

Centre for Research on Children and Families **Annual Report 2013-14**



**Making a difference
for children and families**

crcf
Centre for Research
on Children & Families

Our aims

To undertake research on a wide range of child and family issues across regional, national and international contexts.

To use research to advance our understanding of the development of children and the diverse nature and meanings of family life across the life course in a changing and multi-cultural society.

To advance our knowledge of the effectiveness and efficiency of services across the statutory, voluntary and private sectors.

To work in collaboration with, or on behalf of, child and family agencies in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors.

To develop and disseminate research knowledge which will inform and have an impact on policy and practice, enhancing the well-being of children and families.

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**Research evidence should be
the foundation of policy and
practice developments**

Welcome

The Centre for Research on Children and Families has continued to build on the range and impact of its work this year. At a time when services to children and families are facing continuing financial constraints it is all the more important for research evidence to be the foundation of policy and practice developments. The implementation of a number of key aspects of the Children and Families Act 2014 will benefit from research conducted in the Centre.

In the area of adoption and contact, this year saw the completion of the third phase of a longitudinal study of a cohort of children adopted from care, who are now in late adolescence. Led by Dr Elsbeth Neil, this study of adoption and contact funded by the Nuffield Foundation has highlighted the many challenges that adopted children and their families face over time and the importance of support right through to adulthood. Central to the study's findings in relation to contact, and a major focus to build on in practice, is the quality of 'communicative openness' in adoptive parents. At a time when assessment and preparation of adoptive parents is completed to tighter timescales, it will be important to learn from the messages of this research, and in particular from the voices of adopted adolescents and their families.

The implementation of changes in the family justice system in relation to the 26 week timescale has already benefitted from the work led by Professor Jonathan Dickens and Dr Chris Beckett on the Tri-borough pilot project. The challenges of decision making and care planning for children are also the focus of the current ESRC funded project on care planning and the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer, which will report in late 2014.

Developments in relation to 'staying put' in the new legislation should have a significant impact on how long-term foster care is valued. Professor Gillian Schofield's work in this area has informed the Department of Education's new consultation process on establishing permanence in foster care. The significance of a 'Secure Base' for children from troubled backgrounds is increasingly recognised in both foster care and adoption.

This year also launched the important Recognition and Telling project, led by Jeanette Cossar and myself, which has developed a model for understanding children's experiences of harm and enabling them to seek help. This project was the second funded study in the CRCF involving listening to children that was funded by the Office of the Children's Commissioner. We welcome the fact that the role of the OCC has been significantly enhanced under the new legislation and will be extending its area of responsibility to include looked after children. From 1 May 2014 I became a member of the OCC Advisory Board.

As we go forward we have a range of research activity, and in particular an important new research project funded by the ESRC for 2014-16 and led by Jeanette Cossar. The study of the experiences and identity development of LGBT young people in care is an innovative piece of work in an important and hitherto unresearched area, which will have a significant impact on practice.

We look forward to working with all of our funders and stakeholders, and with the many children, families and professionals who participate so generously in our studies, as we continue with our research programme in the coming year.



Marian Brandon (BA, MA, CQSW, PhD)

Professor of Social Work

Director of the Centre for Research on Children & Families

News

International networks and conferences

Staff of the Centre are now actively involved in three international research networks.

Professor Marian Brandon and Emeritus Professor June Thoburn are founder members of the International Association for Outcome Based Evaluation and Research. IaOBER is funded by the Fondazione Emanuela Zancan which celebrated its 50th anniversary with an international conference in Padua on the 5th June 2014 on *The challenges of living in poverty and experiencing maltreatment on children's future*, an event at which both Marian and June were speakers.

Professor Jonathan Dickens is part of an important international network *Decision-making in child welfare: a trans-national study* with partners from Norway, Finland and the USA. The network is funded by the Norwegian Research Council and is currently gathering data about decision making from professionals in all four countries. Christine Cocker, who joined the School of Social Work in September 2013, is a member of Rainbow HAS (Rights through Alliances: Innovating and Networking BOth Within Homes And Schools), an international network currently addressing issues relating to homophobic bullying in schools.

A number of Centre members presented at a range of international events this year. Dr Elsbeth Neil has given presentations in both Sweden and Finland on her research. Dr Neil delivered the key note address on the 12th December 2013 in Helsinki at a Save the Children Finland conference for adoption organisations, social workers and students as part of the Encounters Project. Dr Neil also spoke at the Euradopt conference in Stockholm on 24th April 2014 on *Adoption as a permanency plan for children in care: some experiences from the UK*.

Professor June Thoburn led a seminar with child welfare faculty members at the Bergen University College on *'Children in Care in International Context: Placement patterns and interim outcomes'*. June also gave a keynote presentation in the Netherlands on the 23rd September 2013 to around 400 people from a range of professions who work with families with complex problems.

CRCF seminars

This year's CRCF seminar series included two international contributions. Dr Patricia McNamara of La Trobe University, Melbourne presented *New models of residential care in Victoria, Australia* on 13th September 2013 and Siv Sæbjørnsen, a visiting researcher from the University of Stavanger, Norway spoke on 'Vulnerable teenagers: exploring teenager's perceptions of inter professional collaboration and service-user involvement' on 20th November 2013.



Professor Marian Brandon (left) with Dr Patricia McNamara

‘It takes a lot to build trust’

Recognition and Telling

There was an official launch in Westminster on 22nd October 2013 of the CRCF report for the Office of the Children's Commissioner titled, *'It takes a lot to build trust'. Recognition and Telling: developing earlier routes to help for children and young people.* This important research project was commissioned by the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England and conducted by a research team led by Jeanette Cossar. The research examined young people's recognition of abuse and neglect, their experiences of telling, and of getting help from family, friends and professionals.

The Children's Commissioner for England, Maggie Atkinson, endorsed the findings of the research, "Children often don't understand they are being abused. If they are old enough to do so, it takes incredible courage for them to overcome the barriers to talk to someone about it, so those with responsibility for protecting them must take heed of the practical advice and recommendations in this report and improve the way they identify and work with children who may be being abused." The research report was launched in the presence of an invited multi-disciplinary audience of key stakeholders including MPs, health professionals and social workers in the field of child welfare and child protection. An address was given by Edward Timpson MP, Minister for Children and Families in the Department for Education (pictured left).

CRCF's annual conference followed the launch and was chaired by Professor Gillian Schofield, Head of the School of Social Work at UEA. The conference included presentations given by the project's research team, including the young researchers who played a key role in this project, lead researcher Jeanette Cossar and the CRCF Director, Professor Marian Brandon. The research findings and a proposed model for recognition, telling and helping were outlined followed by a panel discussion. Jeanette and Marian have presented findings from the study at numerous conferences during 2014.



Children's Commissioner Maggie Atkinson with the research team (below)



The College of Social Work

This year has seen a range of developments that have built links between UEA and The College of Social Work.

Professor June Thoburn was elected to the Steering Committee of the Children and Families Faculty of The College of Social Work for 2014-17.

Professor Gillian Schofield was commissioned by The College of Social Work on behalf of the Department of Health to prepare a new Curriculum Framework for Continuing Professional Development in Planning and Supporting Permanence. Working with John Simmonds, Director of Policy, Research and Practice at BAAF, and with the support of a distinguished advisory group, this curriculum designed to be a tool for educators and trainers that will enable social workers to improve their knowledge and skills in relation to care planning, reunification, family and friends care, long-term foster care, special guardianship and adoption. Gillian Schofield spoke on the curriculum at the Community Care Live Conference – Children and Families in London on 14th November 2013, with Vijay Patel from The College of Social Work, who has continued to develop the curriculum and its application to the Professional Capabilities Framework.

Professor Marian Brandon delivered a workshop with Dr Darren Sharpe from Anglia Ruskin University and the young researchers at The College of Social Work inaugural conference 'The Future of Social Work – leading change together' on 'Recognition and telling: Developing earlier routes to safety for children and young people' on 21st January 2014.

Socio-legal studies – family and criminal justice

Research within CRCF has had important implications for work in the family courts and in professional practice at a time of considerable change.

A full report of the pre-proceedings research *Partnership by law? The pre-proceedings process for families on the edge of care proceedings* was published in April 2013 and widely disseminated. This was followed in July 2013 by the publication of *Concluding Care Proceedings in 26 weeks: Report of the evaluation of the Tri-borough pilot project*.

The President of the Family Division, Sir James Munby, made a lengthy reference to this project in his letter to family courts and the report was circulated by Sir David Norgrove to all Family Justice Boards.

Professor Dickens delivered a School of Law research seminar on this topic at Keele University on 5th Feb and a workshop on 7th February 2014 at the Family Justice Council Inter-Disciplinary Conference in London. On 26th February 2014 together with Dr Chris Beckett, Professor Dickens presented results from the evaluation of the Tri-borough Care Proceedings pilot at a BAAF conference in London 'Proceeding to permanence – managing the varied demands of child care proceedings'.

Professor Marian Brandon presented a keynote address at the Norfolk Family Justice Board conference – 'Safeguarding Children at Home and through the Courts' on 31st March attended by more than 300 professionals. Professor June Thoburn is Chair of the Board.

In addition to the impact of our research on the work of the family courts, we are also involved in areas of work in the criminal justice field. On the 28th January 2014 Birgit Larsson spoke at the House of Commons at an event hosted by the Fabian Women's Network on 'Risks and Rewards of Restorative Justice: Striking the Right Balance for Women'. The panel was chaired by Charlotte Proudman, barrister and members included Dan Jarvis MP, Shadow Justice Minister, and Ellie Cumbo, Fabian Women's Network.

Professor Brandon and Birgit Larsson have also been involved in discussions with senior police colleagues to explore areas of shared concern, where research may inform and assist practice. Dr Jane Dodsworth is now working with Birgit to examine police experiences and attitudes to child sexual exploitation, which is an important link to Jane's other research funded by BASPCAN on child sexual exploitation. Marian Brandon is supporting the police with their national strategy for neglect.



The Secure Base model

National and international developments

This year has seen important developments in the work on the Secure Base caregiving model for foster care and adoption. On the 21st February 2014 two new practice guides, written by Professor Gillian Schofield and Dr Mary Beek and published by BAAF, were launched at a successful national conference at Woburn House in London, with practitioners attending from all parts of the country and also from Ireland. Speakers included two experienced practitioners from Norway, where the model is well established as part of the core training for foster carers, but also as a framework for foster carer supervision and support. Juri Skulstad from Bergen and Ole Jørgensen from Oslo, gave presentations on their work with 'Trygg Base' in individual and group supervision. Also speaking was Nick Dunster, Managing Director of ABC Fostering, and Gareth Long, foster carer, about the introduction of Secure Base into their organisation.

On the 15th October 2013, Gillian Schofield attended a reception in Florence at the Istituto degli Innocenti for the launch of the Italian translation of the *Attachment Handbook for Foster Care and Adoption* (Schofield and Beek 2006, BAAF) – translated as '*Adozione affido accoglienza: L'attaccamento al centro delle relazioni familiari*'.

A further important international development for Secure Base has resulted from Mary Beek's new role as Training and Quality Assurance Manager for Care for Children, an organisation that works mainly in China but also in other countries in the Far East, such as Thailand, to promote family placement for children who might otherwise grow up in institutional care. Mary has been using the Secure Base model as a framework for developing training for foster carers, and in February 2014 she presented the model at a conference in Hanoi to launch the work of Care for Children in Vietnam (pictured above).

The Secure Base caregiving model was developed initially in the context of foster care research in the Centre funded by the Nuffield Foundation, but the model has proved equally relevant to thinking about and developing adoption practice. In addition, there is interest in applications in other settings, in particular residential care, where tuning into children's needs, reducing anxiety and enabling children to be more secure and resilient are valuable goals.

Making Research Count

Through our Making Research Count programme, an important dissemination route for the CRCF, we link with a number of local authorities in the Eastern region, sharing our latest research findings with practitioner colleagues and policy makers, and contributing to the development of research-informed, evidence-based practice in social work and social care. Over the last year we have been pleased to continue our association with our local partners; Norfolk County Council, who were our first partner in this initiative when it was founded in 1997, and Essex and Suffolk Children and Young People's services, with whom we have also had links for many years.

The academic lead for Making Research Count (UEA) is Professor Gillian Schofield, and the project coordinator is Sue Bailey. If your organisation is interested in becoming a partner and subscribing to the initiative, or you would like further information, please contact Sue:

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Email: s.e.bailey@uea.ac.uk

We developed a programme of seminars for each individual authority, and delivered the sessions exclusively to them in their own premises. Topics were mutually agreed to reflect the preference and priorities of the agencies, alongside the research interests and expertise of faculty and research staff in the School. Making Research Count seminars provide:

- An opportunity to hear about the latest research being undertaken in the School, and in other universities;
- A chance for participants to reflect and discuss the evidence base for their practice;
- Encouragement to agencies to develop their ability to evaluate existing policies and practices, and to apply research awareness to service development;
- A forum for professionals to network and share ideas and practice with each other;
- An opportunity for UEA faculty and research staff to meet and engage with practitioners and policy makers in the region (including many ex-students).

Making Research Count members have also received a number of free places at events organised by the School of Social Work this year, including at the 'Secure Base Model' conference in London in February 2014, the research workshop on adoption and foster care at UEA in May, and a half-day conference on 'Making plans work well for children in care' to take place in London in October of this year.

Nationally, ten university social work departments throughout England collaborate in Making Research Count, each offering a programme of research seminars and events for their regional cluster of local authorities and health and social care organisations. UEA was one of the founder university departments in this network, under the direction of Emeritus Professor June Thoburn.



News in brief

Emeritus Professor June Thoburn gave the first Olive Stevenson memorial lecture on 14th February 2014 'Head and Heart in Social Work Practice: Olive Stevenson's Messages for Today and Tomorrow'. The event was attended by approximately 80 people including friends and former colleagues and students of Olive, and Nottingham Centre for Social Work Practice faculty, students and social services partners.

The publication of the report "What do we know about non-resident fathers?" in November 2013 was produced by CRCF member Sara Connolly of Norwich Business School with NatCen Social Research and Thomas Coram Research Unit. Key findings of the report include an estimated 980,000 men in the UK have non-resident children under 16 years old which equates to 5% of all men aged 16-64, fathers who are not in contact are more likely to be unemployed and are less likely to own their own home and that fathers living with a new partner and children are less likely to stay in contact than those living on their own. The report was picked up by a number of national newspapers, including the Times, Guardian, Daily Telegraph, Daily Express and Mail Online and was referenced on Women's Hour.



As part of our collaboration with the Essex Social Care Academy, Peter Jordan and Dr Laura Biggart delivered a one day conference on 6th February 2014 for over 100 social workers on 'Emotional intelligence and resilience in social work' drawing on Laura's ESRC project on this topic.

Dr Nicholas Walsh's work 'General and specific effects of early-life psychosocial adversities on adolescent grey matter volume' exploring how family problems experienced in childhood and adolescence affect brain development received a lot of attention in the national and international press in the week of 17th February. Dr Walsh also presented his findings as part of the CRCF seminar series at UEA.

Dr Beth Neil (pictured above) introduced her latest research 'Contact After Adoption: A longitudinal Study of adopted young people and their parents and birth relatives' at the BAAF Research Group Conference held in London on 20th March 2014. The conference was entitled 'Adopted children's developments over time – new research evidence on the challenges, outcomes and those placements that disrupt'. This topic will be presented in more depth at this year's CRCF annual conference.



Children and families in difficulties need routes for seeking support and help

Research projects

Child protection and support

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Improving the quality of Serious Case Reviews
- 15 Routes into sexual exploitation: Going missing, agency and victimhood.
An exploration of the perceptions of young people involved
- 16 Evaluation of the Tri-borough Family Coaching Service
- 17 Recognition and Telling: Developing earlier routes
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Chelsea Families Forward Service
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And School (RAINBOW HAS): Research on family discourses and analysis of
best practices in tackling homophobic bullying in schools

Evaluation of the training programme: Improving the quality of Serious Case Reviews

September 2013 – April 2014

Research team

Professor Marian Brandon
Dr Pippa Belderson
Sue Bailey

Funder

Department for Education

Context

There has been a requirement to publish Serious Case Reviews since 2010 as part of a government drive towards more transparency and better learning from these high profile local reviews which are carried out when abuse or neglect are known or suspected and a child has died (and in some circumstances where a child has been seriously harmed but has not died). The new edition of Working Together (2013) has revised the guidance for carrying out a Serious Case Review and the principles for learning and improvement which should be followed both whilst carrying out the review and when producing a report for subsequent publication.

In carrying out a Serious Case Review, Local Children Safeguarding Boards may use any learning model which is consistent with the principles in Working Together 2013.

To assist with the new approach to Serious Case Reviews the Department for Education has funded a training programme. The key aims of the programme are to offer training and support to improve the quality of Serious Case Review reports by helping review authors to write reports which:

- provide a sound analysis of what happened in the case and why, and what needs to happen in order to avoid the risk of recurrence;
- are written in plain English and can be understood easily by professionals and public alike; and
- are suitable for publication without needing to be amended or redacted, for example they will not contain personal data which needs to be protected

The support and training is being designed and delivered by a consortium including NSPCC, Action for Children and Sequeli.

Aims

This independent evaluation aims to report on the overall success of the training and support programme from the perspective of participants.

Methods

The study has quantitative and qualitative aspects. The first quantitative part of the study analyses the volume, reach and pattern of take up of the various aspects of support offered via analysis of questionnaires distributed at the training. The second qualitative component uses a combination of focus groups, phone interviews and electronic questionnaires to follow the progress of 50 report author attendees in producing SCR reports that meet the central criteria for the programme. Participants are asked to comment on the extent to which they feel the training and other support offered has helped or will, in the future, help them to write a high quality Serious Case Review report and about other factors involved in being a report author.

Findings

The report is with the Department for Education.

Impact

The study findings will be presented as a short report to the Department for Education and will be written up subsequently as an academic article.

Routes into sexual exploitation: Going missing, agency and victimhood. An exploration of the perceptions of young people involved

2013 – 2014

Research team

Dr Jane Dodsworth

Funder

The British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (BASPCAN)

Context

There is increasing awareness of child sexual exploitation and the individual, family and environmental factors which contribute to involvement. Many young people involved have childhood histories of adversity and there is growing awareness of the additional vulnerability of those who have experience of the care system and/or of running away from care or home. The sense individuals make of these experiences impacts on how they perceive themselves, their sense of victimhood or agency, routes taken and receptiveness to safeguarding services.

Aims

- To gain an understanding of the experiences and perspectives of young people involved in sexual exploitation, particularly those who have run away from care/ home and are involved in substance misuse
- To identify whether it is possible to determine risk and protective factors in the young people's perceptions of agency and victimhood
- To add, from the perspectives of the young people involved, to what is known about routes into involvement, perceptions of agency and pathways taken in order to raise awareness of what has been until recently a largely hidden issue
- To increase the development of effective service interventions which have meaning to the young people involved

Findings

The background history of most participants, perhaps unsurprisingly given what is already known from research, has been of abuse, neglect, loss and running away from, or to, home or running away from or to care. Participants' perceptions of pathways indicate a combination of push/pull factors.

Themes include:

- Abuse/rejection/loss
- Being adrift/slipping through the net
- Seeking affection
- Rebellion
- Feeling different
- Blurred/inappropriate/replaced boundaries
- Isolation, self- hate/self- harm/ fatalism
- Identity confusion/mirroring
- Consistency/ inconsistency and expectations of being let down
- Running away leading to sexual exploitation
- Sexual exploitation leading to running away
- Cyclical negative push/pull patterns
- The need for someone to 'be there'

What also emerged was a complex pattern of pathways in which various 'push' or 'pull' factors and the participants' perception of them in terms of agency or victimhood appeared to precipitate them along different pathways. 'Zee' for example, was pushed by familial abuse into running away to care and then by peer pressure into running away from care back home. At 15 she was both 'pushed' and 'pulled' into sexual exploitation by peer pressure and a need to survive and fund her drug use but also the 'pull' of being 'like a business woman, running my own business'. Her perception was of agency but also of victimhood; 'I don't think I was aware of what I was giving away to people'.

These themes and the 'push/pull' 'victim/agency' pathways and the sense made of them by the participants were used to develop the analysis/models for suggestions for future interventions/practice guidance.

Impact

The research findings will be disseminated via a report to BASPCAN and a presentation for The National BASPCAN conference 2015, and for the participating LCSBs (Local Safeguarding Children Boards). The aim is to use the findings to inform practice in this difficult area.

What also emerged was a complex pattern of pathways in which various 'push' or 'pull' factors and the participants' perception of them in terms of agency or victimhood appeared to precipitate them along different pathways.

Methods

Following careful consideration of ethical factors, fifteen participants aged 16 plus have been identified via 'gatekeepers' from specific specialist outreach projects in three areas of the country and agreed to be interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were used to chart participant's lives and examine experiences in their narratives. A qualitative approach has been taken to data collection and analysis to ensure findings are grounded in the expertise of those directly involved.

Evaluation of the Tri-borough Family Coaching Service

March 2013 – May 2014

Research team

Professor Marian Brandon
Dr Penny Sorensen
Sue Bailey
Professor June Thoburn
Dr Neil Cooper
Dr Sara Connolly

Funder

The London Tri-borough

Context

The Family Coaching service is a response to the Government's high profile 'Troubled Families' initiative and is being delivered across the Tri-borough (of Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea and Hammersmith and Fulham). This new service is being offered to families with problems in at least two of the following: youth offending - crime and anti-social behaviour ; school attendance - truancy or exclusion from school; employment - adults claiming out-of-work benefits. The initiative aims to turn around the lives of troubled families by providing a coordinated approach to support, so the family is not overwhelmed by interventions and is helped to deal with the most urgent difficulties first.

Aims and methods

This study aims to provide a primarily qualitative, critical evaluation of the working of the family coach service to get a better understanding of what elements appear to be making a difference and for whom. As part of the service families with complex needs are visited and helped by a skilled and experienced, but not typically social work qualified 'coach', one or more times a week for six months or longer. The study examines how the coaching service relates to the 'services as usual' that precede and follow the service. It will map each stage of the service beginning with the triage system to allocate families to the coach service (or elsewhere). A series of developmental workshops have been run with the family coaches to understand from their perspective how their work is developing and interviews have been conducted with their supervisors. 20 'Whole family' interviews are providing family perspectives on what might, or might not, be succeeding and why. The study has been extended to provide a costings exercise to try to identify whether the work has produced savings for the Tri-borough.

Findings

The key outcomes of improved school attendance, reduction in criminality and getting adults into work are more than challenging, but early success and satisfaction from families are being reported. Family change appears to be linked to good relationships between families and workers and relationship based work with the whole family appears to be satisfying for both family members and the family coaches. However, risks and potential fault lines are appearing. As well as finding the work satisfying, it is also difficult and emotionally draining and stressful for the coaches, who can quickly become demoralised and lose confidence when family change is not sustained. This begs the question of whether there are potential roles for social workers offering support to early help workers in schemes like this, offering emotional support, supervision, consultation and sometimes co-working.

Key outcomes of improved school attendance, reduction in criminality and getting adults into work are more than challenging, but early success and satisfaction from families are being reported.

Publications

White S., Morris, K., Featherstone B, Brandon , M., and Thoburn, J. (2014) 'Re-imagining early help: looking forward, looking back' in Blyth M ed *Moving on from Munro: Improving Children's Services*, Policy Press: Bristol.

Recognition and Telling: Developing earlier routes to help for children and young people

September 2011 –
August 2013

Research team

Jeanette Cossar
Professor Marian Brandon,
Sue Bailey
Dr Pippa Belderson
Dr Laura Biggart
Dr Darren Sharpe
(Anglia Ruskin University)
and a team of
young researchers

Funder

Officer of the Children's
Commissioner for England

Context

The government commissioned Munro Review of Child Protection (2011) argued that a child's journey from experiencing problems to getting effective help should be at the heart of the child protection system. It stressed the importance of an offer of early help for children and their families. The Recognition and Telling project was based on the premise that children's and young people's perspectives on how they recognise and tell about abuse and neglect would assist in the identification of improved services to protect them. The aims of the project were to examine young people's perceptions of abuse and neglect, and to explore their experiences of telling and getting help from both informal and formal sources.

Aims

The key research questions were:

- How do children and young people think about and classify experiences as abuse and neglect?
- How do children and young people tell about the problems they are facing?
- What are young people's views about support services?
- How do family members experience support services for children?
- How do professionals feel that access to support services could be improved for children and young people?

If a trusted professional responded sensitively and showed concern for the young person, the young person might then begin to talk about underlying problems.

Methods

The study employed six young researchers with experience or knowledge of the topic, aged between 16 and 24. The team of adult and young researchers undertook a thematic analysis of thirty interviews with vulnerable young people aged 11-20, six focus groups with young people, parents, and professionals, and analysed an online message board where young people post and respond to each other's problems.

Findings

Key findings included that young people's recognition of abuse was linked with age, with different barriers to recognition according to the type of abuse or neglect. Recognition might come as an end result of receiving help and talking things through over a long period, rather than being a precursor to telling. Young people most often came to the attention of services through their behaviour rather than through explicitly disclosing abuse. They were often actively weighing up the risks of telling, though sometimes the emotional impact of the abuse overrode the rational process. There were many barriers to telling for young people including their past negative experiences of help. If a trusted professional responded sensitively and showed concern for the young person, the young person might then begin to talk about underlying problems. Teachers and youth workers were found to be particularly important as people to tell and they and social workers were valued as providing holistic support. The findings were used to develop a framework for understanding recognition, telling and help from a child's perspective. The framework could help practitioners to be mindful of the possible issues underlying a young person's behaviour, to understand how young people weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of telling, and to keep in mind the emotional aspects of talking about abuse and neglect.

Impact

The report was launched at an event in Westminster with an address by the Minister for Children, Edward Timpson, and the Children's Commissioner for England, Dr Maggie Atkinson. Members of the research team have presented the findings at several conferences, including the inaugural College of Social Work annual conference.

The full report is available free of charge on the CRCF website.

Neglect in Serious Case Reviews

2012 – 2013

Research team

Professor Marian Brandon
Sue Bailey
Dr Pippa Belderson
Birgit Larsson

Funder

NSPCC

Neglect can be life threatening and needs to be treated with as much urgency as other categories of maltreatment.

Context

Although there is improved recognition of the pernicious long term harm that stems from living with neglect during childhood, neglect is rarely associated with child fatality. The deaths of two young children, Daniel Pelka and Hamzah Khan, from severe neglect and abuse have raised public and professional awareness of the dangers of neglect. This study provides a new contribution to learning about neglect by exploring the circumstances in which neglect can be catastrophic and have a fatal or seriously harmful outcome for a child.

Aims

The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- How often is neglect evident in the families of children who become the subject of a serious case review?
- What are the characteristics of children and families where children have suffered neglect?
- In what ways does neglect feature in these cases of child fatality and near fatality?

Methods

The study offers a re-analysis of neglect in Serious Case Reviews (cases of child death or serious injury related to maltreatment) in England (2003-2011) from four consecutive government commissioned national two yearly studies. The first two research questions are considered from a statistical perspective by firstly examining patterns over time in relation to those cases (from 2005-2011) of children who had a child protection plan for neglect; secondly we use a protocol to determine the presence of neglect more widely for children in serious case reviews (from 2009-2011).

The third question was considered through a qualitative study of forty six cases drawn from 2003-2011, and provides a rich understanding of how different types and circumstances of neglect appear to result in a catastrophic outcome, in six different ways (deprivational neglect, medical neglect, accidents with elements of forewarning, sudden unexpected deaths in infancy, physical abuse combined with neglect and young suicide). Each of the six categories raised particular issues, over and above a common core of concerns around the relationship between the child and his or her parent or carer, and between parents/carers and professionals.

Findings

- Neglect is much more prevalent in serious case reviews than previously understood (60% of the 139 reviews from 2009-2011).
- Neglect can be life threatening and needs to be treated with as much urgency as other categories of maltreatment.
- Neglect with the most serious outcomes is not confined to the youngest children, and occurs across all ages.
- The possibility that in a very small minority of cases neglect will be fatal, or cause grave harm, should be part of a practitioner's mindset. Practitioners, managers, policy makers and decision makers should be discouraged from minimizing or downgrading the harm that can come from neglect and discouraged from allowing neglect cases to drift.
- The key aim for the practitioner working with neglect is to ensure a healthy living environment and healthy relationships for children. Prevention and early access to help and support for children and their families are crucial, but so too is later stage help for older children who live with the consequences of longstanding neglect.

Impact

The report has been widely disseminated by the NSPCC and is referenced in their 2014 annual report '*How Safe are our Children*'. Marian is a member of the NSPCC's advisory group on neglect and has been an expert member of a Department for Education working group, convened to inform practitioner guidance about working with neglect. In March 2014 she was invited by the National Policing lead for Child Protection to be part of the network of academic advisers to help determine national policing strategy for neglect. Over the last year Marian has also given a number of high profile presentations about neglect, including opening a round table discussion about the Daniel Pelka case for the NSPCC and the Office of the Children's Commissioner, presenting at a Westminster Forum, leading a Masterclass for Kent County Council and for Northern Ireland. She has also led four regional Making Research Count events.

Publications

Brandon, M., Bailey, S. and Belderson, P. and Larsson, B., (2013) *Neglect in Serious Reviews*. University of East Anglia/NSPCC

Evaluation of the Tri-borough Care Proceedings Pilot 2012-13

January 2013 – March 2014

Research team

Professor Jonathan Dickens
Dr Chris Beckett
Sue Bailey

Funder

The Tri-borough
local authorities

Context

The Tri-borough Care Proceedings Pilot was an initiative by three London boroughs (Hammersmith & Fulham, Westminster, Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea), together with the court service and Cafcass, to address the problem of unnecessary delay in care proceedings. It aimed to reduce the duration of proceedings to 26 weeks, ahead of national moves in the same direction. This time limit is now law, for all but 'exceptional cases', in the Children and Families Act 2014.

Aims

The main aims of the evaluation of the pilot were to ascertain:

- Whether delay had been reduced, and the target of 26 weeks achieved;
- Whether the changes had impacted on the quality of decision-making, fairness for parents or outcomes for children;
- How the changes had affected the work of social workers and lawyers;
- Whether and how the benefits of the pilot could be sustained.

The evaluation shows that the 26 week target can be achieved without compromising justice and thoroughness, as long as there is proper regard for flexibility.

Methods

The evaluation combined quantitative and qualitative elements. We analysed key data about all cases in the pilot year and the previous year, to discover what had changed and the extent of any changes. We assessed data such as the ages of the children, the start and end dates of the proceedings, assessments undertaken, orders made, plans and placements. We interviewed a range of professionals, including social workers, team managers, local authority lawyers, private practice lawyers, children's guardians, and judges. We also held a focus group with a group of young people in care, to ask about their views of the project.

Findings

- The Tri-borough pilot succeeded in its key aim of reducing the length of care proceedings. The median duration of care proceedings was 27 weeks compared to 49 weeks the year before, a reduction of 45%.
- The fact that the median length of proceedings fell to around 26 weeks means that half the cases were still taking longer than that. The pilot showed that it is important to retain some flexibility, and this can coexist with meaningful efforts to bear down on unnecessary delay.
- While many stakeholders expressed concern that justice might be compromised by a rigid 26 week target, no one suggested that this had actually occurred.
- Commitment and leadership in all agencies, and robust court management by judges and magistrates, were vital to the success of the pilot.

Impact

The evaluation has been widely quoted and circulated, because it shows that the 26 week target can be achieved without compromising justice and thoroughness, as long as there is proper regard for flexibility. The report was quoted at length by Sir James Munby, the President of the Family Division, in one of his regular newsletters to family justice professionals. It was referred to by Edward Timpson, the Minister for Children and Families, in his address to the 2013 children's and adult services conference, and by Baroness Tyler in the House of Lords debates about the Children and Families Bill. It was circulated to all local family justice boards by Sir David Norgrove, the chair of the national board.

Publications

The full report is available free of charge on the CRCF website.

Beckett, C. and Dickens, J. (forthcoming) 'Delay and anxiety in care proceedings: grounds for hope?', *Journal of Social Work Practice*

Review of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Families Forward Service

March 2014 – June 2014

Research team

Professor Marian Brandon
Dr Penny Sorensen

Funder

The London Tri-borough

Context

Families Forward is a newly rebranded service launched to coincide with the development of the wider Tri-borough Family Recovery Project. Families Forward is a multi-disciplinary team working with local families already known to frontline social work teams who have children between the ages of 5 to 18 years. The criteria for the work and the top priorities for the team are to prevent family breakdown and to address any child protection concerns.

The service is personalised, recognising that different families have different needs and require different kinds of interventions. Therefore, families are offered access to a range of different professional skills, experience and resources including, parenting programmes, strategies to address substance misuse, targeted work to address risks associated with sexual exploitation and diversion from crime and anti-social behaviour. Families are also offered the opportunity to spend enjoyable positive time together doing a range of new challenging activities from kayaking and climbing to film making and bicycle maintenance.

The service is personalised, recognising that different families have different needs and require different kinds of interventions.

One to one work with young people is also undertaken when appropriate and the team provides advice and direction to social workers and collaborate intensively with the professional networks around the family.

Aims and methods

The study aims to provide a review of the Families Forward team based on brief observation of team working, examination of workers' practice, interviews with 10 families and examination of interagency working in relation to two of the 10 families interviewed with professionals. The research questions include:

- How is the Families Forward team working?
- What are the team's strengths and what are the areas for development?
- How are practitioners working with families?
- What other practitioners are working with the family and how does co-working and working on the same case operate?
- What are the practitioners support needs?
- What are practitioners' perceptions of good practice?
- What are families' perceptions of good practice?

The review will use a qualitative methodology to address the research questions which will involve:

- Observation of a team meeting to gain an understanding of the team and its work
- Developmental workshop with the practitioners to gain more detail about the cases, the workers' practice and to identify families willing to be interviewed
- Interviews with 10 families
- Interviews with professionals in the Team Around the Family

Fieldwork is underway. The data will be analysed thematically.

Impact

A report will be produced identifying strengths of the service and areas for future development.

Rights through Alliances – Innovating and Networking BOTH Within Homes And School (RAINBOW HAS): Research on family discourses and analysis of best practices in tackling homophobic bullying in schools

February 2013 –
February 2015

Research team

Christine Cocker
(Associate Partner - UEA)
Professor Peter Ryan
(PI -Middlesex University)
Dr Trish Hafford-Letchfield
(Middlesex University)

Funder

EU funded project
financed by the DAPHNE
European research and
development fund

Context

This EU project focuses on the role that schools play in offering support and dealing with homophobic bullying and discrimination. Seven European research centres located in five European countries (Italy, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Bulgaria and the UK) are working together to address the issue of homophobic bullying and discrimination based on differences in sexual orientation in schools.

Aims

The aim of the research is to broaden the debate with institutions, LGBT families, families with LGBT children, families with children and youth who have been victims of trans/homophobic bullying, in order to create spaces and conditions for dialogue or lobbying for positive change to “break the silence” of LGBT discrimination. This hopefully will result in higher levels of mutual respect, a higher degree of awareness and support within families and the challenging of stereotypes, through better and more accurate information, and will lead to more supportive approaches to the welfare of the children of LGBT families, or to LGBT children themselves in schools.

Methods

The fieldwork part of the study used a variety of methods to gather data. Each country used the same method:

- Literature Review
- Gathering of data through interviews and documentary analysis. In England this comprised:
 - 7 ‘generic’ families with birth children who were children school aged (interviews)
 - 5 Lesbian and Gay families with school aged children (birth children and adopted children) (interviews)
 - 4 networks and associations who work with lesbian and gay families (telephone interviews and documentary analysis)
 - 5 cases of children who had experienced homophobic bullying were identified through school teachers and bullying and harassment education officers.
 - 3 examples of best practice in tackling homophobia within schools.

These data have now been gathered and analysis has taken place. A European seminar took place on 27th November 2013 to draw together the main strands of the fieldwork across the 5 countries. Middlesex University will now lead on developing training materials to define best practice in addressing these issues. In order to undertake this work, national and regional seminars have been organised in the five countries, and UEA hosted an Eastern regional seminar on 19th June 2014 to engage in dialogue with schools and representative community groups about a local strategy to address homophobic bullying.

Findings

The project is due to host its final conference in Brussels in February 2015.

Impact

Christine Cocker and Trish Hafford-Letchfield will be presenting a paper at the Joint World Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development in Melbourne, Australia, from 9-12th July 2014. The paper is titled: *Positioning discourse on homophobia in schools: What have lesbian and gay families got to say?*

“I think it’s wonderful to respond to individual cases, but then it’s about whole-school work and it’s about changing the culture of the school, and all too often, in both primary and secondary school, it starts with the use of the term, in a derogatory way, ‘This is gay, that’s gay, you’re so gay,’ and if we don’t start to combat all of that, or address it, I think it then becomes a cultural norm, and that’s not acceptable.”

Primary and Secondary School Social Inclusion Officer



**Successful relationships are
at the heart of child placement
in fostering, adoption and
residential care**

Research projects

Child placement

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Care planning and the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer

August 2012 – October 2014

Research team

Professor Jonathan Dickens,
Professor Gillian Schofield
Dr Chris Beckett
Julie Young
Dr Georgia Philip

Funder

Economic and Social
Research Council

Context

Local authorities are 'corporate parents' for the children they are looking after, and effective care planning is essential for the children's well-being and the best possible outcomes. In 2004, a system of 'independent reviewing officers' (IROs) was established to monitor the way that local authorities implement the plans, and to ensure that the child's wishes and feelings are fully considered. Since then, there has been heated debate about how effective and how truly 'independent' the IROs are. In April 2011, new government regulations and statutory guidance about care planning came into force, which (amongst other things) strengthened the IRO's role.

Local authorities are 'corporate parents' for the children they are looking after, and effective care planning is essential for the children's well-being and the best possible outcomes.

Aims

The main aims are to:

- investigate how the new care planning regulations and guidance are being implemented;
- investigate the effectiveness of IROs for monitoring the plans of the local authority, promoting children's well-being, and managing their participation;
- examine the overlaps and differences in the roles and responsibilities of the range of individuals involved in planning for children in care, how decisions are made and disagreements managed;
- ascertain the views of children and parents about the care planning and review process, particularly the role of the IRO;
- highlight key messages for policy and practice from the histories of the children and views of practitioners, parents and children.

Methods

The research is a mixed methods study. It includes a study of case files on a total of 120 children, in four local authorities in England. There are interviews and focus groups with social workers, IROs, parents and young people. There is also a national survey of IROs, social work managers and children's guardians.

Findings

The fieldwork is now completed, and the research team are analysing the data. Emerging findings show the challenges of care planning for children and young people with considerable needs, and often changing circumstances. They also show the subtleties of the IROs' role as they try to focus on the child's welfare while engaging with families and organisational systems, and trying to maintain effective working relationships with social workers and team managers. Early findings will be disseminated at conferences in summer and autumn 2014, and a conference to launch the research will be held in October 2014.

We shall work with central government, local authorities and non-government agencies to share our findings and develop practice models for rigorous but flexible child focus, and understanding professional roles and boundaries. We plan to produce a good practice guide for IROs, social workers and LAC managers. Findings and practice guides will be available on the project website.

There has recently been much professional discussion and public debate about the benefits and risks of being in care, how the children and young people can be helped most effectively, and the role that the IRO can play in this. Our study will bring well-grounded analysis to add evidence and depth to those debates.

The full report will be available free of charge on the CRCF website.

Evaluation of a transitions and mentoring service in residential care

April 2012 – March 2015

Research team

Professor Gillian Schofield
Dr Emma Ward
Birgit Larsson

Funder

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

Creating a nurturing culture within residential homes and supporting a staff group who can build a feeling of 'family' and belonging into adulthood.

Context

Residential care has for some time provided placements for some of the most troubled children in the care system, often adolescents who have a range of difficulties that make foster care inappropriate. For these young people, residential care needs to provide a therapeutic experience that also prepares them for adult life.

There are longstanding concerns about the experiences of all care leavers, but for these making the transition to adulthood from residential care it is likely that there will be additional concerns. At a time when foster care is expected to offer the possibility of 'staying put' to the age of 21, children from residential care are likely to be leaving for 'independence' before their 18th birthday.

Mentoring children in care can provide an important opportunity to promote activities but also to build a supportive relationship. The aim is to build resilience but also social capital, enabling the young person to build personal strengths but also community networks.

In 2012 a voluntary residential organisation received funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to develop these two areas of their work - their transitions and mentoring programmes. Gillian Schofield and the Centre for Research on Children and Families were funded to undertake the evaluation.

Aims

- To explore the residential and leaving care experiences of young people from residential care and the support provided by the transitions team into adulthood
- To explore the experiences of mentoring of young people in care

The evaluation will focus on residential care, young people's perceptions of their close relationships and the opportunities provided during their time in care, and the support currently available to them.

Methods

- Tracking pathways of children from residential care into adulthood
- Interviews with 20 young people aged 17-29 who are in the process of leaving or have left residential care. The aim will be to explore their accounts of their care experiences, their close relationships and sense of security / identity / belonging, as well as their views of the support they have received from transitions and residential staff
- Interviews with young people receiving the mentoring service regarding their experiences. Photo elicitation techniques will form part of the interview
- Focus groups of professionals to capture the views and experiences of residential staff, transitions workers and mentors

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups will be coded using NVivo and analysed thematically and narratively. The stories of young people are key to this project.

Findings

Early findings suggest:

- a wide range of experiences of young people, with the importance of ongoing support seen as essential in the late teenage years and reinforced as young people move through their 20s
- the significance of the quality of the residential experience and the relationships that persist beyond 'leaving care', for identity development, self-esteem and support
- the role of an organisation in creating a nurturing culture within residential homes and supporting a staff group which builds a feeling of 'family' and belonging into adulthood

Impact

The project will inform a range of practice in relation to residential care, transitions from residential care and mentoring for young people in care. It is an important opportunity to consider how different approaches can improve outcomes as young people move through adolescence and into adulthood. Publications from the project will include academic and practitioner articles. A launch conference will be held in 2015.

Contact after adoption – a longitudinal follow up in late adolescence

January 2012 – July 2014

Research team

Dr Elsbeth Neil
Dr Emma Ward
Dr Mary Beek

Funder

The Nuffield Foundation

Context

Since the introduction of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, contact between an adopted child and his or her birth relatives must be considered and discussed in the child's placement plan, although there is no duty to promote birth family contact. The key consideration should be the child's welfare throughout their life. It is important therefore to have an understanding of how contact affects adopted children not just in the early days of the placement, but also as they grow and become adults themselves. There is very little research that has included the views of adopted teenagers and young people, particularly in situations when children are adopted from care. This is the first longitudinal study of post adoption contact in the UK, as well as a unique outcomes study of children adopted from the care system.

"It must be right for the child. All children are different so there must be very flexible guidelines around contact. I think it's a case of experience, you need adoption workers who are experienced enough to be able to say 'I think this is what you should do with this child in this family in this particular case'. But even that must remain flexible as the children change."

An adoptive mother

Aims and methods

This study has followed up for the third time a group of adopted children (all placed under the age of four, but now in late adolescence) and their adoptive parents and birth relatives where some of post-adoption contact was planned between the child and adult birth relatives. The key aims of the study were to find out how well the young people were getting on in life generally, and to explore people's experiences of contact and the impact of contact on children and adults.

In this third stage of the project we collected data about 65 adopted young people from 45 adoptive families by interviewing adoptive parents (43 families), adopted young people (n=32) and through developmental measures and questionnaires completed by young people and their parents. We also interviewed 37 birth relatives and asked them to fill in a questionnaire about their mental health. The research was completed in 2013.

Findings

About half of young people were doing really well in terms of their overall development; the remainder had some problems and in some cases these were very worrying. Whether or not young people were doing well was affected by range of factors both before and after placement, but contact with birth relatives did not seem to be an important factor in determining overall development.

Overall contact had continued to diminish over time, and one third of young people were no longer in contact with any birth relatives. But in some cases contact had increased in late adolescence, usually at the young person's instigation. Direct contact arrangements seemed more likely to endure over time than indirect contact arrangements. The use of social networking for birth families and adoptive families to find out about or communicate with each other had emerged. Where adoptive parents maintained an open communication with their children about adoption and about the use of social networking, young people were better prepared to deal with any contact via social media.

Views of contact varied from person to person, but where contact had been sustained, satisfaction was usually high. Benefits experienced by young people included help with understanding why they were adopted and understanding their identity. In some cases where contact had been direct, young people also valued the relationships they had developed with birth relatives.

Young people varied in terms of how they were making sense of their adoptive identity, but few young people were uninterested in adoption as a feature of their lives. Birth family contact appeared to have a role in promoting identity development both because it exposed the adoptive parents and child to information about the birth family, but also because it facilitated communication between the adopted young people and their adoptive parents, allowing young people to process their thoughts and feelings about the adoption.

The adoptive parents in this study were mostly very open in terms of adoption communication. Higher levels of birth family contact were linked to high levels of communication about adoption, as each promoted the other. Young people valued being able to talk to their parents about adoption. The adoption communication openness of adoptive parents has, throughout this study, emerged as important aspect of adoptive parenting, whether or not children are able to have any actual contact with birth relatives.

Many birth relatives had high levels of mental distress, and ongoing issues in coming to terms with the child's adoption, but positive experiences of contact were felt by birth parents to help them make sense of and cope with the loss of the child. The extent to which birth relatives could accept the adoption (even if it was not initially wanted) and support the child as a member of the adoptive family was an important determinant of the quality of contact.

Implications for policy and practice

This study shows that although adoption can be successful in providing children with stable and loving family relationships, it cannot always ameliorate young people's problems. The study therefore highlights the urgent need for adoption support services, including preventative early intervention and services to help young people and their families in the adolescent years.

The research has illuminated factors associated with successful post-adoption contact, particularly the role of adoptive parents and birth relatives in making contact a positive experience for the child. The findings support case-by-case decision-making, taking account of the capacity of adults involved to work together to sustain purposeful and safe contact that can address the child's needs. Contact arrangements should be realistic, and supported when necessary, as planned contact arrangements that failed usually did so at a cost for those involved.

Impact

Findings of the research have been communicated to the Department for Education in their process of reforming adoption. The research will be made widely available to practitioners in an easy to digest form through the publication of a research summary by BAAF. This short book will be launched at the Centre Conference on 15 July, where results of the study will be presented to a range of people from the world of policy and practice. In 2014 we will be undertaking focus groups with adoption professionals to explore the potential to develop a range of practice tools grounded in the research. Academic journal articles are also planned.

The full report is available free of charge on the CRCF website.

Publications

Neil, E., Beek, M. & Ward, E. (2013) *Contact after Adoption: a Follow-Up in Late Adolescence*. Norwich, Centre for Research on Children and Families, University of East Anglia.

Neil, E., Beek, M. & Ward, E. (In press) *Contact after Adoption: a longitudinal study of adopted young people and their adoptive parents and birth relatives*. London, British Association for Adoption and Fostering.

Success factors in adopter recruitment: Insights from adoption agency social work managers and marketing offices

July 2013 – September 2013

Research team

Dr John Clifton

Dr Beth Neil

Funder

British Association for Adoption and Fostering - this project is part of the Department for Education's "Adoption Reform" programme of work

Context

Recent government publications draw attention to the shortage of prospective adopters for children in care who cannot return to their birth families and the urgency for those children of finding permanent families in a timely way. This research was commissioned by BAAF who were working with the Department for Education to identify and share effective practices in adoption recruitment so that more adopters come forward and the time taken for children to be placed for adoption is reduced.

Aims

The goal of this qualitative research project was to highlight examples of good practice in recruitment of adoptive parents. The research attempts to identify key success factors in the adoption process, drawing together any common themes or triggers, as well as highlighting any significant barriers to success and how these have been overcome.

"[Adoption enquirers] are human beings who have come to the point in their lives when they have decided they want to adopt and they are not doing so lightly. They have already some knowledge, but they need answers to their questions."

Local authority marketing manager

Methods

Qualitative telephone interviews were carried out with 25 key professionals each representing an adoption agency or adoption consortium. Thirteen adoption managers and 12 marketing officers took part. They came from 18 local authority adoption agencies, five voluntary adoption agencies comprising a mix of sizes of agencies from different areas of England and two adoption consortia. Questions focused on the successful recruitment and retention of potential adoptive parents from encouraging the first contact with the agency, through to the stage of approval to adopt.

Findings

Four main themes emerged in the study:

- Marketing should be integral to the agency plan. In some agencies marketing was integral; in others peripheral. Marketing personnel bring a distinctive focus to adoption recruitment and agencies should learn from this customer-focused perspective in its efforts to reach out to potential adopters.
- High priority needs to be given to establishing and maintaining a vibrant website as a key marketing tool for the agency. "Word of mouth" recommendations of adoption agencies by existing adopters are second only to websites as a source of enquirers.
- Agencies should cherish enquirers on their journey towards adoption. Many agencies have found ways to welcome enquirers warmly and attend to their questions and concerns identifying certain key messages of encouragement and inclusion.
- Agencies who are successful in placing more complex children accept enquirers with their existing aspirations rather than expecting them to want complex children at the start of the process. They enable enquirers to encounter children as "real" rather than as a repository of problems which can lead enquirers to consider children previously thought to be beyond their scope.

Impact on policy and practice

The findings were discussed with members of the DfE Adoption Reform Team in September 2013. These results will be available to a wider group of adoption professionals following a conference presentation at the BAAF national conference: Adopter recruitment: meeting the challenge on 2 June 2014, in London.

Publications

The full report can be downloaded from:
www.uea.ac.uk/documents/3437903/4264977/Success+factors+report+final_V8.pdf/98728dab-f89e-47b0-8967-c1ef4c917509

An investigation of the experiences and identity development of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender young people in care and the support they receive

November 2014 –
October 2016

Research team

Jeanette Cossar
Professor Gillian Schofield
Christine Cocker
Dr Jane Dodsworth
Birgit Larsson
Dr Pippa Belderson

Funder

Economic and Social
Research Council

Context

There have been no major published research studies on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) young people in care in the UK and the services that may be needed to support them. Even in the Care Planning Guidance (DfE 2010), sexual orientation is not mentioned as an issue that may need to be taken into account in ensuring the well-being of young people in care. This is a matter for concern when research suggests that both LGBT young people and young people in care are at risk of stigma, discrimination, bullying and mental health difficulties. There is the potential, therefore, for LGBT young people in care to be in double jeopardy. This is likely to be especially true in adolescence and when making the transition from care to adulthood, a period which in itself is known to present challenges in relation to identity formation and forming close relationships, in addition to the difficulties of finding housing and employment in the absence of a supportive family

Research suggests that both LGBT young people and young people in care are at risk of stigma, discrimination, bullying and mental health difficulties.

Aims

This study aims to investigate how LGBT young people in care experience growing up in foster and residential care and how they negotiate their identities. Of particular interest is the exploration of the intersectional relationship between care and LGBT statuses, understood in the context of the multiplicity of other factors, such as ethnicity or experiences of abuse, separation and loss, that also contribute to identity formation. The study will also explore the provision nationally of services and support for LGBT young people in care and investigate the experiences of foster carers and residential workers who care for and support them.

Methods

A group of young researchers who are LGBT and /or care-experienced will assist with designing recruitment materials, piloting interviews and helping with the analysis and dissemination / achieving impact.

The study will use a mixed methods, layered design.

- A scoping review of the UK and international published policy, research and practice literature relevant to young people in care who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender
- In-depth interviews with a sample of 40 LGBT young people currently or previously in care age 16-25. Narrative analysis of the interviews will be used to provide an in-depth and nuanced account.
- Interviews with 25 foster carers who have experience of caring for LGBT young people. These will be analysed thematically.
- A survey of local authority and independent agency policy, provision and practice to identify whether LGBT young people in care or leaving care are offered any additional support.
- Multi-agency focus groups with professionals to explore the issues emerging from the literature review, survey and qualitative interviews.

Impact

The findings from this study will be used to inform policy and practice. A Good Practice Guide and information for young people will be published in partnership with the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF).



**Relationship based practice
is the foundation of effective
social work**

Research projects

Social work practice

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Decision-making in child welfare: A trans-national study

January 2014 – August 2016

Research team

Professor Jonathan Dickens
with international colleagues:
Professor Marit Skivenes
(Norway)
Professor Jill Berrick (USA)
Professor Tarja Poso
(Finland)

Funder

Norwegian Research Council

Context

The compulsory removal of children from their parents is one of the most intrusive interventions that a state can make in the lives of its citizens, and imposes great responsibilities on the various professionals involved. The decisions they have to make are intellectually and emotionally demanding. In difficult and often uncertain circumstances, they have to try to engage with the parents, work with professionals from other disciplines, and comply with legal requirements and organisational procedures. All this takes place within a wider context of the state's overall welfare approach and its specific child and family welfare policies.

Aims

At the beginning of 2014, Jonathan Dickens joined a cross-national study of decision-making in child protection and care order cases, with colleagues from Norway, Finland and the USA. The aim is to explore how decisions about taking children into care are made by social workers and the courts in these different countries. What knowledge and expertise is relied upon? How tightly regulated are the processes, and what room is there for individual professional judgement? What priority is given to involving parents and young people in the decision-making processes? What biases and errors are more or less likely in the four countries? What is the potential for cross-national learning to improve policy and practice?

Methods

The study is a three stage project. The first stage, completed before Professor Dickens joined the project, was a cross-national comparison of the wider legal and policy framework – key legislation, government policy, regulations and guidance. This was based on studying the relevant documents and interviews with key informants in each country. The second stage, currently in progress, is a questionnaire survey of social workers who are involved in deciding whether cases should go to court, and doing pre-proceedings work. The third stage will focus on decision-making in the courts.

Findings

Findings from the first stage of the study confirm that whilst there are similarities in the day-to-day practice and decision-making of child welfare workers in the four countries, there are important differences between them. All the countries emphasise the primacy of the child's welfare or 'best interests', but this is interpreted differently, in policy and practice, according to wider social values. Although there are ambiguities and overlaps, the US and English systems may be characterised as 'child protection' systems, with high levels of regulation, whereas the emphasis in Norway and Finland is on 'family support', with lower thresholds for state intervention and more room for individual judgement by child welfare workers.

Awareness of the similarities and differences between the four countries creates an important opportunity to reflect on the policy underpinnings of welfare practice, and the implications for the children and their families.

Impact

Awareness of the similarities and differences between the four countries creates an important opportunity to reflect on the policy underpinnings of welfare practice, and the implications for the children and their families. The highly-regulated US and English systems could learn from the ways that parents and children are supported and offered voice in the Nordic systems. The Nordic systems may be able to learn from the research rigour and standardisation of the US and English systems.

Publications

A range of publications are planned in academic journals and book chapters.

Mentalization and social work education

June 2013 – November 2015

Research team

Jeanette Cossar
Professor Gillian Schofield
Laura Cook

Funder

Department for Education

Context

The Anna Freud Centre's Early Years Parenting Unit (EYPU) was set up to offer mentalization-based therapies to high-risk families with complex needs. Mentalization can be defined as the 'mental process by which an individual implicitly and explicitly interprets the actions of himself and others as meaningful on the basis of intentional mental states such as personal desires, needs, feelings, beliefs and reasons' (Bateman & Fonagy, 2004: 21).

As part of the second phase of this project (2013-15), the Anna Freud Centre received additional funding from the Department for Education to work with two universities, the University of East Anglia (UEA) and the University of Sussex, to develop and evaluate the introduction of mentalization as part of social work education.

Aims

The research at UEA and Sussex aims to investigate how teaching and learning about mentalization might assist newly qualified social workers in practicing more effectively and reflectively.

Methods

The project at UEA includes the delivery of mentalization-based teaching to students on the MA and BA in Social Work. Teaching is being provided by staff from the Anna Freud Centre as well as being incorporated into existing units, such as relationship-based practice. Data will be collected from students at different points in the course and analysed.

- Vignettes: Students are asked to respond to a case vignette at the beginning and end of the course. The responses will be coded using an adapted measure of mentalization.
- Placement documentation: Records of Practice Analysis from first and second student placements will be coded to provide an insight into students' ability to reflect on direct work they have undertaken, including how their personal responses to clients may impact on their work.
- Student feedback: At the end of the programme students will be invited to provide reflective feedback on the teaching and placement experience in relation to mentalization.

Impact

It is hoped that teaching and learning about mentalization will increase social workers' ability to reflect upon the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of service users, as well as how their own thoughts and feelings impact on their practice. In particular, it is envisaged that the mentalization theme in the teaching may help student social workers to:

- deepen their understanding of service users' perspectives
- generate assessments which go beyond description to consider psychosocial explanations for behaviour
- generate high-quality assessments which weigh-up alternative explanations of service user behaviour
- consider the ways in which their personal responses to clients may impact on their judgement
- appreciate the ways in which professional systems can themselves adopt non-mentalizing stances, and the implications of this for practice

Lessons learned from the introduction of mentalization teaching as part of social work education at the two universities will be used to inform social work education nationally.

It is hoped that teaching and learning about mentalization will increase social workers' ability to reflect upon the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of service users, as well as how their own thoughts and feelings impact on their practice.

Dissemination

Academic and practice articles will be developed during 2015. A conference will be held in November 2015.

Evaluation of a London borough community social work pilot

September 2013 –
March 2014

Research team

Professor Marian Brandon
Dr Penny Sorensen
Sue Bailey
Dr Pippa Belderson
Dr Sara Connolly

Funder

London borough

Context

The current fiscal climate and the ageing population have sharpened the focus on the capacity of local communities to fill some support needs of older adults.

Part 1 of the Care Bill, due to become law in 2016, has an emphasis on prevention so that crisis-driven interventions may be reduced, as well as a duty to promote the wellbeing of individuals and their communities. To that end, local authorities now have to consider not just the most vulnerable but also the individuals who care for the vulnerable by putting in place community support before a crisis point is reached.

Such support will include strategies to prevent or at least delay the need for statutory care services either by using existing voluntary agencies or commissioning new services within the community. The duty to promote wellbeing will also include adequate systems to provide accessible information and advice for the local population so that individuals may remain independent for longer.

There is an added emphasis on personalised services to allow people choice and control over their support and community-based support to allow people to retain or regain the benefits of community membership and to contribute to the communities they live in. Community social work is one way that the personalisation agenda and some of the clauses in the Care Bill may be addressed. It was within this context that the London Borough of Sutton commenced a community social work pilot.

Aims

The main aim of the evaluation of the pilot was to provide a deeper understanding of how the community social work pilot was working in one team. More specifically, the evaluation sought to address the following questions:

- What is already known about community interventions in the UK?
- How are professionals working within the community social work team?
- How is the service perceived by stakeholders?
- How is the service experienced by the clients?
- What are the costs and benefits of the service to the council?

Benefits of investing in ‘that little bit of help’ schemes are realised over many years, making it harder to prove their impact and to protect funding for (often small scale) initiatives in the face of immediate critical needs.

Methods

The evaluation involved a mixed methodology. The qualitative aspect included interviews with managers, ex-team members and stakeholders and developmental workshops with the community social work team. The quantitative aspect included analysis of time diaries and costing analysis and referral tracking.

Findings

The report is with funders. The findings will be disseminated in due course.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) and performance in child and family social work

2012 – 2015

Research team

Dr Laura Biggart

Funder

ESRC Future research leader scheme

Context

For public sector workers such as social workers, teachers or nurses, good interpersonal skills are very important for the quality of service that they deliver. Skills such as listening and thinking about how the other person may be feeling are all important. Just as important is the ability for individual social workers to manage their own anxiety and stress, otherwise they may not perform as well as they should. Emotional intelligence refers to a number of related skills in individuals: understanding how emotions work; recognising emotions in themselves; recognising emotions in others; managing their own emotions.

Methods

The research project has four phases: the first phase will examine existing measures and conceptualisations of good social work performance and explore these with four focus groups of social work service users; social workers themselves; social work managers and social work lecturers. The second phase involves designing and testing a questionnaire which can capture these elements of social work performance identified from the literature search and focus groups. The second phase also examines if this questionnaire of social work performance is linked to emotional intelligence. The third phase designs an emotional intelligence intervention based on what is known to work from known existing interventions. The fourth phase develops an emotional intelligence training package to deliver an intervention to one group of social workers and compare their performance to another group of social workers who do not receive the training. Their performance will be tracked over the period of one year.

We are interested to see whether something called emotional intelligence helps social workers do a better job and whether emotional intelligence also helps them manage their anxiety and stress better.

Aims

This research will investigate what factors constitute good performance in child and family social work specifically, as this is considered to be one of the more stressful jobs to do. The aim is to see whether something called emotional intelligence helps social workers do a better job and whether emotional intelligence also helps them manage their anxiety and stress better.

If emotional intelligence does help both performance and managing anxiety and stress, we want to see if teaching emotional intelligence skills to child and family social workers makes a difference to their performance and anxiety levels over one year whilst they are in work managing emotions in others.

Impact

The research is important for two main reasons: firstly social workers' stress is known to affect performance; secondly, if emotional intelligence skills are important to carry out the job it is essential that these skills are adequately assessed at the stage of recruitment both to training and into work – and then supported in practice.

Findings will therefore inform our understanding of the role of emotional intelligence in child and family social work and whether training can enhance emotional intelligence in ways that make a difference not only to practice but also to social workers' anxiety levels. This can be taken into account in both qualifying training of social workers and their continuing professional development.

PhD research projects

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An exploration of the relationship between birth expectations and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following childbirth

PhD student

Sophie Bagge

Supervisors

Dr Judi Walsh

Dr Laura Biggart

Dr Laura Jobson

The process of birthing a baby is an event filled with physical and psychological complexity. The event itself is thought about and planned for in the preceding months, and the consequences whether positive or negative are likely to remain a lasting memory (McCorville, 2014). Research suggests that between 20-33% of women report a traumatic birth experience (Ayers & Ford, 2009; Slade, 2006), with a small number developing clinical PTSD (0-7%; Ayers, Joseph, McKenzie-McHarg, Slade & Wijma, 2008). However up to a third of women report symptoms relating to at least one cluster of PTSD symptoms at six weeks post-natal (Slade, 2006). The large number of women who perceive birth as a trauma, and the link between this and negative psychological well-being (Boorman, Devilly, Gamble, Creedy & Fenwick, 2014) illustrates the importance of future research in this area.

Previous research suggests an incongruence between birth expectations and the actual childbirth experience has the potential to cause adverse emotional outcomes (Gibbins

& Thomson, 2001). These findings need to be extended to capture the possible relationships between antenatal and delivery factors, and later post-natal functioning, the emotional well-being of the mother, and any potential effects on the mother-infant relationship. The proposed research will explore the relationships between birth expectations and hopes, the experience and satisfaction with the birth experience, and PTSD following childbirth. Initially two qualitative studies will investigate how primary health care providers and post-natal women view the concepts of birth expectations and PTSD following childbirth. These studies will also examine the views of these groups in regards to the provision and accessibility of care following a traumatic birth. Following this a large scale prospective, longitudinal study will be carried out, following women from 36 weeks gestation to 3 months post-partum to quantitatively examine possible relationships between expectations of birth and PTSD following childbirth.

The development of the caregiving behavioural system: A longitudinal exploration of the transition to motherhood

PhD student

Jessica Brennan

Supervisors

Dr Judi Walsh

The mother-infant relationship during pregnancy has been the subject of research in many areas of psychology. Bowlby suggested that pregnancy was a time when a woman must begin to see herself as able to provide a secure base for her child and to see herself as a mother. He proposed that we have an evolutionary need to "attach" to a person who is bigger, stronger and wiser than us, known as our attachment behavioural system. We will seek out this person in times of fear, anxiety, or distress. This system promotes our survival as a species. He also suggested that we have an evolutionary need to want to protect our young; this is referred to as our caregiving behavioural system, which promotes our genetic fitness.

Although there have been theoretical predictions as to how this system develops, there has not been much study into the actual developmental changes that occur during the transition to parenthood. This longitudinal study will examine the developmental trajectory of the caregiving behavioural system and the impact of prenatal influences on the child's attachment to his or her mother at one year of age.

Encounters with the family in child protection practice: Social workers' reflections on the home visit

PhD student

Laura Cook

Supervisors

Professor Gillian Schofield
Professor Marian Brandon

The Munro Report (2011) emphasised the need for systemic change in order to facilitate social workers' use of 'professional judgement' in child protection work. The report emphasised the need for good quality supervision and organisational structures which would minimise the 'predictable biases' in social workers' reasoning about families. However, to date there has been a lack of research into the way in which practitioners reflect on, analyse and form judgements about children and families.

The study will contribute to our understanding of how social workers exercise their professional judgement.

This research project, being undertaken by Laura Cook, will examine how social workers experience, and make sense of, an initial home visit to a family in the course of child protection work. The study will use in-depth, narrative interviews with child protection social workers in order to elucidate:

- the emotional impact and psychodynamics of encountering the family at home
- the process of reflection through which social workers make sense of the family, and
- how social workers generate knowledge from a home visit, and the reflective processes through which this 'knowledge' is generated.

It is hoped that the study will contribute to our understanding of how social workers exercise their professional judgement and the organisational, systemic, procedural and psychodynamic factors that impact on this process.

Couples' negotiation of childcare in light of fathers' increased entitlements to paternity leave and flexible working

PhD student

Kelly Giannakou

Supervisors

Dr Sara Connolly

During the last decade, Southern, Nordic, Central European and former socialist countries, have increasingly developed diverse forms of parental leave entitlements and bonuses for fathers and mothers, with distinctive design features targeted at enhancing their engagement with infants and children. Despite these developments, our understanding of the impact of parental leave and flexible work policies on parents' work and family behaviour is surprisingly limited. The research attempts to address this gap by comparing three countries with different policy environments.

Our understanding of the impact of parental leave and flexible work policies on parents' work and family behaviour is surprisingly limited - the research attempts to address this gap.

It adopts a parental capital theory lens (Pleck, 2007) which offers a multi-layered framework: including, social contextual factors (ie. parental leave policies and flexible work arrangements) as well as parents' personal and work attributes (eg. gender role attitudes, work behaviours, education and occupation of parents). In particular, the study seeks to examine how macro policy instruments impact (a) parents' work behaviour (working hours, use of leave, use of flexible work), (b) gender role behaviour, and (c) fathers' child care time. Empirical testing will be based on a comparative analysis of large survey datasets in Europe. Countries with extended father-care leave (eg. Norway), with short father-care leave (eg. Netherlands), and with short/minimalist father-care leave policies (eg. UK) will be selected and subsequently compared for between-country and within-country differences.

Prenatal predictors and correlates of early postnatal relationships and outcomes

PhD student

Alexis Hargreaves

Supervisors

Dr Judi Walsh

Dr Kenda Crozier

There has been a growing awareness of the importance of the quality of early parent-child relationships, particularly the mother-child relationship, on children's later emotional, social, and cognitive development (Ainsworth, 1979). More recently, evidence has also shown the significance of the quality of the father-child relationship (Lamb, 2010) and the couple relationship (Fuller, Moore, & Lester, 1993) in supporting optimal later outcomes for child wellbeing. Less is known about the precursors of these early relationships during the prenatal period.

This work looks to explain whether we can predict parental thoughts about the child and parent-child interaction in the first year from

factors identified in pregnancy. This longitudinal study uses mixed methods to look at whether and how antenatal factors such as antenatal mental health, representations of the baby, adult attachment, and caregiving in adult relationships influence postnatal outcomes in terms of the parent-child relationship. This work adds to the previous literature on this topic and looks at both mothers and fathers in an area traditionally lacking in father perspectives.

It is hoped that the research will help to inform whether early parent support interventions are optimal prenatally and also identify specific markers for health professional caring for parents-to-be.

Exploring disabled young people and their families views and experiences of child protection

PhD student

Jane Hernon

Supervisors

Professor Marian Brandon

Professor Gillian Schofield

Research indicates disabled children and young people are at significantly greater risk of experiencing maltreatment, therefore protecting them should be a priority. Yet how well child protection systems identify and respond to the needs of disabled children is poorly understood.

Disabled children's equal rights to participation and the provision of support are integral to upholding their right to protection (UNCRC 1989). The Munro Review of Child Protection (DfE 2011) also called for a fundamental re-focusing on the views and experiences of children themselves within child protection practice in the UK.

While there is a growing literature exploring young people's experiences of child protection, few studies have focused on disabled young people's perspectives. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from childhood and disability studies, this study aims to begin to address this gap in research knowledge.

Activity based interviews are in progress with 20-25 disabled young people and their parents or carers, who have been the subject of a child protection plan. These interviews are exploring disabled young people and their families':

- Access to and priorities for support
- Experiences of having a social worker
- Understanding and views about the child protection process

Analysing what these young people have to say will contribute to understanding how these young people and their families make sense of their lives and experiences of child protection. It is hoped the findings will contribute to understanding and promoting best practice with disabled children among practitioners and policy-makers.

Decision making processes of young people to binge drink: An augmented theory of planned behaviour, social identity theory, ambivalent and implicit attitudes

PhD student

Gregory M Howard

Supervisors

Dr Victoria Scaife

Dr Charles Seger

Binge drinking and risky single occasion drinking (RSOD) are leading causes of injury and death among university students and young adults in the UK and internationally. Drinking alcohol is a particular problem among students as 45% of pupils aged 11-15 said they have been drunk at least once in a year in the UK (NHS, 2010) and young adults aged 18 to 25 are more likely to use alcohol than youths and older adults. Young adults (especially undergraduates) have a tendency towards binge drinking, putting themselves at risk of alcohol related harm. University life can provide a social setting that facilitates excessive alcohol consumption which appears to lead to higher binge drinking rates in undergraduates than other young adults. Therefore, steps should be taken to decrease the levels of drinking for young adults.

My research is looking at the ability of an expanded theory of planned behaviour (TPB), habit, impulsivity, ambivalent and implicit attitudes and social identity theory to predict binge drinking in university students. The theory of planned behaviour is considered to be a deliberative processing model stating that the determinants of future behaviour are one's intentions to perform that behaviour and the subjective perception of having control over that behaviour. In turn, intentions are predicted by attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Knowing more about the factors that play a part in the decision making process of young people to binge drink could help create ways to reduce the amount of RSOD.

Life pathways and narratives of young women who have offended and participated in restorative justice

PhD student

Birgit Larsson

Supervisors

Professor Gillian Schofield

Professor Jonathan Dickens

Dr Laura Biggart

This project consists of a systematic review of the literature; quantitative analysis of four years of police data collected on individuals who have experienced restorative justice; and life history interviews with young women who have offended, sampled from the database.

Although restorative justice has been practiced throughout the world since the 1970s, research into how and why it works is mixed. Findings suggest that it is an effective way of dealing with some types of juvenile crime, but questions remain about how young female offenders experience the process.

The study will be one of the first major studies focusing on young women who have offended and participated in police-run restorative justice

Findings suggest that [restorative justice] is an effective way of dealing with some types of juvenile crime, but questions remain about how young female offenders experience the process.

conferences in the UK. It comes at a time when the number of young women entering the criminal justice system has increased and research on how young women experience and participate in offending is gaining critical attention. Findings are intended to inform future policy and practice with this vulnerable group.

Understanding young people's experiences and views of partner violence in teenage intimate relationships

PhD student

Vicki McDermott

Supervisors

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Dr Jane Dodsworth

Dr Sanna Inthorn

There has been growing recognition of, and research into, domestic abuse in adult relationships; however violence in young people's intimate relationships has not been recognised to the same extent. Studies suggest that a substantial number of young people will experience some form of violence from their partner before they reach adulthood, yet there has been limited research within the UK specifically exploring young people's experiences and views of violence in their intimate relationships. This research seeks to address some of these gaps in our knowledge by examining young people's experiences of violence in their intimate relationships and their views, understandings and attitudes toward intimate partner violence.

The research is being undertaken using a multi-method framework combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Two data collection techniques are being used; an online self-completion survey aimed at identifying whether participants have ever experienced a range of violent behaviours within their relationships, and a series of primarily single sex focus groups intended at exploring young people's views, understandings and attitudes toward teenage intimate partner violence. It is hoped the research will provide insight into the nature and dynamics of different forms of violence in teenage intimate relationships; a nuanced understanding of what intimate partner violence means to different groups of young people; and perhaps offer some insight into how best to respond to teenage intimate partner violence.

Staying in touch: The use of social media by young people in care

PhD student

Andrew Sach

Supervisors

Dr Elsbeth Neil

Professor Jonathan Dickens

This research explores how young people in care stay in touch with friends, family and carers. In particular it will consider how they use social media (SM) to do this. In this context SM is used to describe the use of mobile telephones (smart phones) and computers to communicate through text messages, instant messaging, email and social networking sites. In a relatively short period of time, SM has gained in popularity with developments in technology ensuring the availability and ease of such communication. Such a trend is expected to continue with the increasing availability of smart phones. For example in 2010, smartphone ownership for 12-15 year olds was 35 per cent rising to 62 per cent in 2012 (Ofcom, 2012). The relatively recent emergence and popularity of SM means we are at the beginning of understanding its impact on development. There is growing awareness

of risks such as cyber bullying, sexting and grooming, along with an understanding that SM is used by adolescents to explore themselves and the world. However, currently very little is known about the specific use of SM by young people who are in care. Significantly they represent one of the most vulnerable groups in society which along with living away from parents may uniquely affect their experience of SM. The project will initially involve interviewing a small number of young people in care around who they stay in touch with and SM. Focus groups including social workers and foster carers will provide an adult perspective. The themes that derive from this work will then be used to develop an online questionnaire for a large sample of young people in care. This approach will help build an understanding of SM use in this population and identify whether there are specific risks and benefits.

General practitioner responses to concerns about (possible) child maltreatment in England: a mixed methods study

PhD student

Jenny Woodman

Supervisors

Professor Ruth Gilbert
(UCL-ICH)

Professor Marian Brandon
(UEA)

Dr Danya Glaser (UCL-ICH)

My PhD study aimed to describe and understand responses to concerns about child maltreatment in general practice in England.

I estimated the annual incidence and prevalence of maltreatment-related codes in children's electronic primary care records (over time, by child characteristics) using a UK representative cohort of 1.5 million children from The Health Improvement Network (THIN) database. I investigated other responses to maltreatment-related concerns through unstructured in-depth interviews with GPs (N=14), health visitors (N=2) and practice nurses (N=2) and observations of team meetings (N=4) in four practices in England. I aimed to increase the breadth of my findings by adopting a mixed methods design (integrating quantitative and qualitative data).

In 2010, 0.8% (95%CI 0.8, 0.8) of all children had a maltreatment-related code entered in their primary care health record. Rates of recording (of codes) increased by approximately 10% per year from 1995 to 2010 and increases were seen across all

sub-categories of maltreatment-related code and across all child demographics. I identified seven actions that GPs described taking in response to maltreatment-related concerns, four of which were 'direct responses' to families (monitoring, coaching, advocating and providing opportune healthcare). GPs enacted direct responses through parents and other family members as well as children. From the GPs' perspective, strong relationships with parents and health visitors were prerequisite for responding to maltreatment-related concerns.

I concluded that maltreatment-related problems are already commonly known to general practice, although there is undoubtedly considerable scope for improved recognition, and some GPs are responding directly to these families using core skills of general practice. My PhD challenges policy makers, professionals and researchers to rethink the role of the GP to include a wider range of responses by the GP to families with maltreatment-related concerns. Research is needed to evaluate the balance of benefit and harm of these responses.

Migration and community formation: Narratives of three generations of women living in a Greek diaspora community

PhD student

Alexia Zinonos

Supervisors

Dr Neil Cooper

Migration has been largely studied from a male perspective and has not specifically reflected the experiences of women. It is only in recent years that there has been some focus on the experiences of female migrants. For this research, migration and a particular diaspora community has been reflected on from a gendered standpoint focusing on the interplay between gender and identity across generations of migrant women. The aim is to understand the experiences of women who have migrated and the effect that this migration has had on their ethnic and gender identity.

An understanding of this diaspora community has been formed through an Ethnographic study. Narrative interviews and focus groups have been carried out with three generations of women living in the community. Data has also been collected through observations, the collection of artefacts and community documents and participant research.

It is through the analysis of data gathered through these varied methodological approaches that conclusions have been reached about the individuals and the community as a whole.

The aim is to understand the experiences of women who have migrated and the effect that this migration has had on their ethnic and gender identity.

Findings have given an insight into the formation of this community and how it has transformed over the generations. Some of the emergent themes include: gender roles and expectations, family and community relationships and individual and community identity.

Kinship experiences of children reunified with their birth family from residential care in Moldova

PhD student

Irina Sirbu

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Dr Elsbeth Neil

Professor Gillian Schofield

Research on kinship in diverse cultural and social contexts has brought to light a wide variety of ways in which people define and create kinship. Recent studies of gay/lesbian and adoptive families have shown that kin relations are not necessarily defined by a biological connection, and people are both free and selective in defining their kin. However, there is a dearth of research on children's understanding of kinship.

The study's findings will contribute to a better understanding of children's conceptualisations of kinship in a context of their own family transitions. The study is meant to inform childcare and welfare practices both in the local and international contexts.

The overarching aim of the present study is to explore how children in Moldova define and create kinship in the context of re-unification with their birth families from residential care. Knowing who children perceive as their kin is critical in understanding their support networks during

separation and following re-unification. How children create kin relations with their immediate family and wider kin can help disentangle factors that facilitate the process of re-integrating children into their family/wider kin networks.

The study uses a qualitative methodology that aims to get a deeper understanding of kinship as experienced by children. In-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 families and a photo-elicitation project undertaken by children will explore children's and parents' perspectives on kinship. The present study largely follows the methodology in Mason and Tipper's (2008) study, and adopts a fluid approach in researching children's conceptualizations of kinship. Children will be allowed to identify all people and relationships important to them – both positive and negative. This approach moves beyond the boundaries of immediate family to a broader concept of kinship embracing a wide net of relationships children identify as important to them.

The study's findings will contribute to a better understanding of children's conceptualisations of kinship in a context of their own family transitions. The study is meant to inform childcare and welfare practices both in the local and international contexts.

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Centre Members

The Centre for Research on Children and Families brings together research expertise from across the Faculty of Social Sciences.

More information about our members, along with contact details can be found at www.uea.ac.uk/centre-research-child-family/people

Chris Beckett (BSc, CQSW, MA, PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work and has research interests in court proceedings concerning children, perceptions of risk, the use and abuse of language.

Mary Beek (BA, CQSW, MA, PhD) is an Honorary Visiting Fellow. Her research and practice interests are in fostering and adoption and in supporting caregivers.

Pippa Belderson (BA, MMedSci, PhD) is a Senior Research Associate. Her current work includes: an independent evaluation of the Department for Education funded programme offering training and support to improve the quality of Serious Case Reviews; an evaluation of community social work for the London Borough of Sutton; and a study of how children and young people recognise and deal with abuse and neglect for the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

Laura Biggart (BSc, PhD) is a Lecturer in Social Sciences Research. Her research interests are in work-life balance, Emotional Intelligence and youth offending

Marian Brandon (BA, MA, CQSW, PhD) is Professor of Social Work and Director of the Centre. She is also Director of Continuing Professional Development Programmes. She is a children and families specialist and has research interests in family support, child protection and multi-agency working.

John Clifton (MA, CQSW, PhD) is a Senior Research Associate and an experienced social worker. His main research interest is in men and fathers in adoption and child protection.

Christine Cocker (BSW (hons); MTh (Dist) OXON; PG Dip HSSM (Dist) is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work. Her research interests are lesbian and gay fostering and adoption and social work with looked after children.

Neil Cooper (BSc, PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology with research interests in qualitative psychology, disciplinary boundaries, family relationships and technological change.

Sara Connolly (BA, MPhil, DPhil) is a Reader in Personnel Economics. Her research interests are in gender and the labour market.

Jeanette Cossar (BA, MA, DipSW) is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work and has research interests in children and young persons' views of the child protection process and of risk, LGBT young people in care.

Jonathan Dickens (BA, MA, CQSW, MSc, PhD) is a Professor of Social Work. His research interests include child care law, the development of social work in its wider social policy and international contexts, care planning and decision making for looked after children.

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Clem Henricson (BA, Solicitor, FRSA) is an Honorary Visiting Fellow.

Kamena Henshaw (BSc, MSc) is a Lecturer in Psychology. Her research interest is in applying psychological knowledge to real life settings, particularly in relation to family psychology. Her PhD has explored the role of the family meal in family life from a multi-person perspective.

David Howe (BSc, MA, CQSW, PhD) is an Emeritus Professor of Social Work. His interests are in attachment theory, post-adoption work, developing social work theory and practice, child abuse, neglect, rejection and trauma.

Peter Jordan (BSc, MA, DipSW) is a Lecturer in Child and Family Social Work. His research focuses on the relationships between key professionals engaged in child protection work, with a particular emphasis on the ethical stances taken by workers from different agencies.

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Gillian Schofield (BA, MA, PGCE, CQSW, MSW, PhD) is Professor of Child and Family Social Work and Head of the School of Social Work. Her research interests are in attachment, care planning, long-term foster care, and looked after children and offending.

Clive Sellick (JP, CQSW, MSW, PhD) is an Emeritus Reader in Social Work. His research interests are in commissioning and the mixed economy of foster care provision, and the international aspects of child welfare. He is a lay judge in the Norfolk Family Court.

Penny Sorensen (BSc, MA, PhD) is a Senior Research Associate currently working on the evaluations of The Triborough Family Coaching Service and the Kensington & Chelsea Families Forward Service. She has an interest in family research, particularly the experiences of older men in families.

June Thoburn CBE (BA, DipPSA, MSW, LittD) is an Emeritus Professor of Social Work and founding Director of the Centre. Her research interests are in family placement, and the family support and child protection provisions of the Children Act 1989.

Judi Walsh (BSc, PhD, C.Psychol., AFBPsS) is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology and has research interests in relationships and psychological well-being, particularly in the perinatal period.

Nick Walsh (BSc, PhD) is a Lecturer in Developmental Psychology. His research interests are in the effects of psychosocial experiences upon brain development and psychological functioning.

Emma Ward (BSc, PhD) is a Senior Research Associate. Her main research interest is in adoption and the care system.

Jenny Woodman (BA, MA, MSc) is a population health researcher with expertise in studies combining routine data with in-depth qualitative data. Her research interests are in the role of healthcare services for vulnerable populations, including abused and neglected children.

Julie Young (BA, PGCE) is a Senior Research Associate currently working on a project looking at care planning for children in foster care and the role of the independent reviewing officer.



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