

Procedures on Bruises
in Pre-Mobile Children:
Why we need
improved standards for
policy making

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Are these 2 bruises in a 4 week old baby non-accidental
And what caused them?



What my
presentation
will cover

Review of the evidence
base on accidental bruising

Review of procedures on
pre-mobile children

Impact of procedures

All I did was cry.
I didn't sleep
you just actually start to doubt yourself as a parent.
Like your skills and everything.
You're just terrified of actually doing anything.
Because you think that someone is going to take them away
when you know, you've done nothing wrong personally yourself

The evidence base cited in the RCPCH Evidence Review

Reference	Definition	Point prevalence of bruising
Pierce 2016	Aged under 6 months	1.3% (18/1395)
Kemp 2015	pre-mobile	5.3% (7/133) 10.9% Rolling 1.3% not rolling
Sugar 1999	Pre-cruisers No upright ambulation	2.2% (11/511) 0.6% (2/366) < 6 months
Carpenter 1999	Aged > 6 months & sits	4.0% (4/101)
Wedgewood 1990	No better than crawling	0.0% (0/11)

The evidence base cited in the RCPCH Evidence Review

Reference	Definition	Point prevalence of bruising	Comments on research
Pierce 2016	Inability to crawl, cruise or walk	1.3% (18/1395)	US study on 3 sites with statistically significant differences in levels of bruising with values of 6.2%, 4.4%, and 2.6%.
Kemp 2015	pre-mobile (divided into pre-rolling and rolling)	5.3% (7/133) 10.9% Rolling 1.3% not rolling	Longitudinal study - 6.7% per observation (68/1010) whilst pre-mobile - 2.2% (9/405) not rolling and 9.8% (59/605) rolling. Pre-mobile children were aged 0-11 months and early mobile aged 4-18 months bruises on 45.6% of observations 27.1% bruised over average 7.6 observations whilst pre-mobile
Sugar 1999	Pre-cruisers No upright ambulation	2.2% (11/511) 0.6% (2/366) < 6 months	US study excludes suspected abuse and bruises due to medical conditions. Statistically sig. lower rates of bruises in African American.
Carpenter 1999	Aged > 6 months & sits	4.0% (4/101)	No children under 6 months
Wedgewood 1990	No better than crawling	0.0% (0/11)	Sample size too low to detect

Other issues with the research base

Competing definitions of pre-mobile –

Cruising, rolling/not rolling/under 6 months & no definition

Prevalence and point prevalence –

<1% or >27%

Research challenges to myths

- Accidental bruising in premobile infants is **not rare**
- Ratio of accidental bruises to those leading to child protection plan is at least 1900 to 1
- **No** studies showing bruising is a **sentinel injury**
- Bruises can be unexplained and non-accidental
- Children can be crawling from age 4 months

Review of procedures collected Dec 2020

147 Safeguarding Children Partnerships had a procedure or specific statement about pre-mobile children in December 2020 an increase from 91 LCSBs in August 2016

Differing definitions of pre-mobile

Definition	Number of Local Authorities
No definition	35
By mobility - Rolling children are treated as mobile	12
By mobility - Rolling children are treated as non-mobile	25
By mobility – Not cruising or walking	1
By age and mobility – includes all pre-mobile children + those under 6 months	74

Exaggeration

20 local authority procedures say any bruise is “highly predictive” of child abuse

Almost all say accidental bruises in pre-mobile children are rare, very rare or extremely rare

“The evidence also suggests that it is extremely rare for a non-mobile baby, for example one that is not yet crawling, to sustain accidental bruising.”

Many procedures say “A small percentage of bruising in children not independently mobile will have an innocent explanation or medical cause.”

Procedures contradicting research findings

Research

- Children who were not yet able to roll over. The cause, when reported, included bumping into mother's tooth, falling asleep on a dummy, banging themselves with a fist or rattle and a toy that was dropped on one baby.
- Children who could roll over but were not yet crawling
Causes included 12 children who had fallen or toppled over, 7 rolled into something, 4 banged into an object and 6 hit themselves with an object.

Procedures in 18 local authorities

- Infants **do not** bruise themselves by lying on a dummy or banging themselves with rattles and other infant toys or by flopping forwards and banging their heads against their parents' faces.
- Any explanation that any injury, barring a small scratch, is self-inflicted should not be accepted.

Different actions

- Almost all procedures require referral to CSC and to a paediatrician
- 27 local authority procedures required a strategy meeting in all cases
- 8 local authority procedures require a section 47 enquiry (all these procedures include bruises on any pre-mobile child and all children under 6 months old)

Bedford Borough

Following the conclusions of three separate local Serious Case Reviews, it has been decided that in the following situations, referral to Children's Services and a S47 Enquiry/investigation is undertaken C:

Any evidence of physical injury in an infant aged SIX MONTHS AND UNDER, for example: bruise, thermal injury, clinical or radiological evidence of fracture, etc.

What policies should say

- Where a pre-mobile baby is bruised, staff should be curious and explore with parents the cause in a fair and balanced manner, considering whether the child has been abused.
- Whilst bruising is less common in babies who cannot roll or crawl than in mobile infants, accidental bruising is still many times more common than non-accidental injuries.
- Once a baby can roll the chances of an accidental bruise increase.
- A bruise alone is not sufficient cause to suggest a baby has been or is at risk of significant harm and does not reach the threshold for a child protection investigation, strategy discussion or interim care order without other indicators of risk of significant harm.
- Parents who have not harmed their child may not have a plausible explanation for bruising. This does not mean that there isn't one, or that they are hiding abuse.



Me, Theo and my mum are now in a hostel because we were made homeless ... I had to leave my job in the end because of the stress.

Me and Theo's dad broke up because we became distant because of it all. We couldn't stop arguing.

We just lost everything.