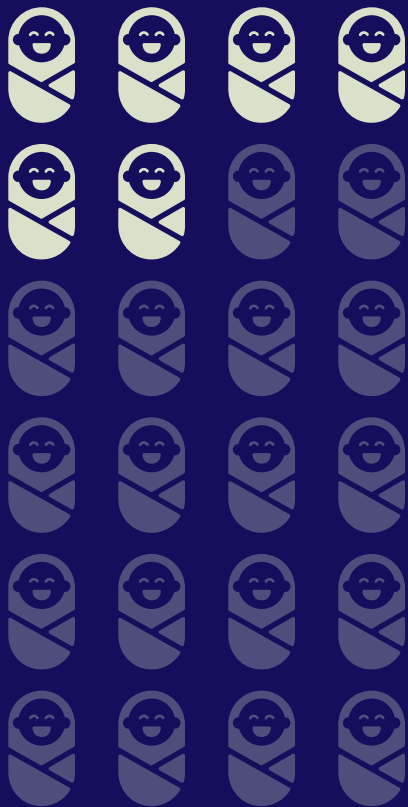
Sporadic, varied,  
inconsistent. A growing  
focus.



**Rising numbers**

Increases across the  
Western world. Huge  
regional variation.

# Terrifying statistics



**England**

48 children per 10,000



**London**

25 children per 10,000



**North East**

102 children per 10,000



**Hartlepool**

170 children in 10,000

1 in 59

(Bilson and Bywaters, 2020)

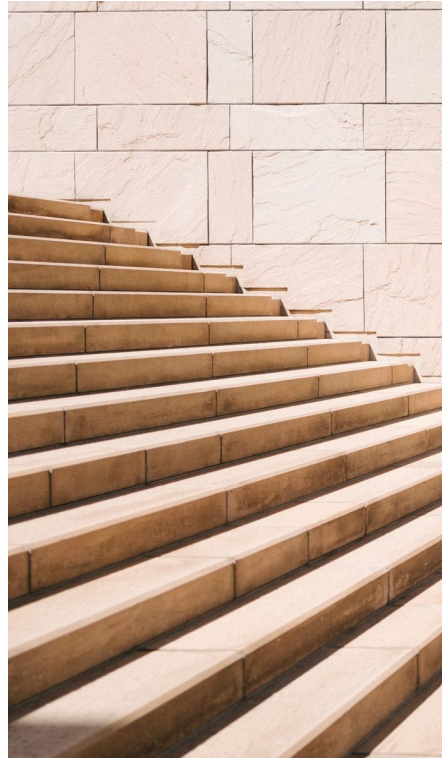
# Literature Review: The Headlines

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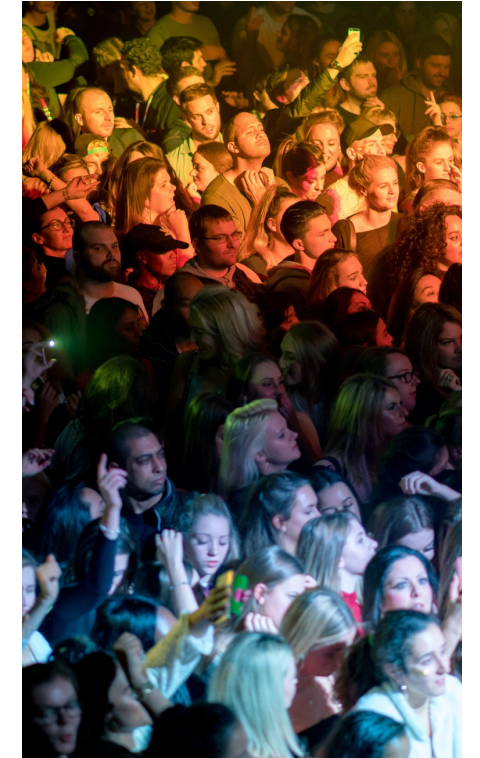
**Lack of guidance**

Limited guidance, legislation, policy



**Variations in practice**

No best practice available. Varied ways of assessing and outcomes.



**Experiences are missing**

Professional and family experiences are a gap in the literature.

A large, dense pile of rusty metal bolts and nuts, filling the entire frame. The bolts and nuts are of various sizes and orientations, creating a complex, textured background. The rust is a prominent orange-brown color, contrasting with the grey metal. The lighting is somewhat dim, highlighting the metallic sheen and the rough texture of the rust.

# Methods



# Preliminary findings

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**Theme 1:**

An 'ominous pressure' - The weight of pre-birth work



**Theme 2:**

Trying to get it 'right' - personal, cultural and structural challenges



**Theme 3:**

Invisible children and educated guess work - The unique complexity of pre-birth work

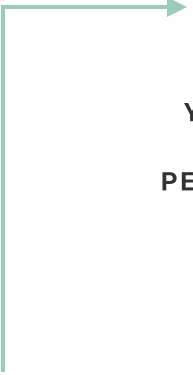


**Theme 4:**

'Wildly unprepared and really scared' - How equipped are social workers for the work?

# Returning to the reflection

IMAGINE YOU HAVE TO  
MAKE A DECISION



THAT DECISION MIGHT AFFECT THE  
TRAJECTORY OF SOMEONE'S ENTIRE LIFE

IT IS RELIANT ON THE  
QUALITY OF YOUR  
WORK

THERE IS NO  
TRAINING  
AVAILABLE,  
THERE IS VERY  
LITTLE  
RESEARCH

THERE IS  
LIMITED  
GUIDANCE,  
LEGISLATION,  
OR POLICY

YOU HAVE VERY  
LITTLE TIME TO  
MAKE THE  
DECISION

YOU CANNOT  
MEET THE  
PERSON BEFORE  
YOU DECIDE

HOW DO YOU FEEL  
ABOUT MAKING THE  
DECISION?



Thank you  
for your time  
Questions?

# References

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●  
Bilson, A. and Bywaters, P. (2020) 'Born into care: evidence of a failed state', *Child and Youth Service Review*, 116, pp.105-164.

Critchley, A. (2018) *Quickening Steps: An ethnography of pre-birth child protection*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of Edinburgh.