Book of Abstracts

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EuSARF2025: Transformation, Transition and Innovation in Child Welfare

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Prof. LAURA VALLEJO-SLOCKER[1], Ms. Celia García de León[2]

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Keynotes

‘Meaningful conversations…’: participatory and relational practices for transforming transitions from care

Keynote

Dr. Jade Purtell Philp [1]

1. *Monash University*

To reduce the number of children, youth and families coming into contact with statutory child welfare systems and break cycles of intergenerational involvement with child protective services we need to transform research, policy and practice approaches to working with children, youth and families. Innovations in participatory research and advocacy give us insights into the personal impacts of our child welfare and service systems – service user experiences that professionals can often be far removed from. Our broad-based, large survey studies of children and young people in care often fail to attract participants from the most marginalised groups and this skews our evidence base away from understanding the worst outcomes. Many child welfare systems narrowly target particular groups of care leavers and strict eligibility requirements can lead to the most troubled children and youth disengaging from supports. In the case of care experienced parents, a fear of surveillance bias may deter pregnant and parenting care experienced people from accessing critical health and social supports, thereby increasing risks of intergenerational involvement with protective services. At a practice level, our governance processes and information infrastructure design is predominantly deficit-focused. Recordkeeping research tells us that these approaches do not support the development of positive identities amongst care experienced people.

Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children in vulnerable and disadvantaged situations is one of the most complex, multifaceted, under-resourced, and wicked problems that governments around the world struggle to address. There is overwhelming consensus in Australia and internationally that Child Protection and Care systems must shift from crisis-oriented tertiary interventions to primary care and harm prevention services. Central to this overdue transformation is the need to represent and respond to the complex human rights and social justice needs of children and their families in the information systems that underpin the interventions in this sector.

In investigating practices and systems to foster rights-based and child-centred practices in child protection contexts, collaboration with care-experienced co-researchers has helped to think beyond deficit-focussed perspectives that represent children, young people and their families as collections of codified characteristics across poverty and homelessness, family violence, mental health, addiction, poor health, educational disadvantage and unemployment, amongst others. Co-designing care systems and services with lived experience representation and transdisciplinary collaboration can enhance children and young people’s engagement in supports and their participation in decision making whilst also countering systemic racial, cultural and economic biases in service provision.

Can the state act as a loving parent? Interrogating quality in children's social care

Keynote

Dr. Mariela Neagu [1]

1. *Manchester Met University*

After the Second World War, the role of the state has become more prominent in providing care for vulnerable children. While care systems were dominated initially by large residential institutions, these were gradually closed-down and replaced by family type care, with a steady push towards foster care and adoption. Moreover, after the end of the Cold War, an increasing number of transnational, public and private actors (Ulybina, 2024) have influenced reforms in the sector, particularly in CEE and Mediterranean countries. However, despite reforms many children in care continue to lag behind those raised by their parents. While care experienced adults have increasingly challenged the care system (Wild, 2021, Pierre et al, 2024, John-Baptiste, 2024) and in some countries they have explicitely asked for [altruistic] 'love' to be at the heart of the system, an increasing number of comparative studies discuss different political and cultural approaches of the care system (Gilbert et al, 2011, Biesel et al 2020) and the tensions and inherent flaws they bear (Neagu, 2021).

This paper explores the evidence and theoretical underpinning in child protection policy and proposes and new ways to re-examine the purpose and the quality of care for children in the child protection system. In doing so, it draws on children's rights, the Capabilities Approach and recognition theories to conceptualise the state acting as a loving parent who facilitates holistic and healthy growing of children in its care.

Is There Evidence that Research Evidence Matters?

Keynote

Dr. Fred Wulczyn [1]

1. *Center for State Child Welfare Data - Chapin Hall*

Evidence-based interventions are an increasingly important component of the policy and practice landscape and rightly so. Spending scarce public resources on interventions that do not work should concern everyone with an interest in the well-being of children and families. Having said that, there is little evidence in the child protection/child welfare literature that research evidence use matters.

To address this gap, we examine what it means to use research evidence when making decisions that affect how child protection systems function. Our work covers three questions: What is research evidence, what is research evidence used, and is research evidence use malleable? For the first two questions, we show that research evidence use by the people who work in foster care agencies is linked to outcomes measured at the child level. The third question is answered using an intervention that places evidence use inside the service improvement process. The findings suggest that research evidence use skills are malleable and that changes in research evidence use skills are linked to changes in child-level outcomes.

For everyone doing research with the idea that the evidence generated will have a positive impact on outcomes, this is good news. However, the findings also highlight the fact that increasing research evidence use is a deliberate act that has to be placed in an organizational context.

Symposia

Staff and children's experiences implementing the CARE model in residential care

Staff and children's experiences implementing the care model in residential care. The CARE Program Model: Creating Therapeutic Experiences and Positive Outcomes for Children in Out of Home Care

Friday, 12th September: Staff and children's experiences implementing the CARE model in residential care - Oral

Mrs. Martha Holden [1]

1. *Residential Child Care Project, Cornell University*

If children are to thrive, they need to have predictable, engaging, responsive, secure, purposeful, and stimulating experiences on an ongoing basis. This enormous challenge can be accomplished in therapeutic residential care by creating a culture and living environment that provides developmentally enriching relationships and experiences. *CARE: Creating Conditions for Change* is a setting level program model designed to accomplish this task. By incorporating six evidence-informed principles (developmentally-focused, family-involved, relationship-based, competency-centered, trauma-informed, and ecologically-oriented) and three key processes (reflective practice, data-informed decision-making, and participatory management strategies) throughout all levels of the organization and into daily practice, an ethos develops that supports and expects developmental relationships in a trauma-sensitive environment (Holden, 2023).

This presentation will present research findings from the ongoing comprehensive evaluation of the CARE Model implemented in organizations in the USA. A growing body of evidence supports the effectiveness of the CARE program model, a fact that is acknowledged in the scientific rating of 3 (promising research evidence) for CARE in the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse (http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/children-and-residential-experiences-care/detailed). A 5-year quasi-experimental evaluation included examination of the impact of CARE on staff knowledge and beliefs and practice, adult–child interactions and relationships and perceptions of safety, child behavior, restraint rates, and the use of psychometric medication (Izzo et al., 2016, Izzo et al., 2020, Izzo et al., 2022; Nunno et al., 2017; Sellers et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019).

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Children and staff experiences in the process of CARE implementation in Spain-The implementation experience of CARE model in Spain

Friday, 12th September: Staff and children's experiences implementing the CARE model in residential care - Oral

Prof. Amaia Bravo Arteaga [1], ***Dr. Carla González-García*** [1], ***Ms. Ana Pulgar García*** [2], ***Ms. Raquel Ordiales*** [1], ***Dr. Iriana Santos*** [3], ***Prof. Jorge Fernández del Valle*** [1]

1. *University of Oviedo,* ***2.*** *Universidad de Oviedo,* ***3.*** *University of Cantabria*

The process of implementing the CARE model in Spain began at the end of 2022 in six children's homes in a region in the north of the country. Six months later all staff working in these services were trained and the process continued with bi-monthly supervision and training workshops on specific practices. We had the opportunity to progressively conduct evaluations not only in these six children's homes, but also in other similar programs where the model was not implemented.

We now have the first results after 18 months of implementation, which demonstrate the achievements and, especially, the experiences of both the professional teams and the young people themselves. In the case of the staff, despite stability issues and team changes that slow the process of change, the leadership's commitment has led to a shift in the culture of care. Specifically, the first evidence points to an approach in the beliefs and practices of professionals to the six principles of the model, with the greatest advances being in the areas where there was a greater distance (flexibility in interventions and intervention models not based on the application of consequences as a strategy for promoting competencies).

This presentation will be focused on the process and the experience of the implementation of CARE model in a Spanish-speaking country, given that this is the first time that the model has been extended to this context.

“Staff and children’s experiences implementing the care model in residential care” -A Canadian perspective of CARE implementation in a Therapeutic Campus Based Program

Friday, 12th September: Staff and children’s experiences implementing the CARE model in residential care - Oral

Mr. Anton Smith [1]

1. *Oak Hill Foundation and Cornell University*

We know that in order to have positive outcomes with children in care, organizations must have a positive culture and climate. The CARE program model provides a practice framework orientated in the Child and Youth Care; empirical knowledge, theory and practice wisdom. This presentation will provide a brief overview of the organization (Oak Hill Ranch). Oak Hill Ranch is a comprehensive Therapeutic Campus Based Care program near the City of Edmonton in Alberta, Canada. Oak Hill serves approximately 30 young people who live on campus and attend school on campus. The presentation will story the impact 15 years of CARE implementation achieving CARE certification and CARE Academy status. It will include the experiences of the organization of this implementation with the organization, organizational staff and young people in residence. The six CARE principles that form the foundation for creating conditions for change in residential care will be highlighted from a practice perspective.

The real experience of one agency’s transition from being very behavioural orientation to using the CARE program model to becoming relationally orientated. The Agency will explain how everyone in the agency is vital in helping to create a new culture and illustrate how transformational change improved the experience and outcomes for the children.

Workshop participants will have an opportunity to reflect on their own organization’s change process, examine their understanding of basic principles that contribute to children’s positive growth and development.

Staff and children's experiences implementing the CARE model in residential care - Implementing the CARE Model in Australia: Creating the conditions for success in residential care

Friday, 12th September: Staff and children's experiences implementing the CARE model in residential care - Oral

Ms. Courtney Patterson [1]

1. *Manager of Program Advancement and Implementation, Life Without Barriers*

Children and young people in residential care tell us what is necessary to best meet their needs. This includes a sense of normality within the therapeutic environment, enduring connections with family, and caring relationships with adults that are genuine and consistent in their approach. In Australia, residential care is primarily provided through community-based homes, where a small team of caregivers provides daily care and support. Yet everyday care is not enough. For children to have positive outcomes in residential care, caregivers must look beyond pain-based or challenging behaviours and focus on creating collective developmental experiences. Experiences that are aimed at increasing a child's self-efficacy and self-worth. This requires caregivers to strengthen their own emotional competence, including self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and attunement. Organisations must prioritise reflective practice, and foster a culture of humility, inclusion and curiosity. Supervisors and leaders play a critical role in creating this culture, ensuring that residential care settings are both responsive and attuned to the needs of children. The CARE model, an evidence-based framework, creates these conditions for success, striving for congruence at all levels of the organisation.

Across Australia, eight organisations are currently implementing the CARE model, all at various stages of implementation. This presentation will share implementation insights, successes and barriers when implementing the CARE model in Australia and review the sustainability of CARE within an Australian Organisation, 'Life Without Barriers.

Life Without Barriers has been implementing the CARE (Children and Residential Experiences) model in partnership with the Residential Child Care Project at Cornell University since 2016. Implementation fidelity has been assessed through structured fidelity reviews conducted by CARE consultants, complemented by methods such as staff and youth people surveys, focus groups, self-assessment quality and fidelity tools and observations. These reviews are designed to monitor practice alignment with CARE principles and occur at key implementation stages. Examples of outcomes for children and staff will be explored, demonstrating when CARE is implemented with fidelity. The presentation will contribute to a broader dialogue on how cross-national experiences with the CARE model can support the ongoing implementation of evidence-based practice in residential care.

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Staff and children experiences implementing the care model in residential care

Friday, 12th September: Staff and children's experiences implementing the CARE model in residential care - Symposium - In-person

Dr. Carla González-García [1]

1. *University of Oviedo*

Evidence-based programs and trauma-informed interventions are crucial to meeting the complex needs of children and youth in residential care. One particularly compelling model currently being implemented is CARE: Creating Conditions for Change, developed by Cornell UniversityCARE offers a comprehensive theoretical framework grounded in six core principles:Developmentally-focused; Family-involved; Relationship-based; Competency-centered; Trauma-informed; Ecologically-orientedIn addition to these guiding principles, CARE integrates three foundational processes across all organizational levels and daily practices: Reflective practice; Data-informed decision-making; Participatory management strategiesTogether, these principles and processes foster an organizational culture that not only supports but also expects the formation of developmental relationships within a trauma-sensitive environment (Holden, 2023).

The CARE model is based on a theory of change that outlines the essential experiences children must have in order to improve their self-concept, self-efficacy, self-esteem, social and emotional adjustment, and behavior. Children need to experience success in tasks that challenge them, develop trust and attachment with their caregivers, feel valued, connected to others, and maintain bonds with their families and community networks. These experiences must occur consistently in their daily lives, supported by a coherent approach among all those they live with. This is made possible through the practices of professionals who intentionally plan activities and create situations to ensure that children's lived experiences become the driving force behind their process of change.

The evaluation of its outcomes and the research strategies developed led to CARE being recognized in 2017 by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse (CEBC) as an evidence-based program. Currently, it is implemented in over 100 organizations that operate residential care programs for children across five countries: the United States, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and, since 2022, Spain.

The aim of this symposium is to present the experience of implementing the CARE model in different countries. Through four oral presentations, we will explore the situations in the United States, Australia, Canada, and Spain. This will allow for an analysis of the challenges encountered during implementation in each country, the processes of adaptation and implementation, and the ongoing efforts required to sustain the model over time.

The symposium will also feature a presentation by Martha Holden, author of the CARE Model and its leading international implementer. We believe this symposium offers a valuable opportunity to reflect on key issues, including the implementation of evidence-based programs in residential care that are responsive to children's needs, the adaptation of such programs across diverse cultural and social contexts, and the strategies necessary to ensure their long-term sustainability.

Social connections- Supporting after care

3. Social connections- Supporting after care - Supporting vulnerable young adults: A preventive, intersectoral and impact driven approach to youth homelessness in Flanders and Brussels.

Thursday, 11th September: Social connections- Supporting after care - Symposium - In-person

Mrs. Gwendy Moentjens [1]

1. *AP university of Applied Science*

Young adults (18-25 years) make up 25% of the homeless population in Flanders. This group often struggles with the transition to adulthood. Research from Lucas (KU Leuven) on the numbers and profiles of people in homelessness in Flanders, shows that a considerable part of these young people in homelessness deals with mental health issues (23%), intellectual disabilities (14%), and addiction-related issues (17.7%). Many of these young adults also have a history in youth care (Hermans & Italiano, 2021).

For these extremely vulnerable young people, who often fall between the cracks of the system, the Lucas research team concluded that a specialized, intersectoral and intense approach is necessary. Based on these recommendations, the Flemish agencies Opgroeien (youth care), VAPH (young people with disabilities), and the Department of Welfare issued a call for organizations across Flanders to form intersectoral teams in order to meet the needs of these youngsters and help tackle this wicked problem.

Since April 2025, eight intersectoral teams have started trajectories with young adults. Back of Track-Oranjehuis, SAM vzw and AP University college have been appointed to support the newly formed teams in this challenging task. In developing a two-year coaching trajectory for the teams, the three partners implemented their expertise in working with the Collective Impact model and the evidence based methods of Back-on-track and Housing First. The trajectory consists of a bootcamp, training days and intervision sessions and an online training platform.

In this seminar, the promising preliminary results after one year of training will be shared along with the challenges teams are facing, how Collective Impact principles are being applied in the teams to improve their impact and the progress made based on the following key indicators:

- **Stable housing**
- **Stable income** from employment or substitute income,
- **Education/work**: training, volunteering, or other activities
- **Network**
- **Short and long-term mental wellbeing**

Social Connections- Shaping the Identity of Children in Alternative Care

Thursday, 11th September: Social connections- Supporting after care - Accepted with changes

Ms. Jamila Aghrili [1], ***Ms. Leyla Aliyeva*** [1]

1. *SOS Children's Villages Azerbaijan*

Social identity is a vital aspect of children's emotional and social development, influencing their sense of belonging, self-worth, and resilience. A strong social identity enables children to form healthy relationships, face challenges effectively, and build a sense of hope for the future. However, for children in alternative care settings, developing a cohesive social identity is often more complicated due to disruptions in their early attachment relationships and caregiving environments.

Children in alternative care often face difficulties in integrating their experiences and building a consistent sense of self, resulting in challenges in forming meaningful relationships and navigating social contexts. These disruptions are linked to an increased risk of role confusion, emotional instability, and social isolation, all of which can impede their long-term emotional well-being.

This study investigates the factors influencing social identity development in children in alternative care, focusing on how caregiving environments, social interactions, and professional support contribute to their sense of self.

The research utilizes a qualitative approach to explore the key elements that impact social identity formation in children placed in alternative care and highlights how frequent placement changes, inconsistent care, and lack of stability hinder the development of a coherent social identity.

Key words: identity development, children, belonging, social identity.

Social connections - Supporting after care: Navigating Adulthood: Cross-Cultural Young Adults' Process of Leaving Care

Thursday, 11th September: Social connections- Supporting after care - Oral

Ms. Nawar Sayyad [1], ***Dr. Marte Knag Fylkesnes*** [1], ***Mr. Ragnhild Hollekim*** [1], ***Dr. Fungisai Puleng Gwanzura Ottemöller*** [1]

1. *University of Bergen*

Objectives:
This paper explores the experiences of young adults (YA) with cross-cultural backgrounds as they transition into adulthood with support from Norwegian child welfare services. The study explores cultural sensitivity and diversity, the process of leaving care and how child welfare services shape opportunities for a successful transition. The study also considers young adults' participation and its impact on the experiences of the provided support. The central research question is: *How do young adults with cross-cultural backgrounds experience support from child welfare services, and how does this support influence their ability to transition successfully into adulthood?*
Method:
This study is based on **10 semi-structured interviews** with YA transitioning to adulthood. Half arrived in Norway as unaccompanied refugee minors, while the others migrated with their families as children or were born and raised in Norway. The sample included four young women and six young men. A participatory approach enhanced the study's relevance and rigor. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, offering an in-depth exploration of participants' narratives. The study applies **Martha C. Nussbaum's capabilities approach** to assess how child welfare services shape YAs' actual opportunities for independence and well-being.
Findings:
Four key preliminary themes were identified, the first being **cooperation between caseworkers and YA**. Participants reported a wide range of experiences in their interactions with the caseworkers. Positive encounters were characterized by effective communication, shared decision-making, and tailored support, fostering a sense of being heard and valued. Conversely, negative experiences stemmed from slow progress and excessive administrative procedures and insufficient practical assistance, leading to frustration and undermined willingness to seek help. Diverse cultural backgrounds and care history also influenced these interactions.
The second theme illustrated how **participants described the value and limitations of the financial, practical, and emotional support provided, and whether it met their individual needs**. While some participants valued guidance that encouraged self-reliance, others felt prematurely pushed toward independence, highlighting the need for a more tailored approach that considers individual circumstances. For participants with backgrounds as unaccompanied refugee minors, practical support also included help adjusting to life in Norway. Findings suggest that they often need extended and varied forms of support to navigate both transition to adulthood and integration into a new society.
The third theme focused on what we identified as a **tension between YAs' need to develop independence and their need for ongoing support during the transition to adulthood**. Several participants emphasized the importance of support that encouraged reflection and decision-making without creating dependency. However, others described age-based criteria for aftercare that sometimes conflicted with actual needs, leading to premature withdrawal of services.
The fourth theme, **(re)building and maintaining relationships,** explored the role of child welfare in supporting social connections that would last beyond aftercare. While some participants maintained strong familial and social ties, others faced challenges in building networks.

Conclusions:
This study emphasizes that aftercare must be **holistic, context-aware, and culturally responsive** to effectively support YA with cross-cultural backgrounds.

Serving Families Facing Poverty

Serving Families Facing Poverty- Findings from Israel

Wednesday, 10th September: Serving Families Facing Poverty - Oral

Dr. Yuval Saar-Heiman [1]***, Prof. Anat Zeira*** [2]***, Dr. June Thoburn*** [3]

1. *Ben Gurion University of the Negev,* ***2.*** *the Hebrew University,* ***3.*** *University of East Anglia*

Background: Tackling poverty and its repercussions for communities and individuals and supporting people living in poverty have long been recognized as a core mission of social work (Global Definition of Social Work, IFSW, 2014). Social workers often struggle to address the impact of poverty on families and children with whom they work and instead they tend to focus on distinct problems (e.g., risk assessment, parental guidance, addiction). This 'poverty-blindness' has led to various attempts to develop poverty-aware and anti-poverty practices. However, these attempts mainly focus on practice undertaken in special programs and not as integral part of public social services. Thus, there is lack of knowledge about what frontline social workers do in their practice and what is the relationship between social workers' perceptions regarding poverty, the organizational context, and their practices.

The goal of this exploratory study is to describe social workers perspectives about their practice with families living in poverty and to examine relationships between attitudes and use of professional principles, theories and models.

Methods: The convenience sample includes 83 experienced social workers currently working in Departments of Social Services in Israel that responded to an on-line survey using an anonymous Google Forms platform. Closed-ended items were constructed on the basis of an extensive literature review conducted by a group of international researchers (https://iaober.org/) and include background information, and series of items about: attitudes and use of professional principles and services and use of models and approaches in their practice.

Results: Significantly higher weight was put on participants' own values and attitudes (e.g., social justice) compared to their assessments of attitudes of their organizations. Contrary, they significantly put lower weight on procedural aspects of practice compared to what they perceive as their organizations'. We found significantly higher reports of implementing interpersonal principles (e.g. respect and empathy to clients) than rights-based principles (e.g. upholding the right to adequate income or housing). Additionally, agencies and services with which they partner most frequently were child-centered services (e.g., daycare centers), while partnership with services addressing poverty (e.g., writ of execution), were reported less often. They also report using more approaches such as strength-based, systems approach and integrative social work and less use of psycho-dynamic and CBT. Partnership and collaboration are central components of their interventions and writing letters and applications on behalf of clients are central skills. Yet, their use of financial literacy and research skills are never or rarely used. Finally, 50% of the participants never took a course on poverty during their academic studies.

Implications: Our findings highlight the gap between social workers' aspirations to address social injustice in their practice and their difficulty to do so within their organizational context. While their use of skills and theories predominantly support them in addressing poverty, it seems they need more training and education on poverty aware practice to better connect social work values to their everyday practice.

Serving families facing poverty – Findings from Australia

Wednesday, 10th September: Serving Families Facing Poverty - Oral

Dr. Patricia McNamara [1]***, Prof. Elizabeth Fernandez*** [2]

1. *University of Melbourne,* ***2.*** *University of New South Wales*

Aim: Child and family poverty is regarded globally as a significant source of social harm. This paper reports on the Australian component of cross-national research which explored how direct practice workers perceive and respond operationally to poverty experienced by children and families they serve.

Method: Data was collected via an anonymous online cross-national, 30-minute survey which included quantitative and qualitative items assessing practitioners' roles and approaches to engaging and working with families experiencing poverty and disadvantage. Five Australian organizations participated, four of which are large generalist child and family welfare agencies engaged in counselling, family support, child protection, out of home care, school based and early years services. One agency is small; it delivers material aid within the context of family casework.

Fifty-nine surveys were completed. Most respondents were women, aged under sixty years; around half identified as social workers; the remainder represented a range of disciplines. Respondents were expected to meet the inclusion criterion of carrying an active caseload; however, six identified as senior managers, who would not ordinarily be engaging in direct practice.

Findings:

Interventions: Improving client access to housing is a dominant theme in respondents' interventions directed at enabling families to secure safe and affordable housing. Responding to diverse and complex housing needs absorbs a great deal of their professional focus and time. Respondents also frequently referred to their efforts to provide material aid such as food, clothing, and transport. They strive to improve agency and financial literacy of their clients, so these families are empowered to navigate poverty traps.

Barriers and facilitators: Practitioners seek to build trust with their clients and work at the client's pace to tailor individualized, culturally inclusive and holistic responses. Deficits in government and non-government organizational responses to the needs of families living with poverty are cited as barriers by the practitioners. These respondents advocate for more streamlined access to services, especially reduction in waiting lists and removal of complex bureaucratic barriers.

*Preferred poverty- aware approaches***:** Advocacy and empowerment are most frequently listed by practitioners as preferred practice approaches. However, they are often prevented from employing these approaches due to casework demands, especially crisis intervention. Practice approaches identified as most effective in addressing poverty at the macro and mesosystems levels include holistic responses, community partnerships, strength-based approaches, anti-oppressive practice, advocacy and empowerment along with collaborative and community-based approaches. At the micro level, casework interventions deemed facilitators of good outcomes include case management support, education and skills development, practitioner skills and knowledge and crisis support, along with material aid and brokerage.

Conclusions: This survey serves as a lens through which we gain insights into practitioners' experience of working with families experiencing poverty and disadvantage. The data portrays how practitioners conceptualize their role and the knowledge, skills and interventive strategies they draw upon to respond to families and children; it identifies facilitators and barriers they encounter at organizational and governmental levels. Understanding how multiple levels of intervention can alleviate persistent poverty experienced by families, remains a critical area for research and policy development.

Serving Families Facing Poverty- Findings from Portugal

Wednesday, 10th September: Serving Families Facing Poverty - Oral

Dr. Paulo Delgado [1]***, Prof. Fátima Correia*** [2]

1. *Polytechnic Institute of Porto,* ***2.*** *Instituto Politécnico do Porto*

Child poverty is persistent around the world and severely affects children and families in both developed and emerging countries, with a growing awareness of its impact on social exclusion. The cost-of-living crisis means that social services professionals are increasingly working with families living in poverty. This can occur at the same time as they are facing financial difficulties in their own lives. This study is part of an international research project by IAOBERfcs - International Association for Outcome-Based Evaluation and Research on Family and Children's Services, which promotes and coordinates the project. Collaborating countries include Australia, Germany, Israel, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the UK and the USA. The central aim of the study is to find out how child welfare professionals in different countries are carrying out their work with children and families experiencing poverty in these difficult circumstances. Poverty has an impact on specific areas of children's and families' experience, such as health, housing, education, employment, maltreatment, the child protection system and juvenile justice.

The study thus aims to gain a better understanding of how social service professionals intervene in contexts of family poverty. It seeks to analyze how the values, principles and individual experiences of each professional influence their response. It also seeks to find out how theoretical approaches and models of practice have an impact on professionals, in order to identify ways of improving responses to help children and families experiencing poverty.

The data was collected by responding to an anonymous online survey on the topics mentioned above, which was available on the Emanuela Zancan Foundation platform. The sample in Portugal included 50 respondents, 62% of whom were aged between 20 and 39, 68% (34) of whom were social pedagogues.

The results from Portugal show that the practice models and approaches are mostly based on partnerships and networking; that the theoretical framework of these practices is based on relationships, family strengths and educational approaches; the skills they use most are their knowledge of welfare systems (e.g., application processes, criteria) or advocacy to help the family obtain social benefits such as housing or other material needs (e.g., food banks). Unsurprisingly, the services most often provided are to meet material needs such as food or clothing and to facilitate work or training opportunities.

It seems that Portuguese state has not yet managed to become a welfare state in the full sense of the term, given the unequal distribution of income, the lack of action in the field of social policies and the bureaucracy in place. Recently established in the mid-1970s, after the transition to democracy, it continues to be complemented by networks of mutual recognition and help based on family and neighborhood ties.

Serving Families Facing Poverty-Findings from the US

Wednesday, 10th September: Serving Families Facing Poverty - Oral

Dr. Robin Spath [1]***, Dr. Bethany Lee*** [2]***, Ms. Linda-Jeanne Mack*** [3]

1. *Independent Scholar,* ***2.*** *University of Maryland,* ***3.*** *University of Maryland, School of Social Work.*

Background: Poverty remains a significant social issue, affecting millions of families across the globe. In 2023, [BL1] the US child poverty rate stood at 15.3%, indicating that about 11 million children under 18 were below the poverty threshold (CAP, n.d.). [LM2] Research has also consistently shown a strong correlation between poverty and child maltreatment. Economic hardship increases parental stress, which can contribute to neglect, inadequate supervision, and maltreatment (Cancian et al., 2013). Additionally, low-income families are more likely to experience child welfare involvement (Shrivastava & Patel, 2023).

Aims: Although much is known about the effects of poverty, there is comparatively less understanding of the specific, day-to-day actions social workers take to support young people and families living in poverty. The objective of this study, which was [LM3] [LM4] conducted in the USA, as well as simultaneously in several other countries, is to build knowledge in this area of practice. A multi-national group of researchers developed a survey to collect data from practitioners about their values, skills, and activities for working with families in poverty.

Method: The US survey was launched online in February 2024, and included both qualitative and quantitative items. Survey respondents were recruited through professional social networks, continuing education listservs, and social work program alumni; 178 professionals [BL5] completed the survey. Participant demographics are consistent with social service providers in that most were well-educated, predominantly female, and racially diverse with significant professional experience in social work.

Findings: The findings suggest that while social workers place a strong emphasis on the values of collaboration, respect, and empathy, there is comparatively less support for advocacy related to economic rights like income and housing. The analysis of the data also reflects a strong emphasis on collaborative, trauma-informed, and agency-partnered approaches in social work practice, while community-based volunteer programs are less frequently used. Additionally, findings indicate a strong reliance on strengths-based and trauma-informed practices, with a growing recognition of systemic and educational approaches in social work. The findings highlight a focus on accessing external material support and providing diagnostic services, with less emphasis on direct financial aid or specialized assistance.

Finally, the analysis indicates that while general awareness of poverty-aware social work (PASW) is relatively moderate, formal education, professional development, and workplace training opportunities remain limited in the USA. In summary, this study suggests that addressing these various gaps through enhanced advocacy training, expanded community engagement, and increased access to PASW education can strengthen the overall effectiveness and equity of social work practice in this area.[LM6]

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Serving Families Facing Poverty- Qualitative Themes from Multi-Country Survey Data

Wednesday, 10th September: Serving Families Facing Poverty - Oral

Dr. Cinzia Canali [1], ***Dr. Yuval Saar-Heiman*** [2]

1. *Fondazione Zancan,* ***2.*** *Ben Gurion University of the Negev*

Background: Although poverty is a pressing social issue that social workers address daily worldwide, research on their actual day-to-day practices in this context remains scarce. Furthermore, the challenges of comparing social work practices across diverse socio-political and professional contexts have resulted in a lack of cross-national studies exploring these issues.

This study aims to bridge this gap by conducting a cross-national survey in X countries, examining social workers' perspectives on their practice with families experiencing poverty. The survey includes both quantitative and qualitative components, and in this presentation, we will share preliminary findings from the qualitative data. The qualitative aspect of the study explores the similarities and differences in social workers' experiences and challenges when working with families and children across diverse contexts.

Methods: The qualitative component of the study consisted of four open-ended questions focusing on: (a) social workers' perceptions of their role in working with families in poverty, (b) their suggestions for alternative practices, (c) facilitators of effective practice, and (d) barriers to supporting families living in poverty. The final sample included responses from social workers in China (n=), Australia (n=), Spain (n=), Portugal (n=), Italy (n=), Israel (n=), England (n=), and the USA (n=).

Data analysis was conducted using inductive thematic analysis, with scholars in each country analysing their respective data separately. A comparative exploration of emerging themes across countries led to the development of a comprehensive analytical framework, within which each country's data was reanalysed.

Findings

While responses varied across countries, preliminary analysis identified six recurring themes: 1. *Frustration with resource constraints* – a perceived gap between families' needs and the resources available to social workers; 2. *Bureaucratic burden* – administrative demands that hinder direct practice with families; 3. *Impact of broader social policies* – the negative influence of policies beyond the welfare system; 4. *Aspiration for systemic change* – a desire to develop community services and influence policy; 5. *The power of relationships* – the significance of building close connections with families; 6. *Complexity of working with families in poverty*– the difficulties of supporting families facing intersecting hardships.

Discussion: Findings will be discussed in relation to social work's commitment to social justice and poverty alleviation. Specifically, we will highlight the urgent need for the profession to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework for practice that can effectively address poverty-related challenges across diverse settings and contexts.

Serving Families Facing Poverty- Symposium Organizing Notes

Wednesday, 10th September: Serving Families Facing Poverty - Symposium - In-person

Dr. Bethany Lee [1]***, Dr. Tiziano Vecchiato*** [2]

1. *University of Maryland,* ***2.*** *Fondazione Zancan*

*This abstract describes the organizing structure of a 5-paper symposium proposal.

Although much is known about the effects of poverty, less is known about what social service professionals actually do to support young people and families experiencing poverty. To build knowledge about social work practice for young people and families in poverty, a multi-national group of researchers developed a survey to collect data from practitioners about their values, skills, and activities for working with families in poverty. The survey items were developed following a thorough review of the literature that also considered the interplay of child protection and poverty.

The survey was launched in 10 countries and over 800 responses have been completed at this time. The survey included both qualitative and quantitative items.

In this five-paper symposium, findings specific to several countries will be shared as a demonstration of how there are both similarities and differences across national contexts in how families at risk receive services from social workers. The implications of these findings suggest that there are some values that are consistent across contexts, like being strengths-based and the importance of relationship-building. However, context-specific information, including the training and preparation of professionals as well as the values of the social welfare state within a particular setting, are also invaluable for understanding current practice with vulnerable families at risk of separation and experiencing poverty.

The Symposium will feature the following papers (abstracts have been submitted by lead authors):

1. Serving Families Facing Poverty- Findings from Israel
2. Serving Families Facing Poverty- Findings from Australia
3. Serving Families Facing Poverty- Findings from Portugal
4. Serving Families Facing Poverty- Findings from the US
5. Serving Families Facing Poverty- Multi-national Qualitative Themes

Young People's Perspectives on Subjective Well-being in Residential Care

Young People's Perspectives on Subjective Well-being in Residential Care

Thursday, 11th September: Young People's Perspectives on Subjective Well-being in Residential Care - Symposium - In-person

Dr. Marion Pomey [1], ***Ms. Carina Pohl*** [2], ***Dr. Andrea Ćosić*** [3], ***Dr. Rebecca Gulowksi*** [4], ***Dr. Susanne Witte*** [5]

1. *ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work,* ***2.*** *PhD Student,* ***3.*** *University of Zagreb Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences,* ***4.*** *University of Augsburg,* ***5.*** *German Youth Institute (DJI)*

The perspective of children and young adolescents living in residential care is essential to understand what is important for their subjective well-being and mental health and to know how they get vulnerable from their point of view. The four presenting research projects have all done qualitative studies with children and young people on their experiences and perspectives of subjective well-being, vulnerability and violence in residential care. Researcher from Croatia, Germany, and Switzerland will present their qualitative results and discuss overarching questions about innovative research approaches in childhood studies on well-being and how theory-practice transformations can succeed, also on the basis of practical workshops that have already been conducted on the topics of social relationships, child participation and social inclusion in residential care.

Young People's Perspectives on Subjective Well-being in Residential Care - What is relevant for Well-being and what constitutes vulnerability?

Thursday, 11th September: Young People's Perspectives on Subjective Well-being in Residential Care - Accepted with changes

Dr. Marion Pomey [1]***, Ms. Carina Pohl*** [2]

1. *ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work,* ***2.*** *PhD Student*

The funded Swiss childhood study in residential care shows that children experience and understand well-being in many different ways. We conducted over 50 qualitative interviews in Switzerland within the different language regions (French Italian German). From a childs perspective, reliable, supportive relationships, friendships, a sense of belonging, social participation, safety and security, retreats and safe spaces, access to digital spaces and protection from violence are all essential needs. These results from our qualitative Swiss study on "childrens' understandings of well-being and vulnerability" show that children especially in out-of-home placements are particularly vulnerable and depending on care and caring relations. We conducted interviews and narrations on well-being and vulnerability from their point of view to better understand their needs and challenges they face in every day life. We analysed how they become vulnerable in relations, situations and institutions, and want to present how we can learn from these insights to improve out-of-homeplacements and minimize vulnerability.

Outlining these main results from our study we provide the floor for the three other presentations and for a broader discussion on the common topic of young peoples perspectives on subjective well-being in residential care and the diverse vulnerabilty aspects they face (see submission of common symposium ID 343).

Young People's Perspectives on Subjective Well-being in Residential Care - Promoting healthy relationships and preventing intimate partner violence among girls in out-of-home placements

Thursday, 11th September: Young People's Perspectives on Subjective Well-being in Residential Care - Oral

Dr. Susanne Witte [1]

1. *German Youth Institute (DJI)*

Adolescence is a key developmental period for experiencing romantic relationships and exploring sexuality for the first time. The competencies acquired during this period form the foundation for healthy relationships in adulthood.

Girls in out-of-home placement face several challenges in forming and maintaining healthy relationships as they often have a history of abuse, neglect, and other adverse circumstances in their family of origin. Additionally, they frequently encounter changes in their living situations, which leaves them without supportive relationships that could help them navigate intimate relationships and sexuality.

Social workers in residential homes often lack the time and training necessary to help these girls develop the skills to express their needs and desires in romantic relationships, establish and accept boundaries, and resolve conflicts constructively. As a result, girls in out-of-home care are at a higher risk of experiencing unhealthy intimate relationships, including intimate partner violence.

Based on a comprehensive literature review, several recommendations for social workers in out-of-home care have been developed. It is essential to provide girls with the opportunity to have their first experiences with romantic relationships and sexuality while also ensuring their safety. Balancing these aspects requires a deep understanding of and acceptance of the girls' perspective on romantic relationships.

In addition to these recommendations, a two-day prevention workshop for girls in out-of-home placements was developed and evaluated in four SOS Children's Villages. The evaluation findings focus specifically on the subjective perspectives of the girls who participated.

Young People's Perspectives on Subjective Well-being in Residential Care - Barriers and Potentials of Bystander Intervention in Cases of Sexualized Peer Violence

Thursday, 11th September: Young People's Perspectives on Subjective Well-being in Residential Care - Oral

Dr. Rebecca Gulowski [1]

1. *German Youth Institute (DJI)*

Adolescents with a history of adverse experiences—such as neglect, violence, or sexual assault—who are placed in residential youth care facilities are particularly vulnerable. Children and adolescents who have experienced violence face an increased risk of revictimization. In particular, sexualized violence among peers is a widespread and under-acknowledged problem. When developing measures to prevent sexualized violence, it is essential to consider the crucial role of bystanders: bystanders can intervene in a protective manner and support victims in coping with their experiences, but they can also facilitate sexualized violence and reinforce its negative consequences.

The joint project *"Check, Reflect, Act!"* aims to empower young people to intervene both preventively and reactively in cases of sexualized violence—whether occurring in person or online. This contribution focuses on the challenges that hinder effective bystander intervention. The analysis draws on the perspectives of young people gathered through qualitative methods. The sample primarily consisted of girls living in residential youth care. It was expanded to include perspectives from girls with cognitive impairments in residential care, as well as from boys and girls without experience in residential settings. The analysis identified various patterns and logics that can either serve as protective factors against assault or, conversely, contribute to heightened vulnerability.

The aim is to identify and present both interpersonal and intrapersonal barriers to effective intervention in situations involving sexualized peer violence.

Young People's Perspectives on Subjective Well-being in Residential Care: Exploring the interplay between discrimination, group identification and subjective well-being in Croatian institutional care

Thursday, 11th September: Young People's Perspectives on Subjective Well-being in Residential Care - Symposium - In-person

Dr. Andrea Ćosić [1], ***Dr. Ivana Borić*** [2], ***Prof. Martina Lotar Rihtarić*** [1]

1. *University of Zagreb Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences,* ***2.*** *University of Zagreb*

Subjective well-being among adolescents in institutional care is important for comprehending various aspects of their lives, especially in relation to discrimination and social identity. Adolescents in care often experience discrimination, which can have a negative impact on their subjective well-being and identity. In addition, group identification with peers in care can be a risk or protective factor, depending on the various circumstances. Given the unique individual, family and care factors faced by these adolescents, it is important to explore their experiences and views on discrimination, group identification and subjective well-being. Therefore, this research aims to gain a deeper understanding of how perceived discrimination and group identity relate to the subjective well-being of adolescents in institutional care. The main research questions are focused on exploring perception of discrimination, group identification and subjective well-being, as well as gaining a better understanding of the interconnections between these issues. A qualitative approach was used, and data was collected through focus groups. A total of 30 young people (16 boys) aged 14-20 years from different types of group homes in Croatia participated. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.

The results show that adolescents experience discrimination related to their stay in care. Adolescents particularly emphasize the prejudice against children in care and the stigma surrounding care institutions. Group identification was recognized as a protective factor during stay in care. However, many adolescents did not feel a strong sense of belonging to their peer group within the institution. Adolescents identified stability and the availability of material resources as key foundations for life satisfaction. In addition, dissatisfaction with oneself and their previous life circumstances also emerged as a theme in their experiences. In general, the results show that the interplay between discrimination, group identification, and subjective well-being is very complex, dynamic, and influenced by the balance of positive and negative aspects of peer relationships and aspects of care quality.

The results of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors that are important for empowering adolescents' subjective well-being in institutional care. The findings also have important implications for further research, policy and practice in institutional care, emphasizing the need to address discrimination and create an environment that promotes quality, stability, and positive social relationships among adolescents.

Change Trajectories in Youth and Families with Complex Needs

Change Trajectories in Youth and Families with Complex Problems – matching case characteristics, care content and outcomes

Thursday, 11th September: Change Trajectories in Youth and Families with Complex Needs - Symposium - In-person

Dr. Arjen Van Assen [1], ***Dr. Loraine Visscher*** [1]

1. *University of Groningen*

Families with multiple and complex problems (FMCP's) are characterised by an accumulation of problems in multiple areas of life (Knot-Dickscheit & Knorth, 2019). Many of these families receive integrated support through various home-visiting programs (HVPs). Meta-analyses have shown these services are effective in improving several proximal outcomes (e.g. reducing behavioural problems), but are often unable to prevent out-of-home placement (Al et al., 2012; Van Assen et al., 2020). Furthermore, there is considerable heterogeneity in the case characteristics, care content, and outcomes of these families. Therefore, it is important to identify *which approaches are effective, for whom, and under what circumstances.* Although several studies have suggested that gender differences may be important in explaining differences in care provision and outcomes (e.g. Hyde & Mezulis, 2020), little is known about gender differences in care content and outcomes of FMCPs in HVPs. We present an empirical study on gender differences in case characteristics, care content, and outcomes in HVPs for FMCPs. Furthermore, we highlight the complexity of monitoring and evaluating the process and outcomes of HVPs.

In this study, we analysed an existing dataset on case characteristics, care content and outcomes of 499 families involved in one of eight HVPs for FMCPs (Visscher et al., 2021). At intake (T0) and case closure (T1) data was collected on family functioning (VGFO), parental stress (OBVL) and children's emotional and behavioural problems (CBCL). Furthermore, the content and structure of HVPs was measured using the Taxonomy of Interventions for FMPs (TIFMP; Visscher et al., 2018). In an earlier study, based on a latent profile analysis, three support profiles (explorative, combined, action-oriented) were distinguished (Visscher et al., 2021). In this study, we used descriptive statistics and bivariate testing (t-test, chi-square test) to assess gender differences in problems at intake. Secondly, we similarly assessed gender differences in care content (e.g. planning and evaluating, working on change; see Visscher et al., 2018) and structure elements (e.g. duration, intensity). Finally, we investigated differences in outcomes based on gender and support profile using two-way ANOVA and multiple linear regression.

The findings show there were no gender differences at baseline in parenting stress and family functioning. There were also no gender differences on the main scales (total, internalizing, and externalizing problems) for behavioural problems. However, girls experienced more somatic symptoms and school problems; for boys more aggressive behaviour and social problems were reported. The structure and content of care was mostly similar, but girls were more frequently referred to other services. For boys, professionals more often consulted colleagues and requested supervision of behavioural specialists. On average, HVPs were found to be effective in improving outcomes (behavioural problems, parenting stress and family functioning). There were no significant gender differences and differences between support profiles in outcomes, but there was considerable heterogeneity in outcomes for boys and girls in all three profiles. Finally, several methodological challenges of the project will be addressed, such as analysis of contextualized and personalised trajectories of care in HPVs and research on gender minorities

Change Trajectories in Youth and Families with Complex Needs - A Multiple-Case Study on KINGS Inpatient Family Treatment

Thursday, 11th September: Change Trajectories in Youth and Families with Complex Needs - Symposium - In-person

Ms. Lysbert Zeinstra [1], ***Dr. Jana Knot-Dickscheit*** [2], ***Dr. Anne-Marie Huyghen*** [2], ***Prof. Annemiek Harder*** [1]

1. *Erasmus University Rotterdam,* ***2.*** *University of Groningen*

Children growing up in families with multiple and complex problems (FMCP) are at an increased risk of interpersonal trauma and adverse developmental outcomes. Parental trauma, emotional dysregulation, and strained parent-child relationships may limit the feasibility and effectiveness of outpatient (trauma-focused) interventions. To address these barriers, the KINGS program (a Dutch acronym for "Child IN Healthy System") integrates trauma treatment for parents and children with interventions targeting emotional regulation, parenting, and the parent-child relationship, in an inpatient setting that ensures the safety of all family members.

This study examined outcome trajectories and patterns of change associated with participation in KINGS across child and parental trauma symptoms, child emotional and behavioral problems, parental feelings and responses toward the child, and the quality of the parent-child relationship. We conducted a quasi-experimental, non-concurrent, multiple-case time-series study with staggered intervention start times to enable nuanced analysis of individual change over time. We collected weekly measurements from 15 families (n = 15 parents; n = 18 children) over a baseline period of at least five weeks, the KINGS intervention period of six to eight weeks, and an eight-week follow-up period. We used visual analyses, Simulation Modeling Analysis (SMA), and Nonoverlap of All Pairs (NAP) statistics to evaluate changes and temporal patterns.

The results indicate that at least half of the participants showed moderate to strong improvement during the intervention across all outcomes, except for the parent-child relationship. Patterns of change varied: some participants improved steadily, while others experienced initial deterioration followed by recovery. By follow-up, the most consistent improvements were seen in child and parental trauma symptoms, with gains largely maintained or further strengthened at home.

This study underscores the value of single-case research designs in capturing variability in individual treatment responses, an aspect often overlooked in traditional group-level analyses. Such designs enable the detection of subtle but clinically relevant changes and provide a robust basis for causal inference in small, heterogeneous samples. The observed heterogeneity in response patterns highlights the importance of tailoring interventions to the unique needs of each family and systematically monitoring their progress over time. We will discuss the implications of these findings for clinical practice and future research on change trajectories in (trauma-focused) interventions for FMCP.

Change Trajectories in Youth and Families with Complex Needs - Together1Plan: A Method and Tool for Providing Integrated Care

Thursday, 11th September: Change Trajectories in Youth and Families with Complex Needs - Oral

Dr. Jana Knot-Dickscheit [1], ***Dr. Marieke Boelhouwer*** [2]

1. *Molendrift and University of Groningen,* ***2.*** *Molendrift*

Children and families facing multiple and complex problems across various aspects of life often interact with multiple care professionals simultaneously. This frequently leads to fragmented care (Tausendfreund, Knot-Dickscheit, Schulze, Korth, & Grietens, 2016; Nooteboom, 2021). Cooperation and coordination of care are therefore essential for ensuring high-quality support (BPSW, NIP, & NVO, 2020). Integrated care requires different actors and organizations to collaborate in a coherent and coordinated manner, with the client's needs and perspective at the forefront. Achieving this demands a broad range of competencies and skills from professionals and is influenced by various facilitating factors and barriers (Nooteboom, 2021).

Together1Plan is both a methodology and an online collaboration tool designed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of care coordination for clients with multiple and complex needs. It was developed through close collaboration between care professionals, parents, and young people. Together1Plan is grounded in evidence-based elements of effective care and embodies a vision of high-quality collaboration in the care sector (Boelhouwer, Aukes, & Loykens, 2019). The focus is on facilitating cooperation between the client (and their system), various care providers, and their support network (family, friends) in the development of a comprehensive (family) plan. This plan includes a clear perspective, associated goals, concrete actions, progress tracking, and a shared appointment schedule. A designated plan coordinator is responsible for overseeing and managing the coordination process. Based on a case study, we will present the Together1Plan tool and methodology.

Since 2010, the Together1Plan platform has been tested and implemented in both the Netherlands and Belgium. It is now widely used in outreach support, with more than 5,700 active users and over 9,600 support plans. Several studies have examined Together1Plan. A small exploratory study assessed client and plan coordinator satisfaction regarding collaboration within Together1Plan (Aukes, Knot-Dickscheit, Boelhouwer, & Post, 2018). Additionally, we have collected metadata on all plans used in recent years, including data on duration, number of care providers involved, and intensity of use (N=6,998 in 2022) (see, e.g., Stichting Samen1Plan [Foundation Together1Plan], 2022).

Working with Together1Plan is generally perceived as effective and positive by parents, young people, and plan coordinators. The platform also appears to be suitable for a highly diverse target group. However, Together1Plan is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Successful implementation requires a shared vision of collaboration and professional commitment to truly engage with one another and with children and families experiencing multiple and complex problems. Ultimately, the goal is to improve the well-being of this target group and ensure that their voices are genuinely heard in the care process.

Change Trajectories in Youth and Families with Complex Needs - Timelines of daily functioning and provided care

Thursday, 11th September: Change Trajectories in Youth and Families with Complex Needs - Symposium - In-person

Dr. Anja Holwerda [1], ***Dr. Loraine Visscher*** [1], ***Dr. Jana Knot-Dickscheit*** [1]

1. *University of Groningen*

Families with (multiple and) complex problems (FMCPs) face a wide range of problems in different areas of life. Moreover, these problems are often complex, long-lasting and intergenerational. Research has shown that the outcomes of family interventions, often provided to FMCPs, are inconsistent and often not long-lasting (Evenboer et al., 2018; van Assen et al., 2020). In addition, the contents of these interventions do not fully match the wishes and needs of FMCPs themselves (Visscher, 2022). Tailoring interventions to the needs of FMCPs might be promising, since each FMCP has a unique combination of strenghts and problems. Previous research made clear that care trajectories for FMCPs are very dynamic and that practitioners attune elements at specific family situations. Better understanding regarding the interaction of provided elements and family functioning during these care trajectories is needed to enhance the effectiveness of these family interventions.

In this ongoing study, we follow ± 10 FMCPs and their practitioners with an app during the duration of the intervention (minimum duration 6 months). The practitioner registers during each (weekly) visit which elements are provided to the FMCP. Family members (1 or 2 parents and/or 1 child in care) fill in a short questionnaire daily regarding their functioning (eg. how good was the atmosphere at home today? How was the contact with my parent/child? Does the approach of the practitioner help me?). The data from the app is processed into timelines of provided elements versus daily functioning of the FMCP involved. These timelines are discussed with family members and practitioners during separate interviews to understand the effect of the provided elements on the daily functioning of families.

During the care trajectory the practitioner has insight in the responses of the family regarding their functioning and this can be discussed with the family in the (weekly) visits of the practitioner. The data provide the practitioner with specific pointers on what the family needs to be able to realize the desired change or improvement and can be used by practitioners during the care trajectory to adjust the provided elements to the families' needs. Family members see how they function on several general as well as personalized questions, which can help them to see change in functioning over time. Together they can discern patterns in family functioning and the underlying causes. Moreover, the questions regarding collaboration of practitioner and family help them to discuss whether the approach of the practitioner facilitates growth or not, as alliance is an important general effective element of the interventions provided.

In this session we will present examples of timelines of family functioning and provided elements by practitioners and reoccurring themes that stem from the data. During this session we discuss the benefits and disadvantages of this type of research for researchers as well as practitioners. This study is an example of how research informs practice, so family interventions can be tailored more to the needs of specific families with specific combinations of problems and improve outcomes of care.

Change Trajectories in Youth and Families with Complex Needs - Qualitative Study on Lifelines from a Complex Systems Approach

Thursday, 11th September: Change Trajectories in Youth and Families with Complex Needs - Oral

Ms. Rineke Bossenbroek [1], ***Prof. Anna Lichtwarck-Aschoff*** [1]

1. *University of Groningen*

Youngsters placed in residential care facilities grow up in challenging family environments and are often burdened with a troubled past. Yet, they often experience that no one really asks about their past and that their care is mostly symptom- and disorder focused (Spijk-de Jonge et al., 2022). Treatment plans usually lack a thorough analysis of youths' life history and current context, limiting professionals' and youths' understanding of how their mental states have arisen and how they are being maintained (Tempel et al., 2022), potentially undermining treatment effectiveness. The field of residential youth care could therefore benefit from a more holistic approach that views the child as an integrated whole and explicitly pays attention to the unique developmental history and current context. In the current study we used a lifeline drawing method – inspired by complex systems theory – to map the unique life histories and broader developmental contexts of young people with residential living experience. These lifelines were explored for distinct dynamic patterns to arrive at a process explanation of how person-environment interactions shape the initiation and maintenance of psychological suffering and recovery.

Each lifeline was segmented and coded for the functioning of the person and their environment. We then sought for dynamic patterns that were repeated within and across cases. The overall line shape showed that youth experienced the majority of their lives as hardship and that their psychological problems worsened over time. While idiosyncratic in content, we found general dynamics (patterns of stability, fluctuations, and diverse change patterns) that could meaningfully be linked to distinct developmental mechanisms. Fluctuating patterns pointed towards periods of instability (or crisis), during which youth appeared more sensitive to external stressors, and which typically marked the start of recovery. Whereas the worsening of youths' problems typically occurred fast, recovery was a much slower process which required an autonomy-supported living environment, psychological interventions, and/or changes in youths' school or living environment. We call for an interaction-based approach to diagnosis and care, in which psychological suffering is understood in the light of a person's history and developmental context.

Innovative Approaches to Contact in Child Protection

Innovative Approaches to Contact in Child Protection

Thursday, 11th September: Innovative Approaches to Contact in Child Protection - Symposium - In-person

Dr. Isabel M. Bernedo [1]

1. *Universidad de Málaga*

This symposium shows different developments in progress innovative approaches that are being carried out in Spain with the aim of offering the possibility of living and sharing in a family for children who are in Child Protection System (non-kinship foster care, collaborating families, and living with a family for a school year). In Spain, the current legislation on child and adolescent protection (Law 26/2015, of 28th July, on modifications to the child and adolescent protection system) prioritizes family protection measures over residential ones. Also highlights the importance of maintaining contact with their family of origin.

During the period of protection, most children maintain visits and contact with their families; however, little is known about the nature and impact of this contact. The research presented in this symposium aims to highlight how family is relevant in children's development and well-being, taking into account the type of protective measure and the characteristics of these contacts. One of these innovative approaches (Bernedo and colleagues) explores contact and visits in non-kinship foster care, revealing the urgent need to improve the quality of contacts and visits, as well as to strengthen the support provided to families. In relation with this need, the research group design the first and unique psychoeducational programme in Spain to improve the quality of visits "*Visits: a context for family development*". This programme works parental, educational and emotional competencies related to contact, conflict resolution skills, optimise the quality of the interactions, and to improve the collaborative relationship between birth and foster families. The *Collaborating Family program* (León and colleagues) is another innovative approach which allows children and adolescents in protection centers to share leisure time with families during weekends, holidays, or vacations. The main aims are to enable young people to participate in alternative activities that are different from those of the protection center; to expand their social support network with significant adults who offer them individualized treatment; to provide them with an environment where they learn to interact in a healthy way and live together as a family; and to ensure that they establish healthy emotional bonds with their collaborating families. Finally, another innovative approach that is currently emerging is "*Living with a Family for a School Year*" (Fuentes and colleagues). It is an innovative temporary foster care project implemented in Madrid (Spain). It offers children living in residential care centers the opportunity to live with a family during the school year. The aim is to provide them with a stable, supportive, and enriching family environment, while also offering host families first experience of fostering, encouraging them to consider becoming long-term foster carers. Additionally, the program seeks to raise awareness about foster care among professionals and the broader community.

All presentations will highlight the type of protective measure involved (non-kinship foster care, collaborating families, and living with a family for a school year), the innovative nature of each resource, and the central importance of the relationship between children in child protection and their families of origin.

Innovative Approaches to Contact in Child Protection - Contact in Non-kinship Foster Care: A Pathway to improve Family Development

Thursday, 11th September: Innovative Approaches to Contact in Child Protection - Oral

Dr. Isabel M. Bernedo [1], ***Dr. Lucía González-Pasarín*** [2], ***Ms. Ana Yira Osorio Z.*** [1], ***Dr. Antonio Urbano Contreras*** [3], ***Dr. Jesús Oliver Pece*** [4]

1. *Universidad de Málaga,* ***2.*** *Universitat de Lleida,* ***3.*** *University of Oviedo,* ***4.*** *University of Comillas*

In accordance with both international and national legislation, children who have been removed from their birth families have the right to maintain contact with them, if it is beneficial for the child. Its main aim is to preserve or strengthen the relationship and emotional bond, but it also plays a crucial role in shaping the personal and family history of the fostered child, thereby contributing to their identity development. Scientific literature highlights that when these contacts are not appropriately managed and incidents occur, they can have negative effects on the child. To ensure that these family meetings are as beneficial as possible for all parties involved, it is first necessary to understand their characteristics. This understanding will facilitate the implementation of improvement plans within organisations responsible for managing these contacts and providing support to children, birth families and foster families.

This communication takes part of a R&D project (PID2022-141337NB-I00). The aim is to present an overview of the state of contact between birth families and children and adolescents placed in non-kinship foster care in the region of Málaga (Andalusia, Spain), who may be potential beneficiaries of a programme designed to enhance the quality of these contacts. This programme, *Visits: A Context for Family Development* (Bernedo et al., 2020, 2024), is the first of its kind designed in Spain and is aimed at both birth and foster families with children aged between 5 - 12 years. The study presents the characteristics of the fostered children, the relatives who visit them, and the nature of the contact between them.

The sample consists of 46 children in non-kinship foster care, who have supervised or unsupervised visits. Data collection was conducted using a sociodemographic data form with the support of professionals from two foster care agencies in the region. The results indicate that the children are placed in permanent foster care in more proportions, with an average duration of 4.45 years in the child protection system. The primary reason for placement was neglect. Regarding contact, both parents do not visit together, with the mother being the main figure with whom the child maintains contact. In general, these contacts typically take the form of supervised face-to-face visits on a monthly or fortnightly basis, with a low frequency of phone or video calls. Nevertheless, when the relationship is with siblings, contact is usually unsupervised and more flexible in terms of frequency. The findings, in line with previous literature, illustrate that the mother remains the main figure in these contacts. This underscores the need to engage fathers from the outset of the child protection process and throughout the contact arrangements. Despite the various options currently available to maintain communication, face-to-face visits continue to be the predominant mode. While this is ideal for fostering emotional bonds, complementing them with phone or video calls, could be encouraged, particularly when face-to-face visits are infrequent. This situation may reflect the reluctance of responsible organisations to promote alternative forms of contact, which may be more challenging to supervise or manage effectively.

Innovative Approaches to Contact in Child Protection - Contacts in the short-term innovative program “Living with a Family for a School Year”

Thursday, 11th September: Innovative Approaches to Contact in Child Protection - Oral

Prof. Nuria Fuentes-Peláez [1], ***Ms. Valeria Soto Gómez*** [1], ***Dr. Ainoa Mateos*** [1], ***Dr. Lorena Maneiro*** [2], ***Dr. Julio Rodríguez Rodríguez*** [1]

1. *Universitat de Barcelona,* ***2.*** *Universidade de Santiago de Compostela*

Introduction: “Living with a Family for a School Year” (LFSY) is an innovative temporary foster care project implemented in Madrid (Spain) and promoted by the foster care family association ASEAF. It offers children in residential centres the opportunity to live with a family during the school year. The aim is to provide a stable, supportive, and enriching family environment, while also giving foster care families their first experience of fostering and encouraging them to consider long-term care. The programme also raises awareness about foster care among professionals and the wider community, and promotes community participation through collaboration between residential centres, foster care services, and family associations.

Aims: to describe the nature of contact and visits between children and their families of origin within the LFSY programme, as well as to identify the perceived benefits and challenges from the perspectives of those involved.

Sample and Methods: A mixed-methods design was used, collecting data with interviews and questionnaires. 27 children and adolescents in residential care, 26 foster care families, and 14 residential care centres. Descriptive statistical analysis and content analyses were conducted.

Results: 69.5% had been in the child protection system for more than three years, and 65.2% were experiencing foster care for the first time thanks to LFSY. Almost all the children and adolescents participating in LFSY have contact with their birth families during LFSY. Seventy-five percent of the participants had contact with two or more family members, including mothers, fathers, siblings, or other relatives (n = 4). Most visits took place either in the residential centre or at designated meeting points and did not include overnight stays. These visits included both supervised and unsupervised contact.

The findings reveal both challenges and benefits perceived by the stakeholders involved. Key challenges include: a) negative impacts on children when birth families make unfulfilled promises, leading to visits being perceived as a burden or creating unrealistic reunification expectations that affect their adaptation to the foster care family; b) loyalty conflicts experienced by children due to bonds formed with the foster family; and c) difficulties in supporting children in navigating complex relationships with their families of origin.

On the positive side: a) improved relationships and stronger emotional ties with birth families; b) emotional relief for children and their families as visits evolve and roles become clearer, fostering a more positive dynamic; c) support from foster families in helping children prepare for and process visits; and d) regular, flexible contact (including phone calls and messages) that helps maintain relationships and reduces feelings of separation.

I**mplications and Conclusions:** The LSFY programme shows strong potential to support the deinstitutionalisation of children in residential care and strengthen ties with their families of origin. All stakeholders’ perspectives highlight the complexity of these interactions and the need for coordination. The importance of supporting both children and foster families during visits to help manage emotions and expectations, and the open communication between foster families and professionals, was considered the key to effective contacts.

Innovative Approaches to Contact in Child Protection - Contacts between children and adolescents in residential care with Collaborating Families and their birth families

Thursday, 11th September: Innovative Approaches to Contact in Child Protection - Oral

Dr. Esperanza León [1], ***Dr. Nuria Molano*** [1], ***Ms. Elizabeth Espinosa López*** [1], ***Ms. Laura Belmonte Toro*** [1]

1. *Universidad de Sevilla*

Previous research on residential and foster care has analyzed the contacts of children in care with their birth families and related them to other key variables. However, little is known about these contacts in the cases of children and adolescents in residential care with a collaborating family. The Collaborating Families program involves adults who commit to share specific periods of time, such as weekends, holidays and/or vacations, with a child or adolescent who is residing in a protection center. This resource allows children and adolescents to counteract the negative consequences of prolonged residence in a protection center. The main objective of this paper is to present data from the first study (Five consecutive projects: 3284/0926, 3527/0926, 3803/0926, 4138/0926 y 4518/0926) carried out in Andalusia, a region in the south of Spain, on this program, focusing on the descriptive and comparative analysis of the assessment of these contacts from the perspective of the different informants.

The sample is composed of 185 participants. Specifically, 37 children and adolescents in residential care with their 37 collaborating families, their 37 residential caregivers, as well as a comparison group of 37 peers without collaborating families and their 37 residential caregivers. Within a broader battery of instruments, the results of this paper are extracted from the sociodemographic data sheets and semi-structured interviews applied to all informants. The data of the collaborating families were collected at home, and those of the children and adolescents and the professionals at the protection centers.

Most children and adolescents studied had contact with their parents, and mostly with their mother. These contacts were very heterogeneous in terms of type, place, frequency and duration. Focusing on the rating of contacts, the perception of the different informants was similar for both the group with collaborating families and the comparison group. In general, it was found that the different informants had a better perception of children's and adolescents' contact with their mothers than with their fathers, although the differences were not statistically significant.

Many of the collaborating families and, especially, the children and adolescents in both groups rated the contacts with parents positively. Furthermore, the perception of residential caregivers was not as positive. When comparing the assessments of the different informants with respect to the contacts, differences were found. Thus, it was the children in both groups who best value contact with their parents, compared to the perception of their residential caregivers and compared to that of their collaborating families.

In addition, there were significant correlations between the rating of contacts with parents and satisfaction with collaboration, both from the perspective of collaborating families and residential caregivers. These latter results reaffirm the importance and impact of contacts on family collaboration, as well as the need to intervene and adjust contacts for the benefit of minors.

These pioneering results on the innovative Collaborating Families resource allow us to have a broader and more positive knowledge about this program, by examining the assessment of contacts, providing us with strengths and weaknesses with important implications for practice.

Innovative Approaches to Contact in Child Protection - Collaborating families: In-depth analysis of contacts between adolescents in residential care and their birth families

Thursday, 11th September: Innovative Approaches to Contact in Child Protection - Oral

Ms. Laura Belmonte Toro [1], ***Dr. Esperanza León*** [1], ***Dr. Lucía González-Pasarín*** [2], ***Dr. Isabel M. Bernedo*** [3], ***Dr. Nuria Molano*** [1], ***Ms. Ana Yira Osorio Z.*** [3]

1. *Universidad de Sevilla,* ***2.*** *Universitat de Lleida,* ***3.*** *Universidad de Málaga*

The scientific literature shows the negative consequences of institutionalisation on the well-being of children and adolescents. In order to mitigate them, in Spain, programmes complementary to residential care have been developed, as the Collaborating Families. This is an innovative initiative involving families who agree to share specific periods of time, such as weekends or/and holidays with children in residential care. This programme is still largely unknown at the national and international level. When children and adolescents are separated from their families, they continue to maintain contact with their birth families, especially when they are in residential care. Such contact, while beneficial, can also be a source of difficulties. In general, both Collaborating Families and birth families contact are positive for children's well-being, but to our knowledge there is no research that explores these family resources in depth and together.

This communication first presents the new research project funded by the Fundación la Caixa (CX23-00125), which is being carried out in the region of Andalusia (Spain) by the University of Seville, the University of Malaga, and the "Crecer con Futuro" agency. The main objective of this research is to analyse the well-being of children and adolescents in care with collaborating families that maintain contact with their birth family. The methodological design allows for in-depth analysis through a mixed approach (quantitative and qualitative), multi-level and a multi-informant perspective. In addition, data are being collected through a wide range of instruments, including semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups with the different informants.

Secondly, a picture of the percentage and characteristics of contacts between adolescents in residential care, participating in the Collaborating Families program, and their birth families is presented, based on preliminary data. Thus, the sample of the present communication is composed of 254 participants, specifically 82 young people in residential care, in addition to their 80 collaborating families (there are two pairs of siblings with the same Collaborating Family), their 82 residential caregivers in the protection centre and 10 birth families.

Preliminary results indicated that the majority maintained contact with their birth families. On the one hand, more than half had weekly telephone contact, followed by bimonthly face-to-face contact. The mother was the most present member in face-to-face visits and in telephone contacts, although when the child in care had siblings, they were a frequent contact too. Other relatives, such as the father, grandmothers and aunts maintained contact, but less frequently. Regarding the possible relationships between the birth family and collaborating family and the perception that both families had about contacts, we found differences on a continuum from families who already knew each other, families who did not know each other but would like to, and families who did not perceive the benefit but would be willing to do so if it were beneficial for the child or adolescent.

These preliminary findings point to challenges and opportunities in relationship analysis and intervention to improve interactions between the participants involved, especially between the two families and the adolescents.

Addressing child sexual exploitation in residential care

Addressing child sexual exploitation in residential care - Sexual exploitation of children in prostitution and traumatic symptoms in emerging adulthood: Empirical evidence from a longitudinal study

Friday, 12th September: Addressing child sexual exploitation in residential care - Oral

Prof. Nadine Lanctôt [1], ***Dr. Maeva Genin*** [1]

1. *Université de Sherbrooke*

CONTEXT: The sexual exploitation of children in prostitution (SECP) constitutes a severe form of child maltreatment associated with contexts and relationships that are degrading and threatening to the young person's physical and psychological integrity (Schnur et al., 2020). This form of exploitation refers to any sexual act performed by a minor where an individual or a group takes advantage of the young person's limited resources given their social, economic, or emotional vulnerabilities. In these abusive situations, sex is traded for money or other types of compensation including shelter, food, or drugs (Hickle & Roe-Sepowitz, 2018; O'Brien et al., 2017; Reid, 2018). Recent research has shown SECP to be particularly prevalent among female adolescents in residential care settings, ranging from 54% to 62% (Lanctôt et al., 2020; Hickle & Roe-Sepowitz, 2018; Reid, 2018), compared to rates of 1% to 6% among female adolescents in the general population (Lavoie et al., 2010; Svedin & Priebe, 2007). Despite the high rates of SECP observed among female adolescents in residential care, research focusing on the consequences of SECP on their psychosocial development and treatment needs is scarce. Much of the research examining the impact of involvement into prostitution on emotional, relational and identity development has been conducted with samples of adult women. Moreover, these studies are mostly based on retrospective and explorative qualitative designs, underscoring the clear lack of prospective studies on the subject (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2000; Sallmann, 2010).

OBJECTIVE: Our study aims to fill the gap in knowledge by providing data on the developmental impact of SECP on diverse traumatic symptoms. The specific objective is to assess whether, and to what extent, sexual exploitation in prostitution during adolescence predicted different traumatic symptoms in emerging adulthood, while considering the possible confounding effects of child maltreatment.

METHOD: Data were gathered in a broader longitudinal study conducted among a sample of 124 female adolescents placed in residential youth care centers. SECP was self-reported during adolescence (mean age = 15,4 years old). Traumatic symptoms were self-reported in emerging adulthood (mean age = 19.1 years old) with the Trauma symptoms Inventory (Briere, 2011). Participant history of child maltreatment was assessed retrospectively using the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ; Bernstein et al., 2003). Hierarchical regressions were performed to test the predictive role of SECP on young women's symptoms, while accounting for the effect of child maltreatment experiences.

FINDINGS: Findings suggest that, even after accounting for the significant effects of confounding variables, SECP increases specific vulnerabilities pertaining to emotional, identity and relational development.

IMPLICATIONS: Our study adds to the literature by highlighting the unique influence of sexual exploitation experiences among vulnerable female adolescents on their transition to young adulthood. Our results highlight the crucial need to support young women with a history of SECP in building and strengthening their own identity and agency, developing trusting relationships and recognizing their emotions.

Addressing child sexual exploitation in residential care - Insights from scientific monitoring

Friday, 12th September: Addressing child sexual exploitation in residential care - Oral

Ms. Vanessa Fournier [1]

1. *Centre de recherche universitaire sur les jeunes et les familles (CRUJeF)*

In 2018, the Government of Quebec published a national action plan aimed at strengthening prevention and intervention strategies for youth who run away from residential care. This plan highlighted the increased risk these young people face regarding sexual exploitation and emphasized that a key strategy to combat this issue is to deepen our understanding of it through active and systematic monitoring of the growing body of knowledge on child sexual exploitation.

Building on these recommendations, the *Centre de recherche universitaire sur les jeunes et les familles* established a scientific monitoring initiative on child sexual exploitation in 2020. Scientific monitoring refers to the systematic and continuous tracking, analysis, and synthesis of research findings on a specific topic, ensuring that knowledge remains up to date and that best practices are identified and implemented. This structured and automated process has enabled the team to collect over 650 scientific papers published in recent years worldwide, creating a vast and easily accessible database. These papers cover a wide range of themes related to the phenomenon, including risk and protective factors, the effectiveness of prevention and intervention strategies, online sexual offending, and more. The database now serves as a valuable resource for guiding new research projects and responding to the needs of practitioners, for example, by informing the revision of professional training programs.

One of the key outcomes of this initiative has been the development of a knowledge dissemination tool designed for both the scientific community and professionals in the healthcare, social services, education and law enforcement sectors. Drawing from the latest international studies and synthesizing them in an accessible way, this tool has been widely welcomed and has become a key resource in Quebec.

This presentation will introduce participants to the development of scientific monitoring and its relevance from both scientific and clinical perspectives. Additionally, the resulting knowledge dissemination tool will be briefly presented.

Addressing child sexual exploitation in residential care – Preventing involvement in pimping among adjudicated youth

Friday, 12th September: Addressing child sexual exploitation in residential care - Oral

Dr. Mathilde Turcotte [1], ***Ms. Nathalie Gélinas*** [1]

1. *Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté*

Context: Concerted and coordinated efforts to prevent the sexual exploitation of adolescents placed in residential care must also target youth at risk of involvement as pimps or sex traffickers (Rizo et al., 2023). While research on risk factors and motivations for involvement in pimping is in its infancy, we know that the age of onset is typically around 17 years old (Barrick et al., 2024). We also know that victims and exploiters share important socio-economic vulnerabilities (Gatwiri et al., 2020). However, at this stage, no promising practice for this specific clientele has been evaluated. Practitioners and researchers must therefore rely on a few studies on perpetrators of sexual exploitation and the "what works" literature for adolescent offenders to develop new services.

Objectives: The objectives of the current paper are twofold. The first is to present the theoretical foundations of a project – project ACTES – that aims to prevent the implication of adjudicated adolescent males in sexual exploitation as pimps or sex traffickers. The second is to report on some of the preliminary findings of a process evaluation of project ACTES in Montreal, Canada.

Methods: The current paper draws on two main sources of data: 1) a scoping review of 51 studies on the characteristics and criminal pathways of individuals involved in pimping; 2) the subjective appreciations and self-reported changes in attitudes of some adolescents who were exposed to project ACTES (n=12).

Findings: Findings from the scoping review highlight the role of family members in the initiation of adolescent males in sexual exploitation (as the exploiters) (Dank et al., 2014; Horning et al., 2019). As a form of criminal activities, pimping does not appear to carry high legal risks (Bouché & Shady, 2017), but do not necessarily generate high rewards either (Horning et al., 2020; Marcus et al., 2016). This literature also strongly suggests that stigma (or fear of being rejected by loved ones) is perhaps the most promising lever for change at the disposal of practitioners (Horning et al., 2022). Indeed, by betting on the potential consequences of involvement in pimping as deterrents, project ACTES appear to be associated with changes in attitudes regarding the exploitative aspects of sex work involving minors and vulnerable persons in general.

Conclusions/implications: While the evaluation of project ACTES is only starting, the findings must be documented and discussed. Currently, we lack crucial knowledge regarding both the individuals who decide to get involved in child sexual exploitation as pimps or sex traffickers, as well as the approaches, tools and strategies that could prevent this involvement. Our research, that combines insights from the literature on pimps and from at-risk adolescents exposed to program ACTES, is therefore a first step in the development of much needed services to address child sexual exploitation in residential care on multiple fronts.

Addressing child sexual exploitation in residential care - Intervening with clients to combat sexual exploitation

Friday, 12th September: Addressing child sexual exploitation in residential care - Symposium - In-person

Mr. Denis Lafortune [1]

1. *Université de Montréal*

The fight against sexual exploitation necessarily involves intervening with clients. Male demand is a central driving force in this market. A scoping study carried out in 2024-2025 aimed to identify emerging and promising interventions aimed at current or potential clients. The review examined the characteristics of published studies, the intervention strategies put forward and the evidence supporting their effectiveness.

The EBSCO and ProQuest databases were searched using keywords relating to sexual exploitation and interventions with clients. The search targeted scientific publications published between 1995 and 2023. Out of 2,160 initial results, 43 studies were selected after applying the inclusion criteria.

The interventions identified fall into seven main strategies: a) awareness campaigns and universal prevention; b) targeted prevention programs; c) criminalization and repression; d) alternative measures (John Schools); e) harm reduction approach; f) restorative justice and g) use of new technologies. This presentation will focus on the first two.

Comprehensive awareness and prevention campaigns aimed at the general public seek to change perceptions and behaviors related to prostitution and sexual exploitation. Some seek to arouse emotions such as guilt, shame or empathy in order to dissuade potential buyers. Others seek to deconstruct the idea of free choice and reduce the social acceptability of prostitution. However, these messages can also generate a feeling of stigmatization in potential clients and reinforce the rationalization of their behavior. They also tend to simplify reality by pitting “predatory” clients against “victimized and traumatized” prostitutes, thus obscuring the diversity of experiences.

Targeted prevention programs are relatively rare. One of the few identified is the Curriculum for High Risk Male Youth tested in the United States in a juvenile detention center. It aims to prevent the involvement of young men in sexual exploitation by making them aware of their potential role as victims, pimps or clients. Its interactive and participatory approach combines presentations, discussions, survivor testimonials and interventions by professionals (police officers, doctors, social workers).

The effectiveness of universal prevention campaigns and more targeted programs remains difficult to establish, due to a lack of rigorous evaluations. Most impact studies focus on perceptions and attitudes rather than actual behaviors. Some interventions have demonstrated their ability to change the perception of the purchase of sexual services, but their proven impact on demand remains highly uncertain. Furthermore, guilt-inducing, divisive and clearly moralizing messages can have the opposite effect by reinforcing clients’ rationalizations, leading them to reject any questioning of their practices.

To be more effective, prevention campaigns and programs should be tailored to different client profiles, a group now recognized as heterogeneous. While some seek an emotional connection, others are influenced by stereotypical norms of masculinity, and still others view the purchase of sexual services as a simple transaction devoid of any moral implications.

Addressing child sexual exploitation in residential care - Innovative pathways to healing

Friday, 12th September: Addressing child sexual exploitation in residential care - Oral

Ms. Roxane Perrin-Plouffe [1], ***Prof. Nadine Lanctôt*** [1]

1. *Université de Sherbrooke*

Context: Sexual exploitation is a severe form of sexual violence, leading to multiple adverse outcomes for victims, including risks of re-victimization, social exclusion, and trauma (Cole et al., 2016; Lanctôt et al., 2021). Adolescent girls in residential care are particularly at risk (Lanctôt et al., 2018; O'Brien et al., 2017; Reid, 2018). Multiple adversities, such as disrupted attachment histories, prior maltreatment, and cumulative trauma, often add to their vulnerability (Hickle et al., 2018; Reid & Piquero, 2014). This intersection results in profound psychological challenges that are not sufficiently addressed by existing care systems (Lanctôt et al., 2021). Despite their complex needs, interventions for these young people tend to focus narrowly on immediate protection and risk management - often at the expense of their long-term recovery, resilience, and well-being (Farooq et al., 2021). This concern is heightened by the limited integration of scientific knowledge in program implementation, increasing the risk of ineffective interventions (Graham et al., 2019).

Objective: This presentation reports on a scoping review aimed at identifying the most promising psychosocial intervention programs that promote positive developmental outcomes for adolescent victims of sexual exploitation, particularly those living in residential care. This review addresses a critical gap in child welfare practice by properly situating the current state of knowledge and highlighting emerging promising programs. Levers and barriers to intervention are also examined.

Methods: Following the PRISMA-ScR guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018), an extensive literature search was conducted across ten databases. Inclusion criteria targeted peer-reviewed scientific publications, written in English or French, published between 2013 and 2023, focusing on psychosocial intervention programs designed for young people aged 12 to 18 who are, or have been, sexually exploited. 4774 results were screened using Covidence software, which facilitates a two-stage screening process with interrater agreement. Ultimately, 21 studies were selected for in-depth analysis.

Findings: Findings reveal five main types of psychosocial interventions: psychoeducational programs (n = 5), trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapies (n = 8), narrative therapy (n = 1), peer mentoring programs (n = 2), and arts- and movement-based programs (n = 5). Key components of these programs are highlighted, including their theoretical approach, intervention objectives, themes and activities, professionals involved, and demonstrated outcomes. This review provides valuable theoretical insights into different approaches, contents, and modalities, offering useful guidance for the development and implementation of future intervention programs. Drawing on innovative practices, six essential components for effective therapeutic interventions are proposed. These elements are inspired by the Trauma Recovery Program at the Agape Restoration Center, Cambodia (Johnson, 2020), which builds on a modified version of trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, specifically adapted to address sexual exploitation (TF-CBT, Cohen et al., 2017).

Implications: Several recommendations emerge from this synthesis, offering valuable insights for practitioners, researchers, and policymakers aiming to enhance therapeutic care in residential settings. Ultimately, addressing this issue requires innovative, evidence-based, and holistic approaches that move beyond protection to promote healing, inclusion, and sustainable well-being. Crucial interpersonal skills are also needed to intervene without judgment, foster trust, and create a safe and supportive environment.

Nordic kinship care

Nordic kinship care - Kinship Care in Norwegian Child Welfare: Exploring Practices and Policies Through Empirical Studies

Friday, 12th September: Nordic kinship care - Symposium - In-person

Dr. Tina Gerdts-Andresen [1], ***Ms. Anne Svalastog*** [2], ***Ms. Kristina Jæger Meyer*** [3], ***Prof. Renee Thørnblad*** [3], ***Dr. Jeanette Skoglund*** [3]

1. *Oslo Metropolitan University,* ***2.*** *University of Stavanger,* ***3.*** *UiT The Arctic University of Norway*

Introduction

Kinship care, where children are placed with extended family members or close network connections, is increasingly recognized as a valuable alternative to traditional foster care. Internationally, kinship care is categorized as either public (state-supervised) or private (arranged without state involvement), with further distinctions between formal and informal placements. In Norway, kinship care is one of several foster care options within the child welfare system and has become a policy priority in recent years. While research over the past 25 years has explored various aspects of kinship care, findings remain dispersed across studies.

Method

This study presents a state-of-the-art review of Norwegian research on kinship care, synthesizing findings from 36 studies published between 2002 and 2025. The material includes journal articles, book chapters, dissertations, and government-funded research reports. Studies were included if they addressed kinship care in a Norwegian context, either empirically or conceptually. The analysis addresses two dimensions: (1) mapping of overarching themes and research interests found across the literature, including studies that discuss Norwegian policy and practice in a comparative or theoretical perspective, and (2) synthesizing empirical findings from studies examining how kinship care functions within the Norwegian child welfare system. A thematic mapping approach was used to identify and organize recurring patterns.

Findings

Core areas of interest within Norwegian kinship care research include the intersection between private family obligations and public child welfare roles, children's sense of belonging and ambivalence, and the role of biological parents and contact arrangements. Researchers have also examined placement stability, support needs, and how social inequality and gender shape who becomes a kinship foster carer. More recent studies highlight policy development, cultural and relational continuity, and the positioning of kinship care within the broader foster care system. The research frames kinship care to family duty, structural inequality, and professional discretion.

Empirical findings from the reviewed studies cluster around five main themes: (1) Placement context and decision-making: Kinship care is often initiated in acute situations, shaped by urgency and family obligation. (2) Stability and relational continuity: Children experience stable placements, often within their local communities and with familiar caregivers. (3) Children's lived experiences: While many feel safe and cared for, they also express ambivalence about burdening relatives or disrupting family dynamics. (4) Kinship carers' perspectives: Carers report strong commitment and meaning in their role, but also isolation, unclear expectations, and responsibility for managing birth parent contact. (5) Systemic conditions and participation: Kinship carers receive less support, lower approval rates, and fewer services. Children's views are inconsistently documented, and their participation in decisions remains limited.

Conclusion and Implications

This state-of-the-art review consolidates two decades of Norwegian research on kinship care, highlighting consistent patterns and focus variations. The literature demonstrates that kinship care can support stability, continuity, and close relationships, yet findings also highlight ambivalence, uneven support, and unclear role ex-

pectations. While children's and carers' experiences are relatively well explored, further research is needed to follow up on known variations and to address gaps related to network placements, informal care, and minority perspectives.

Nordic kinship care – Kinship foster care as placement alternative in cases of lethal domestic violence in Sweden.

Friday, 12th September: Nordic kinship care - Oral

Dr. Lina Ponnert [1]

1. *Lund University, School of social work*

The aim of this presentation is to discuss social workers' ideas of kinship foster care and non-long-term placement due to lethal violence in the family. Although lethal violence is rare, how social workers reason in cases of homicidal violence puts different professional accounts on its edge and can shed light of the interpretation of law in practice and the assessment of children's need in the immediate and further placement in these cases. The discussion departs from a Swedish context. In Sweden, placement in kinship foster care shall always be considered according to the social services act since 1999. What is in the best interests of the child shall however be decisive. In a new legal proposal, it suggested to be mandatory for social workers to assess persons in the child's network who want to become foster parents.

The presentation departs from a previously conducted research project on social workers' assessments of children in need of an immediate and long-term placement due to lethal violence in the family. The study is based on group six group interviews with 14 Swedish social workers conducted. Various legal assessment that needed to be assessed along the child's placement were discussed in the interviews, as the legal basis for the placement (voluntary or compulsory care), choice of foster home (kinship care or non-kinship care) and social workers' perceptions and assessments of custody transfer to foster cares. The interviews departed from two fictive vignettes of lethal violence between the parents, resulting in the death of one parent and the other parent being incarcerated, and where relatives were willing to become foster parents. The vignettes were divided into three phases, corresponding to different part of the decision-making process: decisions regarding the immediate care decision (phase one), choice of long-term placement (phase two) and finally, assessing if a change in custody was needed (phase three).

The results showed how social workers' reasoning were related to an overall ambition to provide stability thorough existing relations, and three discourses called "a real family", "emotional kinship care" and neutral foster care" and struggles between these. The emotional attachment and involvement of kinship cares could be assessed as either promoting or as hindering a child perspective and the child's access to existing family relations in cases of lethal violence, also depending on how social workers assessed the children's need for having a regular contact with the violent parent. In addition, assessments on placement amongst relatives were linked to further assessments of the need for a custody transfer. The results are discussed in relation to recent legal proposals on violence and kinship care in Sweden.

Nordic kinship care: Six reasons why the proportion of kinship and network foster care is higher in Norway than Denmark

Friday, 12th September: Nordic kinship care - Oral

Dr. Jeanette Skoglund [1], ***Prof. Renee Thørnblad*** [1]

1. *UiT The Arctic University of Norway*

Background/aim

In the past decades, the implementation of regulations and legislation, which encourage the use of formal kinship and network care, has taken place in many countries. Yet, the proportion seems to vary greatly, also between countries often regarded as similar. Denmark and Norway are examples of this. In 2021, 33% of children in foster care lived in kinship and network care compared to 13% in Denmark. In a recently published paper, explored the following question; Why is the proportion of kinship and network care significantly different in these two countries? In our presentation we present six reasons why the proportion of kinship and network foster care is higher in Norway compared to Denmark.

Method

The paper is a qualitative analysis of the historical development of CWS in both countries, with particular attention to the last 20 years. We have examined policy, legislation, professional guidance, organisational structures, the training, and practices of professionals, as well as statistics for both countries. In line with the interpretivist tradition, our aim has been to get a deeper understanding of differences in frequency and utilisation of kinship care, rather than search for 'mechanical causality' .The analytical process can be described as abductive in the sense that we started with a puzzle and searched for possible explanations 'that would render the surprise less surprising'.

Findings:

On the basis of our analysis, we find it reasonable to argue that the proportion of kinship and network foster care is higher in Norway than Denmark because:

1. Norwegian child welfare services (CWS) rely more on the use of foster care (rather than residential care), creating also a bigger need for foster care placements.
2. The Norwegian CWS authorities have taken active steps in increasing the involvement of children's family networks in general, and the goal of increasing the number of kinship and network care placements has been made explicit. We cannot find similar examples of activity from the Danish context.
3. Norwegian CWS seem to be more "forced" to find kinship and network foster homes. Norway has a stronger and more centralised management through less exercise of autonomy in discretion which has implications for CWS in the municipalities and the individual social worker regarding the choice of type of foster home. Moreover, Norwegian social workers might be more thorough in assessing and involving the child's relatives and network as they need judicial board approval for placement transfers.
4. Norwegian CWS seem to be more obedient in relation to the regulations set by child welfare services.
5. Norway has a more CWS-specialized educational program for bachelor students where resource-oriented approaches and perspectives where the inclusion of children's families and networks is understood as important.
6. In Norwegian, unlike Denmark, kinship and network foster families have the same status and receive the same financial support as other foster homes.

Conclsuion:

Unlike previous research we describe significant differences between Norwegian and Danish CWS. Implications will be discussed.

Nordic kinship care - Challenges and opportunities for professionals working with kinship and network foster care

Friday, 12th September: Nordic kinship care - Oral

Mrs. stinne Tornøe Frederiksen [1], ***Dr. Anthon Sand Jørgensen*** [2], ***Dr. Bo Morthorst Rasmussen*** [3], ***Dr. Lise Jönsson Koumaditis*** [1], ***Ms. Charlotte Ørnskov*** [3], ***Ms. Sabina Jensen Jæger*** [3], ***Dr. Lene Mosegaard Søbjerg*** [1]

1. *VIA University College,* ***2.*** *UCN,* ***3.*** *UC SYD*

Background

Kinship and network foster care has gained international attention in recent decades, both in research and increased usage. Despite the increased focus, previous research indicates that social work practice lacks the necessary knowledge and tools to support kinship and network foster care. Danish research also points to several challenges for social workers in planning, deciding, and implementing high-quality kinship and network foster care placements.

In this study, we investigate social work to identify challenges in social work and explore opportunities to enhance kinship and network foster care. More specifically, we examine practices of professionals involved in kinship and network foster care, identify the challenges and opportunities they encounter before the placement decision, during the matching process, and in the first year following the placement.

Methods

The study is primarily based on qualitative data from interviews with social workers (n=20) and participant observations (11 hours) of social workers supporting kinship care families and working with network foster care across six Danish municipalities. Additionally, it includes interviews with biological parents (n=4), new primary caregivers (n=6), and young adults (n=3) who, as children, were placed. Interviews of social workers, in a few cases, contain references to the same families within the six different municipalities included in the project. The remaining thirteen interviews focus on other children in kinship care across Denmark.

Conclusions and implications

Our preliminary findings indicate that challenges for social workers particularly arise before the placement decision is made, due to insufficient and delayed involvement of the child's network. This influences the likelihood of a kinship and network foster care placement, affects the matching process, and can present challenges during the first year of the placement.

Regarding the municipalities' matching process, social workers experience some uncertainty about the approval of kinship and network foster care families. We identify a strong focus on the mentalization abilities of foster care families, with less attention given to the conditions and context of the role.

Our preliminary findings indicate a lack of coherence and coordination between social workers and other professionals involved in supporting in kinship and network foster care. In many cases, there is an absence of formalized meetings that bring together all relevant stakeholders to discuss the specific kinship care arrangement. Such a lack of systematic collaboration increases the risk of delayed identification and intervention in emerging challenges, thereby undermining the capacity to provide timely and effective support to the child, the biological family, and the kinship or network caregivers. Given the typically higher number of actors involved in kinship care compared to traditional foster care, the need for robust coordination mechanisms becomes even more crucial.

Overall, our preliminary findings indicate that social workers perceive their role in kinship and network foster care to differ from that of working with formal foster care. This difference is evident in their stronger need for coordination between professionals and the network, as well as navigating new family dynamics, which presents both opportunities and challenges for all.

Nordic kinship care – Informal Kinship Care Experiences in Greenland and Denmark: A Comparative Study

Friday, 12th September: Nordic kinship care - Oral

Dr. Bonnie Jensen [1], ***Dr. Bo Morthorst Rasmussen*** [2]

1. *Ilisimatusarfik,* ***2.*** *UCSYD*

Background, Theoretical Framework, and Research Questions

This research project investigates historical and contemporary practices concerning informal kinship care arrangements in Greenland and Denmark.

Historically, families and social networks have taken responsibility for children when parents were unable to provide care. In both countries there is a social service requirement that informal kinship care exceeding three months must be formally approved, but there is no knowledge of the actual extent. This study explores the extent and experiences of informal kinship care among adults previously in kinship care in Greenland and Denmark. Through comparative analysis we explore the underlying cultural and personal aspects of informal kinship care with the aim of providing new knowledge about this almost invisible aspect of social work with children.

Methods

The data collection combines quantitative and qualitative methods across both countries. The quantitative aspect consists of telephone surveys conducted with 1,000 randomly selected participants in each country asking the question: "Have you lived more than 3 months with family and network, without the involvement of social authorities?" While the surveys share the common objective of investigating informal kinship care, they have been tailored to reflect the distinct socio-cultural landscapes of Greenland and Denmark.

To complement the quantitative data, qualitative interviews (n=8) were conducted to offer deeper insights into the lived experiences of adults who grew up in informal kinship care. Participants provided data on childhood experiences with kinship care, duration, nature, and effects for the children of these arrangements. Our comparative analysis focuses on several key dimensions: the extent of informal kinship care, the demographics of those involved (age, education, and geography), the reasons for informal kindship care, and the long-term impact on individuals' lives.

Findings

Preliminary findings indicate that informal kinship care exists in both Greenland and Denmark. However, significant differences exist regarding extent, characteristics, and the experiences of those involved. The research highlights that many kinship care are informally arranged and informal kinship care remains an essential support system in both Denmark and Greenland but manifests differently due to variations in social welfare structures, cultural perceptions of family obligations, and historical experiences with childcare.

These findings contribute to a broader understanding of both formal and informal kinship care's role in child welfare. They provide valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners working to support children and families navigating these care arrangements.

Conclusions/Implications

International research (Macdonald et al., 2016; O'Leary & Butler, 2015; Hill et al., 2020) underscores a critical knowledge gap in kinship care. Researchers express concern about the well-being and development of children in these arrangements, emphasizing the lack of information on both the children and their caregivers' needs. Furthermore, these families often face legal and financial uncertainties. This knowledge gap is equally evident in Greenland and Denmark, highlighting the need for further research to better understand formal and informal kinship care dynamics. Enhancing knowledge in this field is essential for developing policies and support systems that address the unique challenges faced by children in kinship care and their caregivers.

International perspectives on children's care

International perspectives on children's care - Public Confidence in Courts: A Cross-National Study of Public Support

Thursday, 11th September: International perspectives on children's care - Oral

Ms. Mathea Loen [1]***, Prof. Siri Gloppen*** [1]***, Prof. Marit Skivenes*** [1]

1. *University of Bergen*

In an era of rising populism and increased threats to judicial independence, understanding the factors that influence public support for courts is crucial. Maintaining public trust in courts and judges is essential for compliance with decisions, and the effectiveness and legitimacy of the judicial system. This study examines public confidence in courts and judges making decisions in child protection cases across 41 countries, providing a comprehensive analysis of the input and output factors that shape confidence in the judiciary. Our research uses survey data from representative samples from 41 countries, 41,942 respondents, to explore the drivers of public confidence in family court judges. We focus on two primary explanatory variables: basic values and political orientation. These factors are examined in relation to respondents' reported levels of confidence in judicial decision-making within child protection. The study addresses several key questions:

1. How do basic values, such as attitudes towards authority, family, and individual rights, correlate with confidence in child protection judges?
2. To what extent does political orientation influence public trust in judicial decisions regarding child welfare?
3. Are there significant cross-national variations in the factors that shape public confidence in this specific judicial context?

This research contributes to the broader understanding of public support for courts by focusing on a specific and sensitive area of judicial decision-making. The findings have implications for how courts and child protection systems can work to maintain and enhance public confidence, potentially buffering against political interference and ensuring compliance with judicial decisions. By identifying the key drivers of public confidence in child protection judges across diverse national contexts, this study provides valuable insights for policymakers, judicial systems, and child welfare agencies seeking to strengthen their legitimacy and effectiveness in the face of populist challenges.

International perspectives on children's care – Visibility of child protection in national constitutions

Thursday, 11th September: International perspectives on children's care - Symposium - In-person

Prof. Marit Skivenes [1], ***Prof. Jill Duerr Berrick*** [2], ***Prof. Siri Gloppen*** [1]

1. *University of Bergen,* ***2.*** *University of California, Berkeley*

The U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child is ratified across the globe, but little is known about the presence of children's rights in national constitutions, nor about children's rights to be protected from abuse and neglect. While children make up about one-quarter of the world's population (Dyvik, 2024), they do not necessarily feature in a country's constitution and their rights may or may not be articulated. Constitutions reflect the political functioning of a country and is a central component of a political order. Moreover, a constitution shapes the relationship between those who govern and the governed, it signals a state's autonomy to the international community, and it serves both a pragmatic and aspirational purpose.

Drawing on text from 193 constitutions across the world, we apply a human rights framework and analyze the *visibility* of children in national constitutions across the world. Specifically, we examine whether and how children's right to protection from abuse and neglect are constitutionalized. First, we identify all constitutional text components that include *children,* that is, make mention of children in combination with matters that relate to them. Next, we categorize children's rights under *three basic rights areas*, including civil rights, political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights. Within the category of civil rights, we analyze where and how children's right to protection is described. Finally, we examine the party responsible for realizing children's protection.

Data included in the study were derived from the Comparative Constitutions Project website, which is jointly administered and updated at the University of Texas at Austin, USA, and the University of Chicago, USA. The website allows free and unlimited access to the full text of the world's active constitutions. We derived 193 constitutions from the database. The included constitutions cover 190 of the 193 states that are full UN members, and three non-UN members (Kosovo, Palestine, and Taiwan).

Results from this study show that a total of 177 constitutions (92%) include provisions relating to children. The two most prevalent themes, found in more than 50% of the constitutions are rights to *education* (n=102, 53%) and rights to protection from *abuse or maltreatment* (n=101, 52%). Among the constitutions including provisions relating to abuse or maltreatment, 74% explicitly include protections against violence or exploitation; one-quarter include protection from abandonment. Nearly one-quarter include provisions relating to adoption. Unlike many other topics relating to children's rights, protection from abuse or maltreatment is explicitly noted as a state responsibility in a majority of constitutions.

The visibility of children in constitutions has a powerful symbolic value, making a statement about the importance of children in society and recognizing children as moral individuals. Furthermore, as constitutions typically serve as a primary source of national law, constitutional inclusion of children provides legal and social status and offers the potential for enforceable rights. While some contemporary conversations suggest state withdrawal or retrenchment from its child protection responsibility, this study shows extensive support across the globe for national commitments to child protection.

International perspectives on children's care - Childhood Obesity, Child Protection, and Government Responsibility

Thursday, 11th September: International perspectives on children's care - Symposium - In-person

Prof. Jill Duerr Berrick [1], ***Prof. Marit Skivenes*** [2], ***Mr. Zacky Dhaffa Pratama*** [2]

1. *University of California, Berkeley,* ***2.*** *University of Bergen*

Child protection systems are designed to protect children from a range of adverse experiences, often at the hands of adults – usually parents – who are unable or unwilling to enact their protective role. All countries have established a means for protecting children, though countries vary in the focus of their protective efforts. In some countries, for example, protection may focus on extreme circumstances (e.g, trafficking or armed conflict); in other countries, government efforts may be narrowly targeted toward parental behaviors of abuse or neglect, and other countries interpret government responsibility toward children to include protection of child wellbeing and promotion of developmental growth (Berrick, et al., 2023). How a state defines children's needs is relevant to the scope and function of its child protection system. This study brings research evidence to our knowledge and understanding of public views about child protection responsibilities. Focusing on a developing social issue with significant negative implications for children's health and development, this research is designed to examine public attitudes toward childhood obesity across 41 OECD countries. We use this topic to understand how the public views emerging issues meriting government intervention, and if childhood obesity and its associated risks should be considered a matter of child protection concern.

Rapidly rising obesity trends are evident among children, increasing significantly over the past several decades, and tripling in prevalence in many countries (González-Álvarez, et al., 2020). Globally, it is estimated that over 390 million children and adolescents were overweight and 160 million were living with obesity in 2022 (WHO SDGs, 2024), though there was significant variation among countries (WHO COSI, 2022). Obesity among children is a concerning public health problem as it lowers school performance, raising unemployment risks, and shortening life expectancy (OECD report 2019).

This research uses data from a multiple-country survey as a part of the Child Protection Systems Across the World (CPS-WORLD) project. Data were collected by YouGov Norway AS between July 2023 and June 2024. The sample included representative samples of approximately 1,000 adults ages 18+ in each country resulting in a total sample size of n=41,942. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of three vignettes that indicate concern about a child experiencing obesity. Each treatment condition varies on the severity of risk to the child (i.e., low-risk, high-risk, and very high-risk). Respondents were asked to determine whether the government should respond and how.

Findings show strong public support for a government response to childhood obesity with 70% of respondents favoring government intervention in the low-risk scenario and 82% favoring intervention in the high-risk scenario. (Responses to the very high-risk situation did not change appreciably.) A minority of respondents favored a child protection response, whereas a majority preferring a health-services response. Findings varied by country and by respondent characteristics.

The study raises important questions about how governments respond to children's health and well-being and it has implications for states' design of child protection including limits on the scope of practice.

Insights into child poverty

Insights into child poverty: Theoretical and empirical trends in child and family poverty

Thursday, 11th September: Insights into child poverty - Oral

Prof. Elizabeth Fernandez [1]

1. *University of New South Wales*

Child poverty is pervasive and persistent throughout the world. Although poverty in Western industrialized countries doesn't compare with the extremes of deprivation faced by many developing countries, it does seriously affect children and families in many countries of the developed world as substantial numbers of children continue to experience poverty, deprivation and social exclusion with their basic rights compromised. There is increasing awareness of the impacts of inequality and social exclusion and the need for attention to children and families in the poorest groups who are the most difficult to reach, and who are the focus of social services. There is unanimity in the acknowledgement of poverty as a significant source of social harm, its influence felt in every aspect of a child's life. Apart from the harm done to children through a lack of resources for full social participation, the education and health of children are seriously compromised. The link between poverty and maltreatment and the disproportionate representation of socioeconomically disadvantaged families in child welfare systems is also documented.

The impacts of poverty are experienced in different and unique ways during the lifespan, and particular groups are more vulnerable than others. Impoverished environments experienced by children in the early years affect not only early developmental outcomes but have continuing impacts on later years. The vulnerabilities of youth in the transition to adulthood arising from family hardship and inadequacies of social care is well documented, some entering the labour market prematurely because of economic stress. Many in out of home care are forced to transition from care with inadequate supports. Their journeys through these circumstances often begin at early ages and are exacerbated by the material hardship they experience during their youth and into adulthood. Assumptions about the causes of poverty, factors that shape poverty, and theories of change are debated and serve to underpin policy responses that either emphasize individual responsibility, or advocate and support change to economic and social institutions that lead to poverty, recognizing individuals are limited by the opportunities available to them.

This symposium brings together different perspectives on multidimensional impacts, and policy and service responses to address child and family poverty. Issues will be illuminated through selected country level papers to illustrate dynamics of poverty in different jurisdictions, and programs, policies and interventions to address poverty and its impacts and to de silo issues of poverty, homelessness, child maltreatment, and family violence. This opening introductory paper will outline core trends in child poverty highlight theoretical perspectives on conceptualization, measurement and impacts and discuss practice and policy directions for poverty alleviation. Subsequent papers in this symposium include:

A Scoping Review of Social Work Practices with Children and Families in Poverty

Poverty, child protection and social harms

Poverty and social exclusion of families in Italy and Europe: Some comparisons

Young people at risk of lifelong poverty: Youth homelessness in Australia

Participants will have opportunity to engage critically with policies, ideas and discourses that underpin responses to children and families.

Insights into child poverty - Poverty and social exclusion of families in Italy and Europe

Thursday, 11th September: Insights into child poverty - Symposium - In-person

Dr. Cinzia Canali [1], ***Dr. Devis Geron*** [1]

1. *Fondazione Zancan*

The presentation aims to compare data on poverty in Italy and other European countries.
The **first focus** is on the analysis of child and family poverty in different countries. Data on income poverty, material deprivation, social exclusion and levels of inequality in different countries highlight the evolution of such dimensions over time and the critical issues that different countries are facing.
In Italy, from 2010 to 2023, social spending on poverty increased from less than 50 billion euros per year to over 80 billion euros, while in the same years the percentage of people living in absolute poverty rose from 4.6% to 9.7%.
The **second focus** analyses the levels of spending on social protection (particularly for children and families) through cash and in-kind benefits in different countries, also considering the potential effectiveness of alternative approaches to social spending. This analysis highlights differences in the approaches to poverty used in different countries.
In Italy there is a difficulty in balancing aid based on transfers with few services for children and parents clearly emerges. This difficulty emerges clearly from measuring poverty reduction after transfers. While the Italian index is 8.4%, in other European countries it is higher: 12.6% in Sweden, 12.4% in France, 10.8% in Germany, 9.5% in Spain and overall 9.6% in the European Union (Fondazione Zancan on OECD 2023, data 2021).
The **third one** focuses on specific initiatives that aim to address child poverty in a systematic way. These include, for example, the initiative currently being implemented in a city in northern Italy to build the 'Town of Education', aiming to provide children and young people aged 0-18 with a coordinated system of services and interventions tailored to their needs.

Insights into child poverty- Lived experience of poverty: Youth homelessness in Australia

Thursday, 11th September: Insights into child poverty - Oral

Dr. Patricia McNamara [1]

1. *University of Melbourne*

Background: Australia is described as 'the lucky country', home to hope, happiness and security. And yet many Australian young people live with enduring poverty and homelessness. Youth homelessness has been increasing in Australia (https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/homelessness-and-homelessness-services, AIHW, 2025). This paper explores the nature and levels of homelessness among Australian young people. It focuses on specific groups at high-risk of homelessness and describes current programmatic initiatives and ongoing challenges with youth homelessness prevention and intervention.

High risk groups: We know that homelessness is especially prevalent among particular groups. Unemployed young people, those who have experienced family violence, neglect or abuse, those living with mental illness and addictions, young people involved with criminal justice are at heightened risk; LGBTIQIA+, refugee, asylum-seeking and Indigenous young people are also more likely to become homeless. Out-of-home care also increases risk of youth homelessness. Within their first year of leaving, around half of care leavers are homeless (*Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2023-2024*. AIHW, 2025, https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report). Of all children and young people experiencing homelessness on the last census night in 2021, 36% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023; https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/latest-release ; *Kids Under Cover*, 2025, https://www.kuc.org.au/our-impact/the-facts-and-statistics-on-youth-homelessness/)

Current responses: There is, however, evidence that Australia has recently prioritized policy and programmatic responses to youth homelessness. Crisis accommodation, alcohol and other drug services, individual and family counselling, health and mental health programs, specialist secondary schools, pre-employment training, community outreach, residential programs and mentoring are some of the responses in place. Notwithstanding such initiatives, more young people in Australia continue to experience long-term homelessness each year (ABS, 2023).

Ongoing challenges: Programmatic responses to youth homelessness must be matched with early intervention services for children and families. Experience of family homelessness during childhood increases risk of youth and later, adult homelessness. Notwithstanding the current national housing shortage, Australian families need adequate and affordable housing options to prevent homelessness. More housing stock is needed, including specialized housing resources for young people. Tenancy support programs are also important. These have been shown to be effective in assisting families and young people to sustain tenancies in both social housing and the private rental market. Supporting women and children to live free from threat of violence and abuse is a vital step toward this. Family violence constitutes a major cause of family and youth homelessness. Action to address social inequality and alleviate child poverty is vital if youth homelessness is to be prevented.

Summary: This paper describes current statistical data on Australian youth homelessness. It presents examples of contemporary policy and programmatic responses. As has long been recognized, when homelessness endures into adulthood it puts young people at risk of lifelong marginalization and poverty. Recent progress toward better understanding of pathways to youth homelessness and poverty are discussed. The paper focuses on the roles of child abuse and neglect, family violence, unemployment, criminality, mental health issues and alcohol and other drug use in giving rise to youth homelessness and poverty. It also suggests areas for further policy development and research.

Insights into child poverty - Poverty, child protection and social harms

Thursday, 11th September: Insights into child poverty - Oral

Dr. Yuval Saar-Heiman [1], ***Prof. Paul Bywaters*** [2], ***Dr. Guy Skinner*** [3]

1. *Ben Gurion University of the Negev,* ***2.*** *University of Huddersfield,* ***3.*** *University of cambridge*

Numerous studies have found that poverty significantly increases the likelihood of child maltreatment and involvement with child protection services. However, despite a strong empirical basis supporting the notion that poverty is a "contributory causal factor in child abuse and neglect", theoretical explanations of the relationship between these two harmful social phenomena remain limited.

Indeed, contemporary international evidence on the limited or adverse impact of child protection (CP) interventions and their disproportional application across societies, rise fundamental questions regarding the beneficial or harmful effects of CP systems in developed countries on children. This chapter aims to enrich the theoretical discussion regarding those questions by adapting the social harm perspective as a theoretical lens to explore the potential harms of living in poverty and getting involved with the child protection system.

A social harm perspective shifts the investigation of injurious social phenomena away from individuals and focuses instead on their interaction with systems and structures; the effects of macro-level inequalities; and harm, abuse, and violence that are enacted by or result from state interventions in neoliberal capitalistic societies. A particular focus is on interventions associated with services which claim to reduce harm, such as child protection, risk management, and crime reduction.

To apply this theoretical lens to the field of child protection and poverty, we adapt the social harm typology of three kinds of interlocking social harms – physical/mental health harms, autonomy harms, and relational harms – and connect them to recent findings from a scoping review of the relationship between poverty and child abuse and neglect. Namely, we conceptualize a range of physical and mental health harms that hinder families capacity to care for children, relational harms that make recipients of help feel worse about themselves, and autonomy harms that lead to families avoiding contact not only with children's social care services but also with other services, such as healthcare and education, for fear of being referred to the child protection system. The chapter will suggest a framework for understanding how the interaction of poverty with state responses might amplify disadvantage and harm and will contribute to the theoretical understanding of the relationship between poverty and child protection interventions.

Insights into child and family poverty– Scoping Review of Social Work Practices with Children and Families in Poverty

Thursday, 11th September: Insights into child poverty - Oral

Dr. Bethany Lee [1]***, Dr. June Thoburn*** [2]***, Dr. Tiziano Vecchiato*** [3]***, Prof. Elizabeth Fernandez*** [4]***, Dr. Marianne Berry*** [5]***, Dr. Chiara Berti*** [6]

1. *University of Maryland,* ***2.*** *University of East Anglia,* ***3.*** *Fondazione Zancan,* ***4.*** *University of New South Wales,* ***5.*** *University of Hawaii,* ***6.*** *University "G. d'Annunzio" of Chieti-Pescara*

Objectives: Although much is known about the prevalence of poverty and the negative effects it has on many diverse outcomes of children and families, less is known about how social service professionals are engaging with families in poverty to transform their condition. This scoping review analyzes existing literature to classify the streams of knowledge-building on this topic and identify some promising innovations and best practices.

Methods: We identified 77 existing studies that consider some aspect of social work practice with families experiencing poverty. These studies were organized into broader categories related to the area of innovative practice, including the relationship between poverty, child maltreatment and child protection services (n=18); intervention studies focused on poverty alleviation (n=21) training social workers to better understand or address poverty (n=8), and social work practice with individuals experiencing poverty (n=30). Studies were published in a variety of countries, including US, Canada, England, Northern Ireland, Netherlands, Israel, Chile, Uganda, Australia,

Findings: Several conclusions from this collection of papers will be highlighted. First, there is substantial evidence of the empirical relationship between poverty and child welfare, including engagement with child protection services. Second, there is a growth in the voices of service users being included in the research and learning from their lived experiences. Third, there is concern about whether social service professionals are adequately trained or supported to substantially address poverty experienced by service users, despite the widespread nature of poverty.

Conclusions: Best practices in working with families in poverty included many common practice elements like relationship-building, partnering, knowledge about poverty and finance, financial skill-building, provision of or referrals to material goods, and advocacy. Many of these principles are inherent in the poverty-aware paradigm that recognizes poverty as a violation of human rights. The role of cash transfers in alleviating poverty as well as the role of social service professionals in the design and delivery of cash transfer supports was also noted as an emerging question. Preparing and supporting social service professionals to transform and innovate child welfare practice will require a better understanding of how best to address the conditions of poverty and how poverty impacts the lived experiences of service users.

Sustaining Connections Between Adoptees and Birth Families Post-Adoption

Sustaining Connections Between Adoptees and Birth Families Post-Adoption -Connected to the Past: Conversations Between Adoptees and Adopters About Birth Families, Past Experiences, and Adoption

Friday, 12th September: Sustaining Connections Between Adoptees and Birth Families Post-Adoption - Oral

Prof. Maria Barbosa Ducharne [1], ***Prof. Joana Soares*** [2], ***Ms. Jéssica Fernandes*** [3]

1. *Center for Psychology at the University of Porto. Faculty of Psychology and Education,* ***2.*** *Center for Psychology at the University of Porto. Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences. University of Porto,* ***3.*** *Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences. University of Porto*

In Portugal, adoptions are structurally closed, with no contact between adoptive and birth families. Nevertheless, adoptees often express curiosity about their origins, and adoption-related communication within the family plays a crucial role in filling informational gaps about their past and supporting the search for their origins. Research in the field of adoption has shown that openness in family communication about the adoptee's past relationships (including with birth family and/or other significant figures while in care) significantly impacts adoptees' psychological adjustment, adoptive identity development, and depth of engagement in the search for origins.

This study is part of a broader Portuguese longitudinal research project, AdoPt – Follow-up in Post-Adoption, which aims to explore the strengths, difficulties, and needs of adoptive families. The specific goals of the present study are to: 1)

Identify the degree of openness in family adoption communication from the adopters' perspective;2) Explore the content and emotional expression of family conversations about past experiences, significant relationships, and adoption, from both adopters' and adoptees' perspectives and 3) Examine the relationship between openness in adoption communication, adoptees' psychological adjustment, adoptive identity, and adoption permanence/stability.

This mixed-methods study includes quantitative data collected online at Time 1 of the AdoPt – Follow-up in Post-Adoption project, using adoptive parents as informants, and qualitative data collected at Time 2 through at-home interviews with adoptive parents and adopted children/adolescents. At Time 1, 158 adoptive parents (average age 48 years; 75% mothers) participated. Of these, 12 families took part in the Time 2 interviews, conducted 12 to 18 months later.

At Time 1, data on openness in adoption communication were collected using the Questionnaire on the Child's Past Experiences and Contexts. To assess post-adoption (in)stability, three measures were used: Objective Strain, Subjective Strain, and Disengagement. Adoptees' psychological adjustment was assessed using the Portuguese versions of the Tarren-Sweeney BAC-C and BAC-A.

During Time 2 home visits, qualitative data on the content and emotionality of family conversations were gathered through the Adopter Interview and the Adoptee Interview. Additionally, adoptees completed the Adoptive Identity Work Scale and the Me & My Feelings Questionnaire.

Although data analysis is ongoing, particularly for the Time 2 data, we expect the study to provide scientific evidence that can inform professional practices regarding the search for origins and potential contact between adoptees, adoptive families, and members of birth families. This is especially relevant in the current context of potential legislative changes in the Portuguese Adoption Law, where open adoption is being considered.

Sustaining Connections Between Adoptees and Birth Families Post-Adoption - Self-Regulation and Parent-Child Interaction in Adopted Children

Friday, 12th September: Sustaining Connections Between Adoptees and Birth Families Post-Adoption - Oral

Dr. Lydia Tian [1], ***Prof. Katherine H. Shelton*** [2], ***Prof. Stephanie Van Goozen*** [2], ***Dr. Amy Paine*** [3]

1. *CASCADE, Cardiff University,* ***2.*** *cardiff University,* ***3.*** *Cardiff University*

In the United Kingdom, children are primarily removed from the birth family due to maltreatment and/or neglect (Department for Education, 2019). Early adversity can have a negative, enduring impact on post-adoption functioning (e.g., poor self-regulation; Kim-Spoon et al., 2012). Self-regulation is an individual's deliberate or automatic efforts to manage the content, timing, and manner by which they express their emotions, thoughts, and behaviour (McClelland et al., 2018). Studies on inter-country adopted children demonstrate that many such children have difficulties with self-regulation (Tottenham et al., 2010), but these results cannot generalise to children adopted from state care (Rutter et al., 2010). Positive parenting characteristics are associated with better child self-regulation and buffer the impact of childhood adversities (Karreman et al., 2006; Yamaoka & Bard, 2019). We investigated pre-registered hypotheses on whether early adversity and emotional and behavioural problems are associated with children's self-regulation skills and the potentially protective effect of positive adoptive parenting. We also conducted exploratory analyses between dimensions of child self-regulation and parent-child interaction.

Sixty domestically adopted four- to eight-year-olds (M = 6.39, SD = 1.08; 31 male and 29 female) participated in this mixed-method, multi-informant study. Early adversity was measured using the ten categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (Felitti et al., 1998). Child self-regulation was measured as observed emotional responses and behavioural regulatory strategies during a frustrating task (Goldsmith & Rothbart, 1996). Parent-child interaction was observed during an Etch-a-Sketch task (Deater-Deckard et al., 1997), and positive parenting comprised positive control, positive affect, and dyadic reciprocity. Teachers and parents rated child emotional and behavioural problems using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997).

During the self-regulation task, children with higher rated behavioural problems demonstrated more angry outbursts (Parent-rated r = .362, p = .010; Teacher-rated r = .278, p = .037), and those with higher rated emotional problems asked more questions (Parent-rated r = .411, p = .004; Teacher-rated r = .306, p = .025). Early adversity was associated with distraction behaviours that may indicate problems with self-regulation (r_s = .260, p = .049). Positive parenting moderated this association but, counterintuitively, was found to strengthen the relationship (b = 0.112, t = 2.320, p = .027). Exploratory analyses showed associations between several dimensions of child self-regulation and parent-child interaction.

This study emphasises the importance of supporting adoptive families and highlights avenues for targeted intervention. Children's avoidance and distraction strategies may be adaptive in hostile or threatening environments but maladaptive in more normative social contexts. Given the importance of self-regulation for managing school demands, our findings indicate that school-age adoptees who have experienced early adversity may benefit from targeted interventions that support self-regulation. The counterintuitive moderation effect of positive parenting may reflect compensatory parenting behaviours to accommodate the child's needs, in recognition of their past experiences and ongoing psychological adjustment.

This manuscript advances knowledge as it utilises a novel, ecologically valid observational method to assess emotional and behavioural self-regulation, and explores self-regulation with early adversity and parenting, in a unique population that has yet to be studied in this context.

Sustaining Connections Between Adoptees and Birth Families Post-Adoption - The birth family as family: Understanding post-adoption contact in international adoption

Friday, 12th September: Sustaining Connections Between Adoptees and Birth Families Post-Adoption - Oral

Dr. Johanne Thomson-Sweeny [1]

1. *McGill University*

Adoption transfers legal ties from the birth family to the adoptive family. However, this transition does not mean the birth family is forgotten or ceases to exist. For some adopted children, adolescents, and adults, the birth family remains present in their lives. In international adoption, post-adoption contact with the birth family has traditionally been rare. However, with the rise of social media platforms like Facebook, post-contact and reunions have become increasingly common.

As part of a qualitative doctoral research project aiming to understand international adoptive family relationships following birth family contact, 22 adult adoptees and adoptive parents in Quebec shared their experiences regarding the impact of birth family contact on adoptive family relationships. Participants took part in individual and family interviews, which were guided by a conceptual framework focused on adoptive family dynamics. Findings from both adopted adults and adoptive parents indicate that the birth family plays a role in adoptive family relationships in various ways. Following contact, the birth family occupies a more prominent space in the thoughts and communication of not only adopted adults but also adoptive parents. However, the participants' experiences also show that maintaining contact with the birth family can present emotional and psychological challenges. Further research could concentrate on how members of the birth family experience this contact, allowing for a more well-rounded analysis of the needs of everyone involved. Practitioners can support those navigating contact by helping manage expectations and unpack the range of emotions that may arise.

Sustaining Connections Between Adoptees and Birth Families Post-Adoption - Connected to the Past: Conversations Between Adoptees and Adopters About Birth Families, Past Experiences, and Adoption

Friday, 12th September: Sustaining Connections Between Adoptees and Birth Families Post-Adoption - Oral

Prof. Maria Barbosa Ducharne [1], ***Ms. Jéssica Fernandes*** [2], ***Ms. Luiza Dias*** [2], ***Prof. Joana Soares*** [1]

1. *Center for Psychology at the University of Porto. Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences. University of Porto,* ***2.*** *Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences. University of Porto*

In Portugal, adoptions are structurally closed, with no contact between adoptive and birth families. Nevertheless, adoptees often express curiosity about their origins, and adoption-related communication within the family plays a crucial role in filling informational gaps about their past and supporting the search for their origins. Research in the field of adoption has shown that openness in family communication about the adoptee's past relationships (including with birth family and/or other significant figures while in care) significantly impacts adoptees' psychological adjustment, adoptive identity development, and depth of engagement in the search for origins.

This study is part of a broader Portuguese longitudinal research project, AdoPt – Follow-up in Post-Adoption, which aims to explore the strengths, difficulties, and needs of adoptive families. The specific goals of the present study are to: 1) Identify the degree of openness in family adoption communication from the adopters' perspective;2) Explore the content and emotional expression of family conversations about past experiences, significant relationships, and adoption, from both adopters' and adoptees' perspectives and 3) Examine the relationship between openness in adoption communication, adoptees' psychological adjustment, adoptive identity, and adoption permanence/stability.

This mixed-methods study includes quantitative data collected online at Time 1 of the AdoPt – Follow-up in Post-Adoption project, using adoptive parents as informants, and qualitative data collected at Time 2 through at-home interviews with adoptive parents and adopted children/adolescents. At Time 1, 153 adoptive parents (average age 48 years; 77% mothers) participated. Of these, 11 families took part in the Time 2 interviews, conducted 12 to 18 months later. At Time 1, data on openness in adoption communication were collected using the Questionnaire on the Child's Past Experiences and Contexts. Three measures were used to assess post-adoption (in)stability: Objective Strain, Subjective Strain, and Disengagement. Adoptees' psychological adjustment was assessed using the Portuguese versions of the Tarren-Sweeney BAC-C and BAC-A. During Time 2 home visits, qualitative data on the content and emotionality of family conversations were gathered through the Adopter Interview and the Adoptee Interview.

Although data analysis is ongoing, particularly for the Time 2 data, we expect the study to provide scientific evidence that can inform professional practices regarding the search for origins and potential contact between adoptees, adoptive families, and members of birth families. This is especially relevant in the current context of possible legislative changes in the Portuguese Adoption Law, where open adoption is being considered.

Sustaining Connections Between Adoptees and Birth Families Post-Adoption - Facilitating safe reconnections for adoptees and birth families through Lifelong Links

Friday, 12th September: Sustaining Connections Between Adoptees and Birth Families Post-Adoption - Oral

Dr. Tam Cane [1], ***Prof. Lisa Holmes*** [1]

1. *University of Sussex*

Background

Adopted individuals often experience gaps in their life narratives, which can lead to a sense of disconnection from their heritage and confusion about their identity. However, research has shown that safe and meaningful connections with birth families can foster resilience, strengthen identity formation and a sense of belonging. The Lifelong Links programme in the UK aims to address the fragmentation of support networks caused by the severance of an adopted child's birth connections, mitigating associated psychological difficulties. This study presents findings from a pilot study exploring the effectiveness of the Lifelong Links programme in adoption from the perspective of professionals working with adoptees and their families.

Methods

As part of a small-scale pilot study, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with adoption professionals who supported ten adoptees in reconnecting with and building safe relationships with their birth families and key relationships after years of living with their adoptive families. The interviews explored adoptees motivations for seeking support from Lifelong Links, participants' experiences of supporting adoptees through this sensitive process, and the outcomes.

Results

Findings highlighted the importance of careful planning, sensitivity, risk assessments, and assessing adoptees' readiness to reconnect. Managing expectations among adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth families was essential in preventing potential emotional distress. Key challenges included navigating systemic barriers between children's services and post adoption support services, addressing discrepancies in motives and expectations between adoptees, birth families and adoptive parents, as well as navigating complex family dynamics. The process often required therapeutic support to ensure adoptees felt safe and prepared for the emotional impact of reconnecting with their birth families.

Conclusion

The study emphasised the importance of sensitive and well-planned programmes in supporting adoptees to build sustainable support systems through safe and meaningful connections. Coordinated systems are essential to enable professionals to access adoptee records, birth histories and other family information efficiently, ensuring reconnections are informed and secure. While challenges remain in managing expectations and navigating complex relationships, the findings highlight the importance of integrating relational permanence in post-adoption support practices to enhance well-being and a positive sense of identity.

Sustaining Connections Between Adoptees and Birth Families Post-Adoption - Young Adult Adoptee's Perspective: Biological Parent Involvement and Young Adult Well-Being

Friday, 12th September: Sustaining Connections Between Adoptees and Birth Families Post-Adoption - Oral

Dr. Nancy Rolock [1], ***Prof. Ashley Toland*** [2], ***Dr. Joan Blakey*** [3]

1. *Case Western Reserve University,,* ***2.*** *University of West Florida,* ***3.*** *University of Minnesota - Twin Cities*

Background: Over the past several decades, adoption practices in the United States have shifted significantly toward greater openness. Open adoption—which allows for some form of contact or knowledge exchange between birth and adoptive families—has become more common and is now widely seen as a way to support the identity development and psychological well-being of adopted people. Similarly, kinship adoptions have been increasingly prioritized by child welfare systems due to their ability to preserve familial ties and cultural continuity.

While previous research has documented the potential benefits of openness in adoption, fewer studies have focused on the perspectives of people who were adopted through foster care and are now young adults. Understanding how young adults who were adopted (YA) perceive their connection to birth parents—and how these connections relate to their sense of belonging in the adoptive family and hope for the future—offers critical insights into long-term well-being outcomes.

Methods: This study draws upon data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) Adoption Study to explore the perspectives of young adults who were adopted through the US child welfare system on birth parent involvement and YA well-being. The sample includes 201 YA (average age 24) adopted through foster care in the United States. We used descriptive analysis and logistic regression to examine: (1) how often do YA report knowing at least one birth parent, and whether this varies by adoption openness or kinship placement; (2) the proportion of YA reporting a strong sense of belonging within their adoptive family; and (3) whether knowledge of birth family, open adoption, and kinship care are associated with YA well-being—measured through familial belonging and hope for the future—controlling for age at adoption.

Findings: Results indicate that 73% of respondents knew at least one birth parent. This figure was higher among those with open adoptions (89%) and those adopted by relatives (85%) compared to those without open adoptions (71%) or non-kinship placements (69%). Nearly three-quarters (73%) reported feeling they "completely" or "very much" belong in their adoptive families, and 76% reported being "extremely" or "very" hopeful about their future. Two variables in the logistic regression model were positively associated with a strong sense of familial belonging: adoption before the age of five (OR = 2.76; CI: 1.23–6.18) and open adoption status (OR = 2.35; CI: 1.02–5.39). None of the variables had a statistically significant relationship with hope for the future.

Conclusions/Implications: These findings reinforce the idea that early-age adoption and open adoption are both positively associated with greater familial belonging among YA and underscores the importance of promoting developmentally appropriate and safe connections with birth families and supporting adoptive families in fostering communicative openness. Doing so can enhance identity integration and sense of belonging in YA, both of which are vital to long-term well-being.

Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF)

Integrated Model of Family Foster Care - A pilot evaluation of a standardised protocol for assessing parental capacity

Thursday, 11th September: Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF) - Oral

Dr. Paula Oliveira [1], ***Mr. Filipe Saramago*** [2], ***Ms. Teresa Cadavez*** [2], ***Ms. Carla Lima*** [2], ***Ms. Vania Sousa*** [2], ***Ms. Claudia Paulo*** [2]

1. *ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion - Association,* ***2.*** *Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa*

In the Portuguese child protection system (CPS), a significant gap has been identified in the assessment of parental capacity for families whose children are placed in foster care. Current assessment practices lack standardisation, often offer no clear intervention targets, and fail to identify indicators of parental change – resulting in prolonged periods in care due to ongoing uncertainty around children's social care plans.

In response to these challenges, our team has developed a standardised protocol designed to equip CPS professionals with a robust, evidence-informed framework for assessing families of origin. Drawing on international best practices and grounded in the scientific literature, the protocol has been adapted to the Portuguese context through a co-production process involving CPS professionals in the Greater Lisbon area. It promotes a holistic, child-centred perspective, focusing not only on risk but on the entire family ecosystem—including the child's needs, parental capacity, and the caregiving environment.

In this presentation we will share the findings from an ongoing pilot evaluation of the protocol, currently being carried out in collaboration with CPS practitioners in Greater Lisbon. The pilot includes the delivery of training to professionals—focusing not just on the application of the protocol itself but also on enhancing clinical, observational and reflective skills—and the subsequent use of the protocol in real-world assessments with families. Practitioners participating in the pilot are applying the protocol with families on their caseloads whose children are subject to a placement order and currently in foster care.

The presentation will report results related to: (1) the process of developing the protocol for assessing parental capacity in co-production with CSC practitioners; (2) the feasibility of using the protocol in real life CPS practice, including skill, time and resource demands; (3) the fidelity of implementation, that is, whether and how practitioners are able to apply the protocol as intended; and (4) the acceptability of the protocol among both professionals and parents, including perceptions of clarity, usefulness, and cultural relevance. We will also describe how practitioner feedback is being integrated into the ongoing refinement of the protocol and its training components.

This pilot study represents a significant step toward evidence-based practice and capacity-building in the Portuguese CPS. By supporting more structured, reflective, and timely parental assessments, this protocol has the potential to improve permanency planning for children in care—promoting family reunification where possible and informing alternative care decisions when necessary. This protocol is being developed within a broader framework calling for better integration across CPS agencies, which traditionally tend to operate in silos—creating obstacles to effective assessment and intervention with families. An evidence-based assessment protocol, implemented through coordinated efforts among all parties—including family support services, foster care teams, and the broader network of professionals involved with the child—can more effectively serve the best interests of the child.

1. Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF®) - Developing and Implementing MIAF® in Portugal

Thursday, 11th September: Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF) - Oral

Prof. Helena Grangeia [1], ***Mrs. Sandra Ornelas*** [2], ***Mrs. Patrícia Bacelar*** [3], ***Prof. Stephanie Alves*** [4], ***Prof. Joana Baptista*** [5], ***Prof. Mariana Negrão*** [6], ***Prof. Isabel Soares*** [7]

1. *ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion - Association; Research Centre for Justice and Governance (JusGov),* ***2.*** *ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion - Association,* ***3.*** *Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa,* ***4.*** *Lusófona University, HEI-Lab: Digital Human-Environment Interaction Labs,* ***5.*** *Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (Iscte-IUL), CIS-Iscte,* ***6.*** *CEDH, Portuguese Catholic University,* ***7.*** *ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion - Association; School of Psychology, University of Minho*

The global movement towards deinstitutionalization in child protection highlights the harmful effects of institutional care and the necessity of family-based alternatives such as foster care. These reforms align with international child rights frameworks advocating for nurturing environments to support children's holistic development. However, despite international recommendations, many countries struggle to implement effective family foster care systems, and Portugal is no exception.

Portugal has made significant legislative efforts to promote foster care, particularly since 2019. However, the implementation of these policies remains a challenge. The country has one of the highest rates of children in residential care in Europe, which indicate systemic barriers to deinstitutionalization and the need for a more structured, research-based approach to foster care.

The Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF®) was developed as a response to these challenges, aiming to bridge the gap between policy and legislative intents and practical implementation. MIAF® is structured around three key components: (1) Development, (2) Research, and (3) Training and Dissemination. This model operates through a Research-Practice Partnership (RPP) between ProChild CoLAB and Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa, leveraging Design-Based Research methodologies to iteratively develop, implement, and refine foster care practices.

The Development component of MIAF® focuses on enhancing the professional capacity of foster care through a standardized framework based on seven interdependent processes: (1) awareness and recruitment of prospective foster families, (2) initial training, (3) assessment and selection, (4) child-foster family matching, (5) transition to placement, (6) support during placement, and (7) transition to permanency. These structured steps aim to ensure stable and high-quality foster care placements. This symposium will present two key tools developed within MIAF®: a child-foster family matching decision-support tool and an assessment protocol for evaluating birth families' parental capacities and potential for reunification.

The Research component includes a comprehensive evaluation of MIAF®'s implementation in four foster care agencies across Portugal, through the All4Children project. Using a multi-method and multi-informant approach, this research aims to evaluate the implementation and outcomes of MIAF®, ensuring its adaptation to diverse local contexts. This symposium will also present findings from the process evaluation of MIAF®, providing insights into its implementation.

Finally, the Training and Dissemination component is central to MIAF®'s sustainability. This symposium will also feature a presentation on the supervision model adopted within MIAF®, highlighting its role in supporting professionals and ensuring the quality of foster care placements. Through continuous training and supervision of professionals and organizations involved in the foster care system, MIAF® fosters a shift towards evidence-based, child-centered, and legally grounded foster care practices.

By addressing systemic barriers through a structured, evidence-based approach, MIAF® aims to enhance the quality of foster care in Portugal. This paper will critically examine existing gaps, barriers, and opportunities,

demonstrating how a collaborative model that integrates science, legislation, and practice can drive meaningful and sustainable change in child protection systems. Ultimately, MIAF® seeks to ensure the well-being, stability, and developmental potential of children in alternative care, while strengthening the capacities of foster families and child protection professionals.

2.Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF®) - Development of a tool to support practitioners in matching decision-making

Thursday, 11th September: Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF) - Oral

Mrs. Sandra Ornelas [1], ***Mrs. Sofia Alves*** [2], ***Dr. Cláudia Camilo*** [3], ***Prof. Stephanie Alves*** [4], ***Prof. Joana Baptista*** [3], ***Mrs. Patrícia Bacelar*** [5], ***Prof. Helena Grangeia*** [6]

1. *ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion - Association,* ***2.*** *University of Maia,* ***3.*** *Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (Iscte-IUL), CIS-Iscte,* ***4.*** *Lusófona University, HEI-Lab: Digital Human-Environment Interaction Labs,* ***5.*** *Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa,* ***6.*** *ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion - Association; Research Centre for Justice and Governance (JusGov)*

The decision-making process for matching children with foster families is critical in ensuring the well-being, healthy development, and stability of children in foster care. Its primary goal is to maximize the likelihood of a successful foster placement by identifying the foster family that best suits the child's characteristics and best meets the child's needs.

While heuristics have the potential to streamline and expedite the matching decision-making process, they must be integrated with comprehensive assessments and data-driven tools, leading to more effective and suitable matches for children and foster families.

To promote high-quality practice in foster care, support matching decision-making, and optimize the fidelity of MIAF® implementation, we developed the MIAF® Matching Tool and studied its feasibility. The collaborative methodology to develop and implement the MIAF® Matching Tool was organized into six phases: (1) literature review on matching criteria and professionals' consultation; (2) categorization of the identified matching criteria based on children's needs, preferences, and characteristics, as well as on their family and context of origin, and foster families profile, resources, and competencies; (3) the identification of useful sources of information for decision-making; (4) the design of the tool (structure and layout); (5) the feasibility study through practitioners' retrospective application of the MIAF® Matching Tool to foster care processes; and (6) the optimization of the tool based on the results of this study.

Seven practitioners (85.7% female, 34-53 years old), working in four foster care agencies implementing MIAF® , participated in a semi-structured focus group interview focusing on a set of implementation outcomes: acceptability, appropriateness, feasibility, costs, fidelity, adoption, penetration, and sustainability. Data were analyzed following a thematic analysis approach using NVIVO 14 software.

Our findings suggest that the feasibility of the tool is primarily affected by external factors impacting the matching process and hampering its implementation as recommended. Nevertheless, the tool was deemed appropriate for analyzing matching criteria and coordinating agencies involved in child placement referrals and matching, and practitioners felt confident in their decisions when using it. While the additional time required for its implementation was seen as a cost, and the intention to adopt the tool appears to depend on the nature of the child integration into foster care and decision-making doubts, these may be outweighed by the tool's benefits. Practitioners offered suggestions for improving the MIAF® Matching Tool, although its integration as standard practice remains uncertain.

3. Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF) - Contributions of the All4Children project for the process evaluation of MIAF

Thursday, 11th September: Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF) - Oral

Prof. Stephanie Alves [1], ***Dr. Cláudia Camilo*** [2], ***Mrs. Kamila Araújo*** [3], ***Ms. Mariana Justo*** [4], ***Mrs. Sandra Ornelas*** [5], ***Prof. Helena Grangeia*** [6], ***Prof. Mariana Negrão*** [7], ***Dr. Rita Luz*** [8], ***Prof. Isabel Soares*** [9], ***Prof. Joana Baptista*** [10]

1. *Lusófona University, HEI-Lab: Digital Human-Environment Interaction Labs,* ***2.*** *Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (Iscte-IUL), CIS-Iscte,* ***3.*** *ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion - Association,* ***4.*** *ProChild CoLab Against Poverty and Social Exclusion – Association,* ***5.*** *ProChild CoLAB,* ***6.*** *ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion - Association; Research Centre for Justice and Governance (JusGov),* ***7.*** *CEDH, Portuguese Catholic University,* ***8.*** *Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública, NOVA University of Lisbon,* ***9.*** *ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion - Association; School of Psychology, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal,* ***10.*** *Iscte*

Background: Family-based alternative care, such as foster care (FC), is considered the best out-of-home placement for children's developmental recovery compared to residential care (RC). In line with European and national calls, Portugal is progressively transitioning from RC to FC, resulting in an increased of 38[UC1] % of children placed in FC from 2019 to 2023. Such achievements largely depend on new Child Welfare Practice Models (CWPMs) that guide the recruitment, selection, training, and ongoing support of foster families (FF) and children, such as the Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF). Implementation science frameworks share a stage-based approach, ascertaining that process and outcome evaluations of a new CWPM should always precede effectiveness testing and full implementation, thus allowing further adjustments to the model.

Objectives: This study focused on the process evaluation of the first three key processes of MIAF (i.e., awareness raising and FC' recruitment; pre-service training, and assessment and selection of FC), relying on multi-method and multi-informant approaches.

Methods: Data collection occurred between January 2024 and January 2025. Participants were the MIAF providers (*N*= 26) and foster families (FF) receiving MIAF (*N*= 185). MIAF providers completed questionnaires assessing fidelity, feasibility, and acceptability, after each key-process of MIAF, and participated in focus groups (*n*=3; 15 caseworkers and team leaders), aimed to evaluate enablers and barriers to MIAF's implementation, as well as recommendations for model improvement. FF completed questionnaires after each key process of MIAF.

Findings: Regarding awareness raising and FF' recruitment, both FF and providers reported high fidelity and acceptability of this process, and high satisfaction with the contents of the informative sessions, highlighting its value for the decision to pursue or not with the application to become a FF. Suggestions for improvement included the need for greater outreach of the awareness strategies and the use of testimonies from current FF. FF and providers reported high fidelity, feasibility, and acceptability regarding the pre-service training. Still, FF reported less satisfaction with the depth of some contents (e.g., relationship with the biological family, and FC length and child's transition to a permanent context), as well as less acceptability of the pre-service training format, schedule, and length. Both FF and providers highlighted the utility of the pre-service training in preparing applicants for fostering and to help them deciding to continue (or not) the application process.

Regarding the assessment and selection of FC, FF and providers highlighted its value to enhance a careful selection of FF. Providers also highlighted its importance to reduce subjective assessment procedures.

Main enablers of MIAF's implementation were linked to innovation factors (e.g., manualization facilitates decision-making, structure and flexibility of the MIAF). Main barriers referred to structural factors such as lack of knowledge about FC among the community and CW professionals, work overload, and need for ongoing professional training.

Conclusions: Findings of the present study support the fidelity, acceptability and feasibility of the MIAF's first key processes from the perspective of both FF and providers. Priorities areas for enhancing MIAF's implementation include MIAF-specific and general features of the CW system.

5. Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF) – A framework for supervision fostering professional development, support and quality of care

Thursday, 11th September: Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF) - Oral

Prof. Mariana Negrão [1]***, Prof. Helena Grangeia*** [2]

1. *CEDH, Portuguese Catholic University,* ***2.*** *ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion - Association*

Supervision serves as a critical mechanism for fostering organizational change, promoting continuous professional development, and providing essential support to practitioners. In the context of child welfare practice, supervision holds particular significance because it offers an external perspective on decision-making processes that are inherently complex, and emotionally embedded. Supervision processes can facilitate the integration of diverse viewpoints, encourage deeper reflection, contributing to the pursuit of the best interests of the child. In Portugal, family foster care is currently experiencing a renewed focus; however, it has been an underutilized and largely unfamiliar measure. Recent legislative reforms prioritizing family foster care have prompted the development of regulations, procedures, and models aimed at ensuring adherence to quality standards. Nevertheless, these advancements contrast sharply with a system that still lacks awareness and culture of family foster care, resulting in significant challenges for institutions and professionals. As such, supervision becomes particularly pertinent, serving as a key mechanism to booster best practices and support professionals navigating the field.

Within MIAF framework, supervision is conceived as a pivotal mechanism to promote evidence-based, child-centered practices. This paper outlines the supervision model adopted within MIAF, detailing its core functions, its potential and its challenges. Following Kadushin & Harkness (2002), three main functions of supervision will be under analysis:

Organizational Function - aligned with ensuring quality standards. Developed as a practice model grounded in evidence-based approaches, MIAF is designed to guide actions, decisions, and processes to ensure consistency and effectiveness across the distinct processes of family foster care, in correspondence with quality standards. Within this context, supervision plays a crucial role in fostering team autoscopy, promoting adherence to MIAF's principles, techniques, and methods - heightening its added value for each process or case scenario.

Support Function - Supervision can hold a pivotal role in fostering professional well-being in the field of child protection. Practitioners often face significant stressors, including exposure to histories of adversity and trauma, which can lead to secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue. These challenges are compounded by the inherent complexity of decision-making processes and external constraints. Supervision addresses these demands by creating a safe and supportive space where professionals can explore their emotions, share thoughts, voice concerns, and reflect on challenges. Furthermore, it strengthens team cohesion, promoting an environment of empathy and collaboration.

Development Function - Supervision also plays a crucial role in fostering lifelong professional learning and promoting the integration of new knowledge into everyday practices. Within this context, developmental, attachment-based, and trauma-sensitive frameworks offer inquiry and insightful pathways to the exploration of "beyond surface" behaviors. MIAF supervision is in this regard closely linked with lifelong training, as supervision can signal needs for further structured training in specific topics. Such reflective processes converge on child-centered perspectives, enabling a nuanced understanding of cases and processes, and ultimately guiding professionals toward practices that align with the best interests of the child.

USING A THEORY OF CHANGE FOR CO-DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF RESIDENTIAL INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION

USING A THEORY OF CHANGE FOR CO-DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF RESIDENTIAL INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION - Family and youth co-design residential quality improvement grounded in systems of care principles.

Wednesday, 10th September: Using a theory of change for co-design and evaluation of residential innovation and transformation - Oral

Mrs. Nancy Pierce [1], ***Mr. Robert Lieberman*** [2], ***Ms. Charley Dowing*** [3], ***Ms. Vera Stoulil*** [4], ***Dr. Margaret McGladrey*** [5]

1. *Association of Children's Residential and Community Services,* ***2.*** *Lieberman Group,* ***3.*** *Madrona Recovery,* ***4.*** *Oregon Alliance,* ***5.*** *University of Kentucky*

In 1982 Jane Knitzer, in her report "Unclaimed Chlidren", issued a wake up call to the mental health community, calling for involvement of family members and community in the care and treatment of their children. The following year, the Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP) gave rise to a significant long term investment by the United States government in community systems of care. Since then, System of Care values and principles have been adopted and flourish within community-based services. Key among these values is family driven care- that family members are full partners in the treatment of their own children and assertive leaders in developing better services for all children. Over the years families have found and developed their voice, and have gained knowledge, skills, access, and influence in community systems of care.

Historically however residential programs have tended to see the family as the problem- the reason why youth were in care. "Partnering" with family was directed and controlled by the residential program, a process embedded within accreditation and licensing mandates, and was driven more by organizational needs than those of the family. A signature on a treatment plan was documentation that the family was involved and had been "partnering" with the residential program. There was no fault or blame placed on residential organizations as they were seen as outside the "norm" of the community systems of care.

Over the last 30 + years key national residentially focused organizations have worked diligently to help the field embrace families as being part of the solution to sustainable positive outcomes for youth and families. Providing family driven care training for all staff and hiring family members as employees to support families, has furthered the concept of "nothing about us, without us" which is at the heart of System of Care values. However while families are increasingly partnering in the care provided in residential programs, they are more rarely included in organizational functions such as quality improvement.

A co-designed Theory of Change framework using System of Care principles as foundational for generating innovation and quality improvement in residential programs incorporates family and youth voice as equals in defining what is meaningful and how success is measured. Leaning into this work together is leading to better engagement with families for the programs participating in a demonstration project to test this framework.

Just as residential has embraced families as the future for their youth's success and as equals in the mental/behavioral health journey the concept and understanding of co-design is still very new for families. Residential programs' continued inclusion of families in co-design activities will go a long way toward helping the field see family involvement as more than showing up for home time, therapy, and discharge but rather as families and programs working together to create successful outcomes.

This presentation will describe the impact of co-design processes and activities in a project designed to demonstrate the feasibility of implementing the Theory of Change framework using system of care principles.

USING A THEORY OF CHANGE FOR CO-DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF RESIDENTIAL INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION Shifting agency culture through embodiment of system of care principles

Wednesday, 10th September: Using a theory of change for co-design and evaluation of residential innovation and transformation - Oral

Ms. Charley Dowing [1]***, Mr. Robert Lieberman*** [2]***, Dr. Margaret McGladrey*** [3]***, Ms. Vera Stoulil*** [4]***, Mrs. Nancy Pierce*** [5]

1. *Madrona Recovery,* ***2.*** *Lieberman Group,* ***3.*** *University of Kentucky,* ***4.*** *Oregon Alliance,* ***5.*** *Association of Children's Residential and Community Services*

Leaders in residential organizations seeking to align process improvement strategies with their mission-driven work face challenges in successfully planning for strategic improvement due to the volume and complexity of areas needing enhancement. As a result, strategic plans are often broad in scope and fail to foster meaningful cultural change within organizations. By applying System of Care (SOC) principles and committing to co-design activities to integrate them into their programming, residential programs can enhance their capacity for innovative change and improve outcomes and experiences for youth, families, partners, and staff.

SOC principles include: family and youth driven, equitability, cultural humility and linguistic competence, strengths-based and individualized, trauma informed, home and community based, and data driven/outcome oriented. Co-design efforts prioritize and elevate the voices and experiences of youth and families, who are most impacted by the policies and practices of residential programs.

The Principles to Outcomes Driven Practices project is a project to demonstrate the usefulness of a Theory of Change/logic model framework to implement SOC principles and evidence-informed practices aligned with measurement to improve outcomes for youth and families. This public-private demonstration is a collaboration between five residential programs, family members and youth, the Building Bridges Initiative of ACRC, an international professional association, the Oregon Alliance provider association, the University of Kentucky College of Public Health, and the Oregon Department of Human Services, the funder.

Inspired by early project-driven success connecting with alumni parents, Madrona Recovery's Performance Improvement Committee (PIC) hosted a gathering that included leadership, five direct-care staff members, and alumni parents. This event marked the first time that staff at all levels met parents as equal co-partners in program improvement work. Importantly, this event was also the first time parents had the opportunity to share openly the impact of Madrona policy and practice on themselves and their families. The effect on relationships, communication, assumptions, power dynamics, and other cultural aspects driving organizational change was profound. The ripple effects of this cultural shift have continued, as youth and families remain engaged as thought partners and equal stakeholders in program and process improvement.

Collaborating with parents has resulted in an overhaul of Madrona's methods for collecting data on youth and family outcomes and experiences. A more trauma-informed experience for parents is improving the quality of data collected, thus increasing confidence in the information used to design and measure program improvements.

Resource scarcity—both real and perceived—can pose challenges to the adoption of SOC principles and co-design practices. Leaders who acknowledge the critical role of the co-design process with youth and families in program improvement must also apply the same co-design and culture-shifting practices with the staff. Co-design activities based on a framework for implementing key principles and measuring results has helped Madrona Recovery and other participating organizations build and maintain enhancements that support staff capacity while delivering high-quality care to youth and families.

This presentation will describe and explore examples of how embodying SOC principles to shift organizational culture in a data-driven framework is shaping residential practice innovation and transformation.

USING A THEORY OF CHANGE FOR CO-DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF RESIDENTIAL INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION- A theory of change/logic model frameowrk using system of care principles for residential innvoation and transformation

Wednesday, 10th September: Using a theory of change for co-design and evaluation of residential innovation and transformation - Oral

Mr. Robert Lieberman [1], ***Dr. Margaret McGladrey*** [2], ***Ms. Vera Stoulil*** [3], ***Ms. Charley Dowing*** [4], ***Mrs. Nancy Pierce*** [5]

1. *Lieberman Group,* ***2.*** *University of Kentucky,* ***3.*** *Oregon Alliance,* ***4.*** *Madrona Recovery,* ***5.*** *Association of Children's Residential and Community Services*

Principles to Outcomes Driven Practices (P2ODP) is a project underway in Oregon, U.S., to test the feasibility, usability, and effectiveness of a Theory of Change (TOC) framework for residential interventions. Initially conceived as a framework upon which to build longitudinal research to assess the impact of residential interventions, it is being more immediately used as a platform that transfers research into practice; responds to long-standing calls for family and youth partnership in research and evaluation; and generates quality improvement efforts centered on innovative practices that integrate System of Care (SOC) principles into residential programming.

The TOC framework consists of seven intersecting logic models, an overarching logic model, and a User's Guide. It was co-designed with input from more than 150 residential providers, family members, youth, and the Leaders of Color of the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) of the Association of Children's Residential and Community services (ACRC). The logic models are aligned with seven principles of the evidence-informed SOC approach: family driven/youth guided; equitable; culturally humble and linguistically competent; individualized and strengths based; trauma responsive; home and community based; and data driven/outcome oriented. They provide what is in effect a menu of inputs, activities/programming, outputs, outcomes, and impacts from which programs can develop specific organizational logic models to guide implementation of innovations. The User's Guide offers adaptable pathways for applying the framework to specific organizational initiatives.

P2ODP is a public-private partnership that uses a participatory approach in which program staff, family members, and children/youth set evaluation criteria, collect and analyze process metrics, and interpret results. The demonstration has four phases: start-up activities including baseline data collection; co-design sessions to identify priorities and develop quality improvement initiatives; implementation and monitoring of initiatives (currently in progress); and data analysis and interpretation (from January-June 2026).

The project is organized into four types of teams, each with family and youth participants, as well as staff and leadership: 1) internal teams in each of the five participating residential programs; 2) three BBI Consulting Teams; 3) an Implementation Team also including state agency and professional association staff that provides oversight and direction; and 4) a participatory Evaluation Team responsible for identifying and interpreting mixed-method process and outcome data within and across programs led by the University of Kentucky College of Public Health (UKCPH).

The project has achieved initial milestones. Based partially on the baseline data, each program has identified and begun to implement innovative improvement priorities centering around family, youth, and staff voice and collaboration in program decision making as well as in culturally inclusive practices. Project participants have co-authored an invited article for the journal *Child Welfare,* currently in pre-publication review. Providers are learning and implementing innovative participatory evaluation methodologies and have begun to network as a learning collaborative. State officials have expressed interest in scaling the work.

This presentation will describe the TOC framework and project design and review the application of SOC principles in residential programming.

USING A THEORY OF CHANGE FOR CO-DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF RESIDENTIAL INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION – Co-designing Collaborative Learning Cultures to Build Organizational and Workforce Resilience in Residential Interventions

Wednesday, 10th September: Using a theory of change for co-design and evaluation of residential innovation and transformation - Oral

Ms. Vera Stoulil [1]

1. *Oregon Alliance*

This session describes a unique collaboration between a regulatory agency responsible for contracting for residential services for youth and the state association of non-profit agencies providing those services, to co-design a learning opportunity to build organizational and workforce resilience in residential interventions. Their joint endeavor provided the necessary foundation to implement the "Principles to Outcomes Driven Practices" (P2ODP) project, an initiative designed to help residential programs use a Theory of Change (TOC) framework to implement System of Care (SOC) principles.

The traditional power dynamic between state agencies and non-profit service providers has historically leaned heavily toward the state agency, which has control due to its role as funder over how work is done and the assessment of service quality and program outcomes. However, the concept of "nothing about us without us", referring to the importance of youth and family voice in service delivery and research, also applies, to the state agency relationship with non-profit service providers.

In Oregon, the leadership of Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS), made a conscious decision to relinquish that power and control and come alongside the providers in a learning collaborative to demonstrate the effectiveness of the TOC framework. ODHS entered into a partnership with the Oregon Alliance Center for Excellence (Center), a statewide association of non-profit service providers. As a trusted partner, the Center engaged the provider community in an educational process to learn about the collaborative public private partnership and recruited residential intervention providers through a series of information sessions and an application process.

The partners, working with the national Building Bridges Initiative, a program of ACRC, which developed the TOC and P2ODP, and its research partner, the University of Kentucky College of Public Health (UK), expanded the collaboration through inclusion of cross system residential programs as well as other relevant state agencies. The project design includes Implementation and Evaluation teams with representatives of the state agencies, participant programs, family members, youth, and BBI and UK consultants.

Shifting away from a centralized state agency holding the power and making decisions without meaningful input was critical for the initial successes of this project. The project partners have exercised shared decision making, and peer networking is generating shared learning. Seventeen project participants co-authored an invited research article for the journal *Child Welfare* about the value of co-design processes to include, youth and family, in quality improvement efforts in residential programs.

The project has also engaged front line staff in learning about innovative research and evidence-informed practices grounded in SOC principles (family/youth driven, equitability, cultural humility/linguistic competence, home and community based, trauma informed, strengths based and individualized, and data driven/outcomes oriented). This engagement at all levels has provided a clear sense of purpose, an important pillar of building resilience in the workforce.

This session will describe the system-level partnership development process and discuss how the P2ODP has created spaces and opportunities for providers and state staff to share and learn from each other as they identify

and implement program enhancements and improvements.

USING A THEORY OF CHANGE FOR CO-DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF RESIDENTIAL INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION – Innovations in Participatory Evaluation through a Co-design Methodology

Wednesday, 10th September: Using a theory of change for co-design and evaluation of residential innovation and transformation - Oral

Dr. Margaret McGladrey [1], ***Mr. Robert Lieberman*** [2], ***Ms. Charley Dowing*** [3], ***Ms. Vera Stoulil*** [4], ***Mrs. Nancy Pierce*** [5]

1. *University of Kentucky,* ***2.*** *Lieberman Group,* ***3.*** *Madrona Recovery,* ***4.*** *Oregon Alliance,* ***5.*** *Association of Children's Residential and Community Services*

The outcomes and impacts of residential interventions are notoriously difficult to systematically evaluate due to inconsistencies in service models, varied treatment philosophies, longitudinal post-discharge measurement challenges, and a lack of standardization. Participatory evaluation approaches can help overcome these limitations through the rigorous triangulation of family, children/youth, staff, professional association, sponsoring agency, and academic perspectives in residential intervention design, assessment, and quality improvement. Furthermore, participatory evaluation research can be especially relevant in leveling power differentials in residential settings complicated by trauma, family conflict, structural barriers like transportation, and staff stigma. The Principles to Outcomes Driven Practice (P2ODP) project to demonstrate the feasibility and usability of a Theory of Change (TOC)/logic model quality improvement framework for residential interventions provides an ideal context for participatory evaluation research because it is grounded in System of Care (SOC) principles that center youth and family voice. The evaluation of this two-year project includes members of five participating residential provider programs, family members and youth, the national Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) of the U.S. professional association for residential organizations (ACRC), the Oregon Alliance provider association, the University of Kentucky College of Public Health (UKCPH), and the funder, Oregon Department of Human Services.

To inform each program's co-design and implementation of their quality improvement priorities using the TOC framework, the project fielded the BBI Self Assessment Tool (SAT) using an online survey platform to assess performance indicators during a start-up phase in 2024. SAT results are organized in aggregate and by role (child/youth, family, direct service staff, managerial/supervisory, administrative, parent/youth peer partners, community partner) so that programs can compare similarities and differences in responses by role. Selected sections of the SAT most directly related to each program's priorities will be completed in early 2026 as a post-project assessment tool.

All five programs' internal teams of agency staff, family, and youth prioritized family engagement for their improvement initiatives. The UKCPH Evaluation Team is consulting with each program to build instruments into their logic models from a compendium of measurements developed by ACRC and to troubleshoot assessment challenges. The team collaborates with the Oregon Office of Reporting, Research, and Analytics to identify benchmark agency data for comparison. However, traditional psychometric instrumentation and standard satisfaction surveys do not distinctively evaluate family engagement, so all five programs are leveraging UKCPH's expertise with participatory evaluation methods to implement Photovoice as part of their project design. Photovoice is a participatory action research technique that empowers participants to creatively document and collectively define their lived experience of organizational or community concerns and strengths to guide change efforts and ensure decision-maker accountability. This project's participatory evaluation will conclude with a data analysis and interpretation phase during the first half of 2026, concluding with a capstone event with all project partners (funder, professional association, provider teams, consultants) reflecting on the impacts and

outcomes of each provider’s initiative and their collective learning experience.

Prevention of and reunification after out-of-home placement

Prevention of and reunification after out-of-home placement – Family reunification and permanency planning in the Netherlands

Thursday, 11th September - 14:45: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Prof. Anouk Goemans [1], ***Dr. Sabine Van der Asdonk*** [1], ***Dr. Daisy Smeets*** [1], ***Prof. Mariëlle Bruning*** [1], ***Prof. Lenneke Alink*** [1], ***Dr. Renate Buisman*** [1], ***Ms. Jolien van Boven*** [1], ***Ms. Marike Lenglet*** [1]

1. *Leiden University*

Introduction: Every year, almost 10,000 children are placed out of home in the Netherlands (CBS, 2024). Out-of-home placements are in principle temporary; children will be reunified with their parents if it is safe and feasible. However, research suggests that reunifications are unfortunately not always stable and that children re-entry the child protection system again (Biehal et al., 2015; Font et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2012). Given the negative impact of multiple placement shifts on the development of the child and on the chance of permanent reunification between parents and child, it is important to know what is needed to increase the chance of a stable reunification. However, to date little research has been done on reunification, and even less on stable reunification. In the current study, we examined how decisions regarding reunification are made and identify predictors of (stable) reunification.

Methods: We will present findings from of a larger study on reunification after out-of-home placement in the Netherlands (Bruning et al., 2025). We will focus on two parts of this larger study. The first part is a case file study, wherein case files of 456 children (M_{age} = 8.7 years) were analyzed, focusing on predictors of (stable) reunification. The second part is a questionnaire (N = 397) and interview (N = 35) study with professionals, (foster) parents, and children, focusing on experiences during the decision making process

Results: The case file analysis showed that approximately 40% of the Dutch children are reunified with their parents within a period of 5 years. One in four children is again placed out of home within a few years. The likelihood of stable reunification is lowered by parental childhood maltreatment, domestic violence, and placement in a family setting. The interviews and questionnaires showed that there are many differences between child protection agencies with respect to decision making regarding reunification.

Discussion: This study emphasizes the need for targeted support services for families during and after the process of reunification. It also highlights the need for a more standardized procedure regarding decision-making. We will discuss how future research can provide a next step towards standardized decision making and permanency planning.

Prevention of and reunification after out-of-home placement - Enhancing Quality Practice with Families and children at risk: The Innovative IAQI Tool

Thursday, 11th September - 15:00: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Prof. Nuria Fuentes-Peláez [1], ***Dr. Ainoa Mateos*** [1], ***Ms. Valeria Soto Gómez*** [1], ***Ms. Judit Rabassa*** [1], ***Dr. Toni Ruiz*** [1]

1. *Universitat de Barcelona*

Background: The quality of intervention with families at risk plays a key role in improving family support and directly impacts on the well-being and quality of life of the children and adolescents (C&A) involved. Evaluating quality ensures that interventions are effective and truly beneficial, while also helping to identify areas for improvement.

In Catalonia (Spain), the Socio-Educational Intervention Model (SIS) aims to prevent situations of social risk from escalating into child protection cases (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2016). In recent years, the expansion of socio-educational services for families and children at risk has created a clear need for tools to guide the quality of intervention. In response, the first guide of standards was developed through a collaborative research process in collaboration with the Federation of Child and Adolescent Care Organisations (FEDAIA) and Diputació de Barcelona (Fuentes-Peláez et al., 2023), marking a key milestone in the systematisation of socio-educational practice.

However, the guide alone was not sufficient for evaluation purposes. Therefore, the IAQI tool (Indicators for the Assessment of Quality in Socio-Educational Intervention Services with Families at Risk) was co-constructed together with professionals from these services, incorporating the voices of families and child assessors (Fuentes et al., 2024).

Aims: To explore the usefulness of this tool in generating evidence on the quality of socio-educational intervention with families at risk, promoting reflection on professional practice, and supporting the incorporation of improvements.

Methods and participants: To assess face validity—whether IAQI appears to measure what it intends to—49 professionals completed a relevance and clarity questionnaire, and 61 applications were conducted. Additionally, 32 professionals participated in three discussion groups.

Results and implications: IAQI was refined from 147 items to 97 indicators across 11 standards. Professionals valued its structure, reflective potential, and contribution to service quality. Professionals highlight that it creates opportunities for both individual and collective reflection thanks to the structure and content. It enables teams to discuss and reach consensus on shared criteria. Furthermore, the tool is recognised for bringing rigour and empirical evidence to services, helping to strengthen the quality of intervention. It also facilitates the systematisation of processes and areas of intervention, making it easier to identify gaps and formulate concrete improvement proposals that are tailored to the everyday practice and context of each service. The standardisation of criteria and indicators supports networking and collaboration across services, promoting a more integrated and comprehensive approach to care.

Challenges included limited time for teamwork. Future steps involve incorporating families' and children's perspectives into quality assessment.

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Prevention of and reunification after out-of-home placement – A systematic review of child, family, and care-related factors associated with family reunification after out-of-home care

Thursday, 11th September - 15:15: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Ms. Rosa Sitjes-Figueras [1], ***Dr. Lorena Maneiro*** [2], ***Dr. Marta Garcia-Molsosa*** [1], ***Dr. Mónica López López*** [3]

1. *Universitat de Girona,* ***2.*** *Universidade de Santiago de Compostela,* ***3.*** *University of Groningen*

The preferred permanency option for children and adolescents in out-of-home care is typically reunification with their birth families, provided it is safe and in the child's best interest. Despite ongoing efforts to promote permanency, there is still no clear consensus regarding the factors that contribute to successful family reunification among children and young people in foster care. Understanding these factors is crucial, as it can support informed decision-making, promote placement stability, and reduce the risk of re-entry into care. This presentation synthesizes the results of a systematic review that identifies the factors associated with a higher likelihood of family reunification from an ecological perspective, considering child-, family-, and care-related dimensions. A systematic search was conducted across four databases (PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed), yielding a total of 5309 articles. Studies were included if they focused on children and young people in foster care and examined reunification or time to reunification as an outcome measure. Additionally, to be included in this review, studies had to present longitudinal multivariate quantitative data and control for any factors at the child-, family-, or care-level. Most of the included studies used entry cohort samples that were representative of the study population. At the child level, the findings indicated that age at entry into care and child behavior problems were consistently positively associated with the likelihood of reunification. At the family level, the presence of poverty or financial stress, as well as parental drug abuse, was associated with a lower probability of reunification. At the care level, a higher number of placement moves and longer stays in care were both related to a lower likelihood of reunification. Conversely, placement in group care and regular contact with parents were associated with increased chances of reunification with the birth family. These findings have implications for policy and practice. Identifying and isolating the effects of factors associated with family reunification can support more informed decision-making and improve resource allocation by targeting interventions to support both birth families and foster carers.

Prevention of and reunification after out-of-home placement - Reasons used by Flemish foster care workers in Family Reunification Decision Making

Thursday, 11th September - 15:30: (SEECEL B1) - Accepted with changes

Prof. Johan Vanderfaeillie [1], ***Ms. Mirte Teunissen*** [2], ***Dr. Laura Gypen*** [1], ***Prof. Frank Van Holen*** [1]

1. *Vrije Universiteit Brussel,* ***2.*** *Leiden University*

Background and objectives: Decisions of child welfare workers regarding permanency planning, including a reunification with the birth parents, have a strong impact on the children and the parents. Although a safe reunification of children placed in out-of-home care is considered an important task of child welfare systems, limited research exists regarding reunification. The current study aims to uncover criteria used by Flemish foster workers to substantiate a reunification decision, how important these criteria are vis-à-vis each other and how difficult it is to assess these criteria.

Methods and participants: The criteria for reunification used by foster care workers were examined with *concept mapping*. Concept mapping is a participatory, mixed-method approach using quantitative statistical techniques to analyse qualitative data. Through the analyses, visual representations of the data are constructed. The following steps are distinguished: (1) statements to one well-defined question are generated, (2) unique statements are selected, (3) the statements are grouped and scored, (4) the data are analysed using multidimensional scaling and hierarchical cluster analysis, (5) the results are interpreted, and (6) the interpretation is translated into policy. 45 foster care workers from 6 foster care teams participated in the first step. For step 2 a total of 60 different statements were provided by the foster care workers. To arrive at a consistent terminology, four researchers independently identified statements they judged to be unclear or redundant. In cases of differences between these individual assessments, the researchers mutually agreed upon edits for clarity. This process resulted in 53 unique statements remaining for analysis. Step 3 was done by 26 foster care workers.

Results: Concept mapping resulted in 53 criteria clustered in six clusters ranked in descending importance: (1) Parents offer safety and focus on the child, (2) Conditions for parents, (3) Interest of the child, (4) Reunification is supported, (5) Conditions for the child and (6) Parents are willing to collaborate during and after reunification. The more important criteria are, the more difficult they are considered to assess.

Conclusions: This research shows that the most important criteria are changes regarding safety and being able to focus on the interest of the child. Foster care workers consider most criteria easy to assess.

Preventing the exploitation of kinship care by listening to children's valuations: Transforming kinship care policy through child participation

Thursday, 11th September - 15:45: (SEECEL B1) - Accepted with changes

Dr. Paul Shuttleworth [1]

1. *Kingston University*

Introduction: Worldwide, kinship care as a concept and practice can be exploited as a cheaper alternative to statutory care. This is because it exists between two contrasting dominant narratives. One views kinship care primarily as a social work intervention, prioritising measurable child outcomes and formal monitoring, assessment, and support. The other perceives kinship care as a better reflection of the diversity of family life, emphasising social relationships and cultural beliefs, relying more on informal family and community support than on state resources. The actual stance different countries' policies take on support for kinship care are shaped by cultural notions and ideologies surrounding familialism, values, and perceptions of what is normal, risky, deserving, and undeserving.

Objectives: Part of the original research into "What Matters to Children Living in Kinship Care?" discussed with children the values central to their family lives in kinship care and their relationship with statutory support. By exploring and moving past the adult-centric debates, definitions, and dilemmas, it investigated whether the children could transform the understanding of kinship care and provide innovative ways to support them.

Methods: Insights from 19 children were collated through a series of person-centred, creative, participatory, and task-oriented interviews. These were combined with previous international kinship care literature regarding how it traverses the space between private family life, and public responsibility (e.g. Hunt, 2001). Welfare typologies and the concept of familialism were then applied and the hypotheses were then reiterated back to the children using develomentally-aware methods. Rather than literal replication, theoretical replication combined with critical realist understanding produce appropriate theories so that findings can be internationally relevant. This paper also synthesises these findings with the author's subsequent publications, engagement with other children, and funded initiatives.

Findings: Children in kinship care arrangements are competent in giving considered, nuanced, and sophisticated understandings of their fractured family life experiences and their relationship with the support structures surrounding them. Theories of recognition and mature care emerged from analysing the children's insights to help move past the adult-centric circular debates regarding kinship care support.

Conclusions: The children's insights reiterated how kinship care is often leveraged for its economic benefits, especially during financial strain. While governments may promote kinship care as a cost-effective alternative to state care, this approach can overlook the intricate needs of children, families, communities, and society. So too, can a fetishised, blinkered approach to the development of norms, which excludes the influence of neoliberalism and risk and can push support onto increasingly impoverished families and communities. Analysis from the children's insights calls for better recognition of these critical in-between spaces occupied by kinship care. Better recognition can occur not by not being persuaded by top-down arguments but by starting bottom-up from the experiences of those living in kinship care and finding out what truly matters. The starting point for appropriate ethical support must be the middle of circular debates—what is the value of kinship care for children, and how do the children navigate the relational space between support from their families, communities and the state?

Challenges and Advances in Kinship Foster Care from an International Perspective

Challenges and Advances in Kinship Foster Care from an International Perspective

Wednesday, 10th September: Challenges and Advances in Kinship Foster Care from an International Perspective - Oral

Prof. Nuria Fuentes-Peláez [1], ***Ms. Teresa Williams*** [2]

1. *Universitat de Barcelona,* ***2.*** *Rees Centre, University of Oxford*

Kinship foster care, defined as the care of children by relatives within the child protection system, is implemented in diverse ways across international contexts. While in some countries it has long been established as the primary form of out-of-home care (Montserrat, Llosada-Gistau & Fuentes-Peláez, 2020; Fuentes-Peláez et al., 2014), in others, where it previously played only a marginal role, it is now gaining prominence and expanding rapidly within the child protection system (Hallett, Garstang, & Taylor, 2021; Hill, Gilligan, Connelly, 2020).

This symposium aims to explore kinship care from an international perspective due to its growing relevance and variability across different cultural, practice and legal contexts. Drawing on studies conducted in diverse socio-political and cultural contexts (England, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, and Spain), the session explores how kinship foster care is conceptualised, implemented, and experienced across countries, as well as includes promising practices deployed during implementation.

The presentations will address key issues such as formal and informal kinship foster care, minority groups, assessment and support for kinship carers, the voices and well-being of children in kinship placements, and the impact of policy frameworks on the stability and quality of care.

By highlighting both shared challenges, advances and context-specific approaches, the symposium aims to promote dialogue around innovative practices, equity in care provision, and the development of more culturally responsive and sustainable kinship care models. The session will include the following presentations:

- Dr. Priya Tah, Ms. Teresa Williams and Prof. Julie Selwyn. Raised by Relatives: The experiences of Black and Asian Kinship Carers in England (Oxford University).
- Prof. Daniela Reimer and Ms. Ida Ofelia Brink. Role identities of kinship mothers (ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work)
- Dr. Juliette Borenstein and Dr Patricia McNamara. Transition to Kinship Foster Care in Australia: A Paradigm Shift in Out-Of-Home Care (University of Melbourne)
- Dr. Amilie Dorval and Ms. Joannie Laporte. Evaluating long-term stability in kinship care placements (Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières Université de Montréal)
- Prof. Nuria Fuentes-Peláez, Ms. Judit Rabassa, Dr. Ainoa Mateos, Dr. Belén Parra and Dr. Julio Rodríguez. Strengthening Kinship Care: Research and Innovations for Group-Based Support Programs (Universitat de Barcelona)

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Challenges and Advances in Kinship Foster Care from an International Perspective - Raised By Relatives: The Experiences of Black and Asian Kinship Carers in England

Wednesday, 10th September: Challenges and Advances in Kinship Foster Care from an International Perspective - Oral

Dr. Priya Tah [1], ***Ms. Teresa Williams*** [1]

1. *Rees Centre, University of Oxford*

To date, little has been known about the experiences of Black and Asian kinship carers. This paper describes the legal and practice context for a study to address the gap in research on the experiences and needs of kinship carers (both formal and informal) from Black and Asian communities.

In England, there are an estimated 120,000 children living in kinship arrangements, only a minority of which are in formal, legally secure arrangements. The two main routes to legally secure status are: kinship foster care, where a foster placement under a Care Order is made with a relative or friend sharing parental authority with the local authority, (~19,000 orders made each year); and kinship special guardianship, a form of permanence where a child leaves local authority care to be looked after by a friend or relative under a Special Guardianship Order (~4,000 orders each year). Existing evidence shows that children from minority ethnic groups, and Black children in particular, are underrepresented among children living in these formal kinship arrangements. This matters because the introduction of Special Guardianship Orders was partially motivated by offering an alternative permanency option for children from minority ethnic groups for whom the legal framework of adoption does not meet their cultural or religious needs.

Thirty-seven kinship carers from Black and Asian communities participated in interviews and standardised assessments exploring their experiences. Most participating kinship carers were from the Black Caribbean community, cared for one kinship child, and had a legal order. Aunts and grandmothers comprised the largest proportion of carers in this sample. Levels of well-being were moderate and scores on the support measure were positive. Levels of stress and strain were moderate to high.

Whilst there were similarities in the experiences of carers from this sample to previous (predominantly White) research, the impact of ethnicity cannot be overstated. Black and Asian kinship carers in this study were more likely to live in larger households, in housing that often lacked enough space, in single carer families, had lower incomes and additional caring responsibilities.

Some carers highlighted experiences of racism and a lack of cultural competence, such as professionals' preference for White family members when the child was of mixed ethnicity and assumptions that Black and Asian kinship carers had support from the extended family, that were often mistaken and could be harmful. Black and Asian kinship carers were often overstretched, and their difficulties in accessing support from services left them feeling abandoned.

Despite the challenges, kinship carers reported the children's positive impact on their lives. Carers prioritised their own health and well-being more so they could provide a safe and stable home where their children could flourish with support into adulthood and beyond.

Recommendations highlight the initial and ongoing support needed by kinship carers, including: clear information about kinship care; appropriate support packages; a named point of contact; a focus on the needs of minority ethnic carers in social work training; and experienced kinship social workers/teams committed to cultural humility.

Challenges and Advances in Kinship Foster Care from an International Perspective –Transition to Kinship Foster Care in Australia: A Paradigm Shift in Out-Of-Home Care

Wednesday, 10th September: Challenges and Advances in Kinship Foster Care from an International Perspective - Oral

Dr. Juliette Borenstein [1], ***Prof. Margarita Frederico*** [1], ***Dr. Patricia McNamara*** [2]

1. *La Trobe University,* ***2.*** *University of Melbourne*

Introduction: In Australia, the customary practice of *kinship care*; family and friends caring for children unable to live with their parents, has become increasingly important as a government-sanctioned response to child protection concerns. *Kinship foster care*, as a hybrid of public and private care (and known in Australia as *formal* or *statutory kinship care*), has now displaced non-related foster care as the preferred alternative care arrangement for children in Australia. As usage of kinship care has increased, this shift has proved problematic, with reports of unequal treatment, carer hardship, and worker confusion; especially concerning given the disadvantage of carers and their young kin. These issues have given rise to the research described in this presentation.

Background: Research and policy development in Australia in relation to kinship foster care, has lagged, but there is increasing focus on the complexity of this form of care, and its intersectionality with trauma, poverty, and issues of gender, marginality, and culture. Assumptions underlying kinship foster care as an institutional practice, have been found to be incongruent with, and often in contest with, how kinship care is practised by First Nations people. Although increasingly coming to the fore, the views and experiences of stakeholders including carers, young people and workers, have been under-represented, leaving the practice field and service users inadequately supported.

The study: A recent study from Victoria, Australia will provide the basis for a critique of current conceptual and practice approaches, also exploring promising developments in practice, and recommendations for what is required to better support kinship families.

This study, located in Victoria, aimed to privilege the voices of stakeholders in scoping the operation of formal kinship care in 17 non-government kinship support programs. Adopting a critical approach, the research drew on theoretical, empirical, and experiential evidence. It applied mixed methods, collaborative and participatory processes, and an ethical and ecological lens. Findings emerged from survey data (n=93), focus groups (n=42), and interviews (n=7), with carers, young care-leavers, and workers, and data was analysed for themes and content. The research interrogated key elements of formal kinship care: its nature; the government's engagement with carers; standards of care; the carer's role and good care; the worker's role and good practice.

Findings: Findings from this study highlight the complexity and distinctiveness of formal kinship care, not addressed in policy or practice; this results in worker confusion, unmet support needs, and compounded disadvantage for carers and their young kin. The study also found that practice was being dynamically shaped as workers developed their own procedures for meeting the needs of the families they serve. System elements identified as obstructing good care and practice include inadequate resourcing, paradigm conflict, confusion of imperatives, and misdirecting assumptions about family care.

Conclusions: Based on stakeholders' views and experiences, this study identifies what is effective practice in kinship foster care, and what is required to make it a more equitable and sustainable practice for kinship families.

Challenges and Advances in Kinship Foster Care from an International Perspective - Evaluating long-term stability in kinship care placements

Wednesday, 10th September: Challenges and Advances in Kinship Foster Care from an International Perspective - Oral

Dr. Amilie Dorval [1], ***Ms. Joannie Laporte*** [2]

1. *Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières,* ***2.*** *Université de Montréal*

The latest assessment report on the Youth Protection Act in Quebec indicates a 55% increase in children placed exclusively with kinship care families since 2003. This rise in kinship care placements is partly attributed to their perceived greater stability compared to traditional foster care placements. Despite legislative preferences for kinship care placements, stability assessments in Quebec have only been conducted for children aged 0-12, leaving a gap in understanding stability during adolescence. Existing literature suggests that kinship care placements offer greater stability, particularly for younger children, while older children are at higher risk of instability. However, there's a lack of documentation on long-term stability for kinship care placements. Furthermore, the challenges associated with identity development in adolescence suggest additional difficulties that compound placement challenges.

This project aims to fill this gap by documenting the stability of kinship care placements over a period of 10 years. The results are derived from a study conducted in Quebec, Canada, using administrative data from a cohort of 172 children placed before the age of 12. The findings presented here stem from a second data extraction, conducted 10 years later. Specifically, this poster aims to document 1. The stability trajectory of children placed in kinship care over a 10-year observation period; 2. The variables associated with stability and instability of kinship care placement trajectories.

Some results are presented in this poster to account for the mentioned objectives. First, survival analyses show the stability curves of placements based on two age groups at the time of placement. This highlights an age effect on the duration of kinship care placement: children placed at an older age experience shorter placement durations compared to those placed at a younger age. Although relevant, this result does not fully explain what affects the overall instability of placements. Therefore, logistic regression analyses were conducted to highlight variables associated with instability. Among these, we note the unfavorable evaluation of kin carers at the time of placement, the accumulation of difficulties experienced by the child (ADHD, mental health diagnoses, developmental delays, etc.), and the recurrence of reports concerning the placed child. These elements are relevant for several target audiences, including professionals working with families concerned by this form of placement, as well as managers and decision-makers. Indeed, the results show that variables at the time of placement appear to be determinant for the long-term stability of placements, reiterating the importance of conducting a thorough and differentiated evaluation when placing the child in kinship care. Finally, the presented results underscore the importance and necessity of providing tailored support to the various actors, namely the children and kinship carers.

Challenges and Advances in Kinship Foster Care from an International Perspective – Strengthening Kinship Care: Research and Innovations for Group-Based Support Programs

Wednesday, 10th September: Challenges and Advances in Kinship Foster Care from an International Perspective - Oral

Prof. Nuria Fuentes-Peláez [1], ***Ms. Judit Rabassa*** [1], ***Dr. Ainoa Mateos*** [1], ***Dr. Belén Parra*** [1], ***Dr. Julio Rodríguez Rodríguez*** [1]

1. *Universitat de Barcelona*

Background: Kinship foster care is Spain's most common form of foster care. Of the 51,972 children in the child protection system, 51% are in foster care - 59% of them in kinship foster care and 41% with non-relative foster families (Ministerio de Juventud e Infancia, 2025).
Despite its widespread use and recognised benefits, kinship foster care presents challenges. A critical issue is the limited support for carers in developing parenting skills, which can affect children's well-being, increase carer stress, strain relationships, and affect the contact with birth parents (Malette et al., 2020).
Programmes to support kinship carers exist (Amorós et al., 2012), but their implementation often presents challenges that limit impact. To address this, P+Grupal (including P+Keys and G+Keys) was developed (Fuentes et al., 2023) as a toolset to guide professionals in delivering group-based support according to the core elements of group work (Fuentes et al., 2025).

Aims: The objective of this research* is to examine the effectiveness of evidence-based tools in improving support for kinship foster carers, with particular attention to the development of fostering competencies and the strengthening of core group work elements.

Method: 57 kinship foster carers and 17 professionals from Barcelona and Baix Llobregat (Spain) participated. Data was gathered through pre- and post-intervention questionnaires assessing kinship foster carer competencies, completed by carers. Professionals used the P+Grupal tools to support group implementation. Group interviews assessed the tools' usefulness in enhancing practice and intervention quality.

Results: Findings include participant characteristics and group outcomes in engagement, communication, cohesion, mutual support, and social connection. The link between professional facilitation and the development of group CORE elements is examined.
We also explore areas of greatest and least improvement as perceived by carers, and how these relate to group dynamics. Professionals highlighted key benefits of using P+Grupal tools to strengthen practice in kinship foster care.

Conclusions: Group programmes enhance social support, reduce isolation, and foster a sense of belonging. Equipping professionals with tools that encourage reflective, evidence-based practice improves the quality of interventions and provides more effective support to kinship carers.

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Challenges and Advances in Kinship Foster Care from an International Perspective - Role identities of kinship mothers

Wednesday, 10th September: Challenges and Advances in Kinship Foster Care from an International Perspective - Oral

Prof. Daniela Reimer [1], ***Mrs. Ida Ofelia Brink*** [1]

1. *ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work*

Background: A growing number of children in alternative care are in formalized kinship care. In Switzerland, the proportion of formalized kinship care ranges from one third to two thirds of all foster care arrangements, with regional differences. Kinship care has hardly been studied in the Swiss context (Aeby et al., 2025), and kinship carers are a heterogeneous group (MacDonald et al., 2018). They come to the role at different ages and from different socioeconomic and family backgrounds. They can be grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings, as well as other relatives and unrelated significant others (e.g., Connolly et al., 2017; Potin, 2012). Internationally, kinship care is mainly a female task (Tillard & Mosca, 2019). Kinship carers do not choose to foster an unrelated child but a specific child from their network. This distinguishes kinship carers from unrelated foster parents, who tend to become foster parents in middle life with a stable enough socioeconomic and family situation. Many kinship carers pursue the task from a feeling of obligation due to a family crisis. Often, they do not consider themselves as having the role of a foster carer or parent. When kinship care is established, all actors are required to "renegotiate relations and obligations" (Holtan, 2008).

Methods: The contribution combines data from two projects (Good accompaniment, financed by Palatin Foundation 2001-2023, Images of the foster family, financed by SNSF, 2001-2004). In both projects, qualitative multi-perspective case studies have been researched (Reimer & Aeby, 2025; Reimer et al., in print). In both studies, different actors from one case have been interviewed about their perception of the care situation, the way they consider their family situation, and their cooperation with professionals. The individual interviews and perspectives were reconstructed with a thematic comparative approach (Lenz 1985) and case studies linked together different perspectives (Reimer et al., 2025). Most cases in both studies were from unrelated foster carers. The proposed contribution uses three kinship care cases from the studies, aiming to understand kinship carers' roles towards the child, other kinship members, and professionals.

Results: In the comparison, all female kinship carers consider that the main care work is on them, which aligns with international research results. All of them do not want to take on a parental role but consider themselves as family members of the child they care for. They have a strong feeling of obligation towards the birth parents and the child they care for. They expect other family and kinship members to support the care arrangement, kinship care is hence considered a common family task. A lack of support from kinship members leads to disappointment. The role towards professionals is ambivalent: they wish to receive support but only at certain times and on certain issues chosen by themselves. They do not want professionals to intervene in their families and are not ready to invest time and energy into contact with professionals. The results feature the complexity of social work support in kinship care and underline the need for intense research in the field.

Exploring LGBTQIA+ Children and Youth in Care

Microaggressions among LGBTQIA+ Youth in the Child Welfare System (part of the symposium Exploring LGBTQIA+ Issues Among Children and Youth in Care)

Wednesday, 10th September: Exploring LGBTQIA+ Children and Youth in Care - Oral

Dr. Mónica López López [1], Dr. Luis Armando Parra [2], Dr. Rory Patrick O'Brien [3], Dr. Mijntje ten Brummelaar [1], Dr. Mireia Foradada [4], Ms. Gabriela Alejandra Martinez Jothar [1]

1. *University of Groningen,* ***2.*** *UC Davis,* ***3.*** *San Diego State University,* ***4.*** *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*

(part of the symposium Exploring LGBTQIA+ Issues Among Children and Youth in Care)

Microaggressions among LGBTQIA+ Youth in the Child Welfare System
Research underscores the vital role of care professionals and peers in supporting LGBTQIA+ youth within the child protection system. While affirming and compassionate care fosters their well-being, not all professionals offer this support, resulting in adverse psychosocial effects. This study examines the microaggressions faced by LGBTQIA+ youth in residential care, specifically microinvalidations, microinsults, and microassaults. It also explores how these young people actively resisted such experiences. Semi-structured interviews with 15 LGBTQIA+ youth in Cantabria, Spain, revealed that both care professionals and non-LGBTQIA+ peers were sources of these microaggressions. Participants described microinvalidations (e.g., dismissing their identities), microinsults (e.g., perpetuating stereotypes of hypersexuality), and, less commonly, microassaults (e.g., direct and indirect derogatory remarks). In response, youth asserted their rights by challenging restrictions on self-expression, educating those around them, and choosing to either ignore or directly address perpetrators. Additionally, LGBTQIA+ youth of color experienced intersecting discrimination linked to both their racial and LGBTQIA+ identities. These findings emphasize the necessity of professional training programs that promote affirming care and strengthen LGBTQIA+ youths' resilience, ultimately enhancing their well-being and reducing the impact of microaggressions.

Falling Through the Cracks: The Experiences of Transgender Youth Who Have Transitioned from Foster Care to Adulthood in New York and Buenos Aires: Exploring LGBTQIA+ Children and Youth in Care

Wednesday, 10th September: Exploring LGBTQIA+ Children and Youth in Care - Oral

Dr. Gerald P. Mallon [1]***, Ms. Mariana Incarnato*** [2]

1. *Silberman School of Social Work, Hunter College,* ***2.*** *DONCEL*

A growing body of research finds that young people who leave foster care as adults are uniquely disenfranchised and suffer from a lack of support as a result of their involvement with the child welfare system. This is of significant concern, as studies indicate having access to supportive networks is critical for achieving independence in adulthood among transitioning youth. Although all former foster youth are at risk of support-related challenges, these issues may be exacerbated for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ+) but especially for transgender youth who may also experience rejection and mistreatment associated with their sexual and gender minority statuses.

While research focused on this vulnerable population has been extremely limited, current political climates internationally have caused us to believe that such research could become even more limited. Several studies in Spain, the US, and the Netherlands have explored support provisions for LGBTQ+ identified foster youth or their relationships with the individuals in their support networks, but this is the first to examine such challenges specifically for trans youth. Such lack of knowledge poses limits to our understanding about the needs and challenges these youth face during this critical time and prevents scholars and practitioners from identifying and developing more appropriate protections/services.

This study explores how transgender youth formerly in the child welfare system actually utilize their network members, and the overall quality of their support system in two large cities – New York and Buenos Aires.

Methodology

Data were gathered through in- depth, face-to-face interviews, observations, and focus groups with 24 self-identified transgender participants, aged 21+years, that had exited the foster care as youth to transition to adulthood.

Participants were asked questions related to their experiences with peers, community, and systems as they related to their experiences as a self-identified transgender individual.

Data was analyzed using a combination of qualitative structural and thematic narrative analysis methods. the foster care system.

Findings

Trans youth transitioning from the foster care systems to adulthood have a range of experiences both positive and negative with respect to accessing Trans competent services and developing supportive relationships.

Participants noted how growing up in an LGBTQ+ affirming environment strengthened their ability to deal with homophobia as adults.

Participants reported continued challenges with birth families.

Participants noted the restorative and healing experiences of developing social supports with “families of choice.”

This evidence suggests that the experiences of families of choice as supports may be a positive relational direction in the absence or as inadequate support received from traditional birth families.

Results from this study suggest trans+-identified transitioning youth have distinct needs and challenges that are not being addressed in both cities and provide suggestions for promoting more supportive resources and

relationships for this population. Findings also help to build a framework of knowledge from which to develop further hypotheses and explore other important issues related to how trans identified youth are faring in New York and Buenos Aires' child welfare systems.

Relationships in Residential Care - Stability and change in emotional regulation of careworkers in residential care

Friday, 12th September: Relationships in residential care - Oral

Dr. Beatriz Santos [1], ***Prof. Catarina Pinheiro Mota*** [2], ***Prof. Marlene Moretti*** [3], ***Prof. Paula M. Matos*** [1]

1. *Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Porto,* ***2.*** *University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro,* ***3.*** *Simon Fraser University*

In recent years, despite efforts by Portuguese child protection committees to implement support measures within the natural environment, 6,183 children and adolescents remain in residential care (RC) (NISS, 2023). On average, these young people stay in the care system for around 3.1 years, and more than two-thirds (67%) were removed from their families due to neglect (NISS, 2023). Residential careworkers are important adult figures for youth in RC. In the transition to care, careworkers can be an important source of emotional and instrumental support (Costa et al., 2022; Mota et al., 2016). These professionals often constitute alternative attachment figures (Graham, 2005), where continuous and consistent care can make a difference in youth psychological adjustment (Leipold et al., 2019). However, the daily contact and emotional closeness with young people who have experienced traumatic situations can be challenging for careworkers, potentially triggering intense and difficult emotions and compromising the quality of care they provide (Moretti et al., 2015). The literature has emphasized the importance of emotional regulation (ER) of careworkers for the quality of care (e.g., Douglas, 2021; Moretti et al., 2015). As professionals, careworkers are called on to co-regulate with and scaffold the ability of young people to manage overwhelming emotions (Steinkopf et al., 2020). When responding to a child's emotional dysregulation, careworkers need to recognize and manage their own emotional responses while also understanding the child's needs (Douglas, 2021; Moretti et al., 2015). On the other hand, ER can serve as a protective factor for careworkers' mental health (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2019). Despite the importance of careworkers' ER, little is known about how ER strategies evolve over time. In addition, beyond the individual characteristics of careworkers, there is a limited understanding of the contextual and relational factors that contribute to differential paths. The present study analyzed the trajectories of stability/change in the ER of careworkers in 21 RC institutions in Portugal across four waves, during 20 months. We also analyzed whether individual (sex, age, psychosocial functioning, emotional exhaustion), contextual (length of experience, young-careworker ratio), and relational factors (distance and proximity in careworker-youth relationships) explained these trajectories. The sample included 212 careworkers (77.8% women and 22.2% men), aged 19-66 years old (*M* age = 40.99 years, *SD* = 11.05). We conducted latent growth curve analyses using structural equation modelling. Results revealed that careworkers' ER increases over time, and careworkers' age and length of experience explain this increase. Female gender and higher levels of psychosocial functioning explain higher initial levels of ER. Additionally, more distance in relationships with youth is negatively associated with the initial levels of ER. We will discuss the challenges careworkers face regarding emotion regulation under RC and identify the needs for future research.

Relationships in Residential Care - Quality of care and perceptions of acceptance/rejection of children in residential care

Friday, 12th September: Relationships in residential care - Oral

Mrs. Joanna Fernández Sánchez [1], Ms. Sabina Daniela Gaitán Chiappino [1], Prof. Francisco Javier Fernández-Baena [1], Prof. Maria D. Salas [1]

1. *Universidad de Málaga*

Residential care remains one of the essential measures for the protection of children and adolescents. This study is part of a larger project examining the quality of care and development of children in residential care. This research analyses the relationship between the warmth or rejection perceived by children from their caregivers and the quality of care. It also analyses whether there are differences in the warmth or rejection perceived depending on the number of young people residing in the care home (≤8 places vs. 20 places). A total of 144 children aged 9–16 years (42.6% boys) and 94 caregivers from 22 protection homes in the province of Malaga (Spain) participated in the study. An ad hoc instrument named EQUAR-Andalucía based on the EQUAR quality standards was created and used to assess the quality of care. Specifically, standards 13 ('Normalization and Integration') and 14 ('Development and Autonomy') of the children's version and standard 21 ('Affective and Emotional Needs') of the caregiver's version were used. In addition, children completed the Affect Scale comprising two factors ('Warmth/Communication' and 'Criticism/Rejection') to assess their perception of the affective relationship with their caregivers. Statistically significant positive correlations were observed between the perception of Warmth/Communication and the standards of Normalisation/Integration and Development/Autonomy, and with the 'Affective and Emotional Needs' perceived by the caregivers. Whereas the correlations between Criticism/Rejection and these standards followed the opposite pattern. Furthermore, it was found that in homes with fewer children (≤8 places), they perceived less Warmth/Communication and more Criticism/Rejection than in larger homes (20 places). Finally, we studied whether the Warmth or Rejection that the children perceived from their caregivers could be explained by the quality of care, finding that Normalisation and Integration explained 62.7% of the Warmth/Communication and 36.5% of the Criticism/Rejection perceived. Among the results found, it is remarkable and unexpected, that children perceive more Warmth and less Rejection in homes with more children residing (20 places) than in smaller homes (≤8 places). These results require further research to analyse other possible factors underlying the relationships found and to contribute to their interpretation (e.g. material and human resources, organisation, leadership, etc.). It is also relevant that two of the standards studied (Normalisation/Integration and Development/Autonomy) explain a large percentage of the children's perception of Warmth and Rejection. These results highlight the importance of meeting the indicators on Normalisation/Integration and Development/Autonomy (i.e. that children feel at home in the facility, feel integrated in the community and are autonomous) to provide high quality care, since then children perceive greater Warmth and less Rejection from their caregivers.

Relationships in Residential Care - Attachment and Adversity in Parent´s Childhood: Implications in the Projects and Individuation of Young People in Residential Care

Friday, 12th September: Relationships in residential care - Oral

Prof. Catarina Pinheiro Mota [1], ***Dr. Sara Alves Pacheco*** [1], ***Dr. Elza dos Santos Borges*** [1], ***Ms. Inês Souto*** [1], ***Prof. Mónica Costa*** [1]

1. *University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro*

Introduction: Parental attachment and experiences of adversity are relevant factors in their involvement in life projects and in promoting the individuation of young people, particularly in residential care (RC). The need to involve parental figures in the context of RC has been scarcely addressed in the literature. Despite the indications provided for the Portuguese law, the life projects of young people in RC are scarcely discussed with them, and the family feels less comprised. ***Objectives:*** This research aims to analyse the relationship between attachment to parents and the experience of adversity in their childhood, their involvement in life projects and the individuation of young people in residential care. ***Methodology:*** The sample consists of 92 parental figures of young people in residential care in Portugal of both sexes (76.1% female) and ages between 31 and 73 (M = 44.87; SD = 8.36). Data was collected using self-report questionnaires, including the *Experiences in Close Relationship Structures Questionnaire (ERP-ER), The Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (ACE), the Individuation Test for Emerging Adults (ITEA)* and the *Parental Involvement in Life Projects Questionnaire*. ***Results and Discussion:*** The results will be discussed in light of attachment theory, and the importance of the emotional experiences of parental figures and how they are involved in the life projects of young people in RC will be highlighted, as well as the promotion of their autonomy. Important practical implications point to the need for early investment in the family context and family involvement in the work carried out with young people in RC.

Relationships in Residential Care- Family Support and Quality of Relationships with Significant Figures on Optimism in Young People in Residential Care

Friday, 12th September: Relationships in residential care - Oral

Dr. Cristina Peixoto Alves [1], ***Dr. Andreia Catarina Alves Castro Castro*** [1], ***Prof. Catarina Pinheiro Mota*** [1]

1. *University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro*

Introduction: The literature is consistent on the importance of structured family support as a secure base that guides the formation of promising expectations in young people. However, in Residential Care (RC) settings, intrafamilial support is often compromised or nonexistent. In these circumstances, other significant figures, such as teachers and institutional caregivers can play an important role in promoting optimism and fostering positive expectations among young people in RC. ***Objectives:*** The present study aims to analyze the role of family support and the quality of the emotional bond with significant figures (teachers and institutional caregivers) in the optimism of young people in RC. ***Methodology:*** The sample consisted of 145 Portuguese young people (61.4% male) aged between 12 and 23 (M = 16.3; SD = 2.4). Data were collected using self-report measures, including the *Relationship to Significant Figures* Questionnaire (RSFQ*), Family Support Perception Inventory* (FSPI), and *Vision About Future* (VAF). ***Results:*** The results confirmed a positive association between family support (on the adaptation of young people) and the quality of the emotional bond with institutional caregivers concerning the optimism of young people in RC. Boys presented higher optimistic attitudes and hopeful future expectations. ***Discussion:*** The results will be discussed in the light of attachment theory, emphasizing the role of interpersonal relationships in fostering positive future expectations. The practical implications of this study contribute to implementing specific guidelines for interventions with families and caregivers in RC.

Relationships in Residential Care - Temperament of children in residential care and perceived acceptance/rejection and style of discipline used by care workers

Friday, 12th September: Relationships in residential care - Oral

Ms. Sabina Daniela Gaitán Chiappino [1], ***Mrs. Joanna Fernández Sánchez*** [1], ***Prof. Francisco Javier Fernández-Baena*** [1], ***Prof. Maria D. Salas*** [1]

1. *Universidad de Málaga*

The ability to adapt interpersonal interactions to temperamental characteristics is essential for high-quality care. The present study seeks to deepen our understanding of the reciprocal relationships between the caregivers' discipline styles and the temperament of the youth in Residential Care. Specifically, it aims to find out whether different temperamental characteristics in reactivity and self-regulation are related to and/or can predict the care workers' discipline styles and the affective relationships they maintain with the children. A total of 144 children aged 9–16 years (42.6% boys) and their caregivers from 22 residential care homes (Spain) participated. The Early Adolescent Temperament Questionnaire-Revised (EATQR) was used to assess temperament, the Affect Scale and Rules and Demands Scale was used to assess children's perceptions of affective relationships and discipline styles among their caregivers, and Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function **(**BRIEF-2) was used to assess children's self-regulation. Perceived warmth/communication was significantly higher than criticism/rejection and children perceived more inductive than rigid or permissive styles. Temperamental-scale fear was positively related to warmth/communication and an inductive style, and negatively related to criticism/rejection and a rigid style, whereas high intensity pleasure showed the opposite pattern. In addition, some self-regulation and temperament scales (Emotional Control Problems, Fear, Affiliation and High Intensity Pleasure) explained 26% of the perception of warmth/communication, while others (Inhibition Problems, Fear and Frustration) explained 15% of the variability of the rigid discipline style used by care workers. These results are highly significant as they highlight the relationship between the variables studied and confirm what previous studies with the general population have shown: children's temperamental characteristics are associated with and partially explain or evoke the educational styles used by their caregivers. In particular, the results encourage further exploration of these relationships to understand more precisely the bidirectional effects found in the reviewed studies and to provide care workers with tools to improve their skills in caring for these children. In this regard, considering the transactional relationships between parenting and temperament can improve professionals' actions in caring for children. Therefore, it is essential that care workers' interventions take temperamental characteristics into account, since the children who are especially vulnerable to the effects of negative parenting are precisely the children who evoke this kind of behaviours in caregivers.

Making meaning through integration of data and voice

Making Meaning Through Integration of Data and Voice - Using Co-Design in a Theory of Change Framework to integrate voice into innovation and transformation

Thursday, 11th September: Making Meaning Through Integration of Data and Voice - Oral

Mr. Robert Lieberman [1]

1. *Lieberman Group*

The Association of Children's Residential and Community services' Building Bridges Initiative (ACRC/BBI) has developed a Theory of Change for Residential Interventions (TOC) to provide a comprehensive framework for implementing Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC). The framework consists of seven intersecting logic models, each addressing a core principle of Systems of Care (SOC), a structured approach used in community services in the US with practice principles that, taken together, can also guide TRC, defined as "…the planful use of a purposefully constructed, multi-dimensional living environment designed to enhance or provide treatment, education, socialization, support, and protection to children and youth with identified mental health or behavioral needs in partnership with their families and in collaboration with a full spectrum of community based formal and informal helping resources. (Whittaker, Del Valle, & Holmes, 2014, p. 24)". Despite the widespread use of SOC in US communities, efforts thus far to adapt its principles to residential care have been sporadic and inconsistent. The TOC is in effect a menu of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts that programs can draw from to design practice improvements aligned with measurement that implement SOC principles and are transformational in their potential to actualize TRC.

The framework supports integrating SOC principles into residential programming using the logic models to align practices and measurement. Families and youth voice were involved in the co-design of the framework and are focal in a project to demonstrate its effectiveness and usability, and in project measurement activities. Programs participating in the project have all elected to use Photovoice (PV) as a key aspect of their data and measurement plans. PV is a participatory action research methodology that fosters reflection and critical dialogue through photography and artistic expression, to influence decision makers and promote the adoption of health focused policies. Initial use of Photovoice has generated important information for program leaders to consider in developing innovative practice approaches.

The project, entitled "Principles to Outcomes Driven Practices" (P2ODP) is a 26 month (2/24-3/26) public private partnership involving: ACRC/BBI program, family, and youth consultants; five cross system residential programs; the state of Oregon child welfare and mental health agencies; and the University of Kentucky College of Public Health as the research partner.

The project structure itself involves both youth and family voice at all levels- in the participating programs, the consulting teams, and the project leadership and evaluation teams. Program leaders report that the structure and framework create the opportunity for intentionality in planning incremental change with the voice of youth and families providing feedback and insights that help lead the way.

This presentation will provide an overview of the TOC and P2ODP. Examples regarding how youth and family voice have become integrated into making meaning of the data and generating innovation and transformation will be shared and promising implications for implementation of TRC explored.

Making meaning through integration of data and voice - Between ‘meaning making’ and ‘evidence generation’ in child and family services - epistemological wars revisited

Thursday, 11th September: Making Meaning Through Integration of Data and Voice - Oral

Prof. Sigrid James [1]

1. *University of Kassel*

What knowledge is needed to improve social services and how to respond to the needs of diverse client groups are questions that the profession of social work has wrestled with since its inception. Early on, two different approaches to social work practice were apparent: On the one hand, the values-driven and community-based approaches of the Settlement House Movement as exemplified by the work of Jane Addams; on the other hand, the methods-based and empirical approach pursued by Mary Richmond. The two approaches also represent different epistemological traditions that to this day impact on what knowledge in social work is generated and valued and how it is generated and disseminated. Both strands have shaped social work, are weaved through the profession, and have at times co-existed or been at odds with each other.

At a time where “evidence” has become part of everyday professional terminology in social work and research activity by social workers is at an all-time high, it seems timely to revisit the different epistemological traditions and their influence on the discipline and profession of social work, with a particular focus on the field of child and family services. As part of this symposium on “Making meaning through integration of data and voice”, this paper will use Germany and the US as exemplars of the two different knowledge traditions in social work and explore how knowledge generation compares between the two countries. The objective is to describe differences in the types and methods of research, consider implications for social work education and (child welfare) practice as well as necessary steps toward greater alignment.

Toward this end, available data on ‘publication behavior’ and knowledge production in the social sciences/social work for both countries were reviewed. Results confirm differing publication traditions as well as conceptualizations of ‘what knowledge is needed for social work’ and point to differences in the emphasis on theory (development) and empirical research. All this has implications for knowledge production (e.g., systematic reviews) and discourses around evidence.

Drawing on this analysis, this paper will set the scene for the symposium. It will be argued that knowledge generation in social work benefits from epistemological and methodological rapprochement (voice and data, so to speak) and that continued points of divergence are often due to misunderstandings about data and evidence as well as epistemological posturing, which is viewed as counterproductive for the professional aims of social work. It will further be argued that mixed-methods studies, participatory approaches and agreed-upon standards are essential for advancing the discipline of social work and promoting positive outcomes for children and their families.

Making Meaning Through Integration of Data and Voice - Overarching

Thursday, 11th September: Making Meaning Through Integration of Data and Voice - Oral

Prof. Lisa Holmes [1]***, Prof. Leon Feinstein*** [2]***, Dr. Ruth Goodman*** [1]***, Prof. Sigrid James*** [3]***, Mr. Robert Lieberman*** [4]

1. *University of Sussex,* ***2.*** *Rees Centre, University of Oxford,* ***3.*** *University of Kassel,* ***4.*** *Lieberman Group*

In this symposium we will focus on the uses of data and information in child welfare systems, and the ways in which the 'voice' of children and families can be integrated into those systems. Our series of papers consider how this approach can facilitate transformation of and innovation in child welfare systems, particularly as they relate to supporting children and young people in alternative care.

Our symposium comprises four papers spanning learning from England, Germany and the US. We will start with an overarching paper focused epistemological positions as they relate to evidence generation and 'meaning making' of the information that is used to inform child welfare service. We will draw on the international literature and will posit the two overarching paradigms as they relate to the US and German child welfare systems. This paper provides the foundations for the subsequent papers that offer in-depth and empirical examples of the integration of 'voice' into systems.

The second paper provides an overview of a project in the US, focused on Therapeutic Residential Care. The project structure involves child and family voice at all levels - in participating programs, the consulting teams, and the project leadership and evaluation teams. Examples will be provided about how the voices of children and families have been integrated into meaning making of the data and to generate innovation.

The third and fourth papers draw on the learning from empirical research in England as part of the ongoing Children's Information Project which is focused on the way that information about and from children, young people and families is used in local and national Government. We will first introduce the work to date about the use of Theory of Change to assess and refine how data and information are used in child welfare in England, with a particular focus on support for children and families to prevent a period of out of home care, and on care leavers.

For the final paper our focus will centre on meaningful outcome measurement for care leavers, as determined by those who have recently left care, and professionals working with them. We will consider the dominance of different 'voices' in child welfare systems, particularly as it relates to measurement. We offer conclusions based on our individual and collective research about how the 'voice' of children and families can be brought to the fore of service design and delivery to achieve the best possible, and most meaningful outcomes.

Making Meaning Through Integration of Data and Voice - Integrating ‘voices’ of care leavers into information systems

Thursday, 11th September: Making Meaning Through Integration of Data and Voice - Oral

Prof. Lisa Holmes [1]

1. *University of Sussex*

Objectives: This paper examines how the voices of care leavers are attended to in the English children’s social care system. It focuses on how practitioners seek and respond to young people’s wishes and feelings in supporting their transition to adulthood. The paper also includes an exploration of care leaver outcomes in the English children’s social care system, considering the outcome indicators that are determined by English central government as part of annual statutory recording (as part of government administrative datasets) and the outcomes that are important to care leavers, and those children’s social care professionals working with them. We draw on the learning from the Children’s Information project: a five-year innovative research collaboration between local authorities and universities in England to improve the way that information about and from children, young people and families is used in local and national Government.

Methods: We conducted a series of interviews and focus groups in one local authority in England, comprising care experienced young adults along with frontline professionals working with care leavers, senior managers and data analysts. In addition, our study also employed a qualitative, ethnographic approach. The methods comprise the shadowing of seven practitioners’ interactions with four care leavers in an English local authority. We examined professional practices when probing, interpreting and responding to young people’s wishes and feelings, broadly considering these as ‘voice’ data. We also examined how these interactions were recorded within children’s social care management information systems, and through an examination of electronic case records, and datasets used by the local authority we consider the integration of ‘voice’ in information systems.

Findings: Our paper illustrates how care leavers ‘voices’ emerge from their everyday encounters with their children’s social care workers as relational, negotiated, situated and contingent. Our analysis also highlights how these qualitative and relational interactions are recorded in case management systems, and how ‘voice’ becomes codified, and masked in quantitative data as it moves through the children’s social care system for use by senior managers and in datasets utilised by central government.

Conclusion: Our findings indicate the disconnect between the care leaver outcomes determined by central government and those determined as important to care leavers and those working with them. We will present our work to integrate more meaningful outcomes (as determined by care leavers) into data systems and the steps necessary to ensure that when we measure outcomes for care leavers, we do so in a way that is meaningful for them. The learning from our findings for outcome measurement in child welfare systems internationally will be explored.

Making meaning through integration of data and voice - Utilisation of Theory of Change in Information Use Projects

Thursday, 11th September: Making Meaning Through Integration of Data and Voice - Oral

Dr. Ruth Goodman [1]

1. *University of Sussex*

Objectives: The Children's Information project is an innovative research collaboration between local authorities and universities in England to improve the way that information about and from children, young people and families is used in local and national Government. This information will shape and inform the support and services provided to meet and respond to the diverse needs of children, young people and families. Underpinning the Children's Information project is the concept of the Information Use Project (IUP). Set up in each of the partnership local authority sites, IUPs are co-produced, voice-informed projects that focus on progressing ethical and effective use of children's information in a way that meets the specific need of that local authority. In this presentation we will introduce the concept of an IUP and explore how a Theory of Change (ToC) can be used to inform and test out IUP design, to evaluate an IUP, and to inform child welfare policy and practice. Core to this is ensuring that diverse voices, including those of children, young people, families and practitioners, are heard more clearly and are listened to, and that these voices influence how information is gathered, shared, processed and used. This requires not only sound collection, collation, interpretation and analysis of information, but also a clear ethical foundation and fit for purpose use of information.

Methods: We will present our learning from ToC workshops carried out with children's social care practitioners and managers as well as interviews and focus groups with children and families. We will also draw on case file analysis and observations of practice.

Findings: Our findings highlight how the information used by children's social care services for strategic and operational decision making is dominated by performance management indicators, determined by government, and by senior leaders. We will provide examples of how the voice of children, families and practitioners can be integrated into the information that is used to inform decision-making in child social care policy and practice.

Conclusion: In our paper we will draw on our findings reflecting on how to support children's social care to better integrate voice within an IUP. We will highlight how data collection processes themselves change everyday relationships of care, and that where children and young people's voices are integral to everyday practice and recording, they become more easily embedded within data, and more readily capable of informing ethical use of children's information.

Prevention of maltreatment and sexual violence in institutions

Prevention of maltreatment and sexual violence in institutions - What do professionals in residential care mean when they use the term “sexuality”?

Friday, 12th September: Prevention of maletreatment and sexual violence in institutions - Accepted with changes

Prof. Daniela Reimer [1]

1. *Zurich University of Applied Sciences*

Background

Children and young people in residential care are affected by sexualised violence much more often than other children and young people (Commissie Samson, 2012). In recent years, an intensive discussion in German-speaking countries arose about the prevention of sexualised violence and about protection concepts that institutions must have in place and ideally implement in their daily work (Pöter & Wazlawik, 2018; Wolff, 2019). So far, however, little is known about how professionals in residential care institutions discuss the prevention of sexualised violence in their teams and what effects this has on protection concepts and their implementation.

Methods

In the research project “Prevention of Sexualised Violence in Socio-Pedagogical Institutions” (2021—2025, Zurich University of Applied Science, financed by the Swiss Federal Office for Gender Equality), 12 group discussions were conducted with groups of professional staff in residential child care. Each group discussions took place in a residential care institution which means, all of the professional staff that participated in the group discussion work together. The group discussions were based on a set of guidelines that covered various areas of prevention and encouraged the group to engage in discussion with each other. The group discussions were analyzed using the documentary method. Beyond other topics, in the comparison of the different group discussions it was striking how different groups had different uses of the term “sexuality” with effects on their respective prevention practices.

Results

In the analysis, six different uses of the term “sexuality” have been identified: (1) Sexuality as an educational task, (2) Sexuality as a right of young people, (3) Sexuality as a gender-specific issue were male sexuality is considered as potentially dangerous and female sexuality is vulnerable and needs to be protected, (4) Sexuality as heteronormative were non-heterosexual young people are considered a problem for the institution and the structure, (5) Sexuality as an adult topic were young people must be protected from communications on sexuality and cured or even repaired of experiences with what is considered as non-age-appropriate experiences with sexuality and (6) Sexuality as an exclusive topic for a heterosexual marriage, from which young and unmarried people must be strongly protected.

The way residential care institutions use the term sexuality has strong effects on their idea of protection: if sexuality is considered as a right and/ or an educational task ((1) and (2)), education is in the focus of prevention. If sexuality is understood in a heteronormative way ((3) and (4)) stereotypes are continually reproduced and there is no space for non-heterosexual young people in the instituition. Whereas if sexuality is considered a topic from which children and young people need to be protected ((5)) and (6)), sexuality becomes a taboo. While (1) and (2) have the potential to support the development of professional prevention concepts, the other approaches may harm the implementation of prevention concepts.

Prevention of maltreatment and sexual violence in institutions - Pathways for avoiding the risk of “institutional maltreatment”

Friday, 12th September: Prevention of maletreatment and sexual violence in institutions - Oral

Dr. Cinzia Canali [1]

1. *Fondazione Zancan*

Overview

This presentation is focusing on a “new” form of subtle and elusive violence, a phenomenon that is still little known and undetected: the “**institutional maltreatment**” of children, adolescents and their families by the institutions that should protect, care for and safeguard them. Recent research shows that maltreatment in institutions has multiple causes, stems from bureaucratic inertia, inconclusive decisions, re-shuffling of competences, irresponsibility that do not protect, safeguard, promote, postponing timely interventions and weakening the systems of trust that should characterise the relations between citizens and institutions that are called to protect the rights of the weakest part of the population.

This maltreatment is often carried out unconsciously when supporting families in difficulty, even in family foster care, which amplifies and aggravates the maltreatment suffered.

Arguments

The analysis of stories of institutional maltreatment inside services for children shows that they are procedural and systemic: they find fertile ground in structural deficiencies, where professionals too often find themselves working alone, with a disproportionate workload, committed to dealing with continual emergencies in a situation of progressive contraction of the resources and tools available to them. The “Who”- definition of maltreatment does not explicitly cover “institutional maltreatment” but hints at the possibility of it by indicating the issue of child abuse as “a major public health problem worldwide”, not limited to the family environment (Who, 2002). This definition focuses attention on the role of all contexts and all those who have a relationship of responsibility, trust and power with children and young people. Contexts can be public or private, and institutional maltreatment can be perpetrated in various environments, involving professionals who acted inadequately (Dissegna, 2023).

Implications

The lack of evaluations and research on this failed in understanding the damages made on children’ lives. Adopting a systematic evaluation of outcomes of all interventions devoted to children to be implemented in short-, medium- and long-term projects can be an asset from which to bring out the strengths and weaknesses of the system in order to intervene appropriately. These are indispensable actions to detect possible institutional maltreatment suffered and to remedy it. Each person, inside the welfare system, contributes a part of a procedure, of a process that is not and cannot be linear. Questioning, training and sharing objectives, strategies, but also monitoring and evaluating, can help institutions and those working into them to recognise and reduce or avoid the many possible pitfalls that can also lead to institutional maltreatment. In institutional maltreatment, excluding striking facts that can be traced back to very evident or explicit active or passive conduct, it is very complicated to identify individual responsibility and/or that of the organisation as a whole. Weak users, often not very aware of their rights, are more exposed to the risk of possible maltreatment by institutions. This poses ethical, organisational and professional questions. Only constant reflection (personal and institutional) on the complex work in progress, but even more on the outcomes of the interventions implemented over time, can help to be more aware of possible errors.

Prevention of maltreatment and sexual violence in institutions - Flipping the Script: The Importance of Recognizing and Addressing Violence as Inherent in Child Protection

Friday, 12th September: Prevention of maletreatment and sexual violence in institutions - Oral

Dr. Tim Tausendfreund [1]

1. *ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work, Institute of Childhood, Youth and Family*

Background: Child abuse and neglect (CAN) can occur wherever there are children. No society or social context is exempt. So it should not come as a surprise that research has consistently demonstrated this to be true as well for child protection, across various time periods and welfare systems (Tausendfreund, Gabriel, & Yousfi, 2023). Two nationally coordinated research programs from the Netherlands—comprising together a total of 30 studies on sexual violence in child and youth care (Commissie Samson, 2012) and on experiences of violence (Commissie de Winter, 2019)—even concluded that violence in Dutch child and youth care is systemic in nature and thereby prompting this question to all child welfare systems.

Objective: This contribution to the symposium "Prevention of maltreatment and sexual violence in institutions" acknowledges that experiences of violence are inherent in child protection and must be addressed accordingly. It proposes changing perspectives and narratives from violence rather being the rule than the exception to better match and address these realities. The aim is to understand the systematic intersections of factors that enable or amplify violence in institutions and to explore alternative models centering on shared responsibilities, reconciliation, and prevention.

Method: To achieve this, a broad and integrative vision of the phenomena was developed to bridge fragmented perspectives on practices, theories, and policies. This approach focuses on connections rather than differences, incorporating findings from systematically reviewed research, common elements in social work theories, and shifts in child welfare policies influenced by national and international abuse cases. Practical and theoretical interconnections are illustrated through insights from reports on the so-called "German Experiment" by Helmut Kentler, lessons drawn from abuse cases in prominent reformed institutions, and policies aimed at reconciliation.

Findings: Systematic reviews identify multiple sources of vulnerabilities and intersections that can create or exacerbate experiences of violence. Examples include care cultures that are disconnected from diverse communities or staff lacking adequate training to address questions of sexual identity and development. However, focusing solely on these individual factors risks overlooking broader organizational and systemic issues. Factors such as transitions in and out of care, social movements, care reforms, and the ways ideals of family and relationships are conveyed or applied in care are crucial for understanding, responding to, and preventing violence.

Conclusions: Based on the analyses and examples provided, it is important to address the disruptions and continuities encountered by young people in care. Recognizing violence as inherent to the system necessitates reevaluating not only specific programs but examining experiences, practices, theories, and policies in relation to each other. Supporting young people in transitions in and out of care, fostering their developments, and safeguarding them from violence and abuse require an ethical approach rooted in *responsibility*, rather than conviction or intention.

References:

Tausendfreund, T., Yousfi, S., & Gabriel, T. (2023). Experiences of violence, abuse, and safety in child and youth care: how safe is safe? EuSARF 2023, Brighton, United Kingdom.

Symposium title: Prevention of maltreatment and sexual violence in institutions

Friday, 12th September: Prevention of maletreatment and sexual violence in institutions - Oral

Prof. Daniela Reimer [1], ***Dr. Tiziano Vecchiato*** [2]

1. *Zurich University of Applied Sciences,* ***2.*** *Fondazione Zancan*

Children and adolescents in institutions are “weak users”. Often, they are not very aware of their rights. They are more exposed to the risk of possible maltreatment by institutions. This poses ethical, organisational and professional questions. Only constant reflection (personal and institutional) on the complex work in progress, but even more on the outcomes of the interventions implemented over time, can help to be more aware of possible errors and harm done to children and young people in institutions.

The symposium raises questions about the fact that children often experience harm in institutions meanwhile these institutions are supposed to protect them. The symposium focuses on empirical based approaches of prevention of maltreatment and sexual violence in institutions.

The findings of the presentations aim to provide directions to transform institutions into safe places for children and young people.

Cinzia Canali is focusing on a subtle and elusive violence, a phenomenon that is still little known and undetected: the “institutional maltreatment” of children, adolescents and their families by the institutions that should protect, care for and safeguard them. Recent research shows that maltreatment in institutions has multiple causes: bureaucratic inertia, inconclusive decisions, re-shuffling of competences, irresponsibility, postponed timely interventions are some of them. This kind of maltreatment is perpetrated by the institutions that are called to protect the rights of the weakest part of the population. In the presentation she will provide some directions for researching on this topic.

Tim Tausendfreund speaks on “Flipping the Script: The Importance of Recognizing and Addressing Violence as Inherent in Child Protection”. He argues that systematic reviews identify multiple vulnerabilities and intersections that can exacerbate violence. Examples include disconnected care cultures and staff lacking training on sexual identity and development. Broader organizational and systemic issues are crucial for understanding and preventing violence. He concludes that addressing disruptions and continuities in care is important, recognizing violence as inherent to the system requires reevaluating programs and examining transitions in experiences, practices, theories, and policies and supporting young people in care requires an ethical approach rooted in responsibility.

Daniela Reimer will present from a study based on group discussions from residential care institutions “What do professionals in residential care mean when they use the term “sexuality”?”. She will show that the interpretation of “sexuality” by professionals and their teams strongly influences protection concepts. Viewing sexuality as a right or educational task supports prevention, while other views may hinder effective prevention measures.

Belonging and becoming

Belonging and becoming: Rethinking children's identity development in foster care and adoption - What's in a Name? Family Terminology and Foster Children's Sense of Belonging

Thursday, 11th September: Belonging and becoming: Rethinking children's identity development in foster care and adoption - Oral

Dr. Lara Wulleman [1], ***Prof. Hans Grietens*** [2], ***Prof. Ilse Noens*** [2], ***Prof. Nicole Vliegen*** [2]

1. *University of Amsterdam,* ***2.*** *KU Leuven*

Foster children's sense of "family" both shapes and is shaped by the language they and those around them use to define their relationships. In this talk, we demonstrate that family identity in foster care is inherently discourse-dependent. Our study, conducted in Belgium, investigates how children in non-kinship foster care – and the key figures in their lives, including parents, foster parents, and foster parents' biological/legal children – employ family terminology (e.g., mom, dad, sister, brother) to construct and sustain their identities, as well as the factors that influence these practices.

Guided by boundary management theory and using reflexive thematic analysis, we examined focus groups and interviews with 27 participants involved in long-term foster placements. The data reveal how certain words create a sense of family, affirm and strengthen ties, erase distinctions, promote inclusion and conformity and protect, refute and explain ties to in- and outsiders.

Our findings underscore that, for foster children, discursive practices and identity formation are inseparable. Internally, naming (e.g., how children address people in their (foster) family) can either affirm a sense of enduring kinship or highlight anxieties about the "temporary" nature of their placement. Externally, labeling (e.g., how children refer to their (expected) family members in social contexts) can offer a sense of normality and belonging, especially in school or public settings where being recognized as "someone's child" is pivotal to fitting in. Yet these same practices can create friction if birth parents perceive that terms like "mom" and "dad" erode their own roles or if children themselves feel obligated to resist certain labels out of loyalty. Likewise, extended family's acceptance or refusal to use family terms (e.g., "grandchild" or "cousin") can tangibly validate or negate children's sense of belonging.

Some children avoid family terms altogether, hoping to shield themselves from potential emotional fallout should reunification efforts or placement breakdowns occur or because they do not view the foster relationship as parental. Others, however, feel validated and truly "one of the family" when they are encouraged to use more intimate labels. Crucially, many participants spoke of how the fluidity of such terminology mirrored the evolving sense of identity in foster care; what was comfortable at the start of placement might shift as bonds deepened or circumstances changed.

A strength of the study lies in its close attention to foster children's own voices and their strategies for navigating complex relational worlds. At the same time, the findings reflect the specific context of Belgian foster care and a relatively small, demographically limited sample. These and other limitations will be addressed in the presentation, alongside implications for research and practice across international contexts.

By highlighting the lived experiences of foster children, this study illustrates how "normalcy" in foster care is partly accomplished through discursive acts. Whether speaking to teachers, social workers, or extended family, these children may alter their language to secure social acceptance, avoid stigma, or manage loyalty conflicts.

In doing so, they continuously reinforce – or redefine – the very bonds that shape their sense of identity.

Belonging and becoming: Rethinking children's identity development in foster care and adoption - Exploring the role of family names in identity development for care experienced young people

Thursday, 11th September: Belonging and becoming: Rethinking children's identity development in foster care and adoption - Oral

Dr. Sinéad Whiting [1], ***Dr. Eavan Brady*** [1]

1. *Trinity College Dublin*

Background:

Identity formation can be a complex endeavour for care experienced youth and young adults, shaped by multiple factors including care history, feelings of stigma and senses of belonging. Arguably names, both first names and family names, are core to our identity and can denote social connection, family membership and cultural ties. Family names can indicate a connection to, or a difference from, others and for care experienced individuals, family names can carry additional layers of meaning reflecting connections to both family of origin and/or foster family - central factors contributing to how identity is shaped in this context. Despite this, the role of given or chosen family names and how they contribute to identity development in the context of alternative care appears to be an underexamined area.

Objective:

This presentation will explore how the use and/or choice of family names impacts identity development and shapes sense of belonging for a group of care experienced individuals while in care and beyond.

Methods:

In this paper we will draw on a re-analysis of data gathered as part of two separate qualitative research projects conducted in Ireland: one investigating the lived experience of a group of young adults, (aged 20-30; n=22) who grew up foster care with permanence (Whiting, 2023) and one exploring the educational pathways of care-experienced adults (aged 24-26; n=18) (Brady, 2020). We will highlight how experiences related to family names were an important theme in participants' narratives related to identity and belonging, despite the fact that identity was not the core focus of either project.

Findings

We will present illustrative case examples to demonstrate three key themes identified following re-analysis of these datasets. Firstly, we will demonstrate some of the ways in which family names shaped participant's dual identity in relation to birth and foster families. Secondly, we will examine how using a particular family name strengthened and / or weakened connections and sense of belonging to both birth and foster families. Thirdly, we will highlight the diversity of perspectives on this issue, emphasizing the importance of giving young people agency in deciding what family name they use. This case study approach allows us to bring depth and detail to the evidence presented within the time available.

Conclusion

Given existing research that aligns feelings of stigma and shame to the identity struggles experienced by many care experienced young people, understanding the impact of family names in this context is crucial. In this paper we will highlight how gaining insights into the potential impact a name can have will be valuable to informing policies and practices that support young people as they navigate these complex issues of identity and belonging. To that end, we will also make the case for additional research into the role of names in identity development for young people who have spent time in care.

Belonging and becoming: Rethinking children's identity development in foster care and adoption - The role of foster carers in meeting children's identity needs – Young people's perceptions

Thursday, 11th September: Belonging and becoming: Rethinking children's identity development in foster care and adoption - Oral

Dr. Vânia S. Pinto [1]***, Prof. Gillian Schofield*** [1]***, Dr. Birgit Larsson*** [1]***, Prof. Nuria Fuentes-Peláez*** [2]

1. *University of East Anglia,* ***2.*** *Universitat de Barcelona*

Introduction: Young people in foster care can experience challenges in their identity development as a result of their separation from their birth families, the frequent lack of stability in foster care, and the fact that their care identity is often stigmatised. Moreover, young people from minoritised groups (e.g., in terms of ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and abilities) are overrepresented in foster care (Fish et al., 2019; Fuentes-Peláez, 2022; Middel et al., 2020). Evidence suggests that these groups of young people are likely to face additional identity challenges, such as being misunderstood or even incorrectly treated by professionals and foster carers and experiencing more frequent placement breakdowns (López López et al., 2021). However, there is limited evidence on the specific needs of these diverse groups of young people who are in foster care, more specifically regarding their complex social identity development through the lens of intersectionality.

Objectives: This study builds on previous research by the lead author (Pinto, 2022; Pinto & Luke, 2022). It explores how young people who have foster care experience in England, Portugal, or Spain describe their identity development, with a focus on their social identity (i.e., ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and abilities) and multifamily membership (i.e., birth family and foster family). It also examines their perceptions of how foster carers contribute to their identity development. Therefore, this study follows an intersectionality approach (Phoenix, 2006, 2017) by accounting for multiple, meaningful, and overlapping elements of identity.

Methods: Two focus groups were conducted in England with a total of nine young people between 16 and 21 years of age with foster care experience. Recruitment efforts prioritised diversity in terms of the young people's social identity (i.e., ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and abilities) and care experiences (i.e., age at entry into care, number of placements, and length of time in foster care).

In the focus groups, young people were invited to 1) reflect on the most important elements of their identity, 2) discuss who (including foster carers) has supported their identity development and in what ways, and 3) consider how foster carers can provide quality support to children's identity development. The data within these three topics is being analysed thematically using an inductive approach.

Findings: Data collection/analysis is ongoing in Portugal and Spain, and preliminary findings from the English data will be presented at the conference.

Conclusions/Implications: The intersectionality approach, combined with the international comparative element, makes it a novel study, producing relevant evidence to contribute to the knowledge base. The evidence generated will inform practice by contributing knowledge on young people's identity development in care and providing recommendations to foster carers and social workers on how best to support them. This could enhance cultural competence among foster carers and social workers. Moreover, this research project has the potential to inform policy, more specifically, the discussions on how child protection systems can become more child-centred.

Belonging and becoming: Rethinking children's identity development in foster care and adoption - "We want for him to have a normal family life"–A Multiple Case Study on adolescents in kinship care identity and belonging from a Multi-Informant Approach

Thursday, 11th September: Belonging and becoming: Rethinking children's identity development in foster care and adoption - Oral

Ms. Judit Rabassa [1], ***Prof. Nuria Fuentes-Peláez*** [1], ***Dr. Gemma Crous*** [1]

1. *Universitat de Barcelona*

Objective: This study explores how kinship caregivers promote family and academic identity, as well as a sense of belonging, in adolescents in kinship care, incorporating the perspectives of kinship caregivers, adolescents, and school guidance counselors.

Methods: A multi-case study was conducted in Catalonia, Spain, involving three kinship care placements. The sample included 11 participants: 5 kinship caregivers (4 grandparents and 1 aunt), 4 adolescents in kinship care, and 2 high school guidance counselors. A total of 9 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted: 3 with kinship caregivers (including 2 double and 1 single interview), 4 with adolescents, and 2 with school guidance counselors.

Findings and implications:

1) Kinship care as a natural extension of existing family bonds: Kinship care placement has been perceived as a natural extension of the family bond, given prior informal caregiving experiences. Some adolescents had short stays with caregivers before formal placement, easing the transition, while others had their basic needs met by caregivers beforehand. For caregivers, this role is seen as a duty rather than a choice. These findings suggest that policies should require child welfare agencies to identify and engage potential kinship caregivers as early as possible, allowing time to build trust and understanding before placement. This would help maximize the benefits of kinship care in terms of identity and sense of belonging.

2) Promoting family identity and sense of belonging: A strong sense of belonging is fostered through integration into the extended family network, maintaining normalized family dynamics. Some caregivers redefine family roles, balancing dual identities (e.g., grandparent and parent). These findings point to the need for policies that explicitly support family inclusion and recognise the unique role kinship carers play in maintaining children's family identity, cultural ties, and extended family networks. Support systems should also provide guidance to help caregivers manage the balance between caregiving responsibilities and existing family roles.

In addition, daily involvement, emotional support, quality time, and shared placement with siblings further strengthen the adolescents' sense of belonging. Moreover, these caregiving strategies should inform both individual and group interventions addressed to kinship caregivers.

3) Concerns about the intergenerational transmission of patterns from the birth family history: Caregivers express concerns about adolescents repeating negative family patterns. While some project these fears, others actively work to minimize identity-related triggers, particularly in school settings, to avoid reinforcing trauma. These findings highlight the need for psychological support and training that can help caregivers approach these dynamics in a more constructive and non-reinforcing way.

4) Promoting academic identity in adolescents in kinship care: Academic identity formation varies among kinship caregivers. Approaches vary, from flexible support to strong expectations that shape educational trajectories. Some caregivers experience tensions between aspirations and reality. Positive reinforcement serves as a key factor in fostering academic self-concept. These findings suggest the importance of providing kinship caregivers with tools and resources to support adolescents' academic journey and identity, especially when emotional or

behavioural barriers to learning are linked to family instability or identity struggles.

Belonging and becoming: Rethinking children's identity development in foster care and adoption - 'I have everything I need, but there's always a part of me missing': identity and dual connection for youth adopted from care

Thursday, 11th September: Belonging and becoming: Rethinking children's identity development in foster care and adoption - Oral

Prof. Geneviève Pagé [1]***, Dr. Béatrice Decaluwe*** [2]***, Ms. Karine Tremblay*** [3]***, Mrs. Doris Chateauneuf*** [4]***, Ms. Lyzanne Thibeault*** [1]***, Prof. Marie-Andrée Poirier*** [5]

1. *Université du Québec en Outaouais,* ***2.*** *Private practice in Clinical psychology,* ***3.*** *Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières,* ***4.*** *Centre de recherche universitaire sur les jeunes et les familles (CRUJeF),* ***5.*** *University of Montreal*

Introduction. Adoptive identity is the process through which adopted individuals explore and understand the meaning of being adopted in their lives (Grotevant & von Korff, 2011). Most studies on adoptive identity have focused on private infant adoptions, without considering the unique challenges faced by adoptees in youth protection contexts, such as those who have experienced abuse, neglect, or multiple placements (Grotevant et al., 2017).

Objectives. The aim of this research was to better understand adoptive identity in youth adopted from care in early childhood.

Methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 youth, aged 14 to 25, who were adopted through a foster-to-adopt program in Quebec, Canada. They were invited to talk about their knowledge of the circumstances that led to their adoption, adoptive communicative openness with their adoptive parents and friends, the impact of adoption in their lives, and their curiosity and search for origins. The content of interview transcripts was inductively analyzed.

Findings. Participants reflect on how they manage their dual connection with both adoptive and birth families. Most have supportive relationships with their adoptive parents and view adoption positively. Despite having dealt with early adversity, they value transparency from their adoptive parents and want to know the whole truth about their adoption circumstances. Curiosity about their origins peaks in adolescence; 13 out of 18 participants have reconnected with birth families after their adoption. These connections complement, rather than replace, adoptive family bonds. Nonetheless, participants prefer to keep both worlds separate.

Conclusions/Implications. This research conducted with youth adopted from care in early childhood delivers key messages that can inform practice on the importance of empowering these youth to allow them to regain control over their own life stories, in their process of identity formation.

Innovative practice for infants at risk of harm

Innovative practice for infants at risk of harm - Infants, Risk, and Well-Being: Prevention Science at Work

Wednesday, 10th September: Innovative practice for infants at risk of harm - Oral

Dr. Fred Wulczyn [1], ***Dr. Bridgette Lery*** [2]

1. *Center for State Child Welfare Data - Chapin Hall,* ***2.*** *Urban Institute*

In prior EUSARF presentations, we described Hello Baby, a program being run in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania that targets children born in the county and their risk of contact with the child protection system. We return to this topic in this symposium with the first wave of results. To recap, Hello Baby uses broad-scale risk assessment to connect new parents with a system of supports that the county also strengthened. Our evaluation considers whether Hello Baby led to reductions in first maltreatment reports, first-substantiated reports, and first placements.

For the symposium, we will discuss what we found from a theoretical perspective that integrates implementation and outcomes research. On the implementation side, we have longitudinal measures of what the county put in place organized around the process, quality, capacity, and outcomes framework. Process speaks to what Hello Baby actors did, quality refers to whether the work of actors was done well, and capacity refers to whether the Hello Baby programmatic footprint was substantial enough to have what might be called a plausible causal effect. This latter point is critical to the Hello Baby theory of change. Risk assessment matters but not without a system that responds to what the system learns.

To see the plausible causal effect of agency actions on the well-being of infants, we took advantage of a unique opportunity. Allegheny County Department of Human Services maintains a data warehouse that ties children to their service records in child protection and a host of other child and family service systems, including birth certificates. The data warehouse is organized around people as the main structural element, which is important. We take that data and impose a mathematical structure that exploits the temporal structure inherent in the data. The new structure brings a deep life course perspective that starts with birth. We have achieved, we believe, an unusual level of precision which in itself lends credibility to the results observed.

We will close by fitting our results into the broader discussion of evidence use and the connection to outcomes.

Innovative practice for infants at risk of harm – First results from the PEGASE programme, a standardized health protocol for children in care before the age of 5 in France

Wednesday, 10th September: Innovative practice for infants at risk of harm - Oral

Dr. Morgane MICHEL [1], ***Dr. Daniel Rousseau*** [2], ***Mr. Soulaymane Hodroj*** [3], ***Mrs. Anita Crochet*** [2], ***Mrs. Virginie Marchand*** [2], ***Mrs. Mireille Rozé*** [2], ***Prof. Karine Chevreul*** [1]

1. *Université Paris Cité,* ***2.*** *Association Saint-Exupéry,* ***3.*** *Inserm*

The few studies carried out on children cared for by French Child Protective Services (CPS) and elsewhere agree that these children are in poor physical and mental health at the time of their placement, and remain highly vulnerable in the long term. Studies have also shown that children do not always benefit from adequate medical care while in the care of CPS. To provide a response to their unmet needs, the PEGASE programme ("standardized health protocol for children benefiting from a CPS protection measure before the age of 5") was funded in 2018 to experiment a new protocol which includes an initial standardized health check-up when the child is first admitted to the CPS structure taking care of him/her, followed by 20 health check-ups at fixed ages up to age 7. The majority of these check-ups include standardized scales to assess the development of the child and identify potential delays so as to implement early care.

The PEGASE programme was implemented in 13 departments and ran between 2019 and 2024, with the first child being included in 2021.

Our objective is to describe the health status of children included in the PEGASE programme, as well as their evolution over time. Children's health status was measured through developmental scales: the ASQ-SE, which assesses emotional and behavioural symptomatology, and the ASQ-3 with its five domains (communication, gross motor skills, fine motor skills, problem solving, personal-social development). Both are associated with alert thresholds depending on the child's score, which defines three situations: "typical development", "needs monitoring", or "developmental delay", requiring care. The percentage of children in each category upon inclusion in PEGASE as well as changes over time were assessed overall and for different subgroups.

At the time of writing, a first analysis has been carried out on 657 children included in the PEGASE programme. Median age was 11.4 months (1^{st}-3^{rd} quartiles=2.5-25.0), 53.3% were boys and 15.5% were preterm. Regarding their emotional and behavioural symptomatology, only a third (33.6%) had a typical development on the ASQ-SE scale, with 44.0% presenting a delay and 22.4% requiring monitoring. Likewise, between 35.5% and 46.5% had a typical development on the ASQ-3 scale depending on the domain. The most and the least affected domains were communication and gross motor skills, respectively. Looking at children's evolution over time, there was a sharp increase in children with typical development and a decrease in children with developmental delay for all scales and domains at 12 and 24 months.

The PEGASE programme shows very promising results when it comes to improving the health of children placed into care at a young age. A cohort of children not benefiting from the programme is currently being recruited so as to assess its effectiveness robustly.

Innovative practice for infants at risk of harm: New parenting opportunities for mothers with history of child removal, a qualitative exploration of key stakeholders' perspectives of a perinatal mentalization-based intervention (the Daisy programme)

Wednesday, 10th September: Innovative practice for infants at risk of harm - Oral

Dr. Ana Fernandez Jondec [1], ***Prof. Jane Barlow*** [1]

1. *University of Oxford*

Introduction. In advanced industrialized societies, the protection of children's well-being by the state starts early, beginning with assessments during pregnancy, particularly in cases where previous child removals have occurred. In recent years there has been an increase in newborns subjected to care proceedings, highlighting the pressing need for effective interventions. In response to this need, an intensive perinatal attachment and mentalization-based intervention, the Daisy programme, was developed to support pregnant women with a history of child removal, to prevent further parent-infant separation and involvement in care proceedings.

Aims. This study aimed to explore multiple stakeholders' perceptions of the impact and mechanisms of change of Daisy Programme.

Methods. A qualitative design was used. Data from mothers who benefited from the programme, service providers and other practitioners from the wider professional network was collected through semi-structured interviews and coded using thematic analysis.

Results. Participants included in the study were 4 service users, 5 Daisy practitioners and 6 external professionals (n=15). Findings indicated that stakeholders felt that the programme helped mothers to have more positive relationships, to gain confidence and to recognise their mistakes and the need for change. The four main aspects of the programme that stakeholders identified as having led to these changes were: (1) the relational focus of the intervention, (2) offering support adapted to parents' individual needs and circumstances, (3) the support provided to make sense of the past, and (4) the practical support offered.

Conclusion. Initial findings suggest that the programme was beneficial to pregnant women with histories of child removal, promoting both immediate social care outcomes and likely long-term maternal and infant well-being.

Keywords: Mentalization, perinatal, parent intervention, child removal, parents at-risk

Innovative practice for infants at risk of harm - Insights from the Australian Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home pilot

Wednesday, 10th September: Innovative practice for infants at risk of harm - Oral

Prof. Sarah Wise [1], ***Dr. Ellen Pittman*** [1], ***Ms. Lorne Samuels*** [2], ***Ms. Maddison Licciardo*** [2], ***Ms. Alicia Morris*** [2], ***Ms. Trezalia Skeen*** [2]

1. *The University of Melbourne,* ***2.*** *The Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency*

Background: Racial disproportionality in Australian child protection is most conspicuous for Aboriginal infants, and this has become more pronounced over recent years. Concern about rising rates of Aboriginal infant removals and the lack of proactive measures tailored for expectant Aboriginal families where an unborn child is likely to suffer significant harm following birth has motivated new care pathways to ensure Aboriginal children are born into safety, in the care of their parents. The *Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home* (BUABAH) program was designed by the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA) in collaboration with the University of Melbourne (UoM), Aboriginal practitioners from diverse sectors, Child Protection and the local birthing hospital. The program was piloted in Metropolitan Melbourne, Australia between July 2022 and December 2023 and the UoM evaluated how the design of the program affected outcomes for Aboriginal families, identifying areas of strength and adaptations needed.

Objectives: This paper presents results from the BUABAH pilot evaluation, including observed improvements in collaborative practice and referrals from Child Protection Intake, parent engagement and empowerment, family, Community and cultural connections, and child safety, highlighting the practice components and activities that led to positive outcomes.

Methods: Qualitative data were collected through two interviews with mothers who participated in the BUABAH program, five interviews with BUABAH program staff and one focus group that included BUABAH program staff and staff from Child Protection (n=9). Qualitative data were analysed in NVivo using a mix of theory-driven and data-driven codes, guided by research questions and synthesised through thematic analysis. Qualitative data were also extracted from the minutes of Local Implementation Group (LIG) meetings and were used as a source for qualitative triangulation, providing further context to the thematic analysis of interview and focus group data. Data relating to protective intervention following birth were extracted from VACCA's client information recording system (CSnet).

Findings: Six of the seven program participants were discharged from hospital with their baby, and one baby was discharged from hospital to the care of kin while the BUABAH program continued support to the mother. The women who participated in the BUABAH pilot were extremely complex cases, and at the point of case transfer, Child Protection did not think it was possible to avoid removal following birth. Removal was avoided in all but one case because of VACCA's Cultural Therapeutic Ways practice approach, which includes strategies to restore natural systems of care, support and responsibility and strengthen connection to Community and culture. Other effectiveness elements were collaboration between the BUABAH program, Child Protection, and hospital social workers, experienced Aboriginal practitioners, a small caseload, and flexible brokerage funding.

Conclusion: Core components of the BUABAH program resonate with other programs that have evolved independently in Australia and the UK to reduce infant removals. Other program elements unique to the BUABAH program that were central to its success included an identified Aboriginal practitioner role, and culturally competent and effective practice, which incorporates strategies to strengthen the cultural determinants of health.

Innovative assessment and practice to protect and promote the development of infants at risk of significant harm

Wednesday, 10th September: Innovative practice for infants at risk of harm - Oral

Prof. Harriet Ward [1], ***Prof. Jane Barlow*** [2]

1. *Rees Centre, University of Oxford,* ***2.*** *University of Oxford*

A wide body of research from across disciplines including neuroscience; developmental psychology; psychiatry and social work, now shows that exposure to significantly adverse experiences in very early childhood has a negative impact on all aspects of development (physical growth, language and communication skills, learning, social, emotional and behavioural development) and that this can endure across a child's life trajectory. In most high and middle income countries, the major service response to a risk of significant harm in the perinatal period has been to separate the infant from their mother. However, very few birth parents whose infants are at risk receive the support they need to better promote their wellbeing, and few infants exposed to significant harm receive the intensive support they require to promote developmental recovery whether they remain with their birth parents or are placed with foster carers or prospective adoptive parents.

Concerns about the high numbers of infant removals, the numerous mothers experiencing repeat removals, and the lack of services designed to promote developmental recovery in infants at risk of harm have led to the establishment of the International Research Network on Infants in Child Protection (www.irnicp.org), which aims to bring together research in this area. This symposium focuses on four innovative programmes being developed, implemented and evaluated in Australia, France the UK and the USA that provide a range of support to infants at risk of harm and their birth parents. They include a developmental recovery approach, implemented for all looked after children under five throughout France; a new care pathway designed to ensure that Aboriginal children are born into safety in the care of their parents in Australia; first results from a county wide programme designed to prevent maltreatment and support new parents in the USA, and a mentalization-based intervention to support mothers with a history of removal in the UK.

Innovative practice for infants at risk of harm: First results from the Pegase programme: a standardised health protocol for children placed in care before the age of five in France: Morgane Michel, France

Innovative practice for infants at risk of harm: Innovative practice for keeping Aboriginal babies safe in the care of their parents: Insights from the Australian Bringing up Aboriginal Babies at Home program: Sarah Wise and colleagues, Australia

Innovative practice for infants at risk of harm: Infants, Risk, and Well-Being: Prevention Science at Work: Fred Wulczyn and Bridgette Lery, USA

Innovative practice for infants at risk of harm: New parenting opportunities for mothers with history of child removal, a qualitative exploration of key stakeholders' perspectives of a perinatal mentalization-based intervention (the Daisy programme): Ana Fernandez-Jondec, UK

Co-parenting in foster care

Thursday, 11th September: Co-parenting in foster care - Oral

Dr. Anu Riina Svenlin [1]

1. *University of Jyväskylä*

The concept of co-parenting can be used to describe the way in which parents or other adults responsible for the child's care and upbringing work together to raise the child. Whereas parenting is seen as a dyadic phenomenon involving a child and a parent, co-parenting refers to a triadic - or even polyadic - relationship between a child and several adults. The focus of co-parenting is therefore on the child and the joint efforts made in relation to matters concerning the child.

Co-parenting has often been studied with cohabiting couples or divorced parents. However, virtually all children are 'co-parented' as parental responsibilities can be shared, for example, between a single parent and a grandparent or biological parents, foster carers and social workers. Who is involved in co-parenting can therefore be defined on biological, psychosocial and/or legal grounds. In the symposium, we approach co-parenting in foster care from different perspectives: birth parents, foster parents, social workers and other foster care workers, i.e. different parties in a co-parenting relationship. In foster care research, concepts of shared parenthood and three-part parenthood are often used to describe co-parenting.

Co-parenting is also a highly culturally embedded phenomenon. In the symposium, we will get an insight into current research on co-parenting in foster care from Sweden and Finland. This will provide a platform to discuss how co-parenting is conceptualised and studied, what kind of co-parenting is valued, and how it is supported in services now and in the future.

The presentations at the symposium will address the issue of co-parenting in foster care from different perspectives:

1. Anne Melke and Therese Wissö: Co-parenting as a practice
2. Laura Holmi and Johanna Moilanen: From kinship care perspective
3. Anu-Riina Svenlin and Erikka Levälahti: Co-creating knowledge of co-parenting

Co-parenting in foster care – Co-parenting as a practice: obstacles and actions in an improvement project

Thursday, 11th September: Co-parenting in foster care - Oral

Mrs. Anna Melke [1], ***Mrs. Therése Wissö*** [1]

1. *University of Gothenburg*

Background: Swedish policy documents and law presuppose a 'three-part parenthood' where birthparents, foster-parents/residential staff and case workers collaborate around the placed child. Furthermore, birthparents are entitled to support and advice during the placement, and the intention is to prepare for reunification. Yet, both evidence and local experience point to the fact that co-parenting is a vision rather than a practice.
Objective: This presentation is based on reflections and results from a collaborative research project involving seven social services (about 60 practitioners) and three researchers during 2018-2021. The project aimed at developing practices that enabled birthparents to become parents at a distance.
Methods: The project was designed according to the breakthrough model, giving researchers a dual role as process leaders and researchers (Melke et al., 2024). Data was collected through a follow-up of the local improvement work, focus groups with social workers (Wissö et al., 2022) and interviews with parents whose children were currently in out-of-home care (Wissö et al., 2024).
Results: Several obstacles for involving parents were identified. First, theoretical concepts such as 'three-part parenthood' and 'parent support' had not been translated into action, i.e. specific interventions and routines. Consequently, questions on *how* and *who* had to be solved. Second, it had not been translated into something desirable. On the contrary, involving parents was perceived as threatening the child perspective. Hence, the question of *why* became important. In our understanding, the project contributed to a circulation of theoretical, factual and practical knowledge that nurtured new ideas on how co-parenting could be practiced by different actors in ways that did not conflict with the best interest of the child as well as a new understanding on why that was important. It had to be clarified that co-parenting was not necessarily about being in contact with the child, but for example to be updated on the child's everyday life, to take part in some decisions or to be invited to share experiences and expertise about the child's habits, disabilities, preferences etc. Over time, it became apparent how parenting could be performed in different ways, depending on parent capacity and other contextual features. The new ideas foremost included ways of laying ground for parent involvement, such as: improved and adapted information that made the process more comprehensible, introduction of a support person that focused solely on the parent and the crisis caused by the placement, more engagement in contact visit preparation and performance and mobilization of foster parent's engagement in parent collaboration.
Conclusions and implications: The breakthrough model was useful for developing and trying out new social work practices in a co-creative environment. The findings suggest that the role of service users might play a more significant role than has been recognized in earlier research on organizational adaptation. This could be especially true for areas where service user voices are seldom heard, and in areas where there is a lack of evidence-based methods.

Coparenting in foster care - From kinship care perspective

Thursday, 11th September: Co-parenting in foster care - Oral

Mrs. Laura Holmi [1], ***Dr. Johanna Moilanen*** [1]

1. *University of Helsinki*

Background: The care of neglected children has historically been the responsibility of their family and community. In recent decades, in many Western countries, close placements have also been enshrined in legislation. The overarching objective of these measures has been to ensure the continuity of children's relationships, to prevent disruptions to their placements, to address the diverse needs of various population groups, and to achieve cost savings. (Delap & Mann, 2019.) However, there is a paucity of research on kinship care from a coparenting perspective, despite the recognition that there are different roles and relationships between the birth family, foster family and the child welfare social worker and other professionals (Coulter et al., 2020). While kinship placements are regarded as a means of fostering continuity in the child's network of relationships, they are not without their own inherent risks (Rose et al., 2022). In accordance with Klein-Cox et al. (2024), coparenting or shared parenting relationships in kinship placements are frequently more challenging than anticipated. Nevertheless, the long-term well-being of children in kinship placements can be positively influenced by the cultivation of relationships and coparenting.

Objective: In this presentation, the results of a scoping review will be presented and discussed to identify the factors that either promote or hinder coparenting relationships in kinship care.

Method and results: The aim of this scoping review is to identify the factors that promote or hinder kinship placements and address coparenting. The scoping review is conducted according to the JBI Manual for Evidence Synthesis; Scoping review (Peters et al. 2024).

Conclusion: The factors that promote and hinder kinship care placements need to be identified better to be able to address coparenting relationships and collaboration around the child in kinship care.

Key concepts: kinship care, foster care, coparenting, shared parenting, facilitating factors.

Co-parenting in foster care - Co-creating knowledge about co-parenting

Thursday, 11th September: Co-parenting in foster care - Oral

Dr. Anu Riina Svenlin [1], ***Mrs. Erikka Levälahti*** [2]

1. *University of Jyväskylä,* ***2.*** *JAMK University of applied sciences*

Background: The diversity of knowledge and the different ways of producing knowledge are increasingly discussed in the social sciences and humanities. Co-research, as an example of the co-creation of knowledge, is characterised by the fact that research participants are invited to participate as equal research partners with academic researchers in the different stages of the research process.
The presentation is based on an ongoing collaborative research project on co-parenting relationships in foster care in Finland. The project is conducted in collaboration with birth parents, foster parents, young people who have grown up in foster care, social workers, and other social care professionals, i.e. different parties in a co-parenting relationship.

Objective: The objective is to reflect on the initial steps of the co-research process on co-parenting: the planning of the data collection process for social workers, birth parents, and foster parents to be carried out in the Autumn 2025.

Methods: The research project follows a relational methodology, focusing on the co-parenting relationships between agents and the processes in which these relationships are formed (Powell & Dépelteau, 2013). Relational methodology allows for a process-centred approach that fosters culturally sensitive and ethically responsible research relationships (Allen et al., 2022).
At the beginning of the project a co-research group (17 participants + 3 researchers) was formed (Spring 2025) and will go on until end of 2026. The co-research approach covers all stages of the research, from planning the data collection to analysing the data. The discussions within the co-research group are analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results: The co-research group have so far provided perspectives on how to approach coparenting relationships, which are often characterised by conflicting interests and opinions. The group highlights the need to approach coparenting at different stages of the foster care process. For example, coparenting relationships need to be re-negotiated depending on the wellbeing of the parents, the age of the child and the length of placement. From a researcher's perspective, the composition of the co-research group, with participants representing different groups, has been empowering for the whole group.
Conclusions and implications: The co-research group has already demonstrated how new understandings of the methodological and ethical aspects of studying sensitive relationships in the foster care context can be generated. The experience of sitting together around the same table enabled the sharing of thoughts, mutual learning, and attentive listening. A shared ambition emerged within the group: to make a difference—to 'dust off' prevailing practices and attitudes and to explore new ways of supporting co-parental relationships around the child."

Reducing educational disadvantage for care experienced children and young people through a virtual school model

Reducing educational disadvantage for care experienced children and young people through a virtual school model – Development of the virtual school model in four countries

Wednesday, 10th September: Reducing educational disadvantage for care experienced children and young people through a virtual school model - Oral

Dr. Alice Tawell [1], ***Mr. Bettencourt Michael*** [2], ***Dr. Georgia Hyde-Dryden*** [1]

1. *University of Oxford,* ***2.*** *University of Strathclyde*

Objective

In 2014, it became a statutory requirement for every local authority (LA) in England to have a Virtual School Head (VSH). VSHs and their teams have strategic and/or operational responsibility for promoting the education of children in alternative care across a defined geographical area, as if they attend one school. Drawing on the concept of policy transfer, in this paper we will explore how the English Virtual School model has developed over time, and how the model has both spread and been tailored to meet different national and local contexts in England, Scotland, Australia, and Wales.

Methods

To begin to explore how the Virtual School model has been developed, transferred, and enacted in England, Scotland, Australia, and Wales, we will present a review of existing literature from the four countries, including the authors' own research conducted in England and Scotland, and draw on insights from conversations with researchers and practitioners working in Australia and Wales.

Findings

Emerging evidence about Virtual Schools shows how the model is being used in different ways to promote children's needs at an operational and/or strategic level. In England, the Virtual School model was originally introduced to promote the educational achievement of children in alternative care. The VSH role then expanded to include responsibility for all children who have or have had a social worker, children in alternative care and care leavers at post-16, and most recently children in kinship care.

Informed by the developments in England, 'Virtual School' models have subsequently been adopted in Scotland and in the state of Victoria, Australia, and a model is currently being piloted in Wales. In Scotland, the Virtual School role is non-statutory, but since 2018 several LAs have used government funding to appoint Virtual School Head Teachers and Care Experienced Teams to raise attainment and achievement for all children in alternative care. In Victoria, Australia, four 'Lookout Centres' have been introduced. Mirroring the English Virtual School model, each Lookout Centre is led by a principal, whose role is to oversee a multidisciplinary team of specialists who work with schools, early childhood education and care services, child protection practitioners, case workers, and carers to improve educational outcomes for children and young people in out of home care. In Wales, funding has been used in some LAs to implement a new Virtual School system and by others to improve the capacity and effectiveness of existing systems for supporting care experienced children.

Despite differences in the model's implementation and scope, Virtual Schools in all of the jurisdictions act as a link between partners in education and social care, provide those partners with constructive challenge, and act as advocates for care experienced children and young people at an individual or cohort level.

Conclusions/Implications

The development of the Virtual School model in different countries suggests that it may provide an effective means of promoting national consistency in the support provided to children in alternative care, whilst also allowing sufficient flexibility to meet local need.

Reducing educational disadvantage for care experienced children and young people through a virtual school model – Promoting educational achievement at post 16 in England

Wednesday, 10th September: Reducing educational disadvantage for care experienced children and young people through a virtual school model - Oral

Dr. Georgia Hyde-Dryden [1], ***Prof. Leon Feinstein*** [1], ***Dr. Andrew Brown*** [1]

1. *Rees Centre, University of Oxford*

Pupil Premium Plus Post 16 (PP+ Post 16) is government funding to promote the educational achievement of children in alternative care and care leavers aged 16-18. The funding was piloted for six months in 2021 across 28 local authorities (LAs) in England. The following year, the pilot was extended to 30 further LAs before being rolled out to all 152 LAs in September 2023. PP+ Post 16 is managed by virtual school heads (VSHs), who are responsible for promoting the educational achievement of children in alternative care and care leavers across their LA area.

Objective

PP+ Post 16 is intended to provide sustained involvement in employment, education and training to support improvements in attendance, retention and attainment. PP+ Post 16 can be used to provide individual or cohort level support and VSHs have substantial discretion in how the funding is used locally. The Department for Education commissioned a two-year evaluation to understand its use and look for signs of progress towards outcomes identified in the Theory of Change developed during initial piloting.

Methods

This mixed-methods evaluation included an annual online survey of VSHs; case studies in six LAs involving interviews with key stakeholders and documentary analysis; cost benefit assessment; and analysis of national data sets for education and social care. Year 1 interim evaluation findings from the survey of VSHs and case studies were published in September 2024, with the final report expected in Autumn 2025.

Findings

Year 1 interim findings showed that 85 percent of VSHs had used PP+ Post 16 to build on some existing post 16 provision. The majority of VSHs used PP+ Post 16 to support young people directly including academic support (e.g., tutoring, careers guidance, resources), and extra-curricular activities (e.g., sport and musical instruments) viewed as bridging the opportunity gap between children in alternative care and their peers and supporting mental health and wellbeing. VSHs also used some funding for strategic activities (e.g., training and increasing their post-16 staffing capacity), which was seen as enabling joint working with other professionals and developing practice. VSHs considered having flexibility to decide how best to use the funding to be a key strength. Barriers to using PP+ Post 16 included social worker turnover, a lack of data sharing by education providers, and the size and complexity of the post-16 landscape. Interim findings also showed emerging signs of progress towards a wide range of outcomes set out in the Theory of Change.

Conclusions/implications

The range of reported uses of PP+ Post 16 highlights the value of VSHs being able to use the funding flexibly to meet local need. The emerging signs of progress towards outcomes reported fit with anticipated timelines in the Theory of Change and suggest that activities and approaches implemented by VSHs are beginning to change the way that children in alternative care and care leavers are supported at post-16. Year 2 data including analysis of national datasets and cost benefit assessment will further evidence progress towards those outcomes.

Reducing educational disadvantage for care experienced children and young people through a virtual school model – The extension of Virtual School Heads' duties to include children with a social worker in England

Wednesday, 10th September: Reducing educational disadvantage for care experienced children and young people through a virtual school model - Oral

Dr. Alice Tawell [1], ***Dr. Andrew Brown*** [1], ***Dr. Alun Rees*** [1], ***Ms. Ellen Froustis*** [1]

1. *Rees Centre, University of Oxford*

Objective

Since 2021, local authorities in England have received funding to extend the role of Virtual School Heads (VSHs) to include strategic responsibility for children with a social worker (CWSW, i.e., children currently subject to a Child in Need Plan or Child Protection Plan, and children previously subject to such plans over the past 6 years). The extension was initially piloted for a six-month period in 2021 (Phase One) and subsequently extended in 2022 until 2025 (Phase Two). The extension of duties was introduced after a series of government and research reports found that CWSW had poorer educational outcomes at every stage of their education compared to children who had never had a social worker. The Rees Centre was commissioned by the UK Government Department for Education to evaluate both Phase One and Phase Two of the extension of duties. In this paper, we will draw on data collected during the Phase Two evaluation to explore how the extended duties have been interpreted and implemented by VSHs in England, and the strategies they have used to champion CWSWs' educational outcomes.

Methods

A mixed-methods research design was adopted for the Phase Two evaluation, involving (1) two rounds of interviews with practitioners (VSHs, CWSW Leads, Directors of Children's Services, Designated Safeguarding Leads, Social Workers, and Data Managers) in six case study areas, (2) three national surveys of VSHs, and (3) analysis of linked national administrative data. A theory of change developed during the Phase One pilot evaluation was used as the basis of evaluation for Phase Two. In this paper, we will draw on the interview and survey data to explore VSHs' understandings and implementation of the extended duties.

Findings

Although the non-statutory guidance states that the extension of VSHs' duties is 'strategic', some VSHs reported engaging in more operational activities that they saw as essential to the fulfilment of the strategic role, for example providing multi-agency drop-in sessions, surgeries or case reviews to share information and good practice. VSHs were often described as a 'bridge', working across professional boundaries and helping to connect education and children's social care teams. Over the course of the evaluation, many VSHs reported improved access to data on CWSW (particularly attendance and school exclusion data), which they had been able to use to identify areas for intervention, and improve joint working between services. Many VSHs had also raised awareness of the needs of CWSW, and helped practitioners to better understand and respond to their needs, by providing training on relational practice and well-being, and through establishing locality wide strategies, interventions, and projects to improve attendance and reduce school exclusion. However, the evaluation also found that several barriers to implementation remain.

Conclusions/implications

Through their implementation of the extension of duties, VSHs have raised the profile of, and are helping towards improving outcomes for, CWSW. The evaluation findings have implications for VSH policy and practice in England and will be of interest to those working to improve outcomes for CWSW in other geographical contexts.

Reducing educational disadvantage for care experienced children and young people through a virtual school model - A view from Scotland

Wednesday, 10th September: Reducing educational disadvantage for care experienced children and young people through a virtual school model - Oral

Mr. Bettencourt Michael [1]

1. *University of Strathclyde*

Overview

Scotland's approach to supporting the education of care experienced learners is emerging. This paper considers the construct and the implementation of the Virtual School Head Teacher (VSHT) role and model in a devolved nation of the UK. It proposes the benefits of nuanced contextual implementation with learning and insight for other jurisdictions considering adopting the approach.

Methods

The 'VSHT Network' hosted by the University of Strathclyde is an inter-disciplinary research practice partnership made up of eighteen local authorities, researchers, and other key public administrators and policy makers. The Scottish VSHT Network has become a forum for the consideration of key features of effectiveness, the difference that is being made on learners, their families, and schools as well as paying particular attention to the crucial contextual nuances of the implementation of the approach in one of the devolved nations of the UK. Locating the development of this approach at the intersection of practice; policy and legislation; and research evidence provides valuable insight and learning, including an identification of risks to the model, for successful implementation in other jurisdictions. In this paper, the work of the VSHT Network will be outlined and some key insights from the network on the outcomes of the implementation of the virtual school model in Scotland will be provided.

Findings

The first VSHT post in Scotland was created in 2015 and, since the launch of a Scottish Government 'care experienced children's fund', several of the 32 local authorities in Scotland have created a post or team. In Scotland a VSHT is a senior member of education staff who works at a strategic level with a focus to improve the experiences and outcomes of care experienced learners as if they attended one school. Their reach goes beyond education and has been shown to have an impact on children's rights, their well-being and stability both at home and in school by working with those who live with, teach, and support them. Research evidence and practitioner experience show that the role of a VSHT can be effective in impacting on the ecosystem around children to improve their educational experiences.

Implications

The virtual school model is having a positive impact in Scotland however a series of recently published research and policy papers have raised concerns around the dangers of 'scope creep'. This is a key issue that needs to be considered in Scotland and other countries implementing the model. The conditions for successful implementation of the virtual school model also requires further attention and research.

Eternal paths to a more self-determined life of unaccompanied minors in their transitions to adulthood in Europe

Eternal paths to a more self-determined life of unaccompanied minors in their transitions to adulthood in Europe - Is Anyone There? Supports Available for Unaccompanied Migrant and Non-Migrant Care Leavers in Spain

Thursday, 11th September: Eternal paths to a more self-determined life of unaccompanied minors in their transitions to adulthood in Europe - Oral

Dr. Federica Gullo [1], Dr. Laura García-Alba [1], Ms. Diana Cruz-Álvarez [1], Dr. Iriana Santos [2], Prof. Jorge Fernández del Valle [1]

1. *University of Oviedo,* ***2.*** *University of Cantabria*

Background. Young adults transitioning from care to independent living often face significant challenges due to limited resources and reduced family support. During this critical phase, social support from alternative sources becomes crucial for promoting their adjustment, enhancing their well-being, and facilitating integration into society. However, how they access social support and the types of support they can rely on may vary depending on their care trajectories. This is especially relevant for Unaccompanied Young Migrants (UYM), who navigate multiple transitions simultaneously: from care to adulthood and independent living, between countries and cultures, and through legal frameworks for underage vulnerable children and adult migrants. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the composition and quality of both formal and informal support available for care leavers, identifying characteristics that might be linked to variations in support, such as gender and migratory background, and examining the interplay between different sources of support and the individual circumstances and experiences of these young people. **Methods.** Data were collected from 224 young people (63% male) exiting care and utilizing transitional support services in Spain. Participants included youth of Spanish origin (44%), UYM (33%), and from migrant families (23%). Various areas were explored through semi-structured qualitative interviews, including support from relevant sources, such as parents, other relatives, friends, partners, key adults, and aftercare services. The researchers travelled to participants' locations to conduct individual face-to-face interviews. **Results.** The findings reveal that the support networks available to care leavers are typically small, with family support being limited. Most rely heavily on professionals, with UYM having the most restricted support networks. UYM are less likely to consider friends and family as a source of support, instead depending almost exclusively on professionals and facing more difficulties in accessing certain formal supports, such as economic assistance. Furthermore, receiving support from multiple figures can protect them from various challenges. **Discussion.** These findings highlight current limitations in the support systems for care leavers, particularly the difficulties faced by vulnerable subgroups in accessing appropriate social support. Several implications for intervention are presented, with the goal of improving opportunities and resources for this population within child welfare and care leaving services.

Eternal paths to a more self-determined life of unaccompanied minors in their transitions to adulthood in Europe – A lot is being done for unaccompanied minors, the people who are 18 for them it's very difficult: young refugees in Switzerland

Thursday, 11th September: Eternal paths to a more self-determined life of unaccompanied minors in their transitions to adulthood in Europe - Oral

Prof. Rebecca Moergen [1]

1. *Lucerne University of Applied Sciences, Departement of Social Work*

When unaccompanied minors reach the age of majority in Switzerland, many support services are withdrawn and the right to protected residence is lost. This creates new challenges for young people to overcome. These challenges are accompanied by constant uncertainty. Added to this are the conditions imposed on them and their role as 'refugees'. Both the transition to adulthood and their status as refugees are accompanied by experiences of marginalisation and exclusion. As care leavers, young refugees face particular challenges: a language barrier, finding their way in a foreign system and society, as well as hurdles related to residence rights. Although the situation of young refugees has been studied in various ways in recent years, there is little systematic knowledge about their marginalisation, which is characterised by the interplay of age-related and ethnic-cultural exclusion dynamics. How do young refugees experience the transition to adulthood? What challenges do they face? How do they deal with the associated marginalisation?

The planned presentation will address these questions. It will draw on findings from a longitudinal qualitative study on the accommodation and care of young refugees in Switzerland (2018-2024, funded by the SNSF-NFP 76). Based on ethnographic data and longitudinal interviews with young refugees conducted at three different points in time, it is possible to identify subjective experiences and challenges in transition processes. In this context, contrasting analyses between the different contexts in which young refugees are accommodated are revealing. The dynamics of marginalisation are more pronounced in institutions where social relations tend to be non-binding. Furthermore, the transition to adulthood is handled differently for young people who have been placed in foster care than for those who have lived in residential care. The results show that the abrupt end of care at the age of majority is a challenge for young refugees. On the one hand, managing and structuring everyday life and finding one's way in a new society, a new place and a new social system is very demanding. On the other hand, there are specific challenges for young refugees, such as finding their way in a new society, social stigma, language barriers, educational gaps, psychological stress and family pressure on the one hand, and the integration requirements of asylum law on the other. From their arrival as unaccompanied minors to their independence, the framework conditions for their care, from the basic care to the support ratio, do not correspond to the standard of people without refugee experience. There is therefore a clear gap in the support and care of young refugees and a clear need for the expansion of support services and the implementation of professional aftercare.

Eternal paths to a more self-determined life of unaccompanied minors in their transitions to adulthood in Europe - Coming of age as a sharp chronological cut - with far-reaching consequences for young adult refugees in Switzerland

Thursday, 11th September: Eternal paths to a more self-determined life of unaccompanied minors in their transitions to adulthood in Europe - Oral

Dr. Samuel Keller [1]

1. ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work

Background: This presentation highlights findings from three recent studies in Switzerland. They explored both experienced transition phases of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers and the quality of care they receive before and during aging out of the childcare system. A key focus is on the factors within current care and transition frameworks that often create insurmountable barriers between childhood support and adult refugee structures. A specific problem in the Swiss context starts early: there exist isolated, parallel child and youth welfare structures for refugee and non-refugee children. This leads to major gaps for young refugees in the professional quality of accommodation and care, education, access to civil society, mental health care and - consequently - in individual preparation for their transitions to adulthood. Several research projects have recently been launched to understand and close these quality gaps.

Methods: These research questions and designs were structured as follows: two research projects (2024) focused on the quality of care in cantonal facilities for unaccompanied minors. And one sub-project, which was part of a national project on child's well-being in asylum proceedings (2025), has reconstructed experienced transitions out of refugee care of young adults. The data basis, which was re-interpreted for this presentation, are 11 single & 5 group interviews with unaccompanied minors 16-17 years from the first two studies, and 5 single interviews with young adults 19 - 22 years from the third one. Problem-centred interviews resp. group-discussions were used as the data collection method and qualitative interview analyses as the analysis method.

Results: On the one hand, the overall findings point to four central barriers within transitions: a) overcrowded and under-cared accommodations and a lack of preparation for the independence during care, with b) hardly any participation and opportunities to complain/Ombudsmen, c) the threat to child protection posed by age assessment, d) a hard cut from inadequate care to unaccompanied and sometimes humiliating adult refugee structures. Although some (semi-)professional transition offers exist, they are uncoordinated, qualitatively heterogeneous, and based on unclear criteria and interests - mostly with focus on employability. Nonetheless, some professional offers represent relevant opportunities if a) the young people's needs are known and they feel that they are taken seriously, b) there is a constant person of trust above the age of majority and c) scopes for action in individual needs can be found and used.

Discussion: A combination of formal, informal and non-formal education seems to be of great importance - with a focus on strengthening participation and self-determination. It is also beneficial if support and accommodation are offered up to the age of 23/25 or if transnational prospects can be planned and evaluated in a binding and participative manner. What is needed is a holistically coordinated professionalization that does not shift the duty of creating the conditions for opportunities to be realized onto the overworked professionals, but instead perceives this as a welfare state's responsibility. This includes more obligations and standards, cross-case responsibility, promotion of institutional networking, and a relativization of chronological age cuts during sensitive transitions.

Eternal paths to a more self-determined life of unaccompanied minors in their transitions to adulthood in Europe - Mental health and subjective wellbeing in unaccompanied migrant children: prevalence and treatment coverage

Thursday, 11th September: Eternal paths to a more self-determined life of unaccompanied minors in their transitions to adulthood in Europe - Oral

Dr. Eduardo Martín [1], ***Dr. Carla González-García*** [2], ***Dr. Iriana Santos*** [3], ***Prof. Amaia Bravo Arteaga*** [2]

1. *University of La Laguna,* ***2.*** *University of Oviedo,* ***3.*** *University of Cantabria*

Background: Unaccompanied migrant children (UMC) are a group whose process of integration in the host country is not without its difficulties, making it a group at risk for developing mental health problems. Regarding the factors underlying the emergence of mental health problems in this population, research studies have pointed out multiple variables linked to the different phases of the migration project. In particular, and regarding the post-migration phase, some of the most relevant factors would be the challenges associated with obtaining a legal status upon reaching the age of majority, language barriers, cultural shocks, difficulties in accessing training and employment, feelings of isolation and marginalization or placement in large, overcrowded shelters with depersonalized treatment. This study aims to evaluate mental health problems and treatment coverage provided this population.

Methods: With this goal, a sample of 93 UMC (All of them were of African origin, with the majority coming from Morocco) and 137 young people in residential care who served as comparison. Age range was between 13 and 17 years of age (M = 16.24; DT = .88), with no differences between groups. The sample belongs to rresidential care homes located in 10 different regions of Spain. All youth filled in the Youth Self Report (YSR) and the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI). Educators in charge reported the treatment coverage received by the young people.

Results: Findings point out that, while the comparison group displayed a higher prevalence of externalizing problems, a high percentage of UMC were also within the clinical range, especially for internalizing problems. Unaccompanied migrant children were more satisfied than the comparison group in some domains of the PWI, but less satisfied with the groups of people they belong to. In relation to treatment coverage, it was found that the attention given to UMC's mental health problems is scarce.

Discussion: Consequently, these children's mental health should be included in the agenda of the services provided to these children, redoubling efforts to detect and treat these problems. Therapeutic coverage of the mental health problems of UMC is a fundamental prerequisite for their successful transition to adulthood.

Eternal paths to a more self-determined life of unaccompanied minors in their transitions to adulthood in Europe - Identifying barriers and facilitators of social support for care leavers from Ukraine under temporary protection in Poland

Thursday, 11th September: Eternal paths to a more self-determined life of unaccompanied minors in their transitions to adulthood in Europe - Accepted with changes

Ms. Agnes Szorenyi [1], ***Dr. Ciaran Murphy*** [1]

1. *Edge Hill University*

According to Dybailo and colleagues (2022), thousands of Ukrainian children and young people outside of parental care are under temporary protection in Poland after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This migration flow of young people outside of parental care is unique in Europe, both due to the special circumstances of their arrival, and their current care arrangements. Some young people were evacuated from institutions, "family type children's homes" or foster care arrangements, and crossed the border together with their adult carers. A significantly smaller number of children and young people have arrived unaccompanied. There is also a complex legal situation regarding the care arrangements of these children and young people. While some of them were taken into the Polish care system, the vast majority remain under the Ukrainian care system, which raises the prospect of the existence of "parallel" child protection systems on the territory of Poland (Eurochild, 2022). As the war continues with no imminent end in sight, an increasing number of Ukrainian refugee children and young people are reaching the age of transition from care into adulthood. Accelerated transitions and the lack of social support and safety-net like relationships were highlighted as some of the most important challenges of leaving care, and a contributing factor to poorer outcomes among the care leaving population compared to mainstream youth. This is especially problematic for refugee care leavers, given that research has shown, that social support is particularly vital for vulnerable youth, and during times of profound social change. (Paulsen and Berg, 2016)

This mixed methods research proposes to combine the results of surveys, interviews, and focus groups conducted with young people, carers, and professionals, to explore barriers and facilitators of social support and recommend actions and measures at multiple levels of social systems, including the individual and diadic level, network level, and structural level.

Data collection for this research will take place between May and August 2025, with the proposed conference presentation offering exclusive insights into the initial results. Building on data collected about support gaps and sources of strain, as well as barriers and facilitators of social support, the research aims to identify actions and measures to increase social support and decrease social strain for refugee care leavers, on multiple levels of social systems. After the completion of the research, we would like to organize participatory workshops, which would contribute to the creation of a Social Support Toolkit for Care Leavers with Forced Migration Experience.

Most social support and social network research to date tends to look at proximal characteristics of social networks and social support and doesn't attempt to include distal and structural factors (Viner, 2017). We are hoping that our research with this unique refugee population could contribute to knowledge about such factors as geographical location and care arrangement as determinants of social support for refugee care leavers. This could, in turn, contribute to debates about child placements in remote locations or the deinstitutionalization of alternative care in Central and Eastern Europe.

Eternal paths to a more self-determined life of unaccompanied minors in their transitions to adulthood in Europe

Thursday, 11th September: Eternal paths to a more self-determined life of unaccompanied minors in their transitions to adulthood in Europe - Oral

Dr. Samuel Keller [1], ***Dr. Laura García-Alba*** [2]

1. *ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work,* ***2.*** *University of León*

Europe is home to many unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. They have either fled their countries alone or been separated from their parents along the way. Even if the quality of care for this group must still be described as neglected: In recent years, research and practice have increasingly focused on addressing their needs and important developments in the name of children's rights took place. However, both in politics and within child and youth services, the challenges faced by those in transition to adulthood still receive little attention. There is hardly any political willingness to support young adult refugees after reaching the age of majority.

But the majority of unaccompanied minors – about three-quarters – arrive in Europe at the age of 16 or 17. They have only a few months or years to establish themselves in their host country before they reach legal adulthood. Thus, they have only a brief period under the legal protection and support that should be granted to all children. Added to this, these transitions do not occur in isolation; rather, they are shaped by existing social connections that are redefined, as well as by the formation of new relationships. This sensitive time coincides with significant developments in education and career paths. But often, the asylum structures and procedures are dominant. They only offer rudimentary care and safety. At the same time, we know from existing research, what young refugees need for gradual development of independence: feeling safe, maintaining and building social networks, fostering a sense of identity and belonging, and pursuing education and employment. Certain vulnerable groups face greater challenges in seizing opportunities during this transition, such as young mothers, young people with experiences of deportation or incarceration (risk of trauma), and those with unresolved or unknown legal status. Protective factors supporting transitions include social services that address individual needs, access to peer networks and community engagement, and maintaining connections with family members.

Based on this knowledge, this symposium will present, critically discuss and compare key findings from 5 recent projects in 3 European countries with different contexts of migration routes (Spain, Switzerland, Poland). The presented studies use different methods and focus different needs of young adult refugees. In addition to these presentations and comparisons of empirical designs, the results will also be shortly connected to political and welfare state contexts. This helps to better understand transition stages and challenges of these young adults at risk: Which dimensions are central to young refugees' transitions to adulthood? How can these be addressed and promoted to enable self-determination?

After all, quality, innovation and cultural sensitivity are still of marginal importance when it comes to supporting refugee young adults. Especially in the current political world situation, these services are likely to be fundamentally questioned again and again. That's why we ask about important changes in the recent past and innovative solutions that could be forward-looking for European countries and refugee policies. This requires transnational and transdisciplinary exchange of empirical evidence and evidence-based innovation, as planned here.

A multi-continental view of multisystemic barriers and facilitators in wellbeing for systems

A multi-continental view of multisystemic barriers and facilitators in wellbeing for systems- involved children and youth ____Topic of individual paper: Sources of resilience for refugee youth in Ethiopia

Friday, 12th September: A multi-continental view of multisystemic barriers and facilitators in wellbeing for systems - Oral

Mrs. Senper Fisseha [1], ***Dr. Mónica López López*** [1], ***Dr. Mijntje ten Brummelaar*** [1]

1. *University of Groningen*

Topic of the paper: **Sources of resilience for refugee youth in Ethiopia: Exploring the role of education, work, community, religion, and family**

Background

Young refugees' resilience is linked to involvement in socio-ecological systems that contribute to their well-being.

Objective

This study aimed to understand the experiences and factors contributing to resilience among young Sudanese and South Sudanese refugees (aged 16, M = 16 years; N = 40; 21 males, 19 females) residing at the Sherkole refugee camp in Ethiopia's Benishangul-Gumuz region.

Method

Six focus groups (N = 40) and four key informant interviews with government officials, caregivers, and school teachers explored themes related to resilience using thematic analysis. Member checking ensured findings aligned with participants' perspectives. A socio-ecological framework guided the exploration of multidimensional factors.

Results

Five themes emerged: (1) support systems, (2) work engagement, (3) access to education, (4) role of religion, and (5) community engagement. Work opportunities helped young refugees cope with challenges, but key informants raised concerns about potential risks to education. Social connection and community engagement fostered a harmonious relationship with the host community. Religion and education alleviated stress and worries. The themes are interrelated – community engagement improved host community relationships, increasing job opportunities and income (leading to better support systems). Religious activities and education also benefited relationships and provided relaxation.

Conclusion

This study supports the dynamic and multi-systemic nature of resilience within a socio-ecological framework. Findings can inform future resilience-promoting interventions and policies for young refugees.

A multi-continental view of multisystemic barriers and facilitators in wellbeing for systems- involved children and youth - Institutional undue pressures to accelerate the process of leaving OoHC.

Friday, 12th September: A multi-continental view of multisystemic barriers and facilitators in wellbeing for systems - Oral

Mr. Jaime Muñoz-Insunza [1]

1. *University of Groningen*

Background: The challenges young people face transitioning from Out-of-Home Care (OoHC) to independent living are well-documented in several dimensions such as struggles with progressing to the next level of educational attainment (Courtney et al., 2017), lower chances in the labour market (Gypen et al., 2017), lower annual salary (Okpych & Courtney, 2014) and mentoring they require for finding housing accommodations (Courtney et al., 2020; Gypen et al., 2023). Additionally, studies have shown some disadvantages are deeply linked to the psychosocial intervention they receive (Rice et al., 2023), which does not consider, for example, supporting and mentoring young people to create formal and informal support networks (Stubbs et al., 2023) and lack of instances for learning financial skills (Salazar et al., 2020; Keller, 2023). These challenges highlight systemic obstacles, including individual, family, institutional, and societal factors.

This research examines the institutional dimensions of the undue pressure placed on young people to leave the care system, which results in young people wanting to leave the system more quickly than they should.

Methodology: Qualitative interviews were conducted to explore the transition process to independent living among 18 young people from three regions of Chile. The individuals interviewed came from residential and foster care backgrounds, and the data were analyzed using a biographical-narrative approach (Reimer & Schäfer, 2015).

Discussion: The narratives describe different institutional patterns that accelerate the process of leaving out-of-home Care, and some of these strategies are linked to stigmatization in the institutional and social context. An ecological perspective is utilized to elucidate various patterns in this accelerated process, encompassing legislative dimensions, daily practices, and elements embedded in psychosocial intervention. Furthermore, the discussion will be centred on psychosocial interventions and the practices employed by practitioners to implicitly promote the acceleration of the transition process, which inadvertently results in insufficient preparation and fosters negative sentiments among adolescents and their families.

Implications: Institutional strategies must be developed to avoid the stigmatisation process, focusing on internal policies, protocols, and practical guides. The role of caseworkers and professionals is crucial to avoid undue institutional pressures to accelerate the process of exiting the foster care system. Furthermore, covert practices within the system that promote the acceleration of the transition process should be identified in the intervention and daily routines of the caseworker, as these daily practices are the key element to stop neglectful practices.

A multi-continental view of multisystemic barriers and facilitators in wellbeing for systems- involved children and youth- Intersectional stigmatization of youth in out of home care: an analysis of stigma as a systemic barrier that impacts youth's lives.

Friday, 12th September: A multi-continental view of multisystemic barriers and facilitators in wellbeing for systems - Oral

Ms. Gabriela Alejandra Martinez Jothar [1], ***Dr. Mijntje ten Brummelaar*** [1], ***Dr. Mónica López López*** [1]

1. *University of Groningen*

Background and Objectives: The experiences of stigmatization of youth in out-of-home care (OOHC) remain largely unexplored. Further, calls for analysis of stigmatization that center around power, viewing stigma from a structural perspective have not yet been fully attended to. Such analysis requires an understanding of stigma as a resource that aims to allow (or even form the basis for) exploitation, management, control, and exclusion of those who are subjected to it (Link and Phelan, 2014). Stigma must then be viewed as classificatory violence that is produced from above and thrives and maintains existing power structures (Tyler, 2018). Youth in OOHC exist at an intersection that makes them prone to this. On one hand, their age makes them vulnerable to adultism, which undermines their voices (Langarita et. al., 2024). On the other, their contact with out of home care services sets in motion stigmatizing processes, starting with their labelling as "risky" or "troubled" (Deakin et. al., 2022).

An analysis of stigma from this conceptualization, then, entails consideration of the policies and practices that directly and indirectly impact youth's daily interactions (Deakin et al, 2022).This presentation, then, centers on their experiences with stigmatization exercised through institutional forms, policies, media representations and everyday interactions, as well as the ways in which these youths face, resist and exercise resilience when coming into contact with these stigmatizing forces.

Methods:

This project involved 29 interviews with youth aged 13 to 18 years old, who were living in OOHC in Spain at the time of their involvement with this research. These teens lived in 7 facilities, which varied with regard to the degree of supervision they entailed (i.e. secured residences, socio educational spaces and residential care homes). Their responses were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2022) to explore their direct and structural experiences with stigmatization, as well as the different approaches they took in managing these experiences.

Findings:

Though this research aimed at understanding stigmatization of youth due to their involvement with the system, their narratives showed a much more complex reality of stigmatization prior, during and resulting from this engagement. Participants reflected on their views of OOHC prior to having contact with these services, where these views stemmed from, as well as the stigmatized intersections that led them to becoming involved with it. They further discussed how policies and practices within OOHC facilities served to highlight this involvement, often creating limiting, exclusionary conditions in their daily lives. Focus on their OOHC status often translated into direct experiences with stigmatization in one-on-one interactions with multiple players outside the facilities, which they had to manage and resist in various creative ways.

Conclusions

Understanding the stigmatization of youth in OOHC requires not just an analysis of direct stigmatizing interactions but a careful consideration of the structures of power that (re)construct stigma. Efforts to end youth

stigmatizing which do not account for these, will hardly succeed, and will continue to place the burden of facing stigma on youth themselves.

A multi-continental view of multisystemic barriers and facilitators in wellbeing for systems-involved children and youth - Critical Discourse Analysis of Child Protection Policies in Indonesia

Friday, 12th September: A multi-continental view of multisystemic barriers and facilitators in wellbeing for systems - Oral

Mrs. Indira Briantri Asni [1], ***Dr. Mijntje ten Brummelaar*** [1], ***Dr. Mónica López López*** [1]

1. *University of Groningen*

Background. Child protection policies in Indonesia have undergone significant shifts, as reflected in three key laws: Law No. 4/1979 on Child Welfare, Law No. 23/2002 on Child Protection and its amendments, Law No. 35/2014 and Law No. 17/2016. While the Law on Child Welfare primarily focuses on attending to a child's basic necessities, the Law on Child Protection aims to safeguard children from violence and discrimination while ensuring their rights to grow and develop. This raises important questions about how child protection is defined and the interplay between children's rights and protection.

Objective. This study aims to critically analyze the discourse of child protection in Indonesian legal documents, focusing on how legal frameworks define child protection and children's rights. It seeks to examine whether these policies primarily construct children as vulnerable or as rights-holders with agency. Additionally, this study explores how legal narratives intersect with factors such as gender, class, and socio-political status, shaping the experiences of children in the Indonesian child protection system.

Method. The study employs a policy analysis utilising Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze textual analysis, discursive practices, and social practices (Fairclough, 1995) embedded within Indonesian legal documents regarding child protection/welfare. The Law No. 4/1979 on Child Welfare, Law No. 23/2002 on Child Protection and its amendments, Law No. 35/2014 and Law No. 17/2016 serve as the central key laws visited and scrutinized since they provide the foundations of how child protection in Indonesia is conceptualized. Additionally, a number of relevant legal documents derivative of the above laws and are also visited and analyzed.

Findings. Indonesian child protection laws primarily regard children within a paternalistic discourse where protection becomes the broad umbrella term, in which child's rights are positioned within, as instrumental to national goals and moralistic aims rather than positioning rights as inherent. Children are largely depicted as passive recipients of state protection rather than as active rights holders with autonomy, with vulnerability being the central justification for intervention. Furthermore, the categorisation of children entitled to "special protection" which associates them with specific "issues" risks overlooking the complexity of the respective contexts within broader socio-ecological circumstances and may regard them as the group needing more State control. Although it is crucial to acknowledge that particular populations of children need to be addressed and protected, categorisation tends to dismiss the situatedness of the children's lives and the interconnections between their various rights and particularly in acknowledging autonomy and rights to participation. This highlights an imbalance in positioning a rights-based approach within the child discourse.

Conclusion. The study reveals that moral imperatives and paternalistic narratives appeared embedded in Indonesian child protection legislation. Although it acknowledges children's rights, the passive and vulnerable depictions of children are heavily manifested. The lack of attention to structural factors in addressing vulnerability suggests that policy responses may not fully address the root causes of child protection issues and risk reinforcing systemic inequalities since it ignores autonomy. The study contributes to critical policy discussions to balance children's rights and protection in Indonesia.

Compassion-based residential care

Compassion-based residential care – The mental health of polyvictim adolescents in care: a comparative study

Thursday, 11th September: Compassion-based residential care - Oral

Mrs. Alexandra M. Lino [1], ***Prof. Luiza Nobre-Lima*** [1], ***Prof. Isabel Alberto*** [2]

1. *University of Coimbra, Center for Research in Neuropsychology and Cognitive Behavioral Intervention (CINEICC), Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Coimbra, Portugal,* ***2.*** *University of Coimbra, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Coimbra, Portugal*

Background: Exposure to multiple forms of interpersonal violence have been found by extant research to be a stronger predictor of severe internalizing (e.g., anxiety, depression) and externalizing symptoms (e.g., aggression/anger, hyperactivity, conduct problems) than individual or chronic types of victimization. While there are a significant number of studies addressing the effects of polyvictimization on the mental health of young people from culturally diverse samples, only a few were conducted in child welfare samples.
Objective: The present study examined the effects of polyvictimization on the psychological symptoms of 116 adolescents living in Portuguese Residential Care Homes (46.6% boys; 53.4% girls), aged between 12 and 17 years old. An equivalent sample of 241 adolescents living with their families was used as a control group.
Method: An adapted version of the *Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire* and the *Youth Self-Report* were employed as screening measures for lifetime victimization and psychological symptoms, respectively. Polyvictimization was operationalized as the experience of four or more different forms of victimization. Adolescents were further subdivided into non-victim, victim (1-3 forms), low-polyvictim (4-6 forms), mid-polyvictim (7-10 forms), and high-polyvictim (11 or more forms) groups. The *Student's T* was calculated to compare the mean of the adolescents' symptom scores in both samples. Statistical differences between victim groups were ascertained with a multivariate *Kruskall-Wallis H* test. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons were then processed using the Dunn-Bonferroni test to determine which groups differed.
Results: Adolescents in Residential Care (RC) reported significantly more withdrawn/depressed symptoms, social problems, thought problems, rule-breaking behaviors and aggressive behaviors than adolescents living with their families. Girls in RC reported significantly more internalizing symptoms (anxious/depressed, withdrawn/depressed, somatic complaints) than boys of the same sample, whereas boys reported more rule-breaking behaviors than girls. Symptom scores of girls living with their families were significantly higher than that of boys of the same sample, except for rule-breaking behaviors which did not differ. Compared to the victim group, high-polyvictims in RC reported significantly more internalizing symptoms, social problems, thought problems, and aggressive behaviors. High-polyvictims in RC additionally reported more anxious/depressed symptoms, social problems and thought problems than non-victims and mid-polyvictims, as well as more withdrawn/depressed symptoms and aggressive behaviors than non-victims. High-polyvictims living with their families reported more psychological symptoms than non-victim, victim and low-polyvictim groups, and more anxious/depressed symptoms, social problems and thought problems than mid-polyvictims. In the sample of adolescents living with their families, being a low-polyvictim significantly affected the development of anxious/depressed symptoms and thought problems, whereas other detrimental effects (withdrawn/depressed symptoms, somatic complaints, social and attention problems, and rule-breaking behaviors) became more evident in the mid-polyvictim group.
Conclusion: The detrimental effects of polyvictimization varied across sample and victim groups, emphasizing the need for tailored approaches to the specific treatment needs of multiply victimized children and youths.
Keywords: polyvictimization, adolescents, residential care, mental health

Compassion-based residential care – Why do compassion-based interventions matter in residential youth care?

Thursday, 11th September: Compassion-based residential care - Accepted with changes

Prof. Daniel Rijo [1]***, Prof. Laura Santos*** [1]***, Ms. Rita Ramos Miguel*** [1]

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Placement in Residential Youth Care (RYC) mostly occurs due to a history of maltreatment, which may compromise youths' ability to thrive, predicting future attachment problems and mental health difficulties. Maltreatment experiences have also been found to associate with high levels of shame (feeling defective, undesirable) and self-criticism (comprising condemning, attacking and judgmental thoughts directed to the self). Hence, children and youth in RYC should benefit from interventions tailored to address their psychological vulnerabilities and needs. Such interventions should consider delivering psychotherapeutic interventions directly to children and youth, combined with interventions for care workers, bearing in mind their role as intermediaries of change within RYC. Caregivers play a dual role in the lives of children and youth in RYC, by helping youths learn to cope with their own emotional distress and as a role model for healthy relational experiences. Nevertheless, research indicates that only a few empirically based interventions have addressed the mental health needs of children and youth. Not only are mental health interventions for youth limited, but care workers' training and professional quality of life have also been ignored.

Compassion can be defined as a motivation comprising a deep awareness regarding the sources of suffering in oneself and others, tied to efforts to relieve it. It is rooted in an evolved affiliative mentality and is linked with healthy psychological functioning while being negatively correlated with emotion regulation difficulties and mental health problems. Additionally, Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) has been gaining growing empirical support in the treatment of several mental health problems, including complex PTSD and trauma. It has also been shown to be suitable for children, adolescents, and adults. CFT may help traumatized people reduce shame and self-criticism by developing a compassionate understanding of themselves in relation to their traumatic experiences.

Compassion-based interventions have shown to be effective both in the treatment of several psychological problems, including traumatic experiences and in improving the quality of care in helping settings. Yet, this approach still has limited implementation within RYC. This presentation addresses the theoretical framework of compassion-based interventions, focusing on their advantages and impact when delivered within RYC settings, with the aim of promoting an affiliative care mentality in residential care homes.

Given the need to provide multilevel evidence-based interventions to improve the quality of RYC and its outcomes, we will also propose two new compassion-based intervention programs tailored to RYC: an individual therapy to youth and a compassionate mind training for caregivers, that will be addressed in the subsequent presentations.

Compassion-based residential care - A case study on a novel compassion-based intervention for adolescents in residential care

Thursday, 11th September: Compassion-based residential care - Accepted with changes

Ms. Rita Ramos Miguel [1], ***Prof. Maria do Céu Salvador*** [1], ***Prof. Luiza Nobre-Lima*** [1], ***Prof. Daniel Rijo*** [1]

1. *University of Coimbra, Center for Research in Neuropsychology and Cognitive Behavioral Intervention (CINEICC), Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Coimbra, Portugal*

Background and aims: Children and adolescents in statutory care exhibit a higher pooled prevalence for any mental disorder (49%) than normative peers (13.4%). Thus, it is essential that youth living in residential care homes (RCH) can benefit from interventions that counteract such vulnerabilities. Compassion-based interventions have been gaining growing evidence about its efficacy concerning several mental health problems and have been shown to be suitable for youth. However, its adaptation to residential care settings is still scarce. In order to overcome the existing gap, a structured 20-session individual compassion-based psychotherapeutic intervention was developed and delivered.

Methodology: **The Wise Adolescent** programme is a 20-session, individual, compassion-based psychotherapeutic intervention. It was specifically developed to assist adolescents residing in RYC in cultivating emotional and behavioural self-regulation. This clinical case study details the treatment of one adolescent living in RYC, admitted due to experiences of neglect and domestic violence. Self-reported questionnaires, focusing on compassion and emotion regulation outcomes, were administered at three time points: baseline, post-treatment, and six-month follow-up. Additionally, an in-depth interview was conducted post-treatment to ascertain the participant's subjective perception of the intervention.

Results: Data analysis is currently underway. Quantitative data from the questionnaires will be analysed using the Reliable Change Index (RCI). The RCI is a statistical method used to determine whether an individual's change on a psychological measure is statistically significant and clinically meaningful, rather than simply due to measurement error or random fluctuation. This will be crucial in assessing the initial efficacy of the programme. Qualitative data from the in-depth interview will be analysed to understand the subjective impact of the intervention, alongside its feasibility and implementation within the RYC setting. The qualitative and quantitative findings will be integrated, synthesised, and subsequently presented at the congress.

Conclusion: First, by rigorously documenting the implementation and outcomes of a new psychotherapeutic intervention within a real-world RYC context, this study provides practical insights into its feasibility and initial effectiveness. Second, the study's focus on compassion-based approaches addresses a notable gap in the existing literature concerning therapeutic interventions for adolescents in RYC. Many current evidence-based treatments may not specifically target the unique emotional and relational challenges faced by this vulnerable population, where issues like shame, self-criticism, and interpersonal difficulties are prevalent. Finally, the detailed qualitative and quantitative data collected will offer a comprehensive understanding of the intervention's impact, moving beyond mere symptom reduction to explore subjective experiences.

Compassion-based residential care - Compassionate Mind Training for Caregivers: Findings from program delivery in Portugal and in Spain

Thursday, 11th September: Compassion-based residential care - Oral

Prof. Laura Santos [1], ***Prof. Daniel Rijo*** [1]

1. *University of Coimbra, Center for Research in Neuropsychology and Cognitive Behavioral Intervention (CINEICC), Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Coimbra, Portugal*

Children and youth living in residential youth care (RYC) were hurt by others, who should have protected and took care of them. Consequently, they present complex needs, requiring well trained care workers who help them to heal and thrive. Yet, care workers usually face emotional challenges and poor working conditions, which may impair their mental well-being and the quality of care. Hence, they should be carefully trained and adequate support should be offered. Nonetheless, available training programs present methodological and theoretical limitations, that may compromise their effectiveness.

Compassion plays a significant role in caregiving and its benefits have been largely reported in different helping settings. Considering its potential benefits for RYC, a Compassionate Mind Training program for Caregivers (CMT-Care Homes) was developed. The program is manualized, comprising 12 group sessions designed to foster a compassionate mindset on care workers and an affiliative climate in RYC. Its effectiveness was tested in Portugal through a cluster randomized trial and the program was expanded to transition care homes in Galicia, in Spain. This presentation outlines the program, the methodological design and findings from the studies conducted in Portugal and Spain regarding the effectiveness of the CMT-Care Homes and its potential contributions to RYC practices.

The Portuguese sample comprised 127 caregivers and 154 youth from 12 residential care homes (RCH). RCHs were randomized to treatment and control groups. Caregivers and youth completed self-report measures at three timepoints on social safeness and emotional climate. Caregivers were also evaluated on compassion and mental health outcomes. Data was analysed using MANCOVA. Findings suggested that caregivers from the treatment group showed improvements in (self)compassion and mental health outcomes across time, while caregivers from the control group gradually deteriorated. Youth and caregivers from the treatment group noticed a more soothing and safer emotional climate, as well as feeling safer within relationships. At 6-month follow-up, improvements were retained by caregivers, but not by youth.

In Spain, a qualitative study was conducted to examine the educators' experiences with the CMT-Care Homes, as well as its acceptability in transition care homes and long-term impact. Two focus groups were conducted, enrolling 14 educators, 8-months after their participation in the training. Data were examined using thematic analysis. Findings indicate that the program seemed to enable the development of the three flows of compassion (compassion towards others, receive compassion from others, and self-compassion). While the program's acceptability seemed to facilitate compassion, fears, blocks, and resistances to compassion may represent barriers to its development. Effects from compassion were reported at individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels. These effects seemed to contribute to relational and behavioural changes in youth. Barriers and recommendations to maintain compassion effects were addressed.

Taken together, findings from both studies suggest that the CMT-Care Homes can be useful as a training to protect and support care workers' well-being. In addition, the enhancement of a compassionate mindset seems to facilitate better and effective care practices, as well as safer relationships and an affiliative climate in RYC settings, both for youth and for care workers.

International approaches to the use of Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC)

International approaches to the use of Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC) – Listening young people voices about their experience in Therapeutic Residential Care

Thursday, 11th September: International approaches to the use of Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC) - Oral

Prof. Jorge Fernandez del Valle [1], ***Dr. Iriana Santos*** [2]

1. *University of Oviedo,* ***2.*** *University of Cantabria*

Objective

This presentation will attempt to analyze the main results of evaluations conducted in a sample of therapeutic residential care centers in Spain. It will focus on perceptions collected qualitatively in interviews with young people aged 11 to 17, paying particular attention to personal relationships with their caregivers and the experience of implementing regulations, which in these centers are often particularly detailed and abundant. We will focus on the use of reinforcement contingencies and the treatment of restraints and run-away episodes.

Method

The data collected in this presentation are part of a quality evaluation project in therapeutic residential care in five centers in Spain. These are small centers, all with five places except one with ten. The evaluation was carried out using the ARQUA system developed by the Family and Childhood Research Group at the University of Oviedo, which has been used to conduct quality assessments for over twenty years.

The data analysed were collected through interviews with young people, using a 1-5 point Likert scale to assess various aspects of their residential experience. This scale also includes qualitative questions assessing other aspects, and these are the ones analysed in this presentation.

Results

Young people's evaluations of their residential experience contained very different elements, with aspects that were especially highly valued and others that were heavily criticized. The most negative aspects are related to the enormous pressure of the rules, particularly where stricter phases and contingency systems, such as point systems, exist. The pressure and stress that some adolescents experience in this context, subjected to very detailed behavioral observation in which they gain or lose reinforcements, is one of the reasons cited for running away, in addition to the need to consume addictive substances. On the more positive side, there are comments about the personal relationships with some educators who have been able to bond especially with them. In the presentation, their comments will be analyzed in detail to draw conclusions about practices that need to be improved and reinforced from the perspective of the young people's experiences.

Conclusions

The analysis of young people's perceptions, expressed in their own language, allows us to gain awareness of the relevance of some aspects that adults may miss. Behind many of the comments, one can see the tension between practices based on contingency management and the need to address young people's trauma and difficulties in emotional control. Involving their views and comments more would allow for a better fit between organizational needs and those of the young people themselves. Many of his comments align with principles of TRC work that have been advised by research since the emphasis on trauma-informed models.

International approaches to the use of Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC) – Characteristics of and experiences among young people living in residential care settings – A Danish Perspective

Thursday, 11th September: International approaches to the use of Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC) - Oral

Dr. Mette Lausten [1]

1. *The Danish Center for Social Science Research*

Objective. Although the share of children and young people in out-of-home care (OHC) in Denmark has been stable at 1 percent of the population of children and young people for centuries, the share of young people in residential care units (RCU) has decreased significantly throughout the last four decades. This change is due to political decisions and public beliefs that "every child needs a family" (Lausten, 2023). But will all children and young people be able to benefit from family-based care? The purpose of this presentation is to highlight the characteristics and elevated level of challenges in everyday living among young people living in RCU's in Denmark, compared to young people living in family foster care.

Methods. The analyses are based on 3,287 answers from 11-, 13-, 15- and 17-year-olds from a biannual survey among children and young people in vulnerable positions supplemented with administrative data on background characteristics before OHC. Children and young people in vulnerable positions are defined to be children and young people in RCU, in family foster care, and children and young people receiving in-home preventive care. The purpose of the study and thereby the questionnaire is to map how children and young people in vulnerable positions thrive in their everyday lives. The survey therefore sheds light on well-being in a wide range of areas: Schooling, mental and social well-being, vulnerability, risk behaviour, family relationships, the placement itself, and involvement in case processing.

Findings. Young people do enter the RCU's at a much higher average age at first care order than children and young people in family foster care, and they enter OHC with a considerably higher level of complexity in their lives. Although most young people in RCU's feel safe where they live and feel cared for by the care personnel, the findings show a considerably low level of mental and social well-being as well as a significantly high level of vulnerability and risk behaviour among young people in RCU's compared to all other groups of young people. Including gender, there is a tendency for girls to be more often victims, i.e. exposed to abuse and exposed to their risk behaviour such as self-harm and suicide attempts, and boys to be perpetrators of abuse and risk behaviour. This negative mapping is not just caused by living and learning at the RCU's, it is more likely to be a result of entering the child protection system too late, where the level of complexity in their lives has grown too large.

Implications. The findings require that the child welfare system and policy should change practice towards more timely initiation and offer more focused interventions within this particular group of young people – with a specific focus on young people in RCU's and the most vulnerable girls – to improve well-being and reduce vulnerability to ensure a smoother transition for young people to independent adulthood.

International approaches to the use of Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC) – Australian TRC: Strengths and challenges

Thursday, 11th September: International approaches to the use of Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC) - Oral

Dr. Patricia McNamara [1], ***Ms. Janise Mitchell*** [2], ***Ms. Shelley Wall*** [3], ***Dr. Howard Bath*** [4], ***Dr. Tatiana Corrales*** [5]

1. *University of Melbourne,* ***2.*** *Australian Childhood Foundation,* ***3.*** *Infinity Community Services,* ***4.*** *Allambicare,* ***5.*** *University of Technology Sydney*

Overview: This paper draws upon three Australian Chapters published in the Whittaker et al (2023) international volume on therapeutic residential care (TRC), and other relevant material, to present an overview of contemporary Australian TRC. The paper describes strengths and challenges currently manifest in the sector.

Background: Australia's early colonial history, which gave rise to large children's homes, casts long shadows over contemporary residential care. By the 1970s, public gaze was focused on serious flaws in the large institutions, especially sexual and other forms of abuse. This resulted in major change. Children receiving residential care are now generally living within suburban or regionally located family homes in groups of 2-4. However, there remains a high degree of mistrust in residential care as an out-of-home-care (OOHC) option; it is generally considered a 'last resort'.

Notwithstanding enduring aversion to residential care, its presence within Australian OOHC has almost doubled in the past decade (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, AIHW, 2014; 2024). First Nations children are over-represented in every care type, in every Australian jurisdiction. Their numbers in residential care across Australia increased by 90% from 2017-18 to 2021-22 (AIHW, 2024).

Shift to TRC: Complex trauma and attendant mental health issues carried by many children referred to residential care, has meant policy and programmatic shifts to therapeutic models. TRC is generally reserved for emotionally and behaviorally disturbed older children and adolescents. Many have experienced multiple foster care placement 'breakdowns'; those experiences exacerbate impacts of traumatizing abuse and neglect which brought these children into care.

Strengths: The core aim of TRC models in Australia is almost invariably that of healing complex trauma. Therapeutic milieux are generally underpinned by trauma-informed conceptual frames of reference. They privilege employment of highly qualified therapeutic specialists and staff-to-child ratios capable of delivering individualized care plans. Efforts are made to maintain continuity of well-trained staff on 24/7 shifts and minimize turnover. Most TRC programs work towards healing trauma to the point where young residents can, where possible, 'step down' to foster care or even be reunified with family. Where complete reunification is not possible, TRC's focus on family or 'family-like' partnering often creates opportunities for enduring and nurturing relationships. Re-engagement in, too often lapsed, formal education is also central to TRC case plans.

Challenges: Reducing TRC homes to low resident numbers, to 'reduce contagion' and facilitate individualized intensive interventions, has given rise to contest regarding perceived 'destruction of the therapeutic milieu'. Industrial issues concerning staff safety around aggression and pay scales remain unresolved. Inconsistency of care quality, frequency of absconding and truancy, criminalization and sexual exploitation, poor education and other negative outcomes are also challenges. Government policies and funding arrangements are frequently disrupted by unpredictable political parameters; this is often exacerbated by lack of federal governance structures.

Next steps: Robust outcome-based research evidence and advocacy are needed to challenge the "last resort" mindset that constrains development of Australian TRC. Greater resourcing of specialized staff education and training is also required to lift qualifications and expertise to better match international benchmarks.

International approaches to the use of Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC) - Getting to Zero: Impact of Efforts to Eliminate the Use of Therapeutic Residential Care on Foster Youth in the United States

Thursday, 11th September: International approaches to the use of Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC) - Oral

Dr. Christopher Bellonci [1], ***Dr. Bethany Lee*** [2]

1. *Harvard Medical School,* ***2.*** *University of Maryland*

In the United States, the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA; 2018) was codified with the goal of promoting evidence-based efforts to support families and prevent out-of-home care. As stated in its title, FFPSA was a direct result of a concern about the perceived overuse of therapeutic residential care (TRC) in certain states in the U.S. and a desire to have placements in child welfare be first and foremost within families, homes and community-based settings rather than TRC placements. Using data showing a wide variability in TRC placement rates (ranging from 4% to 44% across states; Wulczyn et al., 2015), there was a belief that state child welfare systems needed to be challenged to reduce their dependence on TRC and increase their focus on family-based care. This presentation will discuss the rationale and consequences of this systems reform effort.

FFPSA used the power of federal funding to incentivize efforts at family preservation and prevent the need for entry into foster care while limiting access to, or at least federal funding for TRC. It was an approach that sought to reinvest dollars from TRC to services and supports at the edge of care, i.e., families who were struggling with risk factors for child welfare involvement such as interpersonal violence, parental substance abuse, or mental illness, and at times poverty that can be pathways for youth entering foster care.

Overall, the goals of FFPSA may have been well-meaning, but the results have been called “deeply harmful” (Hughes & Riley, 2023). The real-world implementation of reducing placement options without first expanding capacity of community-based services and supports has created a gap in service needs. There continue to be youth and families who would benefit from therapeutic residential care; some receive a dose of this care in a federally approved residential setting, but others are warehoused in places like hotels or office spaces that are certainly not appropriate for care.

This presentation will engage participants in critically thinking about how data can be used to confirm biases against the use of TRC and while well-intentioned, may result in negative outcomes for children and families.

International approaches to the use of Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC) – Overarching

Thursday, 11th September: International approaches to the use of Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC) - Oral

Prof. Lisa Holmes [1], ***Dr. Mette Lausten*** [2], ***Prof. Jorge Fernandez del Valle*** [3], ***Dr. Christopher Bellonci*** [4], ***Dr. Patricia McNamara*** [5]

1. *University of Sussex,* ***2.*** *The Danish Center for Social Science Research,* ***3.*** *University of Oviedo,* ***4.*** *Harvard Medical School,* ***5.*** *University of Melbourne*

In this symposium we will focus on recent and current research related to the use of Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC), and engage in practice and policy debates focused on the use of TRC for children with complex needs – one of the key topics of the conference.

Our symposium comprises four papers spanning Spain, Denmark, Australia and the US. We will start the symposium with an examination of the characteristics and experiences of young people living in residential care settings in Denmark, and will explore how the findings from the analysis can be utilised to understanding how and when, and for whom residential care can be used most effectively.

In our second paper we will continue to focus on the young people, drawing on the learning from research in Spain. In this presentation we will learn about the experiences of young people living in TRC, and their perceptions of relationships with their caregivers and their experiences of living in a residential environment.

Our focus will then broaden to a consideration of the use of TRC within the wider child welfare system in Australia. This paper will provide an overview of the uses of TRC and outline the strengths and challenges of TRC within the Australian context, and offers learning related to future research endeavours.

In the final paper we move our focus onto national policies relating to TRC, and provide an example of policy implementation in the US. This final presentation will discuss policies as they relate to system reform efforts, how these are operationalised and the consequences.

We will draw the learning together from these four papers and offer key considerations about TRC. We will then welcome discussion about how the research presented in this symposium can inform the transformation of child welfare systems internationally.

Leaving Care Around the World

Leaving Care Around the World – The Ups and Downs of Leaving Care in South Africa

Thursday, 11th September: Leaving care around the World - Oral

Prof. Adrian D van Breda [1], ***Dr. Joyce Hlungwani*** [1]

1. *University of Johannesburg*

The South African care-leaving context reflects a history of widespread youth unemployment, poverty and inequality, making transitioning from care into independent adulthood complex. Our understanding of care-leaving is hampered by the absence or inaccessibility of administrative data on children in and leaving care. Although there is robust policy, legislation and practice guidelines on childcare and protection, early intervention and prevention, there is almost no policy and legislation on preparation for leaving care and even less on aftercare services for care-leavers. There is also no care-leaver organizing in South Africa. Consequently, despite the significant increase in care-leaving research in recent years, there remains a gap in research on aftercare services and in research on foster care. The burgeoning research on leaving care is, however, giving increasing attention to practice issues with care-leavers and to understanding the resilience processes that improve care-leaver outcomes. This presentation maps the strengths and limitations of policy, practice and research related to care-leaving in South Africa.

Leaving Care Around the World – The Argentinian perspective

Thursday, 11th September: Leaving care around the World - Oral

Mrs. MARIANA INCARNATO [1], ***Mrs. Dana Borzese*** [2]

1. *Founder,* ***2.*** *DONCEL*

This presentation will be focus on the launch of the Book " leaving care around the world", in its Argentinian chapter.

Children and adolescents in and leaving care in Argentina face numerous challenges due to fragmented legal frameworks and socio-economic hardships. Most children in care are placed in residential settings, with few provinces offering family-based alternatives. Many come from impoverished backgrounds, and those with disabilities struggle to reintegrate with their families.

In response, the 2017 Leaving Care law provided financial aid and mentorship to adolescents transitioning out of care. It emphasized the gradual process of achieving independence, offering support in education , employment, and housing. However, the implementation of this law varies across provinces, with resource limitations affecting the consistency and effectiveness of the programs. The presentation will highlight the gaps in preparing care leavers for adulthood and will stress the need for enhanced emotional and practical support.

The participation on care leavers in the process of the approval of the leaving care law is a key factor that will also be shared during the presentation.

Leaving Care Around the World – Supporting Care Leavers in the UK

Thursday, 11th September: Leaving care around the World - Oral

Prof. Berni Kelly [1]***, Prof. Emily Munro*** [2]

1. *Queen's University Belfast,* ***2.*** *University of Bedfordshire*

As part of the launch of the 'Leaving Care Around the World' text, this presentation will address care leaver policy and research across the UK, highlighting core themes and areas for development in policy implementation and research.

The UK is one of the countries featured in this book that has clear policy and statutory provision for youth leaving care. Whilst care leaving legislation, policy and services differs across each of the four nations in the UK, common themes can be identified including a focus on corporate parenting, extended and gradual transitions from care and a range of statutory duties to assess and support care leavers. However, research indicates that there are significant gaps in policy implementation impacting on how well care leavers are supported in practice in each of the four nations. Findings from research on care leaving in the UK show persistent inequalities in outcomes within the care-experienced community and compared to the general population and highlight significant variances in access to support within and across regions that were further exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given these gaps in provision, the paper will highlight some of the barriers to effective care leaver policy implementation including workforce concerns, austerity measures and high thresholds for access to adult services. Within this context, key areas for the development of more effective support for care leavers across the UK will be explored including a refocus on relational connections, emotional support, interdependence and integrated working to meet the complex and intersectional needs of care leavers. Greater attention also needs to be given to understanding and supporting the process of implementing policy reforms.

Leaving Care Around the World – Care Leavers Transition to Adulthood in Italy

Thursday, 11th September: Leaving care around the World - Oral

Prof. Silvio Premoli [1], ***Dr. Diletta Mauri*** [2], ***Ms. Donata Bianchi*** [3], ***Prof. Luisa Pandolfi*** [4], ***Mr. Federico Zullo*** [5]

1. *Catholic University of the Sacred Heart,* ***2.*** *Trento University,* ***3.*** *Istituto degli Innocenti, Firenze,* ***4.*** *University of Sassari,* ***5.*** *Agevolando*

Objectives

This study aims to outline the current state of leaving care in Italy, highlighting the belated albeit overt and sudden public recognition it has received from national institutions. It is estimated that in Italy between 2,500 and 3,000 individuals leave care every year, their destination varies depending on their age (Bianchi & Moretti, 2019). Those over 18 – the formal age to leave care - tend to move on towards independent living, not without feeling some concern about the possibility of finding accommodation, their ability to find a job or other help and therefore their capacity to manage well in their daily lives. In Italy there are different regional jurisdictions and the lack of specifically targeted national regulations guaranteeing universal services for those leaving care is a major shortcoming in the entire care system. For the first time In 2018, a national fund was established for care leavers: thus finally acknowledging their right to be assisted and supported on their pathway to independence at the central government level and therefore the “Care Leavers” national pilot project started (MLPS, 2024b).

Methods

From a methodological point of view, this study is based on a review of the Italian literature dedicated to leaving care and on the dialogue and comparison between the authors who are the expression of different worlds (the National Centre of Documentation and Analysis for Childhood and Adolescence, Universities, Care Leavers Association).

Findings

Research and policies on leaving care have only recently developed in Italy. Despite this, especially in the last decade, important steps forward have been made. Several challenges remain to be addressed to optimize and improve the effectiveness of interventions and policies. For instance, consolidating and expanding the national pilot project also including young people currently not involved, such as unaccompanied foreign minors and those coming from justice pathways; increasing awareness, promotion, and adoption of good practices across the country, to make leaving care a uniformly supported life stage that does not further inequality based on geographic location; and encouraging targeted investment in research that more thoroughly understands the experiences, needs, and aspirations of Italian care leavers, including through their involvement in participatory methodologies.

Conclusions

The study discusses the relatively recent - compared to other countries - appearance of care leavers and leaving care on the Italian social and political scene. Many achievements and steps forward have been made in the last decade, such as the implementation of a national pilot project involving care leavers, the development of a community of researchers that is implementing research on these issues, the growth of an association of care leavers that is actively intervening in this process.

Leaving Care Around the World-Insights from the Global South and Global North

Thursday, 11th September: Leaving care around the World - Oral

Prof. Tehila Refaeli [1], ***Prof. Varda Mann-Feder*** [2]

1. *Ben Gurion University of the Negev,* ***2.*** *University of Concordia*

This presentation is based on our new edited book “Leaving Care Around the World: Policy, Practice, Research, and Youth Participation” published by Oxford University Press. The presentation will provide the highlights of a comprehensive international examination of care-leaving systems across 32 countries from the Global North and Global South. Our presentation will focus on the following themes from the book.

Our comparative analysis highlights a persistent implementation gap between legislated policies and their practical application in both Global North and Global South contexts. While many countries in the Global North have established formal legislation for care leavers, implementation remains inconsistent. In the Global South, legislation is often absent entirely, with NGOs frequently filling crucial service gaps despite limited resources and sustainability challenges.

Extended care—a provision allowing young people to remain in out-of-home care past the age of 18—receives considerable attention. Despite documented benefits, actual uptake is notably low in many regions. Closely linked to this, aftercare services, including financial support, mentoring, housing assistance, and job training, range widely in availability.

Countries with more robust welfare systems often provide some universal supports that indirectly benefit care leavers, but disparities between rural and urban areas, or between administrative regions, create inconsistent outcomes. Our discussion will also demonstrate how contextual factors influence care-leaving experiences across cultures.

The chapters of the book also reveal concerning data gaps across all regions, with many countries lacking even the most fundamental information about care leaver populations and outcomes. Moreover, cross-country comparisons are complicated by varying terminologies and cultural perceptions.

Our international overview provides, for the first time, a comparative analysis of care leaver associations, which advocate for youth rights, improve services, and promote participation in decision-making. While present across all Global North countries, these associations exist in varying degrees throughout the Global South.

Our presentation will call for expanded international guidelines and encourage investment in extended care, early preparation, and inclusive aftercare. It recommends strengthening data collection, fostering global dialogue, and aligning support for care leavers with what is typically available to their peers in the broader population, recognizing that successful adulthood is characterized not by independence but by robust social support networks.

Ensuring the Meaningful Participation of Children and Youth in Child Protection and Those in Conflict with the Law

Ensuring the Meaningful Participation of Children and Youth in Child Protection and Those in Conflict with the Law - Strategies to enhance youth Participation in Child Protection: Findings from a Scoping Review

Thursday, 11th September: Ensuring the Meaningful Participation of Children and Youth in Child Protection and Those in Conflict with the Law - Oral

Prof. Rosita Vargas Diaz [1], ***Dr. Anta Niang*** [2], ***Dr. Isabelle-Ann Leclair Mallette*** [3], ***Prof. Marie-Joëlle Robichaud*** [4], ***Dr. Manuela Eleonora Garcia Quiroga*** [5], ***Prof. Valentina Andrea Vallejo Correa*** [6], ***Ms. Camille Bourgelas*** [1]

1. *Université Laval,* ***2.*** *Institut universitaire de première ligne en santé et services sociaux (IUPLSSS),* ***3.*** *Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté,* ***4.*** *Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières,* ***5.*** *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso,* ***6.*** *Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez*

The participation of children and youth in child protection (CP) is a fundamental right enshrined in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). While legislative efforts and institutional reforms aim to reinforce youth participation, barriers persist. This presentation outlines findings from a scoping review examining strategies to foster youth participation in CP, mechanisms supporting their implementation, structural and relational barriers, and their impact.

The review categorizes participation strategies into informal and formal approaches. Informal strategies focus on fostering positive relationships with professionals, promoting meaningful engagement, and creating everyday opportunities for youth to express themselves (McLeod, 2007; Mandal-Blasio et al., 2009). Literature highlights that building trust and ensuring youth feel heard are critical (Sinclair et al., 2019; Ten Brummelaar et al., 2018). Additionally, advocacy mechanisms, such as independent youth advocates and peer mentors, are essential (McCarthy, 2016).

Formal strategies involve structured mechanisms, such as Family Group Conferences (Augsberger, 2014), participatory decision-making forums, and service evaluation processes (Van Bijleveld et al., 2015). Notable institutionalized programs include the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, which fosters leadership and advocacy (Salazar et al., 2021), and Planning, Intervention, and Evaluation Committees (PIECs), which integrate youth in child welfare decision-making (Alfandari, 2017). Additionally, Research and Development Units in Sweden promote collaboration between practitioners, researchers, and youth to create sustainable participatory practices (Alexanderson et al., 2014).

Participation is constrained by organizational and systemic barriers, including bureaucratization (Ferguson, 2017), high staff turnover (Vis & Fossum, 2015), and inadequate training on participatory methodologies (Cossar et al., 2016). Many young people feel unheard in critical decisions, with participation often reduced to trivial matters rather than influencing their placement and long-term outcomes (McPherson et al., 2021). Professionals' reluctance to balance protection and participation, particularly in risk-averse environments, also poses challenges (Woodman et al., 2022).

Effective participation strategies yield significant benefits. When implemented, they foster empowerment, self-confidence, and a sense of control (Healy & Darlington, 2009; Rap et al., 2019). Youth-led participation models, such as the National Youth in Care Network (NYICN) in Canada, enhance policy responsiveness and service design (Alderman, 2003). Additionally, transition support programs, such as Take Charge/My Life (Powers et al., 2012), prepare youth for adulthood, underscoring the importance of participation beyond placement decisions.

In conclusion, this presentation underscores the need for a culture shift in child protection services, moving beyond tokenistic participation toward meaningful engagement. Findings highlight the necessity of embedding participatory frameworks at multiple levels—organizational, legal, and relational—to ensure youth voices

actively shape the policies and practices that affect them.

Ensuring the Meaningful Participation of Children and Youth in Child Protection and Those in Conflict with the Law - AdoptART: A Toolbox for Sensitive Listening to the Perspectives of Adopted Young People in Chile and Spain

Thursday, 11th September: Ensuring the Meaningful Participation of Children and Youth in Child Protection and Those in Conflict with the Law - Symposium - In-person

Dr. Irene Salvo Agoglia [1]

1. *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*

This paper presents a participatory, arts-based toolbox developed within the framework of the multi-sited project *AdoptART* (Horizon Europe, 2024–2026), carried out in Chile and Spain. The toolbox is designed to facilitate open, sensitive, and respectful listening to the perspectives of adopted young people in both research and intervention contexts. Grounded in a child rights approach, the project responds to the urgent need for innovative methodologies that acknowledge the experiences, needs, identities, and relationships of adopted children and young people, while embracing the complexity and diversity of views surrounding this vital life experience.

Objectives: *AdoptART* aims to provide researchers and professionals with creative, concrete tools that support respectful interaction with adopted children and young people, promoting their agency and safeguarding their emotional wellbeing and safety. It also seeks to contribute to the development of more ethical and inclusive practices that strengthen the effective participation of adopted children and young people in the processes that affect them—particularly within child protection systems.

Methods: The toolbox was co-created through a participatory and interdisciplinary process involving 70 adult adoptees and 3 adopted artists. Methodologically, the project is grounded in *arts-based research*, and included workshops with adopted children and young people in Chile and Spain. These workshops were co-facilitated by the lead researcher and adopted artists, who brought together their lived experience and creative expertise to create emotionally safe and meaningful spaces for expression and exploration. The techniques used include creative collage, participatory photography, work with symbolic and personal artefacts, participatory video, visual storytelling, and the use of multisensory materials, enabling participants to explore complex themes through art and play.

Findings: The result is a flexible toolbox that invites participants to explore and express themes such as belonging, identity, loss, origin, change, the present, and the future. Participants described the experience as "therapeutic," "liberating," and "respectful," highlighting the value of sharing and connecting with others who have similar lived experiences. The toolbox has been validated as a safe and meaningful way to support emotional expression, reflection, and connection.

Conclusions and Implications: *AdoptART* represents an ethical, creative, and relational innovation in research with adopted children and young people in Chile and Spain. It aligns with international standards that affirm the right of children and young people to be heard and to actively participate in matters that affect them. By offering a sensitive, adaptable, and adoptee-centered methodology, this toolkit contributes to transforming research and professional practices. It challenges prevailing narratives that associate adoption solely with vulnerability and silence, and instead promotes a framework of relational ethics, careful listening, and empowerment.

Ensuring the Meaningful Participation of Children and Youth in Child Protection and Those in Conflict with the Law - Youth Qualification Program practitioners: Allies in youth participation ?

Thursday, 11th September: Ensuring the Meaningful Participation of Children and Youth in Child Protection and Those in Conflict with the Law - Oral

Mr. Pascal Jobin [1], ***Prof. Rosita Vargas Diaz*** [2], ***Mr. Martin Goyette*** [3]

1. *Research Institute for Youth in Difficulty,* ***2.*** *Université Laval,* ***3.*** *ENAP*

Context:
All too often, youth's views are still regarded as a mere bureaucratic formality with no real impact on the decisions made within the framework of the protection mandate concerning them (McPherson et al., 2021). The need for youth to participate is all the more obvious in a context of transition to adulthood, considering that decisions are decisive for the rest of their lives. The Youth Qualification Program (YQP) aims to offer personalized support to facilitate this transition. In addition to qualification and housing, autonomy is one of the fundamental pillars of the YQP, and participation in decision-making plays a key role in empowering youth. However, the question arises as to the contribution of YQP workers to youth's participation in decisions concerning their life course.

Objective:
This communication aims to explore the perceptions of young adults who have experienced placement regarding how their participation was implemented in the context of YQP support. The constraints and favorable conditions will be highlighted, specifically concerning the personalized support provided by the YQP during the transition to adulthood.

Theoretical Framework:
Welty and Lundy's (2007) "The Voice" model allows for an analysis of youth participation in the YQP through four key dimensions that promote participation: **voice** (ability to express one's opinions), **space** (opportunity to speak in supportive environments), **audience** (genuine listening by decision-makers), and **influence** (the impact of youth's views on decisions).

Methodology: Semi-directed interviews were conducted with 6 youths aged 18 to 30 who had been taken into care by the YQP. A thematic content analysis based on our conceptual framework was carried out (Paillé and Mucchielli, 2016). Particular attention was paid to the factors promoting or hindering the participation of young people in this program.

Results: The analysis of the results led us to make three observations: a) bureaucratic and institutional constraints do indeed limit young people's participation when it comes to decisions that affect their lives and their transition to adulthood; b) the YQP educator can sometimes play the role of mediator encouraging youth's participation, but c) consideration of the point of view of the youths under YQP remains limited.

Conclusions/Implications:
This project helps to understand the complexity of participation among institutionalized youth. It also contributes to improving support for youth under the YQP. Finally, it provides new insights to help managers reposition youth participation at the center of the clinical process.

Ensuring the Meaningful Participation of Children and Youth in Child Protection and Those in Conflict with the Law-“Participatory Pathways: Empowering Children’s Voices through Visual Methodologies”

Thursday, 11th September: Ensuring the Meaningful Participation of Children and Youth in Child Protection and Those in Conflict with the Law - Oral

Dr. Manuela Eleonora Garcia Quiroga [1]***, Prof. Valentina Andrea Vallejo Correa*** [2]***, Dr. Irene Salvo Agoglia*** [3]

1. *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso,* ***2.*** *Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez,* ***3.*** *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*

Children in residential care often lack genuine opportunities to participate in decisions affecting their lives, despite having a right to be heard. This study, conducted in Chile, explores how children living in residential protection facilities perceive their participation in such decision-making processes. It employs an innovative qualitative design that places children’s voices at the center through creative, graphic-based methods.

The methodology was carefully adapted to the residential care context and tailored to children’s ages and genders (using a toolkit by Thomas, Phillipson, O’Kane & Davies, (1999) as a foundation). Each child took part in two interactive sessions with child-friendly materials. In Session 1, illustrated storyboards depicting typical decision-making situations in residential care (for example: daily routines, family visitis, personalization of spaces, placement decisions) were used to spark discussion, allowing children to share their views and even formulate questions for the adults in charge of their cases. Session 2 introduced a “decision-making traffic light” activity – enabling children to signal comfort or agreement levels with decisions – alongside a playful creative exercise of their choice (e.g. drawing or crafts) to express their feelings. These expressive methods empowered children to communicate their perspectives freely, overcoming power imbalances and communication barriers that traditional interviews might impose. The approach ensured ethical and meaningful participation by giving children agency in how they contributed, making the research process itself a positive, validating experience. This methodological innovation offers valuable insights for child-centered research in vulnerable contexts, demonstrating how adapting playful visual tools can effectively facilitate and enhance children’s genuine participation in child welfare decision-making.

Ensuring the Meaningful Participation of Children and Youth in Child Protection and Those in Conflict with the Law – From Theory to Operationalization of Youths Participation: A Discussion in the Context of Penal Court Hearing in the Quebec province

Thursday, 11th September: Ensuring the Meaningful Participation of Children and Youth in Child Protection and Those in Conflict with the Law - Oral

Dr. Anta Niang [1], ***Ms. Chloé Longchamps*** [2], ***Prof. Marie Dumollard*** [3], ***Prof. Elsa Euvrard*** [4], ***Dr. Isabelle-Ann Leclair Mallette*** [5], ***Prof. Rosita Vargas Diaz*** [4]

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In Quebec region (Canada), the Youth Criminal Justice Act regulates infractions committed by youths aged 12 to 17 (Ministère de la Justice du Québec, 2022). Several studies address the question of juvenile penal pathways, which are shaped through several phases in the criminal justice system (Dumollard and Niang, 2025). These studies focus as much on youths's relationships with the police (Akinlabi, 2017; Bernard & McAll, 2009; Livingstone et al, 2022; Dirikx et al., 2012), the interventions addressed to youths in situations of detention (Amsellem-Mainguy et al., 2018; Bailleau & Milbrun, 2014) or the tensions in interventions towards these youths (Dumollard et al., 2020; Sallée, 2018, 2020). Other studies show the connections between the building of a relationship of respect and trust between youths and professionals and youth's resulting perceptions of the system (Buss, 2021; Cavanagh et al., 2021). In this sense, youths' negative perceptions of the system and its actors (Dan-Irabor et al., 2022) or lack of information about their rights and the different options offered to them (Daftary-Kapur and Zottoli, 2014) would contribute to their disengagement from the decision-making process, or their distrust of the professionals with whom they interact (Murphy, 2015; Cavanagh et al., 2021).

In such a context, how can we think about the participation of youths in a context in which their power of influence on the decisions made may appear limited? In fact, we still know very little in Quebec about youths' experiences of participation in criminal court proceedings. Yet this is necessary, not only because it is a fundamental right, as stipulated in several legislations (CIDE, 1989, legal framework in Quebec, Bardaxoglou, et al., 2020), but also because the criminal court hearing is a decisive part of the decision-making process. Studies nevertheless highlight the limited space youths have to express themselves and be listened to (Pennington, 2018; Gleeson, 2018), and that they often find themselves caught up in power relationships and infantilization mechanisms that can interfere with their decision-making participation process (Niang et al., 2023).

The aim of this presentation is precisely to present the results of a literature review on the conditions that support the actualization of youths participation through their interactions with professionals in a penal context. Using narrative review and observation methodologies, we will present a discussion based on an analysis of the literature on youths participation in the criminal justice process, put in perspective with observations of YCJA criminal hearings conducted in 2025 in Quebec region. In particular, youths participation in the penal process seems to be structured around 5 interrelated dimensions: interpersonal, informational, physical, temporal and symbolic. While the results echo participation as it may appear on the theoretical level, they offer new theoretical and practical avenues for its operationalization in judicial contexts.

Ensuring the Meaningful Participation of Children and Youth in Child Protection and Those in Conflict with the Law

Thursday, 11th September: Ensuring the Meaningful Participation of Children and Youth in Child Protection and Those in Conflict with the Law - Oral

Dr. Anta Niang [1]***, Prof. Rosita Vargas Diaz*** [2]***, Dr. Irene Salvo Agoglia*** [3]***, Dr. Isabelle-Ann Leclair Mallette*** [4]***, Dr. Sophie Hebert*** [4]***, Dr. Manuela Eleonora Garcia Quiroga*** [5]***, Prof. Valentina Andrea Vallejo Correa*** [6]***, Prof. Vicky Lafantaisie*** [7]***, Prof. Marie-Joëlle Robichaud*** [8]

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Over the past three decades, perspectives on childhood and youth within the social sciences have evolved through new approaches, particularly those emerging from “new childhood studies.” These perspectives have challenged dominant 20th-century theories and representations of youth by emphasizing the concept of agency, recognizing children and youth as active social actors (Vinel & Zaltron, 2020). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) establishes youth participation as a fundamental right, based on a vision of youth as capable of actively shaping their social environment (Sirota, 2013). From this perspective, they are no longer seen merely as adults-in-the-making but as full-fledged social actors, entitled to citizenship and equal rights (Eudier, 2007).

Furthermore, recent research highlights that participation is not only a fundamental right but also a key factor in fostering autonomy, self-determination, and a sense of agency among children and youth. Other research emphasizes that youth participation must be analyzed by considering the dynamics and context of interpersonal relationships between youth and professionals (Niang et al., 2023; Sinclair et al., 2019). This entails acknowledging both the social dimension, as seen in children and youth engagement in decisions that impact their lives, and the fundamental role of their voices in striving to rebalance power dynamics (Auberger, 2014).

Despite this knowledge, opportunities for youth to express themselves and be genuinely heard are still limited, particularly in contexts of vulnerability and social exclusion (Dumollard et al., 2021, 2023; Garcia-Quiroga & Vallejo, 2021; Lafantaisie et al., 2022; Niang et al., 2023; Vargas Diaz et al., 2024). This is particularly the case for youth in contact with the youth protection and juvenile justice systems, which raises a critical challenge in the recognition of these youth and their rights within socio-judicial intervention practices and public policy. The structural and relational obstacles that continue to constrain the meaningful implementation of participation in child welfare and juvenile justice services (Lacroix et al., 2023; Garcia-Quiroga & Agoglia, 2020; Niang et al., 2023; Sallée, 2023; Vargas Diaz et al., 2024) reinforce the urgent need to explore new conceptual avenues , as well as creative clinical and research methodologies and practices that can make youth participation effective in these contexts.

The main objective of this symposium is to provide a space for critical, forward-looking, interdisciplinary, and international dialogue on the theoretical conditions and methodologies that support the participation of children and youth in research and socio-judicial intervention. It will bring together contributions from Canada, Chile, and Spain to promote the sharing of knowledge and approaches that guide the participation of children and youth in research and intervention processes and to cross-examine perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for youth involvement in the child protection and juvenile justice systems. The presentation of creative and reflective methodologies and practices will foster the emergence of new theoretical and practical avenues that promote better inclusion of young people in the processes that impact their lives.

The use of confinement on welfare grounds

The use of confinement on welfare grounds - youth representations of carceral space

Friday, 12th September: The use of confinement on welfare grounds - Oral

Ms. Sabrina Bourget [1]

1. *Université Laval*

Context : The concept of carceral space is at the heart of a body of scientific literature in carceral geography that has become increasingly important in recent years. Conceptualized as space of control, surveillance and modification of bodies and minds, carceral space has most often been associated with prison and other similar institutions of punishment (Schliehe, 2014). So far, carceral space has mostly been studied in term of its deleterious effects, its appropriation by inmates or its architecture. While this literature offers a strong theoretical fondation on which carceral space can be apprehended, the concept of carceral space has rarely been used to understand the experiences of children placed in secure residential care. Indeed, secure care and custody units for youth are two examples of spaces too often ignored by research on carceral space, the first aiming at protecting youth from themselves, and the second aiming at rehabilitation and social reintegration.
Objective : The main objective of the present paper is to identify the significant elements of the lived experience of young people that constitute the carceral space in which they are placed or mandated, and to understand how these elements influence their representations of this space.
Method : This study draws on H Lefebvre's theory on the three dialectical dimensions of space - spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation - in the context of secure and custody units for youth under protection and/or penal laws. Based on participant observations in five secure and custody units in the province of Quebec, Canada, as well as semi-structured interviews and sensitive mapping with 20 adolescents placed in these same five units, the current presentation provides a first insight into the representations and the lived experience of carceral space by adolescents.
Findings : Our results allows us to identify three element that must be encountered in secure care and custody units to mediate the carceral aspect of those spaces, which are coherence between the built space and the spatial practices of stakeholders with youth, justice or fairness in how space is used for every youth and autonomy granted to youth in their living space.
Conclusions/implications : Since few studies have addressed the social production of carceral space by the actors who occupy it daily, the current paper also contribute to our understanding of the interplay between the spatial practices, the representation of space and the space of representation that occurs in those units to produce a social space. At the end, the results presented here make it possible to identify aspects of the daily life in secure care and custody units that could be changed to improve the experience of youth living in these secure environments.

The use of confinement on welfare grounds – What is expected of adolescents?

Friday, 12th September: The use of confinement on welfare grounds - Oral

Dr. Mathilde Turcotte [1]

1. *Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté*

Context: Research has shown that adolescents in mandated intervention settings are unlikely to engage in treatment if practitioners' expectations are unclear or unrealistic (Byers & Lutz, 2015; Ungar & Ikeda, 2017). This is perhaps especially important in secure residential care where youth experience considerable restrictions and tend to be even more resistant (Harder et al., 2012; Henriksen et al., 2008; van der Helm et al., 2018). Adolescents need to understand what is expected of them to make sense of the impact of coercive measures on their lives. Yet, previous studies on confinement in secure units have suggested that ambiguous and contradictory messages are conveyed to youth with regards to motives for placement, goals of confinement, and ways to reintegrate more open settings (Enell & Wilińska, 2021; Henriksen & Prieur, 2019; Vogel, 2018). As a result, adolescents tend to just suffer placement in secure settings rather than to get involved in their own care (Cox, 2011; Turcotte & Fenchel, 2024).

Objective: The current paper aimed to compare (and even, confront) the perspectives of adolescents and practitioners on what is expected of the former during and after secure care placements, especially as it relates to the decision to prolong confinement or not.

Methods: The present paper draws on qualitative interviews with 25 adolescents who were placed at least once in secure care, in three different regions of the province of Quebec, Canada, as well as more than 30 semi-structured interviews with practitioners directly involved in secure care placements.

Findings: Our results highlight that adolescents are very confused about what they can do to convince practitioners of their readiness to reintegrate more open settings. Since youth cannot make sense of the fact that they are being treated as the "masters of their fate" while also being isolated in their room most of the time, they simply stop trying to change and start "acting" bettered. In a sense, interviews with practitioners validated adolescents' understandings, as professionals were hesitant to commit to any one positive expectation regarding youth capacity for change or the effectiveness of secure care in general.

Discussion: Given their potential consequences on adolescents' development, secure care and confinement in general should be "accountable". For all children placed in locked settings, practitioners must be able to explain the intervention objectives, how they plan on helping adolescents to attain these goals, and why some youth end up spending many months in confinement before qualifying for release. Researchers would then be able to evaluate such restrictive measures like any other program at the disposal of practitioners working in the child welfare system.

The use of confinement on welfare grounds - Are time-out placements a solution to the escalation of intense behavior among youths in care?

Friday, 12th September: The use of confinement on welfare grounds - Oral

Dr. Sophie Hebert [1], ***Dr. Sonia Hélie*** [1], ***Mrs. Marie-Noele Royer*** [1], ***Dr. Tonino Esposito*** [2]

1. *Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté,* ***2.*** *University of Montreal*

Context: Youth in care are significantly more likely to exhibit intense behavioral manifestations (behavior that puts the youth or those around him at risk, or challenges the therapeutic relationship) than are youth in the general population and the majority have a history of multiple traumas. When youth behavior escalate, efforts are made to mitigate these behaviors. One such strategy is time-out placement (TOP). TOP is a short-term placement whose main objective is to temporarily separate a youth manifesting severe behaviors from the environment in which these behaviors occur. While TOPs are meant to avoid more restrictive measures to manage youth intense behaviors, trauma-informed researchers (Day, 2002; Matte-Landry & Collin-Vézina, 2020) have described this type of placement move as a form of confinement, since the youth is isolated from their regular environment and daily activities. Moreover, a majority of children perceive the experience of placement move (independent of duration) as rejection or abandonment (D'Andrade, 2005; Hébert et al., 2016) and youths' perceptions of TOPs are not an exception to this rule (Bergeron, 2006). As well, the placement instability associated with moving between care environments can elicit anger, frustration, insecurity, and feelings of being misunderstood (Hébert et al., 2016), emotions likely to elicit subsequent behavioral reactions. Overall, a significant proportion of the literature establishes a bidirectional link between intense behavioral manifestations and placement instability, and the TOPs may not be an exception.

Objective: Our study aims to analyze differences between youth who have experienced this measure and those who have not on multiple factors like a) the other restrictive measures employed b) their behavior (runaway and delinquency) and c) the potential of instability in their placement trajectory.

Participants and setting: The population (N = 3755) consisted of all youth (12–17 years old) having experienced residential care placement one day or longer, between the years 2014 and 2019, in Montreal (Canada).

Method: After controlling for the potential effect of childhood trajectory (propensity score matching), we compared the two groups according to the presence or absence of TOP in adolescence, using hierarchical logistic regression.

Findings: The results show that youth who have been subjected to at least one TOP in adolescence are more likely to exhibit behaviors of such intensity as to prompt the use of restrictive measures, and that the use of TOPs in the context of runaways may be commonplace. Indeed, TOPs are also associated with greater placement instability.

Conclusion/Implications: Considering the slide towards instability among youths who have experienced at least one TOP, our paper is in line with the more general observation that these restrictive measures do not have the expected stabilizing effects.

The use of confinement on welfare grounds – The notion of time in youth's experience of time-out placements

Friday, 12th September: The use of confinement on welfare grounds - Oral

Ms. Camille Marchand [1], ***Dr. Sophie Hebert*** [2]

1. *Université de Montréal,* ***2.*** *Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté*

Context**:** Time-out placement (TOP) is a disciplinary measure applied in residential facilities in Quebec (Canada) (Hébert et al., 2025). Time-out is a form of discipline characterized by it's punitive nature and the withdrawal of affection (Hernandez et al., 2023). A TOP lasts a few days and is designed to calm the youth and encourage them to reflect on the behavior that led to the time-out (Bergeron, 2006; Hébert et al., 2020). It takes place in a living unit separate from their usual living unit and restricts the youth's freedom (Hébert et al., 2025). However, the effects of this measure have been mixed (Hébert et al., 2025), and no study to date has been able to understand how young people experience their stay in TOP. Adolescents understand and expect a framework to be in place, with rules and consequences, and that practitioners can use their authority to maintain it. However, living in repression risks undermining the rehabilitation objectives targeted by placement in a residential facility, i.e. their well-being, their social development and their involvement in the intervention (de Valk et al., 2017). Given the paucity of scientific literature on TOPs, it is necessary to know the point of view of youths themselves on this measure. Indeed, what is youth's perspective on TOPs ?

Objective: The aim of this communication is to gain a better understanding of how adolescents experienced the TOPs and how they perceive this measure.

Method: Nine adolescents who had been in TOP at the age of 14 and over, were met in semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the content of these interviews (Paillé and Mucchielli, 2021), themes that emerged through out the analysis were also used.

Findings: It appears that the notion of time is an umbrella theme that defines the essence of their perception of their TOP experience. Time refers, among other things, to the time apart from their usual living unit, the time spent in their room in TOP and the waste of time it represents for some of them. Even though having time to think is generally well perceived by the participants, the effect of time ends up being reversed over time. Finally, time also becomes a marker, a landmark, to define the moment of the beginning of the TOP, which appears to be somewhat different from the administrative markers for some.

Conclusion/implications: With that in mind, clarifying what is a TOP as well as rethinking time management in TOPs, and at a larger scale of other restrictive measures in residential centers, would benefit youth's experience. Furthermore, we hope that, by giving these adolescents a voice on the matter, it influences future practices concerning youth in residential settings in Quebec as well as internationally.

The use of confinement on welfare grounds - Is secure care in the best interest of children or youth care workers?

Friday, 12th September: The use of confinement on welfare grounds - Oral

Mr. Vincent Fleurent [1]

1. *Université Laval*

Background. Secure care is a contested measure that allows for the confinement of adolescents, deemed a danger to others or themselves, in locked units until problematic behaviours stop. In the province of Quebec, Canada, secure care can be used when it is considered in the child's interest. Yet, there is no official definition of this notion of best interest, especially as it applies to restrictions on liberty. It is therefore up to practitioners to identify what the benefits of using such a restrictive measure could be and to assess whether goals were attained. So far, however, practitioners' decision-making and rationalizing with regards to secure care has rarely been the focus of empirical studies.

Objective. The current study therefore aimed to 1. better understand how youth care workers define and use the concept of a child's best interest, 2. explore the justifications behind these representations and 3. see how it applies in the specific context of secure care.

Methods. This study draws on 12 semi-structured interviews with professionals (managers and youth care workers) directly involved in the decision-making process regarding admission and revaluation of secure care placements. All interviews were conducted in Quebec, Canada and were based on clinical vignettes, as well as general open questions about factors that influenced their decisions. Three main codes guided the analysis process: representations of the concept of best interest in child welfare; discourses and justifications on which these representations are based; and application in the context of secure care.

Findings. Results show that practitioners consider confinement of these "out-of-control" adolescents to be in their best interest in itself, irregardless of its outcomes. It appears that secure care is not mobilized for what it can do for the child in the future, but rather what it can stop in the present, however temporarily.

Discussion. If the notion of best interest is reduced to the containment of children, then secure care is mostly used to provide youth care workers with some (extra) time to rethink intervention strategies. The best interests of children are therefore shaped by practitioners and their risk tolerance. The implications and consequences are discussed.

Relationships matter

Relationships matter - Narratives about the Family of Adolescents in Residential Care

Friday, 12th September: Relationships matter - Oral

Prof. Luiza Nobre-Lima [1], ***Dr. Micaela Ponte*** [2]

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The maintenance of family ties is a need identified among adolescents in Residential Care (RC). Despite continuing some contact with their families, leaving the family home results in an ambiguous and unresolved loss, characterised by unprocessed grief, a sense of impermanence, and a lack of family identity and sense of belonging.

This qualitative study aimed to explore the meaning that adolescents in RC attribute to the concept of family, how they represent their own family, and the expectations they have of it. Nine adolescents of both sexes (33.3% boys; 66.7% girls), aged between 13 and 20 years (M=13.33; SD=3.08), with a minimum length of stay in RC of nine months, were interviewed. The narratives produced through the interviews were analysed using the methodology of Thematic Analysis.

The main results of this study revealed that adolescents in RC consider that family should mean affection, care, protection, and presence. Regarding their own family, adolescents distinguish parents from other caregivers they have had, attributing to these other figures a compensatory role in relation to the negative relational and emotional experiences with their parents. From their past experiences with their parents, they reported witnessing domestic violence and drug and alcohol dependencies, and mentioned having been maltreated in various ways, which made them feel excluded and invisible and inadequate. It was through other caregivers that they were able to experience care, affection, and access to education. Regarding these caregivers, adolescents remain connected in the present and wish to continue this connection in the future. As for their parents, contact may or may not have been lost, while contact with other caregivers has always been maintained.

No idealisation towards their parents was found among the adolescents in this sample, which contrasts with the findings of other studies. The age of the interviewed adolescents may help explain their realistic view of their parents and their parenting practices, which, at times, influenced their choices to want to stay away from them. Further research into how children and young people in RC attribute meaning to family and the impact of this meaning on their psychological functioning could inform how caregivers prepare them both for staying in and leaving out-of-home care.

Keywords: Adolescents, residential care, family, narratives

Relationships matter - The Relationship between Abuse and Neglect and Psychological Functioning: The Role of Attachment to Caregivers in Residential Care

Friday, 12th September: Relationships matter - Oral

Ms. Marta Frazão [1], Dr. Eunice Magalhães [2], Ms. Micaela Pinheiro [1], Prof. Joana Baptista [1], Prof. Carla Silva [3]

1. *Iscte,* ***2.*** *iscte,* ***3.*** *Faculty of Psychology, University of Lisbon*

Many young people living in residential care have previously been victims of maltreatment and therefore tend to have more mental health difficulties than those living with their biological families. Relationships with residential caregivers are known to be important for young people's psychological adjustment. However, more research is needed on the moderating role of attachment to caregivers in the relationship between previous maltreatment and current adjustment. This study examines this relationship in a sample in a sample of 155 adolescents aged between 12 and 17 (M = 14.89, SD = 1.59), mostly female (57.4%).

The results revealed a significant moderating effect of emotional distance and rejection in the relationship between psychological and physical abuse and adolescents' psychological difficulties. This moderating effect was observed at medium and high levels of the moderator. Specifically, young people who had been victims of physical and psychological abuse, and who reported emotional detachment and rejection from their caregivers, showed heightened psychological difficulties. This study reinforces the critical role of qualified professionals in the child protection system, so that they can facilitate young people's recovery rather than contribute to secondary victimization. The study underscores the importance of secure and supportive caregiver-adolescent relationships in residential care in mitigating the adverse effects of past maltreatment and promoting psychological well-being.

Relationships matter - Maltreatment and Mental Health of Adolescents in Residential Care: The Moderating Role of Peer Attachment

Friday, 12th September: Relationships matter - Oral

Dr. Beatriz Silva [1], ***Dr. Eunice Magalhães*** [2], ***Dr. Micaela Pinheiro*** [1], ***Prof. Joana Baptista*** [1], ***Dr. Margarida Ferreira*** [3]

1. *Iscte,* ***2.*** *iscte,* ***3.*** *Faculty of Psychology, University of Lisbon*

Research suggests that several adolescents in residential care were exposed to maltreatment experiences which pose significant risks for mental health problems, such as internalizing and externalizing behaviors. However, peer relationships can weaken or heighten the effect of maltreatment on adolescents' mental health. Thus, this study aimed to test the moderating role of peer attachment in the relationship between maltreatment and adolescents' mental health in residential care. A total of 155 adolescents (57.4% girls) aged between 12 and 17 years (M = 14.89; SD = 1.59) from 20 residential care settings participated in this study. Self-reported questionnaires were administrated individually by psychologists with specific training on child protection. Eligibility for participation was restricted to individuals aged 12 to 17 years who resided in non-specialized residential settings.

Statistically significant moderating effects were found, as the effect of physical and psychological abuse on total problems and externalizing symptoms was higher for adolescents who reported lower quality peer attachment, specifically lower levels of trust. These results provide innovative findings on the role of peer relationships in the mental health outcomes of adolescents in residential care, highlighting the importance of fostering positive relationships to prevent social exclusion and mental health problems.

Relationships matter - The role of warmth and safeness experiences with others on psychological distress among adolescents in residential care: Implications for care practices

Friday, 12th September: Relationships matter - Accepted with changes

Prof. Laura Santos [1], ***Dr. Diana Ribeiro da Silva*** [1], ***Prof. Maria do Rosário Pinheiro*** [1], ***Prof. Daniel Rijo*** [1]

1. *University of Coimbra, Center for Research in Neuropsychology and Cognitive Behavioral Intervention (CINEICC), Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Coimbra, Portugal*

Research suggested that not only early affiliative relationships, but also current affiliative relationships may play an important role on mental health. This might be particularly relevant for Residential Youth Care (RYC) practices and interventions, considering that adolescents living in RYC were exposed to early adverse experiences of abuse and neglect and tend to struggle with mental health and interpersonal problems, that might difficult care provision and its potential effects on recovery trauma. Considering the recommendation about therapeutic environments, this study adds to previous knowledge by exploring if the establishment of meaningful affiliative relationships with current caregivers might play a key protective role on adolescents' mental health.

This is a cross-sectional study aimed to examine the role of early memories of warmth and safeness (EMWS) and current experiences of warmth and safeness (CEWS) on depressive and anxious symptoms among adolescents living in RYC. A sample of 293 adolescents (51.9% girls) living in residential care facilities in Portugal filled out a set of self-report questionnaires assessing EMWS, CEWS, depression and anxiety symptoms. Data were analysed using structural equation modelling and latent profile analysis, combining a variable-and a person-centred approach.

Variable-centred outcomes revealed EMWS were only indirectly (through CEWS) associated with depressive and anxious symptoms. Person-centred outcomes allowed to identify four different profiles based on EMWS and CEWS, that differed on depressive and anxious symptoms.

Taken together, findings suggest that both EMWS and CEWS seem to play an important role on RYC adolescents' psychological distress. Yet, it is highlighted that CEWS seem to have a protective role on psychological distress, even when EMWS were poor, suggesting that care workers may play a key role in RYC interventions and should be considered and trained as therapeutic agents.

Oral

A Model of Trauma-Based Care Approach in Group Supervision for Residential Care Providers

Wednesday, 10th September - 11:15: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Prof. Branka Sladović Franz [1]

1. *University of Zagreb Faculty of Law*

Children in alternative care often have a history of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and various traumas prior to placement, and these challenges may persist during and even after their time in care. The effects of such traumatic and stressful experiences can significantly disrupt their adjustment, daily functioning, and long-term well-being. Implementing a trauma-informed care approach in childcare is therefore essential. Care providers face numerous challenges in their daily work, particularly in crisis situations. These crises are becoming increasingly frequent due to factors such as the growing number of children with severe mental health issues and rising violent behaviours in group settings. Also, the family support model leads to placements at older age with more severe consequences of abuse and neglect. In group supervision setting, beyond discussing how to handle specific situations or professional tasks and ethical issues, care providers may also reflect on their own personal histories, emotional responses, and mental states, as these can influence their professional roles and interactions with children. Based on experiences of supervising residential care providers, this paper presents a trauma-informed supervision model, which includes core principles of trauma-based care, the use of appropriate language and terminology and specific supervision techniques. A new case-presentation framework is introduced, structured around types of trauma, the child's experience and consequences from an ecosystemic perspective, the impact on care providers and systemic and institutional challenges and finally recognizing and discovering supervision questions and themes to be analysed aiming at improving care quality for both children and staff. Supervision in this model involves exploring key concepts relevant to residential and group care settings, such as: neuroception, self-regulation and co-regulation, mentalization, the window of tolerance and relational trauma. This approach is especially relevant in crisis situations, such as bullying and peer violence in children's homes and self-destructive and suicidal behaviours witnessed by other children, which will be presented as supervision cases. Care providers have many dilemmas and issues in protecting not only victims but all other children, and afterwards, since such events have long-lasting effects undermining children's sense of safety and trust and staff's stability, motivation, and professional efficacy. Finally, there is a need for distinguishing and promotion of specialized training in trauma-based alternative care, trauma-informed crisis interventions in residential care, and further development of this supervision model in different types of alternative care settings and child protection system.

Transformative Supervision for Social Workers: Integrating Trauma and Attachment Perspectives in Support of Children and Families

Wednesday, 10th September - 11:30: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Adena Hoffnung Assouline [1], ***Dr. Cigal Knei-Paz*** [2]

1. *Hebrew University,* ***2.*** *Tel Aviv University*

This presentation introduces a trauma and attachment informed model of supervision designed to support social workers who work with children and families affected by traumatic experiences. Grounded in contemporary clinical thinking and practice wisdom, the model integrates emotional insight with organizational care, offering a framework for transforming supervisory practices within child welfare systems.

Children exposed to trauma—including abuse, domestic violence, natural disasters, and collective adversity—often experience disruptions in emotional regulation, cognitive development, and the capacity to form safe, trusting relationships. These difficulties may manifest as survival-based behaviours, social withdrawal, or aggression. Supporting such children requires practitioners to engage in emotionally demanding work, which can lead to secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout. In addition to emotional resilience, this work demands the integration of trauma- and attachment-informed practice skills, enabling practitioners to respond effectively and sensitively to complex and evolving needs. Supervision, therefore, must be redefined as a space not only for oversight and accountability but also for emotional processing, skill development, and reflective growth.

This supervision model integrates three complementary lenses that together form an innovative and holistic approach to practitioner support:

1. A Systemic Lens: Grounded in trauma-informed principles, this lens encourages a broad understanding of how trauma affects children, families, and professionals within the wider organizational and social context. It fosters awareness of structural influences, promotes organizational responsibility, and supports the creation of safe, non-retraumatizing environments for both service users and practitioners.
2. A Reflective Lens: Central to enhancing practitioner capacity, the reflective lens emphasizes emotional awareness, attunement, and thoughtful engagement with complex clinical material. It supports the development of self-regulation, containment, and critical inquiry within the supervisory relationship. By creating space for reflection and mutual exploration, this lens helps practitioners process emotional challenges and maintain a grounded, empathetic stance in their work.

1. A Relational-Practice Lens: Grounded in Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), this lens emphasizes the central role of relationships in healing from trauma. It supports supervisors in guiding practitioners to explore how trauma shapes the caregiver-child relationship and the child's inner world. Supervision draws on CPP principles to build practitioners' capacity for attuned, developmentally sensitive interventions that foster safety, connection, and emotional understanding. The supervisory relationship models the same relational stance, creating a parallel process that strengthens clinical practice.

Case-based examples illustrate how reflective supervision grounded in these three lenses can lead to improved practitioner well-being, a deeper understanding of clients' needs, and greater therapeutic effectiveness. At the organizational level, this approach can promote resilience among staff, enhance team cohesion, and contribute to more sustainable and ethical practice in high-stress environments.

The model underscores the need for child welfare organizations to prioritize ongoing, supportive supervision as a core component of effective service delivery. In line with the conference theme of transformation, this presentation highlights how innovative supervision can serve as a lever for systemic change—enhancing outcomes not only for children and families, but also for the professionals who serve them.

Trauma and resilience of older care leavers in Australia: Enhancing service systems and support

Wednesday, 10th September - 11:45: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Prof. Elizabeth Fernandez [1], ***Prof. Jung-Sook Lee*** [1], ***Ms. Anne Livingstone*** [2]

1. *University of New South Wales,* ***2.*** *National Aged and Community Care Roundtable for Forgotten Australians*

Background: The paper draws on the Long-term Outcomes of Forgotten Australians study undertaken to understand the experiences of people who lived in care between 1930 and 1990 in Australia, to identify their current needs and improve services for them. People who lived in care are known to have suffered maltreatment and considerable inequities, injustices and disadvantages in their life course. The presentation will focus on factors influencing educational, socioeconomic and psychological outcomes. It will bring awareness to the unique needs of careleavers as they age and require community care.

Methods: The study sample includes 669 care leavers from across Australia. To identify more resilient and less resilient participants, two-step cluster analysis in SPSS was performed with income, financial hardships, education level, K-10 psychological distress scores, and mental illness. The analysis compared more resilient and less resilient care leavers on in-care, transition, and post-care experiences to understand the relationships between resilience in adulthood and these experiences.

Results: While in care, compared to less resilient care leavers, more resilient care leavers had better educational experiences, experienced lower levels of maltreatment, had someone helpful, and had fewer placements. During the transition out of care, compared to care leavers with low resilience, care leavers with high resilience were better prepared for leaving care, had fewer difficulties, had someone to call on for help, had some assistance from the care institution, and had a job. Post-care experiences also differ significantly between more resilient and less resilient groups. Compared to less resilient care leavers, more resilient care leavers reported better relationships with and support from partners, family, and friends while less resilient care leavers were more likely to receive help from support groups, social workers, counsellors, or care leaver organizations.

Implications: Although the current care systems are different from the care systems in the past, these care leavers' perspectives point to factors leading to positive long-term outcomes. Findings of the current study suggested that placement stability, good education, and support received are important factors in generating long-term positive socioeconomic and psychosocial outcomes of children in care. The implications for trauma informed aged care services to support this aging cohort are underlined. The presentation will spotlight efforts at advocacy for change, improved service model design, support for trauma informed training for practitioners while highlighting the need for policy reform to ensure older careleavers receive the services that are appropriate for them.

Parental Loss in Alternative Care: A Knowledge Gap and Project Outline

Wednesday, 10th September - 12:00: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Monika Alvestad Reime [1], ***Mrs. Nina Bringedal*** [1], ***Mrs. Tone Jørgensen*** [2], ***Dr. Merete Tunestveit*** [1], ***Dr. Ingunn Barmen Tysnes*** [1], ***Dr. Ingrid Johnsen Hogstad*** [3]

1. *Western Norway University of Applied Sciences,* ***2.*** *western norway university of applied sciences,* ***3.*** *Molde University College*

Background/Objectives: The loss of a parent at a young age is a stressful and potentially traumatic experience and compounds the risks already associated with children involved in child-welfare systems. This presentation departs from a scoping review aimed at gaining an overview of the extent of research on children involved in child-welfare systems who experience the death of a birth parent. Children receiving care and support through child-welfare systems are more likely to experience the death of a parent in childhood than other children, particularly those in alternative care. To enhance trauma-informed social work practices with these children, caregivers and policymakers need research-based knowledge.

Method: The scoping review was conducted following the updated Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) guidance. The mnemonic PCC (participants, concepts, and contexts) guided the different stages of our review process. Following the PCC process, study participants were persons who had lost a birth parent in childhood (aged 0–18 years) while involved in a child-welfare system. The study concept was the death of birth parents of children involved in child-welfare systems. The study context included welfare states, child-welfare systems, and all types of child-welfare measures used in these contexts, such as help measures and out-of-home care, including institutional care and foster/kinship care. We included original empirical studies, clinical case studies, all types of reviews, and all types of study designs. The review included publications in the following categories: peer-reviewed articles, doctoral theses, and peer-reviewed book chapters. There were no restrictions due to the date of publication. Searches were conducted in six different databases. The study-selection process followed the PRISMA reporting guidelines and was done double-blind.

Findings: Only three studies meeting the eligibility criteria were identified, indicating a scarcity of research knowledge in this field. We particularly note a lack of research from children's perspectives. Furthermore, none of the identified studies explored parental loss among children placed in foster care, which is by far the most used alternative care option. One study was excluded because it explored an intervention for grief support for children in alternative care, including both death loss and non-death loss (such as being separated from birth parents). We discuss the eligibility criteria and consider whether it could be fruitful for further research to focus on the phenomenon of parental loss rather than exclusively on death-related losses. The concepts of disenfranchised grief and ambiguous loss may be relevant in addressing emotional and relational stress resulting from both types of losses and can inform further research and practice development within social work.

Implications: Based on the identified knowledge gap, the research group has outlined a research project that extensively focuses on children in alternative care and includes both death losses and non-death losses. This project will depart from children's perspectives on how loss-related traumas are experienced and integrated into their everyday life and their developmental possibilities.

KINGS: A family-based approach to trauma recovery

Wednesday, 10th September - 12:15: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Ms. Loïs de Rooij [1], ***Mr. Roel Kooijmans*** [2], ***Ms. Diana Hartogs*** [1], ***Ms. Karin Taphoorn*** [1]

1. *Koraal Centre of Expertise (The Netherlands),* ***2.*** *Koraal Centre of Expertise / De Hondsberg (the Netherlands) University of Amsterdam, Research Institute of Child Development and Education, P.O. Box 19268, Nieuwe Achtergracht 127, 1018, WS, Amsterdam, the Netherlands*

Introduction

Families with multiple and complex problems have often faced adversities and trauma across generations, impacting their well-being and family dynamics. Parental trauma responses may hinder their ability to provide responsive and sensitive parenting, making it challenging to support their children's recovery. To break the circle of intergenerational trauma and adversity, it is important to implement aligned interventions that treat both parents and children simultaneously. The KINGS program (Kind IN Gezond Systeem, 'Child in a Healthy System'), developed by Accare in The Netherlands, is an intensive inpatient trauma treatment programme for families. During the programme, both children and their parent(s) receive individual and joint treatment. KINGS focuses on trauma processing for both parents and children, as well as enhancing parental sensitivity, responsiveness, and parenting skills. The ultimate goal is to ensure that children grow up in a healthy family system and to prevent out-of-home placement.

The objective of this study was to evaluate the treatment outcomes of the KINGS programme at Koraal, a Dutch multicentre organisation that provides care and education for people with intellectual disabilities. Specifically, this study aimed to assess the effectiveness of KINGS in reducing trauma symptoms in both parents and children, emotional and behavioural difficulties in children, and parenting stress of parents.

Methods

A multiple case study was conducted using questionnaire data from 13 families who participated in the KINGS programme. Data were collected at baseline, three weeks into the six-to-eight-week programme, post-treatment, and at follow-up at eight to 16 weeks. Measurements included quantitative inventories of trauma symptoms in both children and parents, parenting stress, emotional and behavioural problems in children, and psychological distress and treatment progress of parents. A qualitative evaluation was conducted with several families at follow-up.

Results

The results show that trauma symptoms in both parents and children significantly decreased by the end of the KINGS programme. In nearly all cases, parents reported a reduction in parenting stress as well. Regarding emotional and behavioural problems, in most families a decrease in the child's emotional difficulties was reported. In some cases, a reduction in behavioural problems was also noted, such as improved attention regulation. Quantitative data at follow-up could not be analysed due to high numbers of non-response. Qualitative evaluations indicated that parents experienced a sense of safety at KINGS and learnt about their existing strengths in parenting as well. Interviewed children were particularly positive about receiving treatment together with their parent(s). For 10 of the 13 families enrolled in the programme, out-of-home placement of children was prevented.

Conclusions

The results highlight the importance of integrated family-based interventions that focus on trauma recovery in both parents and children simultaneously. The KINGS programme offers a promising approach to strengthening family resilience, enhancing parenting capacities, and ultimately preventing out-of-home placements.

Psychological Well-Being, Health and the Role of Leaving Care – Results of a Panel Study from SOS Children´s Village in Germany

Wednesday, 10th September - 11:15: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Dr. Regina Renner [1]

1. *Sociopedagogical Institute, SOS Children's Village Germany*

SOS Children Village Germany has been conducting research on and with its care leavers since 2014. This paper will share some of the insights with particular attention to the interaction between the process of leaving care, the subjective health status and psychological well-being.

Within the framework of the SOS Longitudinal Study, SOS Children's Village in Germany regularly asks youths and young adults about their growing up in SOS Children's Villages in Germany. The research project also examines the further development of former SOS care leavers. The goal of the SOS Longitudinal Study is to examine individual development processes and transitions over a longer time and to continually improve the pedagogic practice on site in the homes based on these empirical insights. The SOS Longitudinal Study is characterized by its broad field access, multiple perspectives and mixture of methods. Quantitative questionnaires are regularly filled out by care receivers twelve years and older, by the care givers and care leavers every two years. Additionally, qualitative interviews are conducted in years between the questionnaires. The population are care receivers of SOS Children's Village in Germany in alternative care from the age of 12. The underlying data for the contribution includes more than 450 persons that have been care receivers of SOS Children's Village in Germany. The data has been collected in six waves between 2014 and 2024 whereby longitudinal quantitative analysis can be conducted.

With that underlying data the paper explores the effect of leaving care on psychological well-being and subjective health status. First findings indicate that moving out of alternative care has no immediate impact on psychological well-being whereas the subjective health status of the SOS-care leavers worsens directly after moving out. However, there is additionally an important impact of the sense of coherence.

The paper argues that youth welfare faces the challenge to offer appropriate support so that stabilizing factors for psychological well-being and subjective health status can be supported. Therefore, care givers should be sensitized to develop the sense of coherence of care receivers as it serves as an important resource to stabilize subjective health, psychological well-being and potentially mental health. This aspect also hits the debate about handling the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and health in general of young people in Germany and the need of increasing the capacities of psychotherapy.

“Maybe I was born on February 15, 1979”: A qualitative study on knowledge gaps, fragments of information, and assumptions regarding the origin of adopted persons

Wednesday, 10th September - 11:30: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Prof. Andrea Abraham [1]

1. *Bern University of Applied Sciences / School of Social Work*

In many countries of the Global North, fierce controversies are taking place regarding the past and future of international adoptions. Adopted persons are demanding information about their origins and the circumstances of their separation from their birth parents. In Switzerland, despite the high number of internationally adopted persons, there is still little research on the subject of adoption. The first studies have now been carried out in this context as part of efforts to come to terms with the past.

This contribution provides an insight into one such study, which deals with the adoption of Indian children by Swiss couples in the 20th century. The focus is on the study part that deals with the birth parents in India. In numerous adoption dossiers stored in Swiss archives, the entry on birth parents contains terms such as “mother unknown”. The contribution explores the question of how actors in the field of adoption - adopted persons, adoptive parents, Swiss and Indian adoption agencies, and Indian adoption activists - deal with the discursive “void” of birth mothers. How does this void manifest itself, how is it maintained and justified? And which “filler narratives” emerge in dealing with the void?

To answer and discuss these questions, the contribution draws on qualitative interviews and ethnographic data collected in Switzerland and India. It shows what missing, inaccurate or constantly changing information can mean for the lives of adopted persons and adoptive families, and what strategies they have developed to deal with these knowledge gaps: In an attempt to get answers, they conduct research, imagine and visualize their origins and construct multifaceted images of mothers. They do this against the backdrop of a persistent silence about birth mothers in India whose children were put up for adoption. Many of them were unmarried mothers. To this day, Bollywood films and fiction are the only social spaces in which these unmarried mothers are talked about.

The silence is accentuated by the tension between the adopted person’s right to know their origins and the culturally granted right to anonymity of the biological Indian mothers. From a social anthropological perspective, this refusal to address the issue in Indian society can be understood as a “polyphonic silence”, which can be an expression of social taboo, oppression and exclusion of unmarried mothers, but also of protection and concern for their stigmatised identities.

This area of tension illustrates the complexity of conducting transnational adoption research in the sense of a “shared history”: Switzerland and India are at very different points in terms of their willingness to conduct critical-historical adoption research, which poses major challenges for research collaborations between country of origin and receiving country. The contribution provides an insight into the results outlined above, as well as into the methodological, ethical and political challenges of such a study. Using the example of adoptions of Indian children by Swiss couples, it presents findings and discussion points that are relevant for all research on international adoptions between the countries of the Global North and Global South.

Challenging Narratives, Transforming Lives: Resilience Through Residential Care for Children of Sex Workers

Wednesday, 10th September - 11:45: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Dr. Tuhinul Khalil [1]

1. *University of EdinburghCare Transformation International*

Children of sex workers in Bangladesh face extreme social exclusion, discrimination, and vulnerability to abuse, with limited access to protection or support. This study critically examines the role of NGO-run residential child-care institutions as an alternative care model that fosters resilience and social reintegration for these children. Through ethnographic research and in-depth interviews with 53 care leavers (ages 12–22), the study explores their experiences of care, transition, and after-care support.

Findings challenge dominant Western narratives that universally critique institutional care, demonstrating that in resource-limited settings, structured residential care can provide a crucial protective environment. The study highlights key factors contributing to resilience, including **educational access, psychosocial support, mentorship, and structured community integration programmes**. Children in care not only received shelter and education but also developed self-confidence, social skills, and aspirations for a future beyond the stigma of their birth identity. The research underscores the importance of **context-sensitive child protection approaches**, where residential care—when properly structured—can function as a **transformative space for marginalised children**.

Insights from this study contribute to global debates on deinstitutionalisation, urging a more nuanced approach that prioritises the best interests of the child rather than one-size-fits-all policy solutions.

Invisible & unheard: an analysis of education & care with Irish children in residential care

Wednesday, 10th September - 12:00: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Ms. Tara Ciric [1]

1. *Maynooth University*

Context

Internationally, widespread systemic barriers result in pervasive educational inequalities for children in care (Gahagan et al., 2023; Garcia-Molsosa et al., 2021; Goding et al., 2022). This persists despite increased focus on care-experienced children within education research, as well as the systemic conditions within State care. Within the Irish context, there is a noted paucity in research concerning children in care, especially the education context (Darmondy et al., 2013). Partially spurred by publication of *the the Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* (Ryan, 2009) and the increased public discourse about the history of systemic institutional confinement and abuse of children and 'fallen' women and girls, there has been a renewed interest in the lived experiences of children in care. However, children in care remain largely invisible within Irish practice and policy. There is no education policy for children in care, and data is not collected on their education outcomes by either the Department of Education or the Department of Children.

Objectives & Methods

This research is the first research exploring the educational experiences of children in residential care in Ireland under the modern Tusla Child and Family Services system. Following an epistemically responsible research structure, attending to the epistemic injustices that occur both within the care system and within many established methodologies, this research used a participatory research approach to work with young people living in residential care. Policy makers, civil servants, advocates and professionals in care and education were also interviewed to add context to larger participatory project. Using expertise through experience, we worked together to analyze the practices and policies within the care and education systems of Ireland which have led to low attendance rate, high rates of early school leaving and low rates of higher education entrance (CSO, 2024). The objective of this research was to analyse the experience of going to school while living in residential care, from the perspective of young people currently in residential care. In particular, we focused on how the lack of education policy and practice guidelines has a lived effect for children in care.

Findings & Implications

Using data collected from 10 interviews with policy makers and civil servants, alongside work with 10 young people in residential care, this presentation will discuss how policy makers and civil servants conceptualized children in care and their education, and how this effects their work in creating policy to support them. These findings will show how the cultural imprint of stigma, passing of accountability and assumptions of deficit towards children and families at risk in historic institutions of containment in Ireland have left their mark on the modern social care system. We will also discuss how these findings are felt by young people in care today.

Rethinking Alternative Care for Children in Disasters in Iran

Wednesday, 10th September - 11:15: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Dr. Hamed Seddighi Khavidak [1]

1. *University of Groningen*

Children are among the most vulnerable populations in disasters and humanitarian emergencies, yet their specific needs related to alternative care often remain structurally neglected. This presentation focuses on the case of Iran, where recurring natural disasters intersect with complex social challenges, including poverty, displacement, and an under-resourced child protection system. Particular attention is given to refugee and undocumented children, as well as children with disabilities, who are at heightened risk of exclusion from state-based care frameworks during crises.

Based on critical policy analysis, document reviews, and qualitative interviews with key informants in the fields of emergency response and child welfare, this study reveals significant gaps in the integration of child-sensitive alternative care into national disaster management plans. The findings show a lack of preparedness for separated or unaccompanied children, limited coordination between welfare organizations and emergency services, and the absence of culturally adapted, trauma-informed care options during and after disasters.

The research is grounded in the author's applied work as a postdoctoral researcher in psychology and former practitioner in humanitarian response. It directly contributes to several key themes of this conference, including trauma-informed care, cultural sensitivity, and the translation of research into practice (REU).

Drawing on both global frameworks and localized insights, the presentation argues for a systematized, inclusive, and rights-based approach to alternative care in emergencies—one that bridges the current disconnect between emergency response and child protection systems. While centered on Iran, the lessons and policy recommendations have potential relevance for other countries facing similar resource and coordination challenges, particularly in the Global South.

This contribution seeks to enrich the evidence base on child protection in crisis contexts and spark dialogue on how alternative care systems can be better prepared to serve children when disasters strike.

Overview of Children Neglect in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja, Nigeria

Wednesday, 10th September - 11:30: (ZICER Room 2) - Accepted with changes

Mr. Michael Adedotun [1]

1. *Michael Adedotun Oke Foundation / Federal Capital Territory Agricultural Development Programe*

Abstract

This paper studies the neglect of under age children in Abuja Nigeria: the implications, behavior's patterns, the various problems, and challenges. Two hundred and fifty (250) different questionnaires were administered among stakeholders, duty bearers, and service providers in Child Protection in the Federal Capital Territory, and split in the following : 50 Interviews among gender and welfare organizations, 80 Interviews across religious organizations, 50 Interviews among Federal Capital Territory and area councils, 50 Interviews with government agencies, and 20 interviews across Civil Society Organization's Four (4) Focus Group Discussions, were also conducted and respondents were drawn from stakeholders in the child Justice Clinic, Police (Anti- Human Trafficking, women and Children Protection Unit), Child Welfare Division, Child Protection Network, Areas Councils (Welfare and Education Department), and Civil Society. Ten (10) Key informant interviews were also conducted among experts and their selection was based on their knowledge, expertise, and direct involvement in Child Protection. The Survey Questionnaires data collected were analysed using the SPSS data analytic tool and the Qualitative Content Analysis Method was used for the Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews.

It was observed that most of the children were being moved from the Northern parts of the country, in vehicles vans and dropped into the different strategic positions, location in the community of Gwagwalada, Kwali , Kuje and Abaji. Here they can cause a lot of burden to the citizens, they beg for food and money and have nowhere to sleep and some of the religious leaders also kept them in respect for their own protections, religious teaching and to help them. Even some populace in the society take care of their welfare and needs, some populace requested in adopting and to adopt them. They are also used for political means as in, during elections periods, in other states, they cause a lot of different security challenges. This paper suggests and recommends that the social welfare of the Federal Capital Territory Administration, must be proactive enough, to work out plans and policies for the care of neglected children, social welfare schemes, introduction of social protection law, for the affected children and addressing the challenges of growing population, allowing all married couples to have two children and providing quality services, in respect to free feeding, children welfare health systems, housing, guiding and counselling and free pre-primary and employment enrolments, introductions of skills acquisition's, and become healthy and productive members of societies.

Keywords: children, communities, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

What influences discharge from locked residential care one year after admission?

Wednesday, 10th September - 11:45: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Ms. Marie Kvalø [1], ***Prof. Sabine Kaiser*** [1], ***Prof. Svein Arild Vis*** [1], ***Dr. Sturla Fossum*** [1]

1. *UiT The Arctic University of Norway*

Adolescents exhibiting severe behavioral difficulties, including aggression, delinquency, drug abuse, and criminal activity, can be involuntarily placed in locked child welfare institutions. In the present study, we focused on Norwegian adolescents in locked institutions, aiming to investigate how case factors, such as externalizing and internalizing behaviors, influence discharge one year after admission. Data was collected between 2011 and 2017, and 151 adolescents were recruited. We had complete data from 132 participants (mean age = 16.41, *SD* = 1.07), including 88 boys (67%) and 44 (33%) girls. We found that the treatment model and age of the adolescents predicted discharge in the final multivariable analysis. Adolescents placed in an institution with a focus on short-term placement for youths with externalizing problems had 5.42 times higher odds of living at home one year after admission compared to those placed in traditional residential care (TRC). Additionally, older adolescents were more likely to return home within the year. Neither seriousness of internalizing or externalizing problems, outpatient care, heavy drug use, family conflicts or gender at intake nor the changes in internalizing- or externalizing problems during placement predicted discharge within one year. We discuss the findings and their implications for placements.

Socio-Emotional Characteristics in Early Childhood and Offending Behaviour in Adolescence

Wednesday, 10th September - 12:00: (ZICER Room 2) - Accepted with changes

Dr. Paul Garcia [1]

1. *University of essex*

This paper examines the relationship between child developmental issues and the probability of engaging in offending behaviour during adolescence, using administrative data from the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education (MoJ-DfE). A factor analysis of child development, as assessed by Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) practitioners, identifies two key underlying dimensions: cognitive and socio-emotional difficulties. The cognitive dimension reflects challenges in language, communication, literacy, problem solving, reasoning, and numeracy. The socio-emotional dimension is primarily characterised by poor emotional regulation and difficulties in forming relationships. After controlling for various confounding variables, I find significant association between poor child development and adolescent offending. The effects of cognitive difficulties on later offending appear to be largely mediated by school-related experiences such as persistent absenteeism, exclusions, and low academic attainment. Socio-emotional difficulties, however, remain significantly associated with a higher probability of being cautioned or convicted for an offence in adolescence even after accounting for potential mediating pathways and group-level variability.

From Childhood Institutions to the Aged Care system: A survey of the perspectives of older care leavers accessing aged care supports in Australia

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:00: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Prof. Philip Mendes [1], ***Ms. Sarah Morris*** [1], ***Dr. Susan Baidawi*** [1], ***Ms. Lena Turnbull*** [1]

1. *Monash University*

This study examines the aged care needs and preferences of older care leavers, often known as Forgotten Australians, who spent their childhoods in institutional out-of-home care. As they age, these individuals face unique challenges, including mental and physical health issues, social isolation, and a strong fear of being re-institutionalised. Despite these prevalent concerns, there is a lack of research addressing their needs within the aged care system.

Between September 2023 and July 2024, the research team conducted an exploratory online survey recruiting Australians aged 50 and above who had experienced childhood institutional care. Using purposive non-random sampling, 105 participants completed the survey. The findings reveal that these individuals have faced lifelong disadvantages, such as low educational attainment, high rates of relationship breakdown, social isolation, mental and physical health issues, and financial hardship.

Regarding aged care preferences, participants expressed a strong desire to remain in their own homes with professional support, avoiding residential aged care facilities. They emphasised the importance of autonomy, privacy, and choice in their care arrangements, reflecting a wish to maintain control over their lives. The data highlights the need for trauma-informed, person-centred care that acknowledges their unique histories and offers empathetic support.

Implications for aged care policy and practices include the importance of tailored support services addressing care leavers' specific challenges, such as mental health support, advocacy, and accessible community-based care. Including care leavers' voices in research and policy development is also crucial for meaningful change. Ultimately, the study supports the need for strategies that improve care leavers' quality of life, providing the support they need to lead dignified and fulfilling lives in their later years.

Barriers in transitioning from children's to adult services for young people leaving care: Learning from research in Scotland

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:15: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Ms. Mihaela Manole [1], ***Dr. Nadine Fowler*** [1], ***Dr. Robert Porter*** [1], ***Dr. Alex McTier*** [1], ***Ms. Jane Scott*** [1], ***Ms. Emma Young*** [1], ***Dr. Leanne McIver*** [1], ***Ms. Carol Ann Anderson*** [1], ***Dr. Heather Ottaway*** [1]

1. *CELCIS, University of Strathclyde*

The transition of young people from care into (semi-)independence involves complex policies, practices and procedures, any failure of which increases the risks of disadvantaging an already vulnerable group. Support for this transition is known to be inconsistent, with programmes which aim to prepare young people for leaving care often patchy. Young people's transition into (semi-)independence happens in a variety of support services, including health, social work, education, and others, whereby support from children's services is transferred to adult services. Young people who experience these transitions can report feelings of disruption and confusion, especially where they happen poorly or inconsistently.

This paper draws on findings from the Children's Services Reform Research, a multi-strand mixed-method study conducted in Scotland, focusing primarily on the findings from Strand 4. Data was collected via a nationwide online survey (N=1,399) and interviews and focus groups (N=91) with the children's services workforce (practitioners and leaders from social work, health, early learning and childcare, education, youth justice, police and the non-governmental sector).

Our findings indicate that transitions between children's and adult services often lack clear pathways, can vary depending on individual circumstances, and can be difficult to navigate for young people and practitioners. Practitioners reported confusion about when young people should transition to adult services and who is responsible for ensuring that they receive appropriate supports. Particular challenges were noted in the provision of mental health supports and access to services for 16-17 year olds, alongside a consistent description of a 'cliff edge' in service provision during transitions.

Nonetheless, examples of good practice were highlighted by respondents in our study, and included: ensuring that planning for transitions began early; making sure practitioners and services recognised their responsibilities, and; prioritising 'follow through' in ongoing improvement activities.

Ultimately, the children's services workforce described adult services as having a different culture and approach, with a greater emphasis placed on diagnoses and thresholds for support, while children's services strove to provide the support to any child or family who they considered needed it. Additionally, the children's services workforce considered their own service model as holistic and unified, compared to their perception of adult services as fractured and rigid.

While respondents noted that the national policy approach was supportive of high-quality support for young people transitioning to adulthood, they highlighted that there was a disconnect between policy and action 'on the ground'. There is an ongoing challenge to ensure a continuity of experience as young people move from children's services to adult services, which will require greater communication, community, and alignment between these service sectors. The challenges associated with transitions require support from a wide range of services beyond social work, such as education, health, housing, social welfare and disability services. Finally, there is a need to clarify transition pathways, processes and procedures, to reduce confusion and ensure that young people continue to receive the support that they need to thrive into adulthood.

Leaving care and transitional housing solutions in Argentina. The development of a model

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:30: (SEECEL Main venue) - Accepted with changes

Mrs. MARIANA INCARNATO [1]

1. *Founder*

The aim of this article is present the development a model of autonomous transition housing that, from a rights-based perspective and progressive autonomy, addresses the needs and interests of adolescents and young people leaving care, promoting their protagonism. Developed by the NGO Doncel in argentina, this model seeks to offer alternatives to residential care, strengthen the subjective skills for independent living, and reverse the experiences of prolonged institutionalization.

Housing and homeliness for young adults aging out of out-of-home care in Norway: Population outcomes and individual experiences

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:45: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Dr. Stian H Thoresen [1]***, Prof. Christian Wendelborg*** [1]***, Dr. Regine Ringdal*** [1]***, Dr. Eva Lassemo*** [1]***, Ms. Siri Mordal*** [1]***, Prof. Veronika Paulsen*** [1]

1. *NTNU Samfunnsforskning AS*

Housing is a basic human need and a basic human right. Sometimes reduced to the physical structure of shelter, having a home entail much more than having a roof over one's head. Aspects of homeliness suggest that one makes a place one's own home, with creature comforts, personal artifacts, and décor, among other things. It also alludes to some sense of security (of tenure, but also felt security) and a person stake with both freedoms and responsibilities in the home. However, how this is manifested varies significantly, both in terms of socio-cultural contexts as well as personal preferences and personalities.

Research emphasises both the resilience of care-experienced young adults, as well as inequities across a number of outcomes in adulthood. The relative housing vulnerability of young adults aging-out of out-of-home care is both a policy and practice concern. Multiple studies have identified volatile housing pathways, homelessness, and housing insecurity among care-leavers. While many of these studies have recruited informants through service providers, and thus had had a higher propensity to recruit participants with higher support needs, some recent population-based studies also illustrate the relative housing instability among care-experienced young adults. However, while under researched in general, even less is known about care-experienced young adults who age out of out-of-home care. Arguably, they are more vulnerable as they are typically leaving a formal support system to independent living, however, it may be that they are therefore better connected with formal services, or that they have informal supports to draw on that they formal system does not pick up on, such as foster parents or biological family.

This presentation will present preliminary findings from a larger study into the transition from out-of-home care to independence for young adults in Norway and Australia. The presentation focuses on Norwegian care-leavers who age out of care. It will present population-based findings form a registry study focusing on housing pathways and outcomes for a birth cohort of care-experienced young adults who age out of care compared with other care-experienced young adults who have been in contact with Child Welfare Services (differentiating between those who have been in care, only received support measures, and those with investigations but no measure) and those without any contact with Child Welfare Services. The larger study also interviews approximately 50 care-experienced young adults in Norway, and the presentation will include preliminary analysis of aspects of homeliness among the subset of interview participants who aged out of care.

Given the limited availability of population-based outcomes, this presentation is a valuable contribution to expand the evidence base of post-care outcomes for young adults who have aged out of care. It is also important to note that housing is not necessarily a dichotomous outcome, but also includes layers of socio-cultural and personal factors. As such, the contextualisation of these findings with qualitative information on homeliness may provide additional insight into the housing transitions, pathways, and trajectories among care leaver in Norway.

Employment pathways for care-leavers in South Africa

Wednesday, 10th September - 15:00: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Prof. Adrian D van Breda [1]

1. *University of Johannesburg*

A key component of the process of leaving care is navigating entry into employment and building a sustainable work history. Unemployment and underemployment are common among care-leavers in many countries, and a NEET status (not in employment, education or training) tends to be more common among care-leavers than the general population. In South Africa, by contrast, the inverse appears to be true. However, these data are complicated by the apparently high levels of unstable employment among youth, including care-leavers. This paper therefor aims to describe the employment pathways of care-leavers, showing the kinds of changes they experience over a period of some years. This paper draws on data from the 'Growth Beyond the Town' (GBT) longitudinal study, hosted by Girls and Boys Town South Africa. A survey was conducted with all participants who were enrolled in the GBT study, who were contactable and willing to participate. A total of 34 care-leavers with a work history participated in the study, with data collected between October 2020 and April 2021. Participants were asked to provide a history of their employment. These data were captured in employment pathways (like timelines) for each participant, a selection of which will be presented. The pathways prove to be highly variable, with frequent job changes, and with participants frequently not landing up in the career they aspired to. In most cases, participants could not show a purposeful employment pathway. Recommendations emerging from this study relate to improved career planning prior to leaving care and linking care-leavers to employment guidance after leaving care, with a view to facilitating a more steady and purposeful career progression, leading towards financial security.

Substance use among adolescents living in out-of-home care in Finland

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:00: (SEECEL A1) - Oral

Dr. Pia Eriksson [1], ***Dr. Minna Niemi*** [2], ***Mr. Eetu Ervasti*** [2], ***Dr. Jenni Helenius*** [2]

1. *University of Helsinki,* ***2.*** *Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare*

This presentation examines the relationship between youth substance use and out-of-home care (OHC) in Finland. The study presented outlines key changes in the substance use patterns (no substance use, experimental substance use and high-risk substance use) of Finnish adolescents in grades 8–9 during the years 2019–2023. Furthermore, these substance use patterns among youths in OHC will be examined in relation to 1) their experiences with their capability and perceived state of health and life satisfaction, 2) social interaction and 3) victimization. The data was drawn from the nationwide School Health Promotion (SHP) Study and analysed using logistic and multinominal logistic regression. The data consist of responses of 8th and 9th graders living in OHC (N=3323) and with parents (N=247 652).

The study's results indicate a strong association between substance use and OHC. The riskier a youth's substance use, the more likely they are to be living in residential care. A strong connection was also found between serious substance use and traumatizing experiences – such as sexual, physical and mental violence – among adolescents in OHC.
Regardless, the results show that in 2023, the abstinence pattern was the most common among both adolescents living in OHC and other youth and abstinence had increased compared to 2019 and 2021.

The results indicate a need for long-term substance abuse and mental health treatments for adolescents in OHC, as well as elicit the question of how substance abuse problems can be prevented and treated as in-home and outpatient services.

Sleep problems in Flemish foster children

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:15: (SEECEL A1) - Oral

Prof. Frank Van Holen [1], ***Ms. Camille Verheyden*** [2], ***Dr. Delphine West*** [1], ***Prof. Johan Vanderfaeillie*** [1]

1. *Vrije Universiteit Brussel,* ***2.*** *Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Psychology*

Objective

Sleep problems are a critical but under-recognized area of concern in high risk groups such as foster children. This study examined sleep problems in Flemish (Dutch speaking part of Belgium) school-aged children (4-12 years) placed in family foster care.

Method

Foster parents (*n*=197) completed an online questionnaire consisting of three parts: (1) characteristics of foster child, foster family and foster placement, (2) behavioural problems of foster child, and (3) sleep problems of foster child using the Dutch version of the 'Children's Sleep Habits Questionnaire (CSHQ)'. Higher scores indicate more sleep problems.

One-sample t-tests were used to compare sleep problems of our sample with sleep problems of various community groups and clinical groups of children diagnosed with a sleep disorder. Multiple linear regressions were used to examine the association of foster child, foster family and placement characteristics with sleep problems of foster children.

Results

Based on a cut-off value used in an American sample (Owen et al., 2010), 71.1% of the foster children in our sample had indications of sleep problems.

Foster children scored significantly higher on all CSHQ-scales than two community samples of American children and one community sample of Dutch children and significantly higher on most CSHQ-scales than community samples of German, Portuguese and Chinese children. In contrast, they scored significantly lower on almost all CSHQ-scales compared with clinical samples from the US, Portugal and Germany.

Multiple regression analysis resulted in a significant model explaining 27% of the variance with three significant variables: internalizing problem behaviour, externalizing problem behaviour, and household composition. The likelihood of experiencing/perceiving sleep problems in foster children is higher in case of more internalizing or externalizing problem behaviour and in case of single parenthood.

Conclusion

These results highlight the importance of screening, assessment and intervention in foster children with sleep problems by health professionals.

Reference

Owens, J. A., Spirito, A., & McGuinn, M. (2000). The Children's Sleep Habits Questionnaire (CSHQ): Psychometric properties of a survey instrument for school-aged children. *Sleep, 23*(8), 1-9. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/t33022-000

Helping care experienced young people develop positive mental wellbeing

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:30: (SEECEL A1) - Accepted with changes

Mr. Murray Davies [1]

1. *My Story Organisation*

This presentation will share an innovative practice framework, MyStory, used with care experienced children and young people to build positive mental wellbeing.

- The importance of a relationship-based practice using story-telling and person-centred reflective practice will be explained.
- The presentation will share the practice theory and research underpinning the approach including narrative theory, child development theory and low-intensity life story work.
- Practice where carers and children's social workers work collaboratively with children and young people to enable them to build a positive sense of self, identity and mental wellbeing will be explained
- How practice is supported by digital technology which arranges autobiographical memories into a single unfolding and developing story – a personal history, will be demonstrated.

Content

This presentation will share an innovative practice framework to address the mental health priority of helping care experienced children and young people develop positive mental health. The experience of several authorities in UK where MyStory practice and digital resources have been developed will be shared. With MyStory children and young people can record memories and experiences as they happen, creating stories that reveal who they are and how their experiences have shaped their lives.

The importance of a relationship-based practice approach will be explained. Self-reflection is a way to help young people develop as individuals. The process of encouraging self-reflection around stories, thinking about experiences in order to learn from them for the future, helps children and young people come to know themselves better. My Story empowers care experienced children/young people in the creation of their personal story.

The presentation will share the practice theory and research. Identity theory explains that everyone finds themselves – their sense of self, through their relationships, experiences and memories. Many research studies demonstrate that access to positive autobiographical memories can have an encouraging impact on mental health. Research demonstrates that 'low intensity life story activity' improves the mental wellbeing of care experienced young people and helps them build their narrative.

The presentation will show carers and children's social workers working collaboratively. Carers are encouraged to use MyStory regularly and naturally, capturing the everyday moments, along with milestones, helping young people develop, understand what's important to them and what they want to achieve. Young people can use their collection of preserved memories as storytelling prompts when talking about stories with social workers.

The presentation will explain how practice is supported by digital technology. MyStory goes beyond traditional tools by offering an interactive, user-friendly space for young people to explore and express their identity, relationships, and aspirations. It helps ensure that they have an accurate record and understanding of their life journey. It supports the development of self-esteem, identity and belonging, essential for positive mental health and wellbeing.

Outcomes

Participants will understand how the My Story practice framework supports the promotion of positive mental wellbeing for care experienced children and young people, and the way in which practice is supported by digital technology to provide a personal history. Participants will understand the value of low-intensity life story work.

The importance of music for the well-being of young people in out-of-home placement

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:45: (SEECEL A1) - Oral

Dr. Marion Pomey [1]

1. *ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work*

The presentation shows how music approaches as part of aesthetic practices in social work can improve young peoples subjective well-being in out-of-ome placements. Especially for young people whose biographies are characterized by fractures and experiences of vulnerability, music enables access through artistic practices and works very well. It enables a different approach to them than just through language; an aesthetic one that also gives them more diverse opportunities to express themselves and communicate what is really going on inside. For many young people, music is a constant companion in their everyday lives and fulfills various functions. They mainly *consume* music via digital music providers, but not only that, some of them also create rhymes on biographical topics or freestyle. So they also *produce* music content *themselves*. This is exactly why I carried out a music project and conducted qualitative data to answer the following research question: *How does music affect subjective well-being and what importance does music practices have in young peoples daily lives in out-of-home placement?*

In this digital music project called “DigiMusic” I conducted music workshops over three month. A musician and I produced together with young people digital tracks and beats in residential care. In addition to producing music, I asked them about the importance of music and music consumption in their daily lives. Presenting the results of this projct

Music does have a great influence on subjective well-being. It helps to perceive, express and regulate feelings and gives access to young peoples perspectives. If you also produce your own tracks, this enables a wide range of positive experiences; community, creativity, self-efficacy, new ways of expressing yourself, joy etc.

As we collected audiovisual data in addition to the interviews, we were also able to create a short film that was shown to the young people for participatory validation and discussion.

“When do(n’t) we talk about substance use in residential care?”

Wednesday, 10th September - 15:00: (SEECEL A1) - Oral

Mrs. Kristin Matre [1], ***Dr. Hulda Mjöll Gunnarsdottir*** [2], ***Dr. Monika Alvestad Reime*** [3], ***Dr. Ingunn Barmen Tysnes*** [3]

1. *western norway university of applied sciences,* ***2.*** *University of Stavanger,* ***3.*** *Western Norway University of Applied Sciences*

Background/Objectives:
Young people in residential care institutions (RCCIs) are a large and heterogeneous group with complex problems and needs, with a higher risk of substance use issues compared to their peers. In Norway, approximately 900 adolescents live in child care institutions each year, two-thirds of whom are in residential child care institutions. The overarching goal of RCCIs is to provide care, protection, and preparation for adolescents as they transition into society, facilitated by a therapeutic living environment. The institutions included in this study do not house adolescents with severe behavioural issues or ongoing drug use. Nonetheless, experimenting with drugs and substances can be seen as a component of ordinary youth culture, where some adolescents engage with drugs and alcohol while others do not.
Previous reports have revealed insufficient and variable knowledge about substance use among staff in residential care institutions. Relational competence and the staff’s ability to create a sense of safety and trust in interaction and communication are vital for adolescents in residential care. Research into adolescent girls’ attitudes towards substance abuse showed that secure relationships in family, among peers and in the broader social context are crucial for shaping their attitudes towards substance use. However, there appears to be limited knowledge about adolescents’ experience and views on their needs for and access to residential care staff with competence about substance use while living in residential care. Knowledge about this can contribute to more targeted efforts in lowering risk and preventing substance use problems among adolescents living in residential care.
Thus, our research question is: how do adolescents experience interaction with staff regarding topics of substances and substance use when living in residential care institutions?
Method:
Our qualitative data consists of eight semi-structured individual interviews with adolescents living in residential childcare institutions. The participants are between 14 and 19 years old, comprising three boys and five girls. The study includes four different residential childcare institutions. The purpose of this study is to explore how adolescents experience talking about or managing issues related to substances and substance use in interaction with professionals during their stay in residential care institutions. Our theoretical approach is based on the theory of sociological ambivalence, with a particular focus on emotional or affective ambivalence, voluntary ambivalence, and cognitive ambivalence in interaction between the adolescents and professional care staff. These theoretical concepts allow us to explore role-related expectations, attitudes and behaviour.
Findings/Implications:
Our preliminary findings reflect two overall themes: 1) ambivalence, and 2) trust. The ambivalence indicates that the adolescents are managing both their own and perceived ambivalence in the staff when approaching issues related to substance use. Our findings also suggest that ambivalence is related to trust, based on uncertainties and questions about staff competence, knowledge, and understanding of substance use. These findings are discussed in light of theory, previous research, and limitations of this study. Finally, we will provide implications for practice and further research.

Renegotiating permanence during a phase of youth transitions: The lived experience of young adults who grew up in long-term foster care with permanence

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:00: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Dr. Sinéad Whiting [1]

1. *Trinity College Dublin*

Background

It is widely accepted that young people growing up in out of home care, such as foster care, face challenges not faced by their non-care experienced peers. Furthermore, the transition out of care, alongside other experiences of youth transitions can be complex for care experienced young adults who often navigate youth transitions with little support. While current research argues that the establishment of relational permanence for young people in care can help mitigate challenges in childhood, there is a dearth of research that investigates how experiences of permanence while in foster care interact with experiences of youth transitions and in turn effect the transition out of care.

Objectives

This presentation will present findings from a qualitative study undertaken with young adults who grew up in long-term foster care with permanence. Findings relating to how experiences of permanence, both relational and legal, negotiated while in long-term foster care, interacted with experiences of youth transitions, including the transition out of care will be highlighted. These findings deepen understandings about how experiences of permanence while in long-term foster care are impacted by youth transitions and in turn effect the transition out of care.

Methods

In this presentation I will draw on findings from a qualitative study conducted in Ireland with 22 young adults, aged 20-30, who grew up in long-term foster care with permanence. Through this study insights into the lived experiences of this group of young adults were uncovered. Using a lens of youth transitions and guided by reflective thematic analysis, participants' narratives were analysed to better understand how experiences of permanence while in foster care were impacted by a range of youth transitions.

Findings

Illustrative case examples highlighting how experiences of permanence while in long-term foster care were impacted by and interacted with a range of youth transitions, including the transition out of care will be presented. Three key themes will be highlighted:

1. Permanence co-created in childhood had to be renegotiated during the transition out of care
2. 'Permanence Display', defined as the various ways young adults and their foster families signalled the continuation of permanence from childhood into early adulthood, was central to the re-negotiating permanence.
3. The participants demonstrated their capacity for agency as they made choices that supported the re-negotiation of permanence during a phase of youth transitions, including the transition out of care.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on how care experienced young adults who have co-created permanence within their long-term foster care placements, renegotiate permanence with their foster carers during a period of youth transitions, including the transition out of care. Using a lens of youth transitions is an ideal way to shine new light on this important area because it allows for an examination of how permanence in care interacts with,

and is impacted by, a range of transitions experiences, including the transition out of care. Understanding more about these issues can support innovating policy and practice aimed at supporting care experienced young people as they navigate the transitions out of care and to adulthood.

Belonging In and Beyond Residential Care: Navigating Social and Spatial Belonging

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:15: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Ms. Carole Zellner [1], ***Prof. Dorothee Schaffner*** [2], ***Prof. Stefan Köngeter*** [1], ***Dr. Lukas Fellmann*** [2], ***Mr. Tobias Kindler*** [1], ***Ms. Jana Osswald*** [2], ***Mr. Thomas Schmid*** [1]

1. *Eastern Switzerland University of Applied Sciences,* ***2.*** *University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland*

Belonging is a basic human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and a crucial factor for individual wellbeing. It encompasses both *social* and *spatial* dimensions. Social belonging pertains to the necessity of stable relationships and supportive ties within one's social networks. Conversely spatial belonging describes the emotional connection that individuals develop toward specific physical places, such as homes (Meuth, 2018). For young people entering residential care, navigating this transition presents significant challenges on both dimensions. They must adapt not only to new social relationships but also to an unfamiliar physical and social environment (Emond, 2014). This raises a pivotal question: How do young people in residential care cultivate a sense of belonging amidst the disruptive experiences that impact their social and spatial connections?

Methodology: The study investigates the relationships between social belonging, spatial belonging and wellbeing, employing both cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches. To enrich our understanding of the quantitative findings, a qualitative follow-up study was conducted with 30 participants through narrative interviews. These interviews were analysed using summarising and structuring content analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2018). The presentation will be grounded in the insights drawn from these qualitative interviews.

Findings: The analysis revealed three distinct types of how and where young people primarily establish belonging: "Belonging to peers within residential care", "(detached) belonging outside of residential care" and "belonging in the virtual realm". Each type is characterized by specific strategies to establish belonging. In residential care, young people create belonging primarily through shared everyday experiences with peers, including informal rule-breaking. Outside of residential care, belonging is fostered through friendships and by deliberately distancing themselves from institutional life. In virtual spaces, young people engage in collaborative practices such as storytelling to cultivate connection. These types are shaped by varying conditions that can either support or hinder belonging. For example, living with peers in the same residential care facility can provide a foundation for building relationships – especially for those previously affected by bullying or social isolation. In contrast, rigid rules and structures may act as barriers, particularly for those seeking belonging outside of residential care or in digital contexts, where maintaining social bonds (e.g., via smartphones) becomes more difficult when restrictions are too tight.

Conclusions: To support belonging processes among young people across the identified types, professionals must recognize the diversity of belonging strategies and create flexible, responsive environments. In residential care, this includes enabling peer relationships through shared, low-threshold activities – even those that challenge institutional norms in constructive ways. Outside residential settings, professionals should validate young people's desire to belong to others and to distance themselves from care experiences, while still offering support networks. In virtual spaces, it is crucial to acknowledge digital interactions as meaningful social connections and to ensure access to devices and time for maintaining them. Across all contexts, fostering belonging means reducing exclusionary structures and strengthening young people's agency. A nuanced understanding of individual biographies and experiences is essential for creating tailored support that enables young people to form, sustain, and redefine their sense of belonging.

The impact of transitions in residential care on young people's personal networks. A comparison of three transition types

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:30: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Dr. Lukas Fellmann [1], ***Ms. Carole Zellner*** [2], ***Ms. Jana Osswald*** [3], ***Mr. Tobias Kindler*** [2], ***Prof. Stefan Köngeter*** [2], ***Prof. Dorothee Schaffner*** [4], ***Mr. Thomas Schmid*** [2]

1. *University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland,* ***2.*** *Eastern Switzerland University of Applied Sciences,* ***3.*** *University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW) School of Social Work,* ***4.*** *University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland*

In residential child and youth care, transitions are associated with changes in various areas of young people's lives. One area concerns their personal networks. A personal network consists of the important people in one's life and the relationships between these people. Personal networks are important for social support, well-being and social belonging, for example. In residential child and youth care, young people's personal networks are embedded in a dynamic social context caused by their own transitions, but also by constant changes in the residential care group. This makes it challenging for young people to form close relationships that last over time. Until now, transitions in residential care have often been studied individually instead of systematically comparing their effects. In this study, we assume that different types of transitions have different effects on young people's personal networks. For example, when returning to the family of origin, the importance of family relationships is expected to increase in comparison to a transition to independence. The current study examined the changes in young people's personal networks that are related to three typical transitions in residential care: (1.) change of the residential care facility, (2.) family reunification, and (3.) leaving care to independence. The network changes were measured in terms of the composition, size and structural characteristics in a longitudinal design with two measurement points one year apart. Those young people who did not experience a transition were used as the control group. The sample consisted of 415 young people who lived in residential care in the German-speaking part of Switzerland at least in the first wave of data collection. The data were analyzed using a series of linear regression models with change scores (t1-t0) as dependent variables while controlling for age and gender. The results show several significant changes in the personal networks that vary between the three transition types, including changes in network size, contact frequency, support, conflict, share of family members, share of friends, and share of professionals. The results provide information on how young people's personal networks can be prepared and supported depending on the upcoming transitions.

Impact of Foster Care on Social Support Networks and the Transition to Adulthood in Care-Experienced Youth

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:45: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Dr. Josefina Sala [1], ***Dr. Laura Arnau*** [1], ***Dr. Mercè Jariot*** [1], ***Dr. Mireia Foradada*** [1]

1. *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*

Introduction:
Care-experienced young people often have limited social networks compared with their peers not in care (Økland & Oterholm, 2022), and mainly rely on formal support from educators and social workers (Babo et al., 2024). However, the effectiveness of these networks varies; a broad network does not always mean it is functional or of high quality. Additionally, these young people often struggle to form strong relationships due to past experiences of rejection, trauma, and underdeveloped social skills (Stubbs et al., 2023). This contribution examines the social support networks of care-experienced and non-care-experienced when transitioning to adulthood, analyzing their size, composition and type of available support. It also explores how factors like gender and placement type shape network availability.

Methodology: This exploratory study used a cross-sectional design to analyse the support networks of 142 young people aged 16 to 25, divided into three groups: those in residential care (46), foster care (58), and non-care-experienced university students (38). A questionnaire assessed how many individuals they could rely on for emotional, material, or advisory support. The results were analysed using statistical techniques to identify significant differences between the groups.

Results

Differences by Gender and Age

No significant gender differences were found in overall support network size. However, females mentioned their romantic partners more often as sources of support, while males had more individuals for advisory support. No correlation was found between age and network size.

Differences Between Care-Experienced and Non-Care-Experienced Youth

Non-care-experienced youth had broader support networks than those in care. Foster care participants had larger networks than those in residential facilities. Care status accounted for 26.4% of the variability in support networks.

Significant differences were observed in network composition, except for educators and romantic partners. Non-care-experienced youth received more support from their nuclear and extended families, particularly parents, siblings, and grandparents. In contrast, those from residential care had smaller networks, with less family support and greater reliance on educators and professionals.

Dimensions of Support

The study analysed three types of support: emotional, material, and advisory. Non-care-experienced youth had more individuals to support them across all three areas. Among care-experienced youth, those in foster care had greater emotional and advisory support than those in residential care. While they also had more material support, this difference was not statistically significant.

Discussion: Despite being an exploratory study with a limited sample, findings confirm that care-experienced youth have smaller support networks than their non-care-experienced peers, potentially hindering their transition to independence. Those in foster care had more support than those in residential care, suggesting better conditions for their social development.

However, foster care youth had less contact with their biological parents, potentially limiting future support. These findings highlight the need to strengthen both formal and informal support during care to make the transition into adulthood smoother.

Conclusions: Care status significantly impacts the structure of young people's support networks. It is essential to implement strategies that help care-experienced youth build strong, interconnected networks to enhance social integration and ensure a stable transition to independent living.

Transforming ourselves to transform the system: Key Assets Australia's journey of change to become accountable to the young people we work with

Wednesday, 10th September - 15:00: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Ms. Lisa Ranahan [1], ***Ms. Lucy Thornton*** [1]

1. *Key Assets Australia*

What does it really mean to put children and young people at the centre of an organisation?
At Key Assets Australia, we believe that young people are the catalyst for change in our sector. We need to make a transformational shift in the way we work if we want to see systemic, generational change for young people, particularly First Nations young people who are over-represented in care.
In 2023, KAA embarked on a significant innovation agenda. Chrysalis was launched in 2023 as Key Assets Australia's transformation hub. It is a place to experiment and do things differently. Our goal is to transform ourselves to transform and influence the broader child and family system.
Through our 'Voice of the Child' initiative, the voices of young people led to our commitment in KAA's new five year strategic plan to put accountability to young people, engaging with lived experience and First Nations truth telling at the centre of our work.
We would like to share that journey, with a focus on how we have partnered with young people as collaborators in that shift and how we are transforming as an organisation.
About Chrysalis and Key Assets Australia
Key Assets Australia (KAA) is a child and family services provider who is committed to our reconciliation journey with First Nations children, young people, families and communities.
Key Assets Australia provides services including out-of-home care, child protection, disability care and intensive family support services.
KAA created Chrysalis Transformation Hub in 2023 as a place to explore complex challenges in out of home care. Our mission is to partner with children, young people, families, carers and communities to identify and explore systemic issues and design and test new approaches to drive better outcomes for all.
We work closely with KAA's Cultural Practice Collective to bring a First Nations approach to our innovation work by 'walking alongside' First Nations peoples.

Preventing child institutionalization. The applicability of the P.I.P.P.I. Model in socially vulnerable contexts

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:00: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Prof. Farnaz Farahi [1]

1. *Università eCampus*

Adopting a pedagogical perspective, the prevention of child institutionalization is a cornerstone for promoting, on the one hand, the well-being of the families to which the children belong, and on the other, a more cohesive concept of society and citizenship.

Given that the principle of the best interest of the child (Art. 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) requires that every intervention involving children must be aimed at their overall well-being, it is essential to strengthen, in every social context, the support and prevention services addressed to at-risk families, in order to avoid situations that may lead to institutionalization.

In this regard, the Italian model P.I.P.P.I. (Program of Intervention for the Prevention of Institutionalization) represents an innovative intervention model in the field of social and childhood policies aimed at strengthening support for families in difficulty and preventing the removal of children from their family environments.

Developed by Paola Milani et al., P.I.P.P.I. effectively responds to the issue of child removal by promoting a preventive, integrated approach centered on the enhancement of parenting skills. Through strategic pedagogical interventions, the model is based on collaborative practices adapted to local contexts, capable of enhancing family resources, promoting empowerment, and countering socio-educational inequalities that lead to marginalization and, in the most severe cases, to institutionalization. The design of the interventions is therefore personalized, through individualized plans that take into account the complexity of each family situation and their specific needs. Among the activities developed are home-based educational accompaniment, laboratory activities, and training actions aimed at both parents and children. In this approach, families are not passive recipients of policies but co-protagonists in the process of change, actively contributing to the definition and implementation of the interventions themselves.

This contribution, starting from a socio-pedagogical analysis of the phenomenon of institutionalization of children from complex family backgrounds and the best interest of the child, aims to explore the application potential of the P.I.P.P.I. model in contexts characterized by social vulnerability, with specific reference to the reality of Zagreb.

Preventing infants from entering out-of-home care through evidence informed processes and practice

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:15: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Prof. Melissa O'Donnell [1], ***Ms. Renée Usher*** [1], ***Prof. Rhonda Marriott*** [2]

1. *Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia,* ***2.*** *Murdoch University*

Background: Perinatal child protection involvement is a highly complex issue in Australia and internationally. Many of these families are facing multiple adverse issues including trauma and mental health challenges, substance misuse, homelessness and family violence. Infants in Australia have the highest risk of entry into out-of-home care

Objectives: The aim of this study was to develop the evidence of current perinatal processes and support to co-develop improved principles and practice.

Methods: Purposive and snowball sampling methods were employed to recruit mothers with lived experience (n=13 mothers) and relevant professionals (n=68) across 14 health, welfare and legal government and non-government organisations in Western Australia. Through interviews with parents, focus groups with government and non-government professional staff, and co-design workshops with professionals and those with lived experience we have developed evidence for improved perinatal child protection processes. Thematic analysis was used to develop the themes and identify patterns across the interviews and focus groups and codesign workshops and sessions were utilised to ensure that all participants, both lived experience and professionals, had an equal voice in the process.

Results/Findings: Parental experiences highlighted issues of transparency, lack of support pathways and powerlessness in child protection processes. Government and non-government focus groups identified a number of system and practice issues that are barriers for parents to able retain care of their children. The codesign workshops found that what is needed to support families is the development of clearly articulated care co-ordination and support pathways. There was consensus that the principles required for care coordination for families include: individualised; respectful and transparent relationships; empowering families through a partnered and responsive approach; inclusive; and place-based.

Implications: Co-ordinated perinatal care pathways are required for families facing multiple adversities to provide support to address safety and wellbeing issues of infants.

Evidence from this research has already been utilized to support the implementation of improvements, including the expansion of independent facilitators at pre-birth meetings in Western Australia. Ongoing evidence in the area of early intervention is important to guide improvements in perinatal processes and support for families facing adversity during pregnancy to reduce the risk of removal into out-of-home care.

Working “On the floor” in child welfare services (CWS) to enhance participation and empowerment for children and families

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:30: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Dr. Lena C. L. Westby [1], ***Mr. Arild Heskje*** [2]

1. *NTNU Social Research,* ***2.*** *Sandnes Municipality Child Welfare Service*

The Norwegian child welfare services (CWS) hold a position of power with the legal right and duty to conduct investigations in families. Child welfare investigations are often inadequate, failing to capture the entirety of the child’s life situation and to facilitate sufficient participation processes for caregivers and children. The CWS’ position of power can be overwhelming and frightening for families in vulnerable positions, leading to suspicion and distrust toward the CWS. Stressful situations can create barriers between caregivers and the CWS, hindering early interventions and effective measures for the child. This power imbalance calls for innovative, democratic and empowering approaches that prioritise the participation for children and families.

In 2013, Sandnes municipality developed the ‘På Gulvet’ (PG) approach (‘On the Floor’ in English) to address challenges faced by the CWS, such as lack of early interventions, trust issues between caregivers and the CWS, and insufficient facilitation for caregiver participation. PG refers to the physical interaction scene between caregivers and the child on the floor and is a metaphor for a better grounding of the communication and interaction between CWS and families. PG is a user-orientated, relation-based approach seeking an alliance between the helper and the family. PG aims to better guide caregivers with cognitive challenges, weak language comprehension, and immigrant status. PG is a structured approach of mapping the basic needs of the child with the caregivers, using the ‘Behovsutforsker’ (‘Needs Explorer’) tool to explore the child’s physical, emotional, and social needs. ‘Behovsutforskeren’ consists of a three-part magnet board and magnetic chips with illustrations and words that describe the child’s various needs. Caregivers select and prioritise which of the child’s needs they believe require attention by placing the selected chips on the board. The power to define the child’s needs shifts from CWS’ expert assessments to the caregivers’ day-to-day experiences. The identified needs of the child are then organised to stake out a plan for the collaboration and common goals of the family and the CWS. The work process with the family is constantly evaluated by the CWS and the family to ensure that the provided help is effective and sufficient. This ensures a strong base of participation for caregivers in child protection measures. By focusing on the caregivers’ involvement and trust-enhancing communication, PG is an example of how a concrete tool can contribute to supporting children and families towards inclusive trajectories through participation. The PG approach has shown very good results, particularly in terms of the CWS’ ability to build relationships with vulnerable families. PG is used by professionals in over 75 Norwegian municipalities, state-run child welfare institutions, and voluntary sector organisations. PG has recently been adopted in Denmark as well, specifically in the Bornholm Regional Municipality.

Due to the approach’s significant potential to transform the child welfare system’s interaction with children and families, we have applied for research funding from the Research Council of Norway to study parents’ and service providers’ experiences with the approach and how it can be developed for cross-sector use to promote early intervention.

Expectations and concerns of adoptive families of children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:45: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Mr. Dídac Gómez [1], ***Mrs. Carme Montserrat*** [1], ***Dr. Marta Garcia*** [1]

1. *Universitat de Girona*

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a lifelong condition resulting from prenatal alcohol exposure, impacting individuals across different stages of development. Without appropriate resources and strategies, those affected—as well as their families—often encounter significant challenges that can hinder their well-being and adaptation.

This study aims to examine the experiences and perspectives of adoptive parents in raising children with FASD and facilitating their adjustment. To this end, an ad hoc questionnaire was administered to a sample of 101 adoptive parents.

The findings indicate that most parents were unaware of the disorder or the possibility that their adopted children might be affected. Furthermore, they emphasized the length of time between adoption and diagnosis as a critical factor, highlighting the importance of early identification. Parents also noted that their perceptions of their children's adaptation and future prospects tended to be more optimistic when the children were still young.

Overall, concerns were raised regarding their children's emotional health, social interactions, and use of free time, alongside a general sense of uncertainty about their long-term development. However, parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with specialized FASD support organizations, recognizing their valuable role.

These results underscore the urgent need for improved guidance and resources for adoptive families, particularly in cases where prenatal alcohol exposure is suspected. Additionally, training professionals and implementing standardized screening and intervention protocols are essential to ensuring early and effective support. Finally, fostering peer networks among adoptive families, especially of children with FASD, could be highly beneficial, as shared experiences and coping strategies appear to provide significant emotional and practical support.

What do children, adolescents, and young people receiving social services understand by participation? Similarities and differences with the professionals' perspective.

Wednesday, 10th September - 15:00: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Mr. Aziz Matrouch [1], ***Mrs. Carme Montserrat*** [1], ***Prof. Nuria Fuentes-Peláez*** [2]

1. *Universitat de Girona,* ***2.*** *Universitat de Barcelona*

The participation of children and adolescents should be present at various moments when professionals make decisions that directly affect their lives. The goals of the study aim to understand the perspective of children and adolescents connected to a protective or preventive resource regarding their participation, as well as that of the professionals. The study seeks to understand what they understand by participation, the experiences they identify, and their improvement proposals. Using a methodological design with qualitative data collection, 30 interviews were conducted, 16 with children and adolescents and 14 with professionals from different resources. Additionally, 7 discussion groups were held, 3 with children and young people and 4 with professionals. A total of 41 people participated. The results show that children and adolescents view participation as a helpful element, without emphasizing decision-making, and they relate their understanding of participation to previous experiences they have had. These experiences occur in the context of daily life, in the organization of activities, and in more routine aspects. Listening to and understanding them are suggestions they make to improve participatory actions in different socio-educational resources. On the other hand, although professionals verbally acknowledge that participation should be a fundamental element of practice, they highlight the difficulty they face in making it a reality. They point to the workload involved in generating participatory experiences. This research emphasizes the need to combine protection with participation, highlighting the benefits of participation in socio-educational processes.

Life satisfaction of young people in care

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:00: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Ms. Sibel Dönmez [1], ***Ms. Martina Pokoj*** [1], ***Dr. Mike Seckinger*** [1]

1. *German Youth Institute (DJI)*

Growing up in out-of-home care brings various challenges with it that young people in care have to face and that have an impact on their lives and their view of their own lives.
Care receivers, for example, generally have to deal with the fact that they live in out-of-home care and also with the requirement to become independent earlier. They had relationship breakdowns with parents, siblings and later on with carers due to a turnover of professionals and as well with other young people living in care due to changes of care settings.
In addition, the different care settings and their influences on young people's lives are critically discussed. All of these factors can increase the likelihood that young people in care are dissatisfied with their lives. A comparison with the population of the same age shows that care receivers are more dissatisfied with their lives.
The presentation reports on more than 1,400 young people in out-of-home care in Germany and their assessment of life satisfaction. The assumption that life satisfaction changes positively when young people feel at home in out-of-home care -
in other words, when they make the initially unfamiliar place their own - is tested. Other factors influencing life satisfaction are also analysed empirically on the basis of data from the CLS study.
The study 'Care Leaver Statistics: Social participation in the life course of young adults - a long-term study' (CLS study) is the largest cross-organisational survey of young people in foster families and residential care in Germany to date. Over a period of several years, the quantitative long-term study analyses the participation in the lives of young people who have lived (for a time) in a foster family, a residential group or other forms of alternative care. The aim of the CLS study is to collect data on leaving care and the participation of (prospective) care leavers in the life course.
The first surveys were conducted in 2023. The second wave and the first survey of a top-up sample took place in 2024. In total, over 1,400 young people were surveyed using the first-wave questionnaire. The data on which this presentation is based are those of all first-time respondents.
In the CLS study, the young people were asked about their life satisfaction in various areas of life. Overall, it can be seen that the young people are most dissatisfied in the areas of available money (approx. 25%), health, relationship status and with themselves (approx. 20% each) and with their current job (approx. 19%). They are least dissatisfied with their circle of friends (approx. 8%). It also shows that different groups of people tend to be dissatisfied in different areas of life. Nevertheless, a comparison with the data from their peers shows that young people who live in out-of-home care are more dissatisfied than young people who do not live in out-of-home care.
The presentation will look at possible factors that could explain differences between different groups of people in terms of higher dissatisfaction scores.

“A Door, a Bed, a Closet … And Air”: Material Deprivation as a Distinct Adverse Experience (ACE) for Children in Out-of-Home Care in Israel

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:15: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Ms. Ayelet Gal [1], ***Dr. Talia Meital Schwartz-Tayri*** [1]

1. *Ben Gurion University of the Negev*

While material deprivation is typically studied through the lens of household poverty, its impact on children in out-of-home care remains underexplored. This study centers the lived experiences of children in care systems and, using a poverty-aware and Subjective Well-Being (SWB) framework, we propose material deprivation as a distinct Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE).

The study draws on in-depth interviews with 77 young adults in Israel who were considered children “without family anchors” and spent their childhoods in residential and foster care.
Thematic analysis of participants’ narratives revealed material deprivation as a central theme, with four recurring domains: (1) unstable housing, (2) food insecurity, (3) limited transportation, and (4) financial scarcity. Participants’ accounts revealed how material deprivation is shaped by the specific context of out-of-home care: conditional, standardized, and depersonalized - meaning that basic needs were met only under strict institutional rules, while children’s broader developmental and personal needs were systematically ignored. These experiences undermined their sense of autonomy, contributed to social marginalization, and placed them at increased risk of cognitive and mental health challenges. Participants’ accounts further illustrate how material deprivations may contribute to violations of children’s rights, including the right to shelter, bodily integrity, and protection from child labor.
The findings extend the concept of material deprivation beyond the household, showing how it is structured and experienced within out-of-home care. It also conceptualizes material deprivation as a standalone ACE, with developmental and rights-based consequences. Furthermore, by recognizing children as epistemic agents, the findings challenge deficit-based models of poverty and childhood. Taken together, participants’ insights and the critical framework of the study call for a shift from standardized provision in care for children without family anchors toward trauma-informed, rights-based approaches with structural accountability.

Addressing Health Challenges of Children in Open Care : Perspectives from Parents and Professionals in the Tunisian Child Protection System

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:30: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Mrs. Nada Soula [1], ***Dr. Séverine Euillet*** [2], ***Prof. Menel Mellouli*** [3]

1. *Paris Nanterre University, Efis, Cref/ Faculty of medecine of Sousse, University of Sousse, Tunisia,* ***2.*** *Université Paris Nanterre,* ***3.*** *Department of Family and Community Health, Faculty Of medicine of Sousse, University of Sousse, Tunisia*

Tunisia has long been considered a pioneer in child protection in the MENA region, with its Child Protection Code (1995, Article 20) emphasizing prevention and family preservation. Despite this, little is known about how parents experience open care services or how professionals perceive their roles in safeguarding children's well-being. Most existing studies focus on one perspective only—either parents or professionals—while this research brings both together to better understand the systemic constraints and opportunities for preventive, family-centered action.

Objectives

The aim was to examine the difficulties encountered by both professionals and parents in ensuring children's physical, mental, and social well-being in open care settings, considering family circumstances, institutional support, and systemic gaps.

Methods

We conducted a qualitative study based on 70 semi-structured interviews with 50 parents and 20 professionals (educators, psychologists, social workers, and directors) across five open care institutions (three Childhood Complexes and two Integrated Youth and Childhood Centres). Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) guided the interpretation, drawing on the WHO definition of health (physical, mental, social well-being) and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a conceptual framework. Ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty of Medicine of Sousse, with informed consent from all participants.

Findings

Parents emphasized three interrelated areas of difficulty. Physically, access to healthcare was hindered by resource shortages in public hospitals, forcing families to pay out of pocket. Mentally, parents reported high levels of stress and worry about their children's future without adequate psychological support. Socially, families often had limited awareness or use of available services, leaving important needs unmet.

Professionals highlighted challenges across the same dimensions. Physically, they reported limited training in health-related issues and weak coordination with healthcare providers. Mentally, workload pressures and emotional fatigue were recurrent themes. Socially, delays and discontinuities in inter-institutional collaboration often hindered timely responses. Both groups noted that parental engagement in planning services was inconsistent, with decisions sometimes left entirely to professionals.

Discussion and Implications

The findings align with international evidence that effective child protection requires strong parent–professional partnerships and holistic approaches that integrate medical, psychological, and socio-economic dimensions. Tunisia's open care institutions have preventive potential but face significant constraints: high caseloads, resource shortages, and fragmented coordination with health services. Strengthening multidisciplinary committees, enhancing parental empowerment, and bridging the gap between child protection and healthcare are urgent priorities.

Conclusion

By combining the perspectives of both parents and professionals, this study provides original qualitative evidence from Tunisia on the structural and psychosocial barriers to safeguarding children in vulnerable contexts.

The results highlight the need for holistic, resource-supported, and collaborative approaches, grounded in genuine family engagement, to strengthen prevention and improve outcomes for children in open care.

THE IMPACT OF SPECIFIC PROGRAMS TO ADRESS THE MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN ALTERNATIVE CARE

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:45: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Prof. LAURA VALLEJO-SLOCKER [1], ***Ms. Celia García de León*** [2]

1. *SOS Children's Villages Spain and Complutense University of Madrid,* ***2.*** *SOS Children's Villages Spain*

Background: Protegiéndolos is a project that quantified the prevalence of mental health problems and diagnoses among children to identify the main areas of intervention. This information a vital information for designing personalized plans within alternative care models. Meanwhile, foster care programs with specialized, exclusive dedication have emerged as an alternative to traditional residential care, aiming to provide more personalized support for children and adolescents, specially those with special needs. This study provides insights into the main challenges on mental health in accordance with the "Protegiendolos" project and also evaluates the impact of AcogES+ on the mental health and well-being of children.

Methods: A survey on the incidence and prevalence of mental health problems was conducted to collect data for the 'Protegiendolos' project. Children and adolescents participating in AcogES+ were assessed using the SDQ, the KIDSCREEN and an attachment measure. These results were compared to data from a control group in traditional residential care.

Results: The Protegiéndolos project revealed a high prevalence of children with neurodevelopmental problems (special educational needs). In contrast, children with special needs in the AcogES+ group showed significant improvements across multiple mental health indicators. These improvements were greater than those observed in the control group. Furthermore, children and adolescents reported a stronger emotional connection with their caregivers, which likely contributed to the observed improvements.

Conclusions: Designing individualised care models requires a focus on the most prevalent diagnoses. Conversely, alternative care models, such as specialised foster care programmes dedicated solely to this purpose, have a positive impact on the mental health and overall quality of life of children and adolescents with special needs.

Implications and limitations: The findings emphasise the importance of establishing a baseline when designing care models to address mental health issues. Projects that collect and update data on these issues are essential for developing alternative care models that address the mental health needs of children and adolescents. Conversely, the results also support the expansion of Specialised Exclusive Dedicated Foster Care as a model capable of improving the mental health and quality of life of children and adolescents. Further research is needed to explore the long-term effects and scalability of AcogES+ as a care model for people with special needs.

KEYWORDS: children and adolescents; foster care; mental health; AcogES+, Protegiendolos

P+Claves: Designing and Validating a Tool for Meaningful Group Configuration

Wednesday, 10th September - 15:00: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Dr. Gemma Crous [1], ***Prof. Nuria Fuentes-Peláez*** [1], ***Dr. Paulo Padilla-Petry*** [1], ***Ms. Judit Rabassa*** [1], ***Dr. Jordi Méndez*** [1], ***Dr. Belén Parra*** [1]

1. *Universitat de Barcelona*

Overview: Often the individualised intervention is used when working with families from the child protection system, but this has some limitations. Scientific literature had proved that working with a group methodology increases the efficiency of the intervention, it improves the relationship families-professionals, and it is more coherent with the ecological perspective. Subsequently there has been an increase in the number of programs that uses group methodology in the intervention with families in the child protection system. However, configurating a group to work with is not an easy task: How to choose the families to work with? How to promote engagement and commitment to change? How to build professional relationship with all the members of the group? These and other questions can arise when organising a group methodology type of intervention.
Objectives: Considering the above head mentioned, our project had the aim to design and validate a tool: P+Claves. P+Claves is a tool that aims to help configurating meaningful groups to work within the child protection system families. This tool has been designed considering internal and external validations, with the collaboration of researchers and professionals from the child protection system. The tool considers 3 main dimensions: communication, engagement and personal characteristics, and helps the professional who uses it to configurate a group. The validation process of the tool will be presented.
Methods: 103 professionals (25.2% men, 63.1% women) from the child protection system from Spain (from 10 different autonomous communities) participated on the validation process of the tool. The participants answered a survey related to the P+Claves tool. The instrument asked about each section of the tool considering its pertinence, relevance and clarity. Also, the instrument allows to add some qualitative comments about each section with the aim to improve it. All the information was used to improve the P+Claves tool and for its validation.
Findings and conclusions: the P+Claves tool will be presented, with its design and validation process.

Children Deprived of their Liberty

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:00: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. Ellie Ott [1]

1. *Nuffield Family Justice Observatory*

Children subject to deprivation of liberty orders (DoL) in England and Wales – or similar structures in other national contexts – are some of the most vulnerable in care and in society. They live with severe restrictions, overriding children's rights frameworks. England and Wales has seen a drastic growth in family court judges using DoL orders in recent years with 1,280 children subject to a DoL application in 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025) and an approximately ten-fold increase in DoL applications in the last seven years (NFJO, 2025).
The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory has helped shine a light on this issue. This presentation will provide the most up to date look at the numbers and trends (updated quarterly), the needs and demographics of children with DoL, and the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory commissioned research and artwork with young people to understand the multiple and complex needs these children face.

The presentation will also discuss the key messages from an April 2025 Invite-Only Summit with over 200 change makers from the Judiciary, Children's Services, Accommodation Providers, Mental and Physical Health (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS); NHS), Government, and Education across England and Wales. Amongst the key messages include that children's voices need to be central, change is possible, practitioners need to look after themselves and communicate in trauma-informed ways, and the importance of the moral narrative of 'our children, our responsibility' and acknowledging that the rapid rise in the use of deprivation of liberty orders is a symptom of what is wrong with systems of care rather than what is wrong with children. The presenter will open to the broader audience for a discussion about how to improve services and outcomes for these children globally.

Driving Transformation: Embracing Trauma-Sensitive Care in Residential Homes in Macao

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:15: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. Marjory Vendramini [1], ***Prof. Vítor Teixeira*** [1], ***Prof. Elisa Veiga*** [2]

1. *Faculty of Health Sciences- University of Saint Joseph- Macao,* ***2.*** *Research Center for Human Development, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Porto, Portugal*

Children in residential care frequently have a history of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), such as abuse, domestic violence, neglect, or parental separation. These experiences can profoundly affect children's emotional, psychological, and physical development. Despite this, the concept of trauma-informed care remains largely unfamiliar in Macau, with no comprehensive system-wide guidelines in social welfare to support its implementation. The significance of ACEs and the impact of trauma on children have yet to be fully integrated into decision-making processes across education and social services.

This research project seeks to foster positive transformations in the lives of children and staff in residential homes in Macau through the implementation and monitoring of a trauma-sensitive care (TIC) approach.

Objective: This study aims to establish a baseline evaluation of the policies and practices implemented within two residential care homes (RCH) operated by a local association in Macau. By analysing these practices through the perspective of trauma-sensitive care guidelines and professional insights, the study seeks to identify strengths and weaknesses that can inform a tailored process of organizational change.

Method: A total of 38 staff members, including technical staff, internal assistants, and support staff (mean age: 39.55 years; mean years of experience: 6.2), participated in the study by completing the Trauma-Sensitive Care Evaluation Questionnaire for Residential Care Homes (TSCEQ, Veiga, Rocha & Negrão, 2022). The questionnaire utilizes a 5-point Likert scale and addresses four critical domains essential for trauma-sensitive care in the welfare system: Training, Policies and Practices, Supervision, and Physical Space. These domains encompass key elements such as institutional mission and values, recruitment and workforce development, guidelines for screening, assessment and trauma-focused intervention, community network services, as well as supervision and self-care.

Results: The mean scores across the sub-scales reflect a general awareness of trauma-sensitive practices among staff. However, variability in the scores highlights disparities in understanding and implementation across different areas. Notable weaknesses were identified in the dimensions of Supervision (mean: 3.29) and Training (mean: 2.94), indicating areas that require improvement to meet the complex demands of children and youth in residential care units.

Implications: This study serves to enhance awareness regarding the alignment of residential care homes (RCH) with trauma-sensitive care principles and guidelines. By providing an empirical evidence base, it contributes to informed policy development and advocacy efforts aimed at improving the quality of out-of-home care practices. Moreover, the findings offer valuable insights for other departments and organizations that serve traumatized children in Macau, supporting the development of more effective and responsive services.

Transnational implementation of an evidence-based milieu program model

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:30: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. Jonathan Huefner [1]

1. *Boys Town*

Purpose

The most common reason for organizations to seek a new evidence-based program is that their current intervention is not as effective as desired. A sound program model is the necessary foundation for effective residential care practice, and without it nothing else will likely matter (James 2017). Aarons et al. (2011) propose a four-phase model for program implementation and observe that many implementation efforts have failed to reach their full potential due to incomplete execution of the process. The adoption and implementation of the Boys Town Teaching Family Home program (USA) by the Dunlea Centre in Engadine, NSW Australia followed the Aarons model and is examined in this presentation. The primary focus of this current effort is examining the impact of implementing the BT-FHP in a new setting. Specifically, will youth perceive an improvement in organizational climate after the implementation of the new model.

Method

The Dunlea Centre is a 5 day/4 night (Monday–Thursday) per week accredited residential school for both male and female children and young people who face both academic and behavioral challenges. From 2015 until the end of 2024, group home climate measures were given to youth in the Dunlea Centre during time spent in their residential house. During this 10-year period, 852 questionnaires were collected. Two climate measures were used: the Group Climate Instrument for Children (GCIC 8-15; a 14-item Likert-type measure measuring children's perception of the quality of group climate) and the Living Unit Evaluation (LUE; a 5-item measure using a 1 to 10 scale). A 4 x 4 (implementation stage by house) multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used to analyze the data.

Results

The multivariate results for the MANCOVA were significant for House, Implementation Stage, and the House by Implementation Stage interaction. The pairwise comparisons for GCIC across Implementation stages showed that the Implementation, Sustainment, and Accreditation stages were all significantly higher than the Baseline stage. Similarly, the pairwise comparisons for LUE across Implementation stages showed that the Implementation, Sustainment, and Accreditation stages were all significantly higher than the Baseline stage.

Conclusion

The focus of this effort was on the impact of implementing a new model on organizational culture. The means of doing this used a climate survey completed by youth in the program. Accounting for young people's perceptions of care practices, cultures, and conditions is critically important, because these explicitly shape relationships and youths' sense of being valued, respected, and cared for. The implementation process used by DC was systematic, strongly supported by leadership, and sustained by continued training and accessing model fidelity. The results supported the hypothesis that the new model would significantly increase youths' evaluation of the program's organizational climate.

From Litigation to Collaboration: Lawyers' Roles in Norwegian Child Welfare Dialogue Conferences

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:45: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. Marte Tonning Otterlei [1], ***Mrs. Pia Moum Hellevik*** [1], ***Dr. Øivin Christiansen*** [2]

1. *Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stavanger, Norway,* ***2.*** *Regional Centre for Child and Youth Mental Health and Child Welfare West, NORCE Norwegian Research Centre AS*

In severe child protection cases involving alternative care, the dialogue between child welfare workers and families may become strained. The Norwegian Child Welfare Services (CWS) has been criticized for failing to adequately safeguard the legal rights of private parties. Research also indicates that children and parents often struggle to understand the CWS's assessments and feel they have limited influence over decision-making processes.

In response, an innovative approach—dialogue conferences—has been introduced within the Norwegian CWS. This method offers lawyer-assisted support to families outside the courtroom, aiming to enhance decision-making processes while upholding the rights of parents and children to participate. The approach seeks to foster constructive dialogue and collaborative problem-solving with families, with the goals of finding common ground, reducing reliance on court proceedings, and potentially preventing care orders.

This paper presents findings from a qualitative study investigating the experiences of lawyers who have represented private parties in dialogue conferences. The study aims to explore their attitudes toward the method, their perceptions of its utility, and how they understand their role in the conferences. The study is part of a larger research project that examines two dialogue-based decision-making tools used within the Norwegian child welfare system. The broader project also explores the experiences of child welfare workers, parents, and youth in these participatory processes.

Lawyers (N = 9) were recruited with the assistance of CWS agencies participating in the research project. Individual qualitative interviews were conducted digitally via Teams, each lasting approximately one hour. A semi-structured interview guide was used, and the interviews were audio-recorded, securely stored, and transcribed using AI tools. Ethical research guidelines were followed throughout the study. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings indicate that lawyers generally support collaborating with the CWS to find solutions, emphasizing the value of resolving conflicts locally and at the lowest possible level. They describe their role as mediators and underline the importance of being well-informed about each case. Ensuring children's participation was seen as particularly challenging and requiring dedicated efforts to uphold their rights. Lawyers also noted that parents facing mental health or substance abuse challenges may have difficulty understanding and adhering to agreements.

Although the lawyers view the method as constructive and helpful in reducing conflict, concerns remain about potential power imbalances. One key concern is the risk of "voluntary coercion," where the implicit threat of tribunal proceedings may pressure families into accepting agreements. Another potential drawback is that the process can be time-consuming, which may undermine the child's right to timely protection.

There is a lack of research-based knowledge about this method, making the study's findings particularly valuable. As dialogue conferences may directly influence the quality of decision-making in alternative care cases, the findings offer important insights into both the challenges and potential of working in a dialogue-based manner with families. These insights may have implications for practice development and future research in the field.

Individualized approach to unaccompanied children as a protective factor in mixed migration

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:00: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Mr. Danijel Vasilj [1], ***Prof. Meliha Bijedić*** [1], ***Prof. Ranko Kovačević*** [1], ***Prof. Edin Muftić*** [1]

1. *Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation of University in Tuzla*

This study explores the impact of individualized support on the psychosocial wellbeing of unaccompanied minors, operationalized through their Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) scores. To assess the level of individualization, three variables were defined: (1) type of accommodation (outdoors, reception center, or family-type housing), (2) number of organized weekly activities (none, 1–3, or more than 3), and (3) presence of a significant adult (yes/no). A higher degree of individualization is assumed with family-type housing, more activities, and the presence of a supportive adult figure.

Correlation and regression analyses were conducted to determine the relationships and predictive power of these variables on emotional symptoms, behavioral problems, hyperactivity, peer relationship problems, and the overall SDQ score. Results revealed significant negative correlations between better accommodation status and all psychosocial difficulties (e.g., $r = -0.68$ for total SDQ score, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, more frequent participation in structured activities correlated with fewer difficulties across all SDQ subscales. In contrast, the absence of a significant adult figure was positively associated with increased psychosocial issues, indicating its critical role as a protective factor.

Regression analysis confirmed that the three variables significantly predicted the total SDQ score ($R^2 = 0.67$, $F = 38.28$, $p < 0.001$). Among them, accommodation status had the strongest predictive value ($B = -6.39$, $p < 0.001$), followed by the number of organized activities ($B = -3.45$, $p = 0.013$), and presence of a significant adult ($B = 5.08$, $p = 0.001$). These findings emphasize that stable housing, opportunities for meaningful engagement, and trusted adult relationships substantially contribute to the resilience and mental health of unaccompanied minors.

The results are supported by existing international research, which highlights the importance of socio-emotional support, access to basic services, and culturally responsive care environments. Studies from the UK, Norway, and the U.S. have shown that individualized care models, such as foster care or small group homes, lead to lower rates of depression and PTSD compared to larger or adult-only reception facilities. Moreover, involvement in arts, sports, and educational programs has been linked to improved emotional regulation, self-confidence, and a sense of belonging among migrant youth.

The presence or absence of a significant adult was found to be a complex variable. Although statistically weaker, its absence was associated with increased behavioral difficulties and hyperactivity. Literature suggests that the quality of this relationship is essential; emotionally supportive and stable adult figures are crucial to positive psychosocial outcomes.

This study highlights the necessity of adopting individualized, child-centered approaches in work with unaccompanied minors. Findings imply that targeted interventions—ensuring secure living conditions, access to structured weekly activities, and the establishment of trusted adult relationships—serve as protective factors that enhance resilience and psychosocial adjustment. Given the legal and emotional limbo many minors face during asylum processes, these interventions are not only beneficial but ethically imperative.

Permanent Life Projects for Children and Youth from Ethnocultural Minorities in Youth Protection: Tensions, Perspectives, and Challenges in Practice

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:15: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Prof. Rosita Vargas Diaz [1]***, Prof. Marie-Joëlle Robichaud*** [2]***, Dr. Isabelle-Ann Leclair Mallette*** [3]***, Dr. Lisa Ellington*** [4]***, Dr. Chantal Lavergne*** [5]***, Mrs. Leila Loucif*** [1]

1. *Université Laval,* ***2.*** *Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières,* ***3.*** *Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté,* ***4.*** *Laval University,* ***5.*** *Université de Montréal*

This presentation shares the results of a research project conducted in Quebec (Canada) that explored intervention practices surrounding the determination of permanent life projects for children and youth from ethnocultural minorities (ECM) under the care of the youth protection system (YPS). These children and youth are overrepresented in reports and placements (Boatswain-Kyte et al., 2020; Lavergne et al., 2009, 2014; Sarmiento & Lavergne, 2017) and are more likely to face differential, even discriminatory, treatment within the system (Lavergne & Dufour, 2020). Despite this, their specific realities and needs remain underdocumented, particularly in relation to their placement trajectories and life project planning.

A permanent life project aims to provide children and youth in care with a stable and safe living environment that meets their needs and fosters their development (Goemans et al., 2016; Osmond & Tilbury, 2012; Vargas Diaz, 2021). In Quebec, the Youth Protection Act (YPA) considers placement an exceptional measure, to be used only as a last resort, and calls for the inclusion of cultural characteristics of families in the decision-making process (YPA, 2007, s. 2.4.5b).

This study adopts an intersectional perspective, which makes it possible to understand the inequalities experienced by ECM children and youth through the interplay of various social structures—gender, race, class, and age (Bilge, 2009). This approach allows for an analysis that goes beyond individual risk factors to examine the effects of power relations and institutional dynamics that may reinforce the vulnerability of these children, youth, and their families (Bilge, 2010; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Fauteux, 2017).

The study gathered the voices of 26 participants—placed children and youth, parents, and practitioners—from two urban regions of Quebec. Through interviews and focus groups, we explored lived experiences of placement and permanent life planning, with particular attention to intercultural dynamics, participation, and recognition. Three key findings emerged from the analysis:

• Marginalization of families in decision-making processes, exacerbated by systemic inequities, language barriers, institutional mistrust, and asymmetrical power dynamics.

• Misunderstanding of cultural practices, where the parenting approaches of ECM families were sometimes judged as inadequate without any meaningful intercultural dialogue. Practitioners acknowledged challenges in integrating cultural diversity into their decisions, despite legal mandates and calls for intercultural training (CSDEPJ, 2021). In addition, current working conditions do not allow sufficient time for intercultural dialogue or adequate training.

• Cultural and relational continuity was perceived by children and youth as essential. They expressed a strong desire to maintain ties with their cultural heritage and loved ones, while also integrating elements of the host society's culture in a harmonious and respectful way.

These findings highlight the need for a shift in youth protection practices toward more culturally competent, inclusive, and co-constructed interventions that meaningfully engage those directly affected.

Disparities in Placement Stability and Permanency Planning for Ethnocultural Minority Children in Quebec

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:30: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Isabelle-Ann Leclair Mallette [1], ***Mrs. Marie-Noele Royer*** [2], ***Prof. Rosita Vargas Diaz*** [3], ***Mrs. Daphné Fallu*** [4], ***Dr. Chantal Lavergne*** [5], ***Prof. Marie-Joëlle Robichaud*** [6]

1. *Université de Sherbrooke,* ***2.*** *Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté,* ***3.*** *Université Laval,* ***4.*** *Université du Québec en Outaouais,* ***5.*** *Université de Montréal,* ***6.*** *Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières*

In Quebec, the decision to place a child is considered by the Youth Protection Act (YPA) as an exceptional measure that ideally aimed at family reunification. The law stipulates that when placing a child, professionals must assess the risk of instability or discontinuity within prescribed timeframes based on the child's age (MSSS, 2016). If a risk of deviating from the reunification project is identified, professionals must determine a permanency plan, defined as "a situation in which the child live on a stable and permanent basis with a significant person with whom the child can develop an attachment bond" (St-Jean, 2012).

A significant proportion of children in child welfare belong to ethnocultural minorities, and several studies have reported their overrepresentation in the Quebec system (Boatswain-Kyte et al., 2020; Lavergne et al., 2009, 2014; Sarmiento and Lavergne, 2017). This is concerning, as these children are more likely to experience differential or even discriminatory treatment within the system (Lavergne and Dufour, 2020). However, knowledge about the service trajectory of children from ethnocultural minorities placed under the YPA remains limited, despite the lasting consequences of these decisions on the children's future. It is therefore crucial to examine the experiences of these children during their placement, particularly in relation to permanency planning and placement stability.

Objectives : The aim of this communication is to explore the differences in the service trajectories of children in out of home care depending on whether or not they belong to an ethno-cultural minority.

Methods : Clinico-administrative data from Quebec child welfare centers were used. The sample is formed of 790 children who experienced a first placement in 2016 in two major Quebec cities. Of these, 315 were from ethnocultural minorities (39.9%). The observation period spans from 2016 to 2022. Latent class analyses were performed to identify sub-groups based on variables related to placement stability and permanency plans. The percentage of children from ethnocultural minorities was compared across each identified class using chi-square analysis.

Results : Six latent classes were identified: (1) simple family reunification (43 %); (2) complex family reunification (18 %); (3) Long-term foster placement without reunification attempts nor instability (15%); (4) Long-term foster placement with reunification attempt and instability (7,8 %); (5) Emancipation without reunification attempt and with instability (7,8%); (6) Adoption/guardianship without reunification attempt and with instability. Compared with children who are not from ethnocultural minorities, children belonging to ethnocultural minorities are over-represented in the emancipation class and the complex reunification class and under-represented in the adoption or guardianship class.

Conclusions: Results suggest that in Quebec, children from ethnocultural minorities are overrepresented in permanency plans associated with lower stability. The discussion will focus on the relative role of ethnocultural minority status, as well as other variables that may contribute to explaining permanency planning of children placed under youth protection.

Youth priorities for leaving care research and practice: reflections from an international learning community with care leavers

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:45: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Prof. Mandi MacDonald [1], ***Prof. Berni Kelly*** [1], ***Ms. Lucy Jamieson*** [2]

1. *Queen's University Belfast,* ***2.*** *University of Cape Town*

There is a pressing need for innovative leaving care practice to address the internationally well-documented challenges that confront many young people as they transition out of care (van Breda et al., 2020). To achieve this, the importance of engaging with care-experienced youth as full partners in knowledge generation and mobilisation is increasingly recognised (Farragher et al., 2023). This paper reports on an international learning community that partnered with care leavers at the earliest stage of the research cycle to identify priorities for research and practice development. The learning community was a collaboration between care leavers, their advocacy organisations and inter-disciplinary researchers in South Africa and Northern Ireland aimed at cultivating a dynamic environment for shared learning (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024). Activities included online facilitated discussions, in-person international exchange in Cape Town and Belfast, and participatory filmmaking. Inter-cultural learning and immersion in these two international contexts stimulated fresh insights on leaving care policy and practice and identification of a common research agenda and shared advocacy goals.
This paper will summarise aspects of the leaving care process that were most salient for care-leavers in both South Africa and Northern Ireland, although they were experienced in different ways in each context. The learning community highlighted the following as priority areas for leaving care policy and practice development:

- the management of, and reintegration with, birth family relationships;
- timing and nature of support when moving from a supported care environment to coping alone;
- risk of homelessness and the value of post-care supported living options;
- the implications of care leaving for emotional wellbeing, and access to mental health services;
- the role of supportive formal and informal relationships;
- recognition of individual efforts to establish fulfilling adult lives;
- opportunities for being heard, having influence and giving back to the care-experienced community.

Following consideration of the implications of these salient themes for leaving care policy and practice, the paper will outline the priority areas care leavers identified for future research including:

- family relationships during and after leaving care;
- experiences of stigma associated with the imposed 'care-experienced' label and the implications of this in the transition out of care;
- the role of supportive advocacy organisations and implications for youth who do not engage with such groups.

We will conclude by summarising the value of global dialogue and extend a welcome to expand our learning community with others across the globe.

Population Specific Legislation in Child Welfare: Challenges and Opportunities Amidst the Anti-DEI Backlash

Wednesday, 10th September - 15:00: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Joan Blakey [1], ***Dr. Traci LaLiberte*** [2]

1. *University of Minnesota - Twin Cities,* ***2.*** *Multidiscplinary Institute for Child Welfare*

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), Minnesota African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act (MAAFPCWDA), and LGBTQ related legislation were created to address disparities in child welfare that have historically led to the disproportionate removal of Indigenous and African American children, and children with disabilities from their families. However, these population specific laws are now at the center of legal and ideological battles, particularly in the context of the growing anti-Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) movement in the United States. Opponents argue that these laws provide racial privileges and violate the Equal Protection Clause, while proponents emphasize their necessity in rectifying historical and ongoing injustices in the child welfare system.

ICWA, enacted in 1978, was a response to federal and state policies that removed Indigenous children from their families and placed them in non-Native foster and adoptive homes, severing tribal connections and disrupting cultural continuity. The act mandates Active Efforts—a higher standard than "reasonable efforts"—to prevent the removal of Indigenous children and prioritizes placement within Indigenous families and communities. However, recent legal challenges, most notably Haaland v. Brackeen (2023), have attacked ICWA on the grounds that it imposes racial classifications rather than recognizing the political sovereignty of tribes (Dwyer, 2024). While the Supreme Court upheld ICWA, the decision left room for further legal challenges, particularly from conservative groups seeking to dismantle race-conscious policies.

Similarly, MAAFPA, passed in 2024, was designed to prevent the disproportionate placement of African American children in foster care by requiring agencies to take Active Efforts to preserve family unity. The law acknowledges the historical role of the child welfare system in the surveillance and destabilization of Black families, particularly in the aftermath of policies like the War on Drugs, which led to the criminalization of Black parents and family separation. However, MAAFPA has faced resistance, with critics labeling it as an unconstitutional racial preference and part of a broader effort to dismantle race-neutral legal frameworks.

All population specific legislation is under attack within the broader anti-DEI movement, which has sought to eliminate race-conscious policies in education, employment, and government programs. The Supreme Court's decision in Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard (2023), which struck down affirmative action in higher education, has emboldened legal challenges to population specific legislation across multiple domains. Critics of population specific legislation use similar legal arguments, positioning these laws as race-based affirmative action in child welfare, despite their intent to remedy systemic racial disparities.

This presentation will explore:

1. The historical context and necessity of population specific child welfare legislation, including the legacies of forced removal and racial disproportionality.
2. The contemporary legal and political challenges facing ICWA and MAAFPA amid rising opposition to these kinds of policies.
3. Opportunities for advocacy and policy innovation to sustain population specific legislation protections in child welfare.

As child welfare systems undergo transformation and transition, this session will examine whether race-conscious policies can survive in an era of increasing hostility toward racial justice and what strategies can be employed to protect the integrity of these laws.

Advocacy for children's rights in Portugal: the NGO AjudAjudar mission.

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:00: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Prof. Sónia Rodrigues [1], ***Dr. Márcia Lemos*** [2]

1. *Universidade Lusíada Porto,* ***2.*** *NGO AjudAjudar*

Portuguese Protection of Children Law underwent an extensive reformulation in 2015, giving priority to family-based interventions over out-of-home care and to foster care (FC) over residential care (RC), particularly for children under 6 years old.

However, even with the implementation of the Child Guarantee Plan, the amount invested in prevention and intervention measures at a natural/community environment in Portugal is still less than half of what is spent on out-of-home care, even if family interventions represents 88%. At the same time, there is a lack of coordination and articulation of the different entities on the ground with responsibilities in this area (Social Security, health/Mental Health, education, Justice, and Commissions for the protection of children and young people).

Because Kindship care was not until very recently considered a type of FC, extended families who accept to take care of children who do not have adequate parental care or who are mistreated by their parents still do not receive the same financial support as foster care families, which prevents many family members from assuming this responsibility.

Regarding out-of-home care, Portugal continues to be nowadays a sad exception in the European panorama, with the overwhelming majority (95.7%) of children in out-of-home care living in an institution. The regulation of RC Law was published only in 2019 but their application was dependent, until december 2023, on the publication of a legal ordinance. Although the publication of the legal ordinance clarified what changes were required to RC facilities so that they can remain open, in practice anything changed until now.

A national assessment of the quality of the Portuguese RC system (Rodrigues, 2019) showed that most RC centres are still too large, segregated according to gender, leading to the separation of siblings, do not have a family home architecture, are not supervised and the quality of care does not respond to the needs of children and young people in care, especially those of girls. Furthermore, funding is carried out according to the number of children in care, benefiting the biggest and not the best institutions, they operate autonomously and with very little overview.

It is not only the demand for greater quality in RC that has been postponed by the different Ministry of Social Security with low-quality RC centres, especially those that accommodate babies and children under 6 years still open: the implementation of FC is also been done very slowly.

Only recently civil society entities, supported by the scientific community, have started to actively advocate for children's rights and to demand greater participation of children at the protection system in the decision-making processes that concern them. AjudAjudar is a vibrant example.

Change is happening but at a slow pace. This presentation will list the problems, examine the difficulties and the degree of implementation of the change achieved so far. It will also consider the tasks that still need to be carried out, in order to achieve a more effective Portuguese child protection system, that truly promotes children's rights and ensures their best interests.

Non-compulsory care in Scotland: from research knowledge to practice improvement

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:15: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Dr. Brandi Lee Lough Dennell [1], ***Dr. Robert Porter*** [1]

1. *CELCIS, University of Strathclyde*

Background: The authors undertook research, supported by the Nuffield Foundation, on the understanding, use, and experiences of non-compulsory care (Section 25) in Scotland. Section 25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 allows local authorities to 'look after' children and young people away from the parental home when parents do not object. There are similar non-compulsory care arrangements in other jurisdictions in the UK and across Europe. What is common between nations, is that children are cared for away from the parental home, without the use of a court order or court-like process, and the parent or guardian retains parental responsibilities and rights (see Brennan et al., 2021, p. 2).

This research involved quantitative analysis of a 12-year longitudinal data set and qualitative interviews or focus groups with 101 individuals representing key perspectives on non-compulsory care arrangements, including social workers, children's reporters, solicitors, and parents. The research found that over 70% of children cared for away from the parental home were first cared for under non-compulsory arrangements. Within the context of this high use, the research also found significant practice variation and contradictions regarding how, when, and why practitioners used non-compulsory arrangements; concerns over parental ability to 'agree' to arrangements in times of stress or crisis; and, a lack of local or national guidance and policy on use.

Methods: The research has generated significant interest in the sector (e.g. 200+ attendees at a webinar on research findings), yet highlighted often conflicting perspectives between teams, local areas, and agencies. Through the research engagement, we found that it will take sensitive facilitation for the sector to move from acknowledgement of the findings to develop, agree, and implement national goals. To drive the impact of the research findings on practice improvement, and mark thirty years of the legislation, the authors are undertaking an eight-month knowledge impact programme with the children's care sector in Scotland. With the support of governmental and third sector partners, we are drawing together organisations representing children, young people, and parents, and service delivery organisations, to engage with the research findings, agree and map implementation goals, and begin a shared national programme of work.

Objective:

Child welfare systems are complex and involve a wide range of professionals and agencies with different roles in, and at times interpretations of, the same legislation or processes. This presentation will explore the emerging learning from the knowledge impact programme underway with the children's care and protection sector in Scotland to transfer research findings on non-compulsory care into practice improvement for children and their families. The discussion will be of interest to researchers aiming to use research findings to inform policy change and practice improvements, practitioners collaborating within complex systems, and anyone with an interest in non-compulsory care arrangements for children.

Creating space for learning from lived experiences: Embedding experiential knowledge in child welfare and protection in Flanders

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:30: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Dr. Chris Swerts [1], ***Ms. Gesquiere Mieke*** [1], ***Ms. Janis Vancoppenolle*** [1]

1. *EQUALITY//ResearchCollective, HOGENT University of Applied Sciences and Arts*

Background**:** Experiential knowledge, rooted in the lived experiences of young people, has gained traction as a vital source of knowledge in the field child welfare and protection, complementing professional and academic expertise. Despite growing interest, practices remain fragmented, and the full potential of experiential knowledge often goes untapped due to conceptual ambiguities and various barriers. This presentation explores how experiential knowledge is currently understood, valued, and used within the Flemish child welfare and protection context, and identifies key conditions for its meaningful implementation.

Methods**:** This study draws on qualitative research carried out with 23 child welfare and protection organizations, including professional service providers and youth advocacy organizations. Thematic analysis was used to identify cross-cutting patterns, tensions, and practices.

Results: Findings revealed recurring tensions that hinder implementation, including conceptual ambiguity, tokenistic practices, lack of role clarity for experts-by-experience, and unequal power dynamics. At the same time, several promising practices emerged in which experiential knowledge contributed to more relational and responsive forms of support.

Discussion: While the value of experiential knowledge is increasingly acknowledged in policy and practice, its implementation remains constrained by dominant organizational cultures and traditional views on professionalism. These prevailing frameworks often leave limited space for alternative forms of knowing. As a result, the transformative potential of experiential knowledge risks being reduced to symbolic gestures rather than leading to systemic change.

From rebel to researcher: Reflections on co-producing knowledge with experts-by-experience in child welfare and protection

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:45: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Ms. Janis Vancoppenolle [1], ***Dr. Chris Swerts*** [1]

1. *EQUALITY//ResearchCollective, HOGENT University of Applied Sciences and Arts*

This presentation highlights the transformative potential of engaging experts-by-experience as co-researchers in the (academic) field of child welfare and protection. Too often, young people with care experience are spoken about rather than meaningfully involved, their knowledge acknowledged but not always acted upon. This reinforces patterns of epistemic injustice, the systematic disqualification of these individuals as credible and authentic knowers of their own lifeworld and experiences. We draw on the project *ErvaringsVuur* (Flames of Experience), a practice-based research at the HOGENT University of Applied Sciences and Arts (Ghent, Belgium), where an expert-by-experience is fully embedded as co-researcher throughout the research process. Rather than only positioning lived experiences as raw data, we co-construct knowledge grounded in lived experience, disrupting traditional hierarchies of knowing. In this presentation, we reflect on the tensions and insights that emerge from this approach: the negotiation of roles, the ways we navigate the sharing of experiences, the messy, relational process of building knowledge together, and the uncertainties that shape our thinking and work. In doing so, we invite a critical conversation on what it means to do research *with* rather than *on* young people with care experience, and how co-research with experts-by-experience can foster more socially just research.

Tearing up the book: Transforming Life Story Work into an innovative child-led approach that matters to children living in kinship care

Wednesday, 10th September - 15:00: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Dr. Paul Shuttleworth [1], ***Mrs. Michelle Hall*** [2]

1. *Kingston University,* ***2.*** *Leeds Trinity University*

Introduction: Life Story Work (LSW) lacks a single, unified definition, but it is generally conceptualised as a therapeutic process designed to help children living in foster care, adoption, and residential care to understand and integrate their past, present, and future. LSW aims to promote positive mental health, emotional permanence, identity, and family preservation. Notably, there is a gap in research and practice focusing specifically on LSW for children in kinship care, despite kinship care being the fastest-growing alternative worldwide for children who cannot remain with their birth parents. These children also often navigate complex, ambivalent, and sometimes contradictory relationships and narratives, which differ from those experienced by children in fostering, adoption, and residential placements.

Objectives: The overall objective was to develop an innovative child-led, "what matters" approach to LSW with children living in kinship care, synergising and drawing from both the authors' research and the ongoing insights from the Department for Education-funded Kinship Life Story Work project in England. The research sought to synthesise findings and insights to shape LSW practices for children in kinship care, providing valuable guidance for further training initiatives for child welfare professionals.

Methods: The initial child participatory research involved 19 children and employed an innovative approach that integrated critical realism with dialogical participation. This method included iterative and reiterative retroductive analysis alongside creative methods to identify mechanisms central to a child's sense of identity and narrative(s). The second study, an interpretative phenomenological analysis of five special guardians' experiences of contact with birth parents, was drawn upon to develop a deeper understanding of the complex family histories that are a unique feature of kinship care. At the time of writing, the kinship carer LSW workshops included eight in-person sites and eight online sessions, engaging over 250 kinship carer participants. Insights from these workshops were thematically analysed and synthesised with the authors' previous findings.

Findings: The study found that collectively recognising children's agency and existing strategies for managing LSW is crucial. Building on these strategies can provide an effective foundation for further LSW. The approach developed from children's insights focuses on key principles:

- Adding to narratives, not substituting
- Navigating flexible truths and ambivalent relationships
- LSW is ongoing, child-led, and collaborative
- LSW is threaded and embedded
- LSW is timely, not time-driven

Workshop participants found the new approach relevant, empowering, fun, and informative. The need for professional training to ensure collective responsibility and cohesive collaboration with the child was also emphasised.

Conclusions: Children must be viewed as active agents in LSW now and in the future. Significantly transforming the traditional adoption and fostering models of LSW into a reiterative, "what matters" dialogical critical realist creative approach for kinship care is beneficial not only for children but also for their entire families, who are also managing their life stories within the family arrangement. The research knowledge can inform the development of a specific kinship care LSW training programme for UK child welfare professionals more aligned with children's and carers' experiences and needs.

Exploring foster parents' role in a reunification process in Norwegian Child Welfare Services

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:00: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Dr. Ellen Syrstad [1], ***Prof. Ingunn Tollisen Ellingsen*** [2], ***Dr. Margrete Aadnanes*** [1]

1. *VID specialized Universty,* ***2.*** *The University of Stavanger*

To tell a story is a way of making meaning of events in our lives. Based on interviews with ten foster homes in Norway we will explore how the fosterparents make meaning by telling their stories about children´s re-unification from foster homes to their birth parents. Reunification has been highlighted as a priority task for Norwegian Child Welfare Services (CWS) after Norway has been convicted in several cases brough up for The European Court of human rights (ECHR) by parents whose children were placed in public care.

Using narrative analysis, we look for patterns in the stories told by foster parents, how the stories reflect larger narratives and ideas about the role of foster parents and children's upbringings, and how these narratives seem to be challenged by the idea of reunification. We also look for exceptions from the normative stories and unique experiences that may support successful stories of being a foster parent thorough a reunification process.
Foster parents' narratives can be understood in the span between two roles:
The professional role, and
The emotional and more private role.
We have organized the three main narratives in chronological order, starting with the phase before reunification, followed by the reunification phase itself, and finally the phase after the reunification.
1. Collaboration with parents while the child is in care
2. Managing children's conflicting loyalties in the reunification process
3. Foster parents' role after reunification

However, our study shows that the role of foster parents is changing in line with political and professional discourses in the Norwegian child welfare services, related to increased demands for reunifications. We will discuss dilemmas, practical implications and innovative suggestions for foster care in the child welfare services. One such dilemma is that foster parents that are initially positive about reunifications, find it emotionally difficult, partly because they are unsure whether the children will be cared for. The fact that contact appears to cease in many cases after a reunification makes this particularly challenging. However, collaboration between foster parents and parents appears to be a key factor for good reunification processes.

The Families Supporting Teens Program - FAST

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:15: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Dr. Gerald P. Mallon [1], ***Ms. Jenisette Perez*** [2]

1. *Silberman School of Social Work, Hunter College,* ***2.*** *The Children's Village*

Potential foster families will often admit to being unwilling to take in teens because they believe it is easier to work with a younger child still seeking bonding and attachment. That reluctance makes locating families willing to accept teens difficult, and nation-wide data indicate a high rate of turnover for those that do. Also, foster parents can misinterpret what are, in fact, age-appropriate behaviors associated with teens' need to establish trust, test limits, exercise their growing independence and urge to question authority, as teens' unwillingness to assimilate into the foster parents' home. The result is that many teens bounce from placement to placement at exactly the time when they are most in need of stability and support. This workshop will examine the positive impact that the Families Supporting Teens (FaST) program—funded by a grant from the Hilton Foundation—has made in addressing these and other challenges inherent in fostering teens. By providing additional financial resources, individualized in-home support, and specialized training for foster parents that is focused specifically on working with teens, the FaST program has enabled our families to more effectively bond with one another and to manage potentially disruptive behaviors. This has increased the success of our FaST program teen placements over those of our agency's regular foster boarding home program (non-therapeutic) placements and established a higher level of permanency for these teens. These outcomes show that the FaST program could become a model for helping thousands of teens across the country facing these same issues.

Innovative Foster Care in Practice: 'Living with a Family for a School Year' – Impact on the Community and Residential Care Centres

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:30: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Dr. María Teresa Díaz-Tartalo [1], ***Prof. Nuria Fuentes-Peláez*** [2], ***Ms. Anna Fantova*** [2], ***Ms. Judit Rabassa*** [2], ***Dr. Sara Pérez-Hernando*** [2]

1. *CEU Universidad San Pablo,* ***2.*** *Universitat de Barcelona*

Introduction: The "Living with a Family for a School Year" (LFSY) is a temporary foster care program for children and adolescents in residential care centres in Madrid (Spain), running for the school year. It facilitates the placement of children and adolescents with foster families, promoting family integration. The program strengthens emotional bonds, provides long-term role models, and fosters community involvement. It encourages collaboration between residential centres, foster care services, and family associations to reinforce family-based foster care.

Goal: To explore the impact of the LFSY programme on the community and residential care centres, based on the experiences of children and adolescents in residential care, foster care families, and residential care professionals.

Methods: To analyse the impact of the programme, interviews were conducted, and questionnaires were used to characterise the sample. The sample included 27 children and adolescents in residential care (16 interviews, 18 questionnaires), 26 foster families (23 interviews, 16 questionnaires), and 8 professionals from residential care centres (8 interviews, 22 questionnaires). Content analysis was conducted across the following dimensions: support, impact, best practices, challenges, improvement suggestions, and experiences, across all agents and programme phases.

Findings: The programme has impacted the community and residential care centres. It has increased awareness of foster care, allowing families to experience fostering firsthand and potentially motivating long-term commitments. The programme also supports social integration by providing children opportunities to engage in family activities, helping them understand different family dynamics. Participants highlighted the programme's rehabilitative impact on children, offering a family environment, and reference figures for emotional and social development. It has improved relationships between residential care professionals and foster families, fostering better communication and support networks. Additionally, the programme has improved residential care centre climates, with children returning more relaxed, and enhanced their social skills and academic performance. More promotion is needed to engage additional families.

Conclusions/implications:

1. The programme increased awareness of foster care as a positive alternative to residential care. This could motivate more families to consider long-term fostering. Expanding this awareness is essential for recruiting more foster families and addressing placement shortages.
2. By offering children family experiences, the programme reduced stigma and promoted social integration. This suggests that such initiatives help children engage more positively with their communities. Scaling this programme could help normalise foster care and reduce social stigma.
3. The programme fostered communication between foster families and residential care professionals, strengthening support networks. Residential care professionals, with daily contact, provide more detailed insights into children's behaviours than other professionals in the child protection system, who lack this close interaction.

4. The programme helped increase children's long-term reference figures as important role models, supporting their well-being. This underscores the value of stable adult figures for children in residential care, enhancing their social support networks beyond the programme.
5. Children returned from foster care with a greater sense of well-being and enhanced social skills and academic performance. These outcomes contributed to a better atmosphere in the residential centres, highlighting the need to integrate family-based interventions into residential care for broader impacts.

Affording Managed Opportunities for Independence to Build Young People's Resilience in Residential Care in South Africa

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:45: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Dr. Joyce Hlungwani [1]

1. *University of Johannesburg*

Research on what is done in practice to adequately prepare young people for life after residential care is limited. This paper focuses on the contribution of managed opportunities for independence (MOI) in building young people's resilience and preparing them for life after care. The residential care setting tends to emphasize risk prevention and typically deprive young people of the freedom to explore their environment. It is argued that the practice of MOI in residential care is crucial for equipping young people with independent living skills and provide them with opportunities to engage with manageable amounts of risks, which are critical for building resilience and preparing for adulthood.

This paper presents findings of a qualitative research study conducted in various residential care centres in South Africa. Purposive sampling was used to select 29 participants, namely: nine child and youth care workers working in residential care, nine care-leavers and eleven young people living in residential care. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data and resilience theory was used as the theoretical lens.

Findings reveal that some young people are afforded MOI in care and both care givers and young people perceive the practice of MOI as crucial for building resilience and preparing young people for life after residential care. Findings also show that despite being considered a useful in-care practice, the practice of MOI in residential care is often hindered by institutional barriers, often influenced by lack of mandate on preparation for leaving care. Several practice and policy implications are drawn, including the need to strengthen policy provisions on preparation for leaving care programmes, providing clear preparation for leaving care guidelines and channeling resources to allow for resilience building programmes while young people are still in care.

Youth in foster care - Worries and concerns for birth parents

Wednesday, 10th September - 15:00: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Prof. Ingunn Tollisen Ellingsen [1]***, Prof. Ingunn Studsrød*** [2]***, Dr. Ellen Syrstad*** [3]

1. *The University of Stavanger,* ***2.*** *The University of stavanger,* ***3.*** *VID specialized Universty*

(Backround:) Every year, a significant number of children enter foster care in Norway. In 2024, approximately 42,400 children received services from the Norwegian Child Welfare Services (CWS), with about 7,400 children receiving care measures as of 31 December 2024. Research suggests that children may struggle to adjust to their new circumstances in foster care, partly due to concerns for and loyalty towards their parents. Moreover, parents who lose custody often face multiple stressors in their lives. Losing custody of a child brings additional challenges, such as stigma, social isolation, grief, and a sense of powerlessness.

(Objectives:) There is limited research on how children in foster care perceive their birth parents' situations after the loss of custody, as well as their concerns regarding their parents. This study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge gap by examining the perspectives of youth with foster care experience. The overall research question for our study is: How do youth in foster care view parental follow-up after their placement in foster care?

(Methods:) We conducted a qualitative study, including interviews with ten youths aged 15-25 who have experience with foster care. We applied thematic analysis to explore what participants deemed important in the CWS follow-up with their parents.

(Findings) The analysis revealed significant concerns and worries regarding their parents' circumstances, which were connected to key aspects that participants found crucial for supporting parents after custody removal. Most participants expressed deep and ongoing concerns and worries about their parents. These concerns appear to stem from their awareness of their parents' challenging situations, encompassing emotional, mental, practical, social, and economic aspects.

(Implications:) In our presentation, we will elaborate on these findings and discuss their practical implications for follow-up to children in foster care and to parents who have lost custody of a child.

Unaccompanied minors in times of migration crisis in Spain

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:00: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Dr. Carla González-García [1], ***Dr. JOSE PABLO CALLEJA*** [1], ***Dr. Ignacio Fradejas*** [1]

1. *University of Oviedo*

Since 2020, a proclaimed migration crisis in the Canary Islands, due to the unauthorized arrival by boat of West African migrants, led to a collapse of the hosting system, placing adult men in large hosting camps and women and unaccompanied minors in specific resources. While adults started to leave the Canary Islands and reach continental Europe, the minors were confined there due to the Spanish rule that obliges the first arrival community to deal with the unaccompanied minor. It has been causing struggles in those Islands, hosting a few thousand minors alone. Solidarity (beyond the rule) to has been almost absent from other Spanish Autonomous Communities to host and share the increasing number of minors in the islands. This "high" numbers have produced other effects there, such as problems in identification of minors, uncontrolled resources with bad living conditions, difficulties when they become of legal age, etc. In 2025, a new regulation is being passed by the Spanish government to "oblige" other Spanish communities to host part of those minors and help the Canary government. What will happen is uncertain, but for now it caused a strong political confrontation. This presentation seeks to provide a critical analysis of the situation of these minors, as well as the implementation, regulatory frameworks, and measures adopted to distribute and accommodate them across the different regions during the initial months of enforcement. The purpose of this analysisis is to provide a critical analysis of the situation of unaccompanied foreign minors in Spain through a comprehensive review of the theoretical, legislative, and current contexts. Methodologically, the analysis draws on an extensive review of legislation, theoretical perspectives, academic literature, and institutional protocols concerning unaccompanied foreign minors in Spain. Building on this framework, it examines the general circumstances surrounding these minors, including the main migration routes and pathways into Spain, the drivers of unaccompanied migration, and the risks and vulnerabilities they face along the way. In addition, the paper explores the reception protocols and conditions upon arrival, as well as the ongoing territorial distribution disputes among Spain's autonomous communities. Ultimately, it underscores the importance of studies such as this one, which, from a rights-based perspective, shed light on a critical issue with significant implications for policy and practice, while also serving as a foundation for future research.

Unaccompanied Children in the U.S. Child Welfare System: Examining the Intersection of Systems, Gaps, and Policy Impacts

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:15: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Dr. Kerri Evans [1], ***Ms. Linda-Jeanne Mack*** [2], ***Ms. Zayna Lyon*** [3], ***Ms. Morgan Pardue-Kim*** [2]

1. *University of Maryland, Baltimore County,* ***2.*** *University of Maryland, School of Social Work.,* ***3.*** *George Mason University*

Background:
In 2024, 98,356 unaccompanied children entered a federally funded child welfare system (CWS) in the US (ORR, 2024). Unaccompanied children arrive in the US irregularly and in large numbers fleeing violence, poverty, and a lack of socio-economic opportunities in their home countries (Clemens, 2021; Lorenzen, 2017; Schmidt, 2017). Traumatic experiences pre-, during, and post-migration place them at high risk of mental health concerns (Castañeda et al., 2021), and systemic gaps in support leave them vulnerable to exploitation (Greenberg et al., 2019; Heidbrink, 2024; Samari et al., 2021).
At the time of this writing, there are continuous changes in US government and policies, underscoring the urgent need to bring the unique needs of unaccompanied immigrant children to the forefront of conversations about child well-being. As EuSARF 2025 aims to address transformation, transition, and innovation in child welfare services, we believe this is the perfect place to discuss the unique needs of this population in the US CWS.
Objectives:
Our presentation aims to identify systemic biases that impact unaccompanied children who interact with CWS, emphasizing their immigration status over minor status, and ways to incorporate this into social work policy and practice in the US context.
Method
Our research team included four researchers with experience as social workers in CWS or with unaccompanied children impacted by CWS. We used techniques from policy mapping (Bowen et al., 2022) to review data about both CWS and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) policies. Using techniques from reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2021), we met regularly to review themes and findings discovered to examine similarities and differences between systems.
Findings
Findings indicate that although US-born and unaccompanied children both experience out-of-home placement and have case management services when involved with CWS, unaccompanied children are uniquely impacted by additional policies specifically applied to them. Main themes of differences in CWS policies and practices include preemptive investigation of biological parents, challenges in reunification, and strengthening communities and resources for newcomers. (Lyon et al., 2025).
Unaccompanied children also intersect with US CWS under certain circumstances, further complicating service provision for them, however, this was not salient in the CWS literature we reviewed. Major implications from this study highlight ways in which unaccompanied children are not acknowledged in CWS practice or training in the US.
Conclusions:
This study suggests numerous implications for social work education, policy, and practice.

1. US policies regarding immigration and unaccompanied children are changing by the day, it is critical for child maltreatment professionals across spaces to be aware of and advocate for policy changes.
2. Policymakers should broaden existing services to explicitly include unaccompanied children and create targeted interventions to address their unique needs especially when involvement with US CWS occurs.

3. CWS social workers in the US need specialized training to work effectively with unaccompanied children when this intersection occurs.
4. Social work education in the US should include unaccompanied children across all child-focused courses, especially child welfare specific courses, to prepare the social work workforce to effectively advocate for and support their distinct needs.

The Role of Parent-Child Contact in Out-of-Home Care: A Systematic Review

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:30: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Dr. Carla González-García [1], ***Dr. Eunice Magalhães*** [2], ***Mr. Jaime Burón*** [1], ***Dr. Laura García-Alba*** [3], ***Ms. Emma Castro*** [4], ***Ms. Sofia Ferreira*** [4], ***Dr. Micaela Pinheiro*** [4]

1. *Universidad de Oviedo,* ***2.*** *iscte,* ***3.*** *University of Oviedo,* ***4.*** *Iscte*

Background. Young people in out-of-home care encounter numerous challenges that heighten their vulnerability, including parental maltreatment, exposure to violence, and family instability. These adverse experiences can have long-term effects on their mental well-being and capacity to develop healthy relationships. Despite these challenges, family reunification remains a central objective within child welfare systems, striving to balance child safety with family preservation whenever feasible. Maintaining connections with their family of origin is essential, as it enables children to retain their sense of identity and personal history. Given the significance of family involvement and the complexities associated with its implementation, understanding its characteristics, the factors influencing its variability, and its impact on children may provide valuable insights into how family involvement can be effectively strengthened across care settings. This systematic review, therefore, aims to synthesize existing research on family involvement in out-of-home care, focusing on its various forms, influencing factors, and associated outcomes. **Methods.** The literature search was conducted in June 2024 across multiple databases, including Academic Search Complete, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, ERIC, MEDLINE, Web of Science, and Scopus. The search strategy combined the following keywords: a) *child OR youth* OR young* OR adolesc***; b) "residential care" OR "group home" OR "foster care" OR "out-of-home care" OR "alternative care"; and c) *"family contact" OR "contact with parent" OR "parent-child" OR "birth family" OR "biological family" OR "face-to-face contact" OR "contact visits" OR "family visit"***. **Results.** A total of 4,189 articles were initially identified. After removing duplicates, 2,334 articles underwent title and abstract screening using the Rayyan web application. One researcher conducted the initial screening, while approximately 30% of the articles (*n*=700) were independently reviewed by a second researcher, yielding a 99% inter-rater agreement. Any discrepancies (30 manuscripts) were resolved through discussions among the raters and the research team. Ultimately, 67 studies were selected for data extraction and analysis. Findings from these studies indicate that the majority of young people in out-of-home care experienced either appropriate or consistent family contact. Of those included, 45 studies provided evidence linking family involvement to various outcomes, including psychological well-being, social relationships, academic performance, the quality of relationships with relatives, and the likelihood of family reunification or permanency. **Discussion.** The findings of this systematic review will be analyzed in relation to their implications for policy and practice within out-of-home care system.

The Implementation of the New Flemish Decree on Juvenile Delinquency in the Secure Community Institutions: Overview and Critical Reflections

Wednesday, 10th September - 14:45: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Dr. Bram Soenen [1], ***Ms. Axelle Dujardin*** [1], ***Prof. Stijn Vandevelde*** [2]

1. *Gemeenschapsinstelling De Zande,* ***2.*** *Ghent university*

Background

In 2019, the new Flemish decree on juvenile delinquency was approved. One of its guiding principles is that responses to delinquency should be evidence-based. Over the past years, the secure Community Institutions (CIs) have adjusted their programs in line with the new decree.

Objective

This paper reports on these programs and seeks to critically reflect on these developments.

Program

As an overarching framework to develop individual trajectories, the CIs have implemented Ziv's RNR-M (2018), integrating the Risk-Need-Responsivity model with the Good Lives Model. Each trajectory begins with a comprehensive risk assessment to advise the judge regarding the need for continued secure placement. An individualized treatment plan is developed, focusing on reducing the risk of recidivism and enhancing reintegration.

Reflections

RNR-M allows the CIs to transcend the dichotomy between the GLM and RNR, integrating the strengths of both models without compromising their complexity.

In the current risk assessment, a high risk of recidivism typically leads to a recommendation for continued secure placement. However, the risk principle of the RNR model posits that high recidivism risk warrants intensive intervention, but not necessarily secure placement. We recommend that the risk assessment be expanded to include an evaluation of the need for security. This would enable advice not only on the intensity of intervention required but also on whether such intervention should occur within a secure context.

The population within the CIs is highly diverse. Current assessment instruments are rather generic, which may limit the ability to conduct targeted assessments. While the interventions addressing criminogenic domains are already well developed, they do not cover all relevant problem areas. Both risk assessment and interventions require further expansion and differentiation to adequately address the population's diversity.

RNR states that interventions conducted in youth's natural environment are generally the most effective. However, the placement of young people in relatively remote CIs hinders this proximity. Efforts are made to involve parents/context figures and to identify support systems within the youth's immediate environment. Further development of context-oriented work is needed, including alternative methods that bring the youth's network into the institution and efforts to limit the duration of secure placement, transitioning to outpatient treatment.

Youth in CIs live in groups of 8 to 10. Principles of a positive living climate (van der Helm), have been implemented to create opportunities for youth to engage with their treatment plans. We endorse the value of this approach and recommend limiting group size to a maximum of six to fully leverage this learning environment.

Implications

The program of the Cis has undergone significant transformation. The RNR-M provides a solid foundation for this evolution. To further advance these developments, we recommend including the concept of security in the risk assessment; broadening both the assessment and interventions to allow for better differentiation; strengthening the focus on network-oriented practices; and reducing group sizes.

Children's help-seeking in relation to adverse childhood experiences

Wednesday, 10th September - 15:00: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Dr. Ylva Spånberger Weitz [1], ***Dr. Emelie Shanks*** [2], ***Dr. Sylwia Koziel*** [1], ***Dr. Inger Linblad*** [1]

1. *Södertörn University,* ***2.*** *Stockholm University*

In this presentation we will discuss the participatory design and preliminary results from an ongoing research project about children's help-seeking in relation to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). Exposure to ACE is a significant concern with potential long-term consequences. In a Swedish context, children's rights to support and protection from harm is clearly defined in national policy and legislation (including the UN Convention on the rights of the child, which was incorporated in Swedish law in 2020). In both school and social services, there are guidelines for promoting and ensuring these rights and both have a clear mandate to engage in early detection of children in need of support or protection. However, despite a strong emphasis on children's rights for support and protection in policy and legislation, research shows that children's exposure to ACE often remain unrecognised and unreported.

The objectives of the research project are to gain knowledge about children's preconditions and pathways for help-seeking when exposed to ACE and to explore how this knowledge can be implemented in social work practice through participatory methods. The focus is on children and young people's own experiences of help-seeking and their views on need for help and support. However, to be able to include a broader perspective on the preconditions for help-seeking, children's general perceptions of rights and support in relation to ACE are also examined, as well as professionals' perceptions of children's help-seeking and their experiences of supporting children in their help-seeking process.

The project draws on various types of data, including a survey of school children, interviews with young people and professionals, and collaborative workshops with stakeholders. During spring 2025 we are conducting the survey of school children, focusing on their knowledge about help-seeking possibilities and perceptions of social services. Additionally, the first interviews with young people will be carried out, focusing on their own experiences of ACE and help-seeking. Our presentation will include preliminary results from these first empirical studies. Collaborative workshops are held throughout the project and this participatory approach will also be a topic of our presentation.

The project has the potential to contribute much needed knowledge about children's help-seeking, considering different perspectives on the matter. Furthermore, through collaboration with stakeholders, the project aims to transfer knowledge on children's help-seeking to relevant organisations. By integrating these insights into practice, the project seeks to improve early identification and support strategies, ultimately enhancing the preconditions for children to seek and access help.

Social climate and victimisation in residential care - an exploration of youth's experiences

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:00: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Dr. Emelie Shanks [1], ***Dr. Peter Andersson*** [1], ***Dr. David Palsson*** [1]

1. *Stockholm University*

Each year, around 7,000 children and youth receive care in one of Sweden's residential care institutions. The purpose of such placements is to ensure a safe living environment and to contribute to positive development. However, several worrying reports of various types of abuse and violence in residential care have surfaced in Sweden, and there is a lack of systematic research focusing on placed youths' experiences of residential care.
In this presentation, we will outline the study design and preliminary results of our ongoing research project, which aims to describe and analyse the youth's experiences of social climate and victimisation in Swedish residential care institutions.
The study draws on various types of data: a national survey of approximately 300 young people at around 50 residential care institutions, in-depth individual interviews with 20-40 young people, and basic information about the included institutions collected from registers and representatives of the institutions. The data collection began in autumn 2024 and is expected to be completed during autumn of 2025. This presentation will be based on early findings from the first two types of data: the survey and the interviews. It will address the following research questions:

- How do the youth describe the group atmosphere and support from staff and other youth at the institution?
- How do youth perceive their opportunities for participation and personal development in care?
- Have the youth experienced violence from other children/youth and/or staff in care?

The findings we will present are closely aligned with key themes of the conference, particularly the quality of alternative care for children, the subjective well-being of children in care, mental health and well-being of children in alternative care, and child participation in alternative care. While data analysis is still ongoing, at the time of the conference, we will be able to highlight emerging patterns related to the social climate and young people's experiences of support, participation and victimisation.
Preliminary results indicate differences between young people's experiences of the social climate depending on the structure of the institution. In terms of victimisation, data suggest that young people may both be subjected to violence and, in certain situations, perpetrate violence themselves. Moreover, the violence manifests in various forms—primarily physical and psychological—though instances of sexual violence have also been reported.
In terms of implications, this is the first large-scale study in Sweden to explore young people's perspectives on social climate and victimisation in residential care. By systematically examining these issues, the study fills a significant research gap in Sweden and contributes to the evolving international research discourse in this area. The findings will also inform policy and practice by highlighting factors that contribute to a positive social climate and identifying risks for victimisation.

Children in Care and their Narratives of Violence

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:15: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Ms. Carina Pohl [1]

1. *PhD Student*

Objectives

Family violence is a significant factor leading to the placement of children in residential care. Through in-depth interviews with children aged 10-14 in residential care I have analyzed how they articulate their experiences of violence. Despite their systematically vulnerable positions, these children present themselves as capable actors in their narratives. My presentation focuses on reconstructing their agency, examining their ability and inability to act, and their power or lack of power to act.

Methods

The interviews were conducted as part of the Swiss study "Childhood vulnerability and children's understandings of well-being" (2021-2025). In the study 56 in-depth interviews with children, aged 8-14, were conducted. In doing so, the guidelines developed by the international cuwb-network on 'children's understandings of well-being' (cuwb.org) were followed. Thus, these interviews included open questions and many opportunities for child choice and co-design in their delivery.

The data collected was transcribed, anonymised, and analysed based on the grounded theory method. For closer examination, the children's agency was reconstructed using text analysis (based on Helfferich 2012 and Lucius-Hoene 2012).

Findings

Children describe various strategies they employ in violent situations, such as creating spatial distance, offering resistance, and seeking help from adults. They also develop methods to prevent further violence. The interview setting itself becomes a moment of empowerment, allowing children to narrate their stories in ways that reflect their agency and desired self-perception.

However, the limitations of their ability to act are also evident, primarily due to their vulnerable positions within the power hierarchy with adults. Despite their strategies, children often cannot stop or prevent violence in the long term. It is thus clearly recognisable that children remain in vulnerable positions despite their agency.

Implications/Conclusion

The children's past experiences significantly impact their daily lives, their mental health and their well-being, especially in residential care. They express a desire to discuss their experiences in trauma-informed and supportive environments, where they can speak freely without judgment. Creating such spaces and fostering trust-based relationships with social workers is crucial in residential care. Research on violence is essential to understanding the realities and life worlds of children in care, forming the foundation for developing settings where they can learn to cope with their experiences.

Growing Up in Residential Care; Institutional socialization vs family-based habitus

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:30: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Prof. Veronika Paulsen [1], ***Dr. Stian H Thoresen*** [2], ***Prof. Reinie Cordier*** [3], ***Dr. Regine Ringdal*** [2], ***Dr. Lauren Parsons*** [4], ***Dr. Donna Chung*** [4]

1. *NTNU,* ***2.*** *NTNU Samfunnsforskning AS,* ***3.*** *Northumbria University,* ***4.*** *Curtin University*

Young people who grow up in residential care often face challenges when transitioning into adulthood, and many struggle when it comes to independent living skills such as navigating financial management, conflict resolution, and everyday responsibilities. These are skills that are typically acquired informally within family settings. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital, together with life course theory, we explore how institutional upbringing and socialization in residential care shapes young people´s development of life skills and such "informal learning", their navigation of social relations and their transition to interdependent adulthood.

We will present and discuss preliminary findings from a study on the transition from out-of-home care to independence for young adults in Norway and Australia, funded by the Norwegian Research Council. In the project we have conduced qualitative interviews with around 100 care leavers, in addition to policy analysis, interviews with support network and analyses of registry data. The presentation is based on qualitative interviews with a sub-sample of around 50 young adults over 18 years, in Norway and Australia, who have aged out of residential care. Analyzing this data, our preliminary findings suggest that residential care provides structured environments where rules and routines guide daily life but often fails to equip youth with the implicit knowledge needed to manage many of the unpredictable challenges met in everyday-life. The young people experience challenges when it comes to e.g. budgeting, long-term financial planning, and negotiating personal and professional relationships – often leading to conflicts in relations and limited social support. These gaps in life skills highlight how institutional socialization differs from family-based habitus, reinforcing structural inequalities in the transition to adulthood.

The findings will contribute to discussions on how residential care can be restructured to better prepare young people for adulthood. By acknowledging the limitations of institutional upbringing, we can propose policy and practice recommendations to bridge the gap between those living in residential care/structured care and a family, to facilitate better wellbeing in adulthood for care leavers.

Searching for a Sense of Belonging: Running Away from Residential Care

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:45: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Dr. Anne-Kirstine Mølholt [1], ***Ms. Helle Schjellerup Nielsen*** [2], ***Dr. Ann-Karina Henriksen*** [2]

1. *The Danish Center for Social Science Research,* ***2.*** *University College Copenhagen*

When young people run away from out-of-home care in residential institution, focus is often on the risks and serious implications of this behaviour, both for the young people involved and the residential institutions. Research highlights the risks for the young people, including substance misuse, criminal and sexual victimisation, prostitution, and arrest (Biehal & Wade, 1999; Crosland & Dunlap, 2015; Pereda et al., 2022; Venables et al., 2025). It can also lead to educational disruption and long-term instability (Biehal & Wade, 1999; Crosland & Dunlap, 2015). From an institutional perspective, runaway behaviour disrupts everyday routines, affects other residents, increase placement breakdowns, and lead to increased inspection (McIntosh et al., 2010). A central focus in research has thus been how to predict and prevent runaway behaviour (Byers et al., 2024; Coutney & Zinn, 2009; Landry et al., 2024). Reasons for running away from residential care are typically framed through into two perspectives: running *away from* something, such as adverse or restrictive placements and caregivers, or running *towards* something, such as friends or family (Courtney & Zinn, 2009; Crosland & Dunlap, 2015). These perspectives are often referred to as 'push' and 'pull' effects.

This study aims to move beyond these dichotomies by asking: 'How can running away from residential institutions be understood within a theoretical frame of belonging?' A sense of belonging is here understood as a multidimensional experience of feeling at home in one's physical and social environment (Bengtsson & Mølholt, 2018; Lähdesmäki et al., 2016; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that belonging must be studied across various analytical levels: social locations; identifications and emotional attachments; and ethical and political values. Davies (2000) adds that the concept of belonging inherently involves longing. These two feelings are mutually constitutive, so that a longing for something different is inherently tied to the experience of belonging. To *belong*, therefore, is not a static condition but a dynamic process, opening up a multidimensional understanding of stability and instability in both physical and social environments.

Empirically, the study draws on 18 individual interviews and five focus groups conducted with young people from seven residential institutions. Findings suggest that running away is not simply an act of push or pull but often reflects complex emotional and relational dynamics. These dynamics are positioned on a spectrum between belonging and longing, formed through interactions with their surroundings (Bartoscko & Herland, 2024; Karam & Robert, 2013).

The study challenges dominant risk-based discourses by highlighting how running away may also represent an effort to seek or reclaim a sense of belonging. Implications for practice include the importance of fostering environments where belonging can be safely explored and experienced. Further research should examine how residential institutions can respond to expressions of disconnection in ways that support young people's emotional and relational needs.

QUALITY STANDARDS FOR A DEINSTITUTIONALIZING APPROACH TO THE ATTENTION OF CARE LEAVERS

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:00: (SEECEL A1) - Oral

Dr. Aida Urrea Monclús [1], ***Dr. Sara Pérez-Hernando*** [2], ***Dr. Anna Mundet-Bolós*** [2]

1. *Universitat de Lleida,* ***2.*** *Universitat de Barcelona*

Young people in care, upon reaching the age of majority, are placed in a vulnerable situation with a high risk of homelessness or re-institutionalization. Both internationally and nationally, strategies and initiatives are being promoted to transform the institutionalized support and care system into a system in which all people can pursue their chosen life plans. Therefore, care leavers must have adequate support to enable them to transition to adulthood from a deinstitutionalizing perspective.

This communication presents the results emerging from the analysis of the design, experimentation, and evaluation of Innovative Actions for the Successful Emancipation of Care Leavers. The IMEX project was developed over three years (2022-2024) in Spain, in 36 organizations belonging to the FEPA Federation, and funded by the Spanish Ministry of Social Rights 2030.

For the analysis of the project, participatory action research was conducted through participatory evaluation sessions using reflective practice, with the aim of analysing, reflecting, and building shared knowledge. A total of 275 professionals, 47 young people, and 87 experts distributed throughout the different phases of the project participated. A bottom-up process established four categories for content analysis: professional well-being, communication, methodology, and the community approach. The first three were included in the dimension of person-centred care.

The results highlight the incorporation of Person-Centred Care and the Community Approach as the main axes of the action. This entails changes in (1) Direct Care for individuals, (2) Internal Coordination within the same organization, and (3) External Coordination with other organizations, services, and resources that intersect with care leavers.

As the final product of the research, 21 quality standards are presented, defined as necessary conditions for implementing a deinstitutionalizing approach to the attention of care leavers. Their application aims to promote a change in organizational culture and seek a change that goes beyond professionals as the sole protagonists, but rather a change within the organization, which should extend to institutional and political levels.

How to Improve Foster Carer Retention and Recruitment

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:15: (SEECEL A1) - Oral

Dr. Ellie Ott [1]

1. *Nuffield Family Justice Observatory*

Globally, there is a movement to place more children in need of alternative care arrangements in foster care and family environments. Recruiting, retaining and appropriately supporting non-relative foster carers can help children in care thrive. In England, despite the growing number of children in care, the national statistics show a decrease in the number of approved foster carers for five years in a row (Ofsted, 2024) – leading to greater challenges in matching children in care with foster carers who can meet their needs and leading to a focus in social care reform on foster carer retention and recruitment.

Dr Ott led a scoping study conducted by the Centre for Evidence and Implementation, commissioned by The Fostering Network and funded by KPMG Foundation, aiming to systematically and comprehensively understand the evidence on the national picture of recruitment and retention. This research presents a new re-analysis of the national-level English Ofsted data of all foster carers, a re-analysis of the Fostering Network's 2022 State of the Nation survey on foster carers and fostering services (the largest survey of English foster carers), a new survey 2023 of over 1,000+ foster carers in England, and individual and group interviews with prospective foster carers, current foster carers, and previous foster carers. In doing so, the research highlights surprising trends in the trajectory of foster carers by age and ethnicity and gaps in the national data about why enquiries don't lead to applications and applications don't lead to approved foster carers. Throughout the research, an emphasis is placed on equity to understand how prospective foster carers' trajectories differ by characteristics and intersect with stigma, discrimination and social inequalities.

The research challenges a focus on 'recruitment' and 'the foster carer market' to think about perspectives on what we can learn from the foster carers who stay, the quality of care, and on retention. The research also presents systematically what foster carers think would improve retention and recruitment. Dr Ott will also present ongoing work she's led or played a senior role on linked to messages from the research, including evaluation of foster carer recruitment hubs, funding of the Mockingbird model of foster care based on evaluation evidence around retention (Ott et al, 2020), an evaluation of programmes to support children in foster care's sleep, diet, and exercise to improve their mental health, and an evaluation of Fostering Connections - a trauma-informed training for children's social workers and foster carer's supervising social workers. The evaluation proposes next steps for data in England and for further research on foster carer retention and recruitment, with implications for thinking about foster carer retention and recruitment within and across countries.

Has anyone thought to ask if youth can swim?

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:30: (SEECEL A1) - Oral

Dr. Annie Smith [1], ***Dr. Maya Peled*** [1]

1. *McCreary Centre Society*

Introduction: Fatal and non-fatal drownings have been increasing in British Columbia, Canada since the Covid-19 pandemic, including high-profile cases of children and youth drowning while in out-of-home care.
Method: Data from the population-level 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey (n=38,488 students) was analyzed to consider whether youth with care experience were able to swim at a similar rate as their peers without care experience. Analyses were also carried out to identify barriers to taking part in extracurricular activities such as swimming.
Results: When comparing youth with any type of child welfare experience to those who were never in care, the percentage who could not swim was comparable (9.5% vs. 8.4; p=.14). However, when types of care were examined separately, youth who had been in a group home were more likely to report they could not swim compared to young people who had never been in care (16.5% vs. 8.4%; $p < .01$). In contrast, youth who experienced a "family model" type of care—i.e., a foster home or Extended Family Program—were as likely as youth who had never been in care to be able to swim.
Also, youth who had been in a group home in the past year were more likely than their peers without this experience to report barriers to participating in extracurricular activities such as swimming in the past 12 months. Barriers included being unable to afford to participate (16.2% vs. 8.8%), lack of transportation (17.8% vs. 11.5%), their caregiver not allowing them to participate (12.4% vs. 6.9%), and that their health needs/disability could not be accommodated (6.1% vs. 2.2%).
Conclusion/implications: Youth with out-of-home care experience face inequities in their access to extracurricular activities, including swimming. Swimming is a potentially life saving skill which should be incorporated into core school curriculum to ensure children and youth in out-of-home care have equitable access to lessons.

Applying youth-led research findings to address the needs of youth transitioning out of care in British Columbia, Canada

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:45: (SEECEL A1) - Oral

Ms. Evelyn McGowan [1], ***Dr. Annie Smith*** [1]

1. *McCreary Centre Society*

Objectives: The presentation will share a successful example of transferring research evidence into practice.
Method: A Collective Impact initiative in Vancouver, British Columbia (BC) has been using research conducted by youth with out-of-home care experience to guide its strategic planning and operations.
Since 2019, trained youth researchers with care experience have been conducting a longitudinal study of youth transitioning out of foster care, staffed residential care, and other types of government care with the aim of identifying the supports and resources necessary for a successful transition. Young people in government care are invited to complete a survey six months before turning 19 (the age of majority in BC), and every six months thereafter until their 27th birthday. The goal of the study is to identify factors that contribute to youth's successful transition out of care, as well as areas where more supports may be needed to help reduce inequities between youth with care experience and their peers never in care.
Results: Findings of the study to date have highlighted three key areas where youth need additional support: housing, food security, and pet care. Around two thirds of youth (68%) faced barriers to finding housing in the past six months, including not being able to afford housing (65%; among those who had experienced barriers). Around 3 in 10 youth (29%) currently lived with a pet, and most youth who had a pet reported that their pet made them feel safer (90%) and improved their well-being (95%). However, 32% of youth reported that having a pet was a barrier to finding housing. In addition to challenges with finding pet-friendly accommodations, youth identified other challenges associated with having a pet, including difficulties paying vet bills.
Also, most youth who had transitioned out of care (66%) went to bed hungry at least sometimes because they did not have enough money for food, including 16% who often or always went to bed hungry. Youth who experienced food security were more likely to report positive health and well-being, including feeling hopeful for their future (50% of youth who never went to bed hungry vs. 26% who went to bed hungry at least sometimes). Members of the collective have worked with non-traditional partners (including housing cooperatives, food collectives, and animal welfare agencies) to address the needs of youth in these three key areas.
Conclusions/implications: Youth-led research can identify key areas of priority that would likely be missed by adult researchers without lived experience, and which can be key to supporting young people to experience a successful transition from out-of-home care into adulthood. Findings from the youth researchers' longitudinal study have helped to guide the strategic direction and practices of the Collective Impact initiative to contribute to improving outcomes for youth transitioning out of care.

Transitioning Home: Trajectories of Short-Term Residential Care Combined with Evidence-Based Systemic Intervention

Wednesday, 10th September - 17:00: (SEECEL A1) - Oral

Dr. Annemarieke Blankestein [1], ***Ms. Anne Rovers*** [2], ***Dr. Aurelie Lange*** [3], ***Dr. Rachel van der Rijken*** [4], ***Mrs. Linde Broekhoven*** [5], ***Dr. Dineke Feenstra*** [2], ***Prof. Ron Scholte*** [6]

1. *de Viersprong, Netherlands Institute for Personality Disorders / Behavioural Science Institute, Radboud University,* ***2.*** *de Viersprong, Netherlands Institute for Personality Disorders,* ***3.*** *Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences,* ***4.*** *Praktikon,* ***5.*** *Pluryn,* ***6.*** *Behavioural Science Institute, Radboud University*

The importance of implementing family-centred practice in residential care is widely known today. Implementation and use of evidence-based systemic interventions can help families with the young person's transition home, avoid ruptures in family relationships, attain better family outcomes, and help to maintain improvements in behaviour problems of the young person post-discharge.

Our prior research on the use of family-centered practice in secure care combined with the use of systemic interventions (N = 111) demonstrated that families are not referred to evidence-based systemic interventions as often as they could. 71% of families meet these criteria according to psychologists, but only 21% of those are actually referred to an evidence-based systemic intervention pre- or post-discharge (Blankestein, 2021).

Two subsequent research studies (N = 86; N = 81) looked at outcomes of trajectories combining short-term residential care for adolescents with the evidence-based Multisystemic Therapy (MST). This trajectory is called ThuisBest in Dutch (or "HomeBest" in English). In ThuisBest, young people are placed in secure care for a short-term stay of 4-8 weeks, while evidence-based MST starts with parents in the home environment. Treatment sessions with parents and their child are conducted at home and at the institution, all while building up the amount of leave spent with parents during the placement. The residential practitioners are trained in ThuisBest and MST principles, adopting a systemic treatment approach. A quality assurance system monitors if and how practitioners adhere to the ThuisBest model.

Results on ThuisBest show 72-82% of young people are living at home at the end of the trajectory (Rovers et al., 2019; Blankestein et al., 2025), which is a larger percentage than seen nationwide in the Netherlands (<50%; Broekhoven et al., 2023). Results also show that over 75% of young people are no longer truant or involved with the police by the end of ThuisBest. The duration of placement drops to 56-59 days (Rovers et al., 2019; Blankestein et al., 2025), compared to an average of 6+ months nationwide. The relationship between outcomes and treatment adherence – from the perspectives of professionals and families – was also assessed and will be discussed.

Since 2023, ThuisBest trajectories have become available with and without a court order. Residential stays in more 'open' residential facilities (4-6 weeks) or secure care (6-8 weeks) are combined with MST. Insights on the effects of or experiences with these trajectories are not yet available. Therefore, in 2026, we aim to conduct a participatory and qualitative research study on the experiences of young people, parents, and clinicians with ThuisBest. Through this study, we aim to gain insight into (un)helpful treatment elements and experiences that

assist young people and families in their transition home post-discharge. To achieve this, practitioners, practice-based researchers, young persons, parents and experience-based experts are co-designing the study. Although the study design process is ongoing, we will share insights into which steps we have taken in (co-)designing this study so far.

A Trauma -Informed Approach To Service-Learning With Vulnerable Young People: A Youth Participatory Action Research Project

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:00: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Ms. Ellen Froustis [1]

1. *Rees Centre, University of Oxford*

Rationale

Adolescence is a time when young people develop interests, talents and abilities as part of an integrated self-concept to discover a “possible future self”. Educational, extra-curricular and work experiences can spark an interest for their future. However, for Children in Care (CIC), opportunities to recognize strengths and work toward a future “possible self”, can be limited due to challenges in their background that can limit access to opportunities (Oyserman, et al, 2011). Learning while serving others is known as Service-learning (SL), an experiential educational method with positive outcomes for empowering agency for learning, enhancing self-concept, and inspiring purpose for future goals (Scales et al, 2006; Smith et al, 2018). Facilitating a trauma-responsive SL- YPAR project through the lens of the Theory of Possible Selves with young people in care has been less researched and was worthy of investigating.

Methods

This youth participatory action research project was a DPhil Education project at the University of Oxford. It engaged four young people, ages 14-17, supported by the Oxfordshire Virtual School, in a 9-week summer program. The aim was for young people to investigate a social issue of their choice that impacted their life and to develop a community service project to benefit other youth.

Young people identified that social media had the most impact on their life, particularly their identity development. They engaged in a review of literature and created a video project to share with schools.

DPhil research questions centred on identifying the mechanisms of a service-learning, youth participatory action research that can strengthen youth voice, connectedness/belonging, and adolescent purpose for future educational or work goals.

Data was collected from weekly youth reflections, drawings, a pre-post Possible Selves open-ended questionnaire, a focus group and researcher observations. A reflective thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was used to transcribe, code and triangulate data to strengthen validity of findings.

Findings

Findings showed that young people developed trust in their “voice” as a result of negotiating and acting upon “choices” during project development. “Connectedness and belonging” with peers, that were unknown to eachother, developed through shared interests and engaging on a common goal. Participants either identified, clarified or confirmed personal strengths, talents, abilities they perceived as useful to their future work or education goals. Trauma-informed researcher facilitation skills were beneficial to encouraging young people to co-lead as equals in the research and project development process.

Outcomes of this research, although limited due to the small sample size, can inform the work of educators, researchers and youth development leaders who aim to provide vulnerable young people with meaningful experiential opportunities for positive youth development.

“It’s going to change my practice”: the secondary impact of a simulated case file exploration of professional decision making

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:15: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Dr. Nina Maxwell [1]

1. *Principal Research Fellow*

Objectives

Any child of any age, gender or ethnicity can be criminally exploited but certain groups are at an increased risk, including those in residential or foster care and those who have been adopted (Whittaker, 2018). With limited adult oversight and no sense of familial belonging, these children are vulnerable to exploitative relationships but when this involves conflict with the law, “professionals responsible for child welfare and protection have given way to policing and criminal justice responses as the dominant legal framework” (Jay Review, 2024:48). Consequently, criminally exploited children often receive a criminal justice rather than a safeguarding approach.

Since devolution, Wales has passed significant legislation in relation to social welfare, including the Social Services Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 which promotes collaborative approaches between agencies. Welsh Government have also published the All Wales Safeguarding Procedures that are aimed at improving child safeguarding and enhancing multi-agency responses for a range of issues, including child criminal exploitation. This non-statutory guidance states that when criminal exploitation is suspected, children’s services will arrange a multi-agency strategy meeting to consider what actions should be taken to safeguard the child. This study was funded by Health and Care Research Wales to examine the service pathways for criminally exploited children and the factors which influence professional decision-making regarding service provision.

Methods

A simulated case file and think aloud techniques were used to explore professional decision making about service pathways for a criminally exploited child. The case file was a composite of 15 children identified from case file analysis in one Welsh local authority.

Twenty five professionals from a range of welfare and justice roles and three young people engaged with youth justice services completed a 60-minute activity. They were asked to identify what was happening in the child’s life and what actions they would take using a simulated case file of 26 documents. The activity began with the breakdown of the kinship care placement and ended with the child requesting removal from the foster home to an out of area placement following a violent incident.

Findings

All participants reported the activity was realistic with several noting similarities to existing cases. Participants expressed frustration about the level of missing, incomplete or inconsistent information which was deemed detrimental to effective decision making.

Participants actively sought information about the wishes and feelings of the child but noted this information lacked depth and failed to offer a rich account of the child’s life. Even where information was recorded about the child’s wishes and feelings, there was no indication it had been used as a basis for service provision.

Most participants indicated frustration about missed opportunities for intervention and queried why actions had not been taken at earlier stages of the child’s life.

Conclusions/implications

The study had practical implications for case file completion and capturing multiple perspectives to inform service responses. An unexpected outcome was the extent to which professionals used the simulated activity

as a training tool, with many self-reporting changes to their practice based on the insights they had gleaned.

“What is her last name and where does that bitch live?” – Digital Violence, Harassment, and Threats Targeting Child Welfare/Social Workers: A Scoping Review

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:30: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Prof. Ingunn Studsrød [1]***, Dr. Ida Bruheim-Escobar*** [2]

1. *The University of stavanger,* ***2.*** *The University of Stavanger*

Background:
Child welfare/social workers are among the most vulnerable professionals to experience work-related violence, harassment, and threats. Such experiences have a detrimental impact on individuals, organizations, and the society, affecting people’s dignity, health, and overall well-being. As society becomes increasingly digital, violence and harassment have also entered the digital spheres.
On social media platforms, anonymous individuals and groups can also easily reach vast audiences, spreading racist, discriminatory, hateful, sexist, xenophobic, and other forms of harmful speech. A Norwegian survey revealed that nearly one in four municipal child welfare workers have experienced cyberbullying, often originating from the at-risk families and children they serve. To prevent and combat the widespread nature and severity of this issue, we need to identify and examine current research literature on digital violence, harassment, and threats (here called online aggression) directed at child welfare/social workers.
Objectives:
This presentation aims to share findings from an ongoing scoping review examining research on online aggression directed toward social workers. We examine research in current area, highlight the key characteristics of the existing research, and identify significant gaps in the field.
Method:
The scoping review followed the steps outlined by Arksey and O’Malley (2005). By performing systematic literature searches in the databases Scopus, SocIndex, Academic Search Premier, and Web of Science and doing hand searches of reference lists of included studies.
Preliminary findings:
We identified only 10 studies on online aggression towards social workers. Most were empirical, one had a theoretical approach. Key characteristics of these studies will be presented, showing the broad spectrum of platforms for online aggression, various types and content, and the effects on professionals. We also will highlight gaps in current research.
Conclusion/implications:
Current study illustrates the complexity and nature of online aggression and the importance of awareness raising, and to find efficient ways to prevent and battle it.

The health of care experienced people: a scoping review

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:45: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Dr. Davara Bennett [1], ***Dr. Michelle Black*** [1], ***Dr. Yanhua Chen*** [1], ***Ms. Mia Hankinson*** [1], ***Dr. Melissa Harden*** [2], ***Dr. Yiwen Liu*** [2], ***Dr. David Marshall*** [2], ***Dr. Mark Rodgers*** [2], ***Dr. Emily South*** [2], ***Prof. Amanda Sowden*** [2], ***Prof. David Taylor-Robinson*** [1]

1. *University of Liverpool,* ***2.*** *University of York*

Background

Reducing health inequalities for care experienced people is central to the UK Government's strategy to reform children's social care in England. This requires a holistic understanding of the nature, scope and limitations of the available evidence on the health outcomes of care experienced populations. We undertook a scoping review to identify and map evidence from systematic reviews of the health outcomes of care experienced people.

Methods

Comprehensive searches of topic-specific and systematic review databases were undertaken in March 2024 to identify systematic reviews published in high-income countries since 2013. The population of interest included children looked after across different care settings, reunified children, adopted children, and orphans. All health-related outcomes were of interest. Study selection and data extraction were performed by two independent reviewers. Results are presented in a series of interactive evidence maps created using EPPI-Mapper, alongside stakeholder reflections.

Results

Of 9,299 unique records identified, 329 met the inclusion criteria and were included in the evidence maps. Most reviews focused on social/emotional health and mental health, with relatively little evidence on physical health. A small proportion evaluated risk factors for care entry (N=15) or interventions to prevent care entry (N=17). Interventions often targeted children or families rather than the wider living/working conditions or macro-level, and largely involved information/education provision or psychological counselling. Just over half of reviews assessed the quality of the included primary studies (N=184, 56%).

Discussion

There are clear gaps in the systematic review literature for physical health outcomes and care entry risks/prevention. Prevention is a stakeholder priority, but existing evidence may be skewed towards program-focused, rather than policy-focused interventions. Reviews tend to address discrete parental risk factors, rather than the social conditions that give rise to those risks. Some reviews did not assess the quality of the studies included, or included primarily studies from outside the UK, thereby limiting the reliability and applicability of their findings to our UK policy stakeholders.

The provision of material assistance as an important component of child welfare prevention efforts

Wednesday, 10th September - 17:00: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Dr. Rachael Lefebvre [1], ***Ms. Brenda Moody*** [2], ***Ms. Jolanta Rasteniene*** [2], ***Dr. Barbara Fallon*** [1]

1. *University of Toronto,* ***2.*** *Peel Children's Aid Society*

Objectives: A growing body of research has shown promising results in the use of various economic and material supports to prevent subsequent child welfare involvement. While providing material assistance is a common practice in child welfare settings, it has received negligible scholarly attention. The objectives of this study are to: (1) examine the Ontario child welfare system's use of financial/material assistance for families who are struggling to pay for their basic necessities; and (2) identify the distinct profiles of need for families who experience economic hardship and are investigated by the Ontario child protection system. This presentation will also showcase how the largest child welfare agency in Ontario has integrated economic and material supports as a core component of prevention efforts.

Methods: A representative sample of 6,621 child maltreatment-related investigations was analyzed from the Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2023, a representative cross-sectional study of child welfare investigations conducted in Ontario, Canada in 2023. Univariate analyses describe the experience of economic hardship among Ontario child welfare investigations and the system's use of material assistance. A latent class analysis was conducted to identify and describe distinct classes of need using indicators of child, caregiver, and economic adversity.

Results: In 22% of all investigations, the child protection worker noted that the household was struggling to pay for at least one basic necessity captured by the study (e.g., food, housing, medical care). Financial and/or material assistance was most likely to be provided by the child welfare agency for food (i.e., provided to 53% of households who were struggling to pay for food) and transportation (27%). Agencies provided financial assistance to support housing costs in just over one in ten situations where the household was struggling to pay for their housing (11%). Overall, material assistance was provided in less than half of investigations where the household was noted to be struggling to pay for at least one basic necessity (45%). The latent class analysis revealed six distinct classes of need among investigations and there were several profiles where indicators of poverty were probable. Rate of transfer to ongoing child welfare services varied greatly by class.

Conclusions: The findings highlight the importance of ensuring an optimal fit between the distinct needs of investigated families and the child welfare interventions provided. Interventions that are tailored to the specific constellations of co-occurring adversities that families face may be more effective in reducing the need for future child welfare involvement and/or more intrusive child protection responses. It is likely that investigated families who experience poverty would benefit from a range of economic and material supports. Results indicate that there is room for greater uptake and more consistent use of these types of supports.

Well-being and psychosocial adjustment in the transition to adulthood among young people with residential care experience

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:00: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Dr. Maite Román [1], ***Ms. Lucía Cabezas*** [1], ***Ms. Lucía López*** [1], ***Dr. Pablo Carrera*** [1], ***Dr. Jesús Palacios*** [1]

1. *Universidad de Sevilla*

International legislation advocates for prioritizing family-based protection measures in cases of child and adolescent vulnerability. However, residential care remains highly prevalent in countries such as Spain, where, in 2023, 17112 children and adolescents resided in protective care centers. One of the major challenges of the child protection system lies in ensuring a successful social integration of these young individuals upon reaching adulthood.

This study is part of the longitudinal research project *Adoption and Institutionalization Study* (LAIS.US) whose goal is to describe the developmental processes and trajectories of people who have experienced early adversity. Specifically, the present study analyzes the well-being and psychosocial adjustment of a cohort of 75 young adults aged 18 to 25 who had experienced residential care in Spain before reaching adulthood. The findings were compared to a community-based sample of 174 young individuals who had never been involved with the child protection system.

The study examines their current well-being and psychosocial adjustment through an online questionnaire, incorporating standardized assessment measures such as the *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* (Goodman, 1997) and *The Network of Relationships Inventory* (Buhrmester & Furman, 2008). The results indicate greater difficulties in adjustment and social integration among those with residential care experience compared to the community sample, with higher levels of both internalizing and externalizing problems. Similarly, young individuals with a background in residential care exhibited more challenges in peer and romantic relationships than those in the community sample.

These findings underscore the pressing need to continue providing support to young adults who have transitioned out of the child welfare system, ensuring their full and adequate social integration and extending protective measures beyond childhood and adolescence.

From Lived Experience to Educational Innovation – Young Women from Alternative Care as Co-Educators in Social Work through Theatre-Based Practice

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:15: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Dr. Nour Shimei [1], ***Ms. Michal Naomi Elkayam*** [2], ***Dr. shimrit prins engelsman*** [2]

1. *The Faculty of Social Work Ashkelon Academic College, Israel,* ***2.*** *The Faculty of Social Work Ashkelon Academic College*

The meaningful engagement of service users as experts by experience has the potential to enrich social work education and promote empowerment. This study presents an innovative teaching model that integrates young women with lived experience in welfare and alternative care systems into academic training through participatory theatre techniques.

Using an action research methodology, we developed a structured nine-step model based on the collaboration between an academic institution, a community organisation, and young women aged 18–26 with experience in alternative care. As part of a third-year BA social work practicum, we facilitated a joint seminar with participants from the For Life project (pseudonym), which supports young women in planning and achieving their employment, education, and housing goals.

At the heart of the seminar was the encounter between social work students and young women living in vulnerable and marginalised circumstances. The process aimed to create a shared space for dialogue, reflection, and transformation—enabling future social workers to learn directly from those with lived experience, and offering young women a role in shaping how their knowledge is received and valued within an academic context.

Two core principles underpin the model:

(1) the integration of lived experience with academic and professional knowledge, and

(2) the fostering of fluid and shifting roles among all participants.

These principles were implemented through theatre-based participatory techniques, enabling dynamic, dialogic encounters between students, lecturers, practitioners, and young women currently or formerly involved in welfare services. The process fostered mutual learning and challenged traditional hierarchies within educational settings.

Findings highlight the importance of creating structured, inclusive learning environments that centre the voices and agency of young people with care experience. The model contributes to innovation in social work education, supports trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice, and strengthens youth participation and social inclusion.

This presentation will outline the nine steps through concrete examples from the process, drawing on the perspectives and voices of the young women, social work students, professionals, and lecturers involved.

Supporting at-risk families in the early years through preventive intervention: a mixed-methods evaluation of a participatory assessment tool within the Italian P.I.P.P.I. Program

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:30: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Dr. Armando Bello [1], ***Dr. Sara Serbati*** [1]

1. *University of Padova*

The socio-educational interactions that children experience in their early years—especially in the first thousand days—are crucial to their development and wellbeing. Yet a growing body of evidence highlights how socioeconomic inequalities can compromise early development, exposing children living in poverty to environments often lacking in cognitive and emotional stimulation (Milani 2018; Shonkoff & Richter, 2013). Supporting parenting and caregiving practices is therefore essential to reducing inequalities and preventing developmental risks, particularly in families facing vulnerability.

In response to these challenges, the Italian *P.I.P.P.I.* program (*Program for Intervention to Prevent Institutionalization*) aims to prevent child maltreatment and out-of-home placements by innovating care practices through a multidimensional and intersectoral approach. This contribution presents findings from an impact evaluation of the *"Maps to Explore the 0–3"* (Serbati et al., 2023), a participatory tool used with families at risk of neglect, designed to support professionals and caregivers in recognizing and responding to the developmental needs of children aged 0–3, while co-constructing individualized care plans.

Grounded in a pluralistic evaluation approach (Fives et al., 2017) that integrates post-positivist, constructivist, and pragmatic paradigms, the research adopts a mixed-methods design with a convergent structure (Greene et al., 2007). It combines a quasi-experimental impact evaluation and a questionnaire for practitioners with qualitative data from focus groups with professionals and interviews with parents. The analysis focuses on three dimensions: implementation, perceived effectiveness, and impact on children and families.

Findings indicate that *Maps* is an effective tool in enhancing professionals' and families' capacity to consciously address young children's developmental needs from a holistic perspective. The tool contributed to strengthening protective factors, reducing risk in vulnerable contexts, improving relationships between families and services, and fostering parental autonomy and reflective thinking.

The study confirms the transformative potential of the tool when embedded in relational practices grounded in reflexivity. Theoretically, it highlights the integration of experiential and professional knowledge. Methodologically, it contributes to the development of mixed-methods approaches as a powerful response to the complexity of evaluating family support programs, capturing both measurable outcomes and the depth of lived experiences. Practically, it provides recommendations for scaling up and transferring knowledge into practice, contributing to the broader discourse on early intervention and parenting support in child welfare—particularly in working with at-risk families to prevent neglect and institutionalization.

Focusing on the Needs of Children Exposed to Harm in Australia

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:45: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Ms. Deborah Tsorbaris [1]

1. *Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare*

Over the past 15 years, Australia has undertaken significant legal and policy reforms to protect children from harm, including mandatory reporting laws (requiring professionals to report suspected child abuse), reportable conduct schemes (requiring organisations to respond to allegations of abuse), and multiple Royal Commissions, most notably the National Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Despite these efforts, persistent gaps remain, leaving many children at risk and highlighting the uneven implementation of reform findings.

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS), the first national research of its kind, revealed that 62% of children and young people report experiencing at least one form of maltreatment. In Victoria, approximately 4,500 children are currently subject to intervention orders, legal mechanisms designed to protect at-risk children. These figures signal ongoing gaps in early intervention, family support, and child-focused services. Many children continue to experience unmet needs for mental health care, developmental support, and trauma-informed interventions.

Family violence responses often prioritise adult victims, particularly women, leaving children's complex needs secondary. Some children respond to the trauma they experience by using violence themselves. Evidence from the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare's Adolescent Violence in the Home (AVITH) initiative, examining adolescents who use violence in response to trauma, demonstrates that these children are often subject to punitive rather than therapeutic interventions, reflecting a system focused on compliance rather than healing.

Internationally, models such as Barnahus in Europe provide holistic, integrated services—combining legal, psychological, and social support—that centre on the child's experience and recovery. Australia urgently requires similar child-centred approaches that prioritise long-term healing over temporary or punitive measures.

A fundamental shift is needed. Future responses must recognise the multifaceted impacts of harm on children, address their unique needs, and implement restorative, evidence-based interventions. Only through a preventative, therapeutic, and child-focused approach can Australia create a system that genuinely supports children to recover, thrive, and live free from harm.

Feasibility Evaluation of a Parenting Programme for Fathers Involved with Children's Social Care

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:00: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Dr. Paula Oliveira [1], ***Dr. Saul Hillman*** [2], ***Dr. Michelle Sleed*** [2], ***Ms. Maddie Rawlinson*** [2], ***Ms. Rose Eagle-Hull*** [2], ***Dr. Meryl Westlake*** [2], ***Prof. Nick Midgley*** [2]

1. *ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion - Association,* ***2.*** *Anna Freud Centre*

Fathers involved with children's social care (CSC) often face complex challenges, yet they often feel are under-represented in parenting support interventions and evaluations, and excluded from their children's social care plans. The Southwark Fathers Group is a 10-week group-based parenting programme developed in the London Borough of Southwark for fathers in need of support. In this study, fathers were eligible if their children were aged 4–12 years-old and had a social worker. This study aimed to assess the feasibility of delivering and evaluating the Fathers Group in preparation for a future efficacy trial.

This study used a mixed-methods design. Out of 58 fathers who agreed to being contacted, 36 were recruited to the study, across three cohorts from September 2023 to July 2024 (one cohort runs each school term). Participants completed pre- and post-intervention assessments, including the Child Abuse Potential Inventory (CAPI), mental health and parenting measures, and qualitative interviews. Partners were also invited to take part. Relevant professionals in the borough were interviewed (N = 18) about their views of the programme and of a future large-scale evaluation. A scoping survey of CSC professionals from other local authorities in the UK (N = 32) assessed wider applicability and interest in the programme. A feasibility cost evaluation was also undertaken.

Results showed moderate programme retention (60%) and high completion of pre- and post-intervention assessments among research participants (78% at post-test). The CAPI, our primary outcome measure, showed a statistically significant decrease in abuse potential scores (mean reduction of 33.85, p = .013), suggesting sensitivity to change, though findings must be interpreted cautiously due to the small, non-randomised sample. Fathers reported improved parenting confidence, better relationships, and reduced isolation. Qualitative data highlighted the programme's relational approach and facilitator rapport as key enablers of engagement.

Barriers included recruitment challenges, scheduling conflicts, and logistical issues. Fathers showed significant reluctance to engage in the study before direct personal contact with the researchers, emphasising the need for trust-building in future studies. The intervention was found to be affordable when compared to other parenting programmes, with an estimated cost of £225 per participant.

Qualitative findings from both fathers and professionals indicated that a future randomised controlled trial (RCT) would be more acceptable if designed with an active comparator arm, while a waitlist control design may not be acceptable for this population. Both fathers and professionals expressed reluctance to be randomised if it meant delaying access to support. Recommendations for future evaluations include earlier engagement strategies, session scheduling flexibility, and refining outcome measures.

Scoping survey responses from CSC professionals across the UK confirmed the lack of father-specific support and a strong demand for scalable interventions like this one.

This study demonstrates the feasibility and value of father-focused parenting interventions in CSC settings. It offers important insights for scaling and evaluating similar programmes across diverse local authorities, with the ultimate aim of improving outcomes for children through strengthened paternal engagement.

Foster children's casebrokers and gatekeepers: A comparison between foster care workers and foster parents

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:15: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Mr. Matthias De Coster [1], ***Prof. Johan Vanderfaeillie*** [2], ***Dr. Delphine West*** [2], ***Ms. Camille Verheyden*** [1], ***Ms. Tamara Pigozne*** [3], ***Prof. Jolanta Pivoriene*** [4], ***Prof. Frank Van Holen*** [2]

1. *Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Psychology,* ***2.*** *Vrije Universiteit Brussel,* ***3.*** *Rēzeknes Tehnoloģiju akadēmija,* ***4.*** *mykolo romerio universitates*

Background and objectives

During the placement of a child in family foster care, parenting is shared by several parental figures. While birth parents retain (to a lesser degree) legal responsibility over their child, the foster child is being cared for by foster parents. A third "parent" appears in the form of social workers, referred to as foster care workers. They monitor the foster care placement and support foster children, birth parents and foster parents. If foster parents feel the parenting situation is out of their control, they can ask for support beyond the ordinary. Foster care workers may then provide extra support in the form of services available within foster care or act as brokers to specialist care. In this presentation, (dis)agreement between foster care workers and foster parents on a need of extra support in foster parents is investigated.

Methods

A total of 297 foster care workers and 443 foster parents were presented eight different vignettes, describing the problem behavior (internalizing or externalizing) of a ten-year-old foster child (boy or girl) and the foster parents' reaction to it (reflecting low or high quality of parenting). To each vignette, participants had to rate the need of extra support in the foster parents on a 5-point Likert scale. Data was examined using a repeated measures mixed design analysis.

Findings

Main effects were found between the groups of respondents, between boys and girls, and between foster parents reacting with low and high quality of parenting. An interaction effect was found in the combination between the type of problem behavior and the groups of respondents.

Conclusion

Foster care workers assessed the need of extra support in foster parents higher than did foster parents. Them being sensitive for foster parents' needs is reassuring. Moreover, low quality of parenting was both identified by foster care workers and foster parents. Yet when problem behavior was externalizing, foster parents assessed the need of extra support in foster parents higher than did foster care workers. Surprisingly, both foster care workers and foster parents agreed on a higher need of extra support in foster parents when caring was done for a girl. These findings indicate foster parents' support needs cannot be derived from characteristics of the foster child, but should be expressed by foster parents themselves.

Supporting the use of observation and reflective practice in residential childcare practice in Scotland

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:30: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Ms. Mihaela Manole [1], ***Ms. Laura Quinn*** [1], ***Ms. Gemma Watson*** [1], ***Ms. Sarah Deeley*** [1]

1. *CELCIS, University of Strathclyde*

Objectives and context:
This oral presentation aims to increase understanding of how to support residential childcare practitioners in using observation and feedback to strengthen their reflective practice, ultimately delivering high-quality residential childcare. It draws from our extensive experience with Active Implementation (Fixsen et al., 2019), which provides a set of frameworks for guiding the implementation of effective practice. Through a participatory approach, we drafted a practice profile outlining eight core components of high-quality residential childcare practice and continued to create the conditions for its effective implementation. These included readiness for staff's practice to be observed so that observational data could inform coaching and improve support for staff. Two children's houses were selected through a bespoke readiness assessment tool, and over an initial period of eight months, 77 direct observations were conducted by experienced practitioners—internal staff from each house and team members leading the implementation work across houses. All children and young people in the two houses were consulted before the start of the observations, and regularly during the period of observations, to ensure they continue to feel comfortable with the initiative.
This presentation focuses on the period of observations and support for reflective practice. It explores what helped and hindered the process, the reported benefits and drawbacks, and the experiences and perspectives of staff.
Methods:
Implementation research and developmental evaluation: rapid plan-do-study-act cycles, observations, and group interviews, including the use of the 'sailboat retrospective' (Gonçalves & Linders, 2015) to capture the views and experiences of those involved. We combined inductive and deductive coding and conducted an iterative thematic analysis.
Findings:
Staff reported that they initially felt nervous about being observed, but the familiarity of the staff and children in the houses with the observers, alongside their respectful and relational approach, alleviated these concerns and made practitioners feel supported by the process.
Feedback from observations made supervision more purposeful, helping staff set manageable goals aligned with the practice profile. Positive feedback was well-received, creating readiness for receiving developmental feedback to improve practice. Staff appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their practice and the support for their professional growth.
However, the internal observers struggled to balance the demands of observation and feedback with their regular duties, and the additional paperwork (observation notes) was a barrier. Leadership support and permissions were crucial – having a dedicated senior manager aligned with the work created an internal feedback loop between practice and senior management, allowing for timely and responsive support.
Conclusions/Implications:
Structured observation and the gradual introduction of feedback can substantially support residential childcare practice development but require leadership support and a relational approach, different from an 'inspection' mindset – overall, a learning culture. Addressing capacity issues is crucial for sustaining this approach. The findings highlight the important benefits of intentionally supporting reflective practices and building effective implementation supports.

Fixsen, D. L., Blase, K., & Van Dyke, M. (2019). *Implementation Practice &Science.* Active Implementation Research Network.
Gonçalves, L., & Linders, B. (2015). *Getting Value out of Agile Retrospectives: A Toolbox of Retrospective Exercises*. BenLinders Publishing.

The Role Of In-care Experiences In Fostering Care Leavers' Development And Resilience In Young Adulthood

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:45: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Prof. Yafit Sulimani-Aidan [1], ***Mrs. Ilay Kovach*** [1]

1. *Tel Aviv University*

Background: The transition to adulthood for care leavers is often fraught with challenges, leading to less favorable outcomes in education, employment, and housing. While existing research has highlighted gaps in support interventions and examined the diversity of care leavers' experiences, most studies have focused on "objective" outcomes like education, overlooking the complex, subjective experiences that shape their transition to independent living. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how in-care experiences influence care leavers' development as emerging adults. Grounded in life course theory, it aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that affect their well-being beyond the immediate post-care period, offering insights to inform more effective interventions.

Methods: The sample for this study consisted of Forty-seven care leavers aged 18 to 29, who had been in residential care facilities or foster care. In-depth semi-structured interviews addressed their personal and familial backgrounds and their perceptions regarding the ways in which their stay in care impacted their lives. The analysis utilized theoretical thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Findings: The analysis uncovered two main themes. The first theme pertained to young adults' perceptions of care as an environment fostering self-development and skills, discussing the impact of care on their growth and maturation. This theme included three sub-themes: 1) Self-improvement and development; 2) Development and enhancement of interpersonal skills; and 3) Utilization of rights and higher educational achievements.The second major theme focused on out-of-home placement as a locus of belonging and a place where trust and self-worth could be restored, encompassing two sub-themes: 1) Regaining a sense of belonging and trust, and 2) The influence of peers in care.

Conclusions and implications: The study's findings suggest that in-care experiences can positively and enduringly impact both tangible and intangible skills among care leavers, including improved social relationships, self-trust, and confidence. These results underscore the potential benefits of out-of-home placements in supporting the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood. Despite their challenging backgrounds, young individuals can productively utilize the resources provided during care, demonstrating their agency in shaping their futures. The study also highlights the critical role of staff and peers in fostering a sense of belonging and well-being. In practice, it is crucial to recognize the in-care period as pivotal, actively engaging and supporting youth through resilience-based interventions and future-oriented strategies to better prepare them for adulthood

Navigating Education, Employment, Independent Living Skills, and Well-Being: A Comparative Study of Unaccompanied Migrant and Non-Migrant care-experienced youth

Wednesday, 10th September - 17:00: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Dr. Laura Arnau [1], ***Dr. Valeska Cabrera*** [1], ***Dr. Jose Tello*** [1], ***Dr. Daniel Ortega*** [1], ***Dr. Josefina Sala*** [1]

1. *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*

Background

Young people transitioning out of the child protection system face significant challenges in their journey to adulthood. This contribution examines their educational attainment, employment experiences, independent living skills, and overall well-being, highlighting differences between unaccompanied migrant and non-migrant care-experienced youth.

Methods

The study was conducted within the *Care Leavers Moving Into Adulthood (CALEAMI)* project, a longitudinal research initiative in Catalonia (first wave). A stratified sampling method was applied to select 201 young people aged 17 and above, all under the protection of the *Direcció General d'Atenció a la Infància i l'Adolescència* (DGAIA). Data collection involved surveys assessing their educational background, employment status, independent living skills, and well-being indicators. The sample included both native (104) and unaccompanied migrant (100) care-experienced youth, allowing for comparative analysis.

Results

Education and Employment

The majority of participants had low educational attainment, with 55.9% completing only primary education and 44.1% obtaining a secondary qualification. Among unaccompanied migrant youth, 78.1% had completed only primary education, compared to 37.3% of non-migrants. While 86.9% were engaged in some form of training or education, most were enrolled in basic courses such as vocational training or secondary education for adults. Employment rates were low, with only 9.7% currently working, although 60.3% had prior work experience. Migrant youth had higher rates of work experience (84%) compared to non-migrants (42.3%).

Independent Living Skills

A significant proportion of participants had limited experience in managing household tasks. About one-third reported never cooking (35.9%) or doing laundry (29.4%). Those in supported independent living programs developed more self-sufficiency than those in residential care, with significant differences in the frequency of cooking (M = 9.5 vs. 1.7) and shopping (M = 1.3 vs. 0.7). Migrant youth engaged more frequently in independent living activities due to their placement in autonomy-supporting resources.

Physical and Emotional Well-being

Overall life satisfaction was moderate (M = 7.3), with migrant youth reported lower levels (M = 6.9) compared to non-migrants (M = 7.5). Psychological distress was common, with 30.7% frequently feeling anxious or depressed in the three months before the survey. Key stressors included family-related issues (60.3%), unemployment (40.9%), and financial insecurity (35.9%). The COVID-19 pandemic likely influenced these findings.

Risk Behaviors and Social Challenges

Tobacco use was more common among non-migrants (46.2%) then migrants (26%). was similar to that of the general youth population, with 8.2% reporting binge drinking episodes. Also, 11.8% of participants had experienced physical violence in romantic relationships, with non-migrants showing a significantly higher incidence (22.1%). Reports of police involvement were low (13%) and did not significantly differ between groups.

Conclusions

Care leavers, particularly unaccompanied migrant youth, face considerable barriers in education, employment, and independent living. While migrant youth demonstrate greater work experience and self-sufficiency in daily tasks, they also report lower well-being and higher economic distress. Enhancing transitional programs that support both educational achievement and social integration is essential for improving long-term outcomes.

Vulnerability and resilience factors among child protection involved families during pregnancy and post birth

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:00: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Prof. Sarah Wise [1], ***Mrs. Ann MacRae*** [1], ***Dr. Ellen Pittman*** [1]

1. *The University of Melbourne*

Background: Research has shown a pattern of repeat involvement with Child Protection Services post birth following a prenatal report, as well as infants and toddlers exposed to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and experiencing developmental and behavioural difficulties while they remain in the care of birth parents. Yet, removing infants from their primary caregivers may be harmful, and placing infants in out-of-home care has severe negative effects on birth parents including exacerbation of mental health difficulties, disengagement with services and an increased likelihood of substance misuse. To inform decision-making about whether to place infants in out-of-home care, more information is needed about the indicators of harm and safety across the perinatal period.

Objectives: This paper aims to present findings from the Australian *Motherhood and Me* study on vulnerability and resilience factors among child protection involved families during pregnancy and post birth.

Methods: *Motherhood and Me* employed a 2-wave repeated cross-sectional design, collecting data from different samples of child protection involved birth mothers during pregnancy (n=16) and following birth (n=10). Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with birth mothers, including the use of a genogram (single generation), sociogram, closed-ended questions (single-item questions and multi-item rating scales) and open-ended questions.

Findings: For the post birth sample, all but one study child was in the care of their birth mothers at the time of interview (kinship care with a reunification plan). Birth mothers were generally comparable across the two samples on socio-demographic and reproductive history variables, although more birth mothers were partnered and had experienced a still birth post birth. Comparisons on vulnerability factors showed little difference across the two samples, although homelessness was a far greater concern during pregnancy (X^2=7.22, p=.007). Birth mothers had a stronger informal support system post birth, but there was no difference between the two samples on other resilience factors. The mean number of vulnerability and resilience factors was 4.7(1.6) and 3.9(1.9) and 3.5(2.0) and 4.2(2.0) for the pregnancy and post birth samples respectively.

Conclusion: Birth mothers experienced a high number of vulnerability factors across the perinatal period and, most infants lived with their birth mother post birth. While increased informal support may be meaningful in mitigating risks, more information is needed about ACEs and developmental and behavioural outcomes among children involved in a prenatal child protection report who remain in the care of birth parents.

Parents' and professionals' experiences of reunification: Barriers and supports working towards and following children's return home from care

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:15: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Ms. Ebony Tucker [1], ***Prof. Melissa O'Donnell*** [1], ***Dr. Olivia Octoman*** [1], ***Dr. Jacynta Krakouer*** [1]

1. *University of South Australia*

Background

As a policy and practice priority, reunification remains the most frequent permanency outcome for children and young people leaving out-of-home care (OOHC) among several child protection systems across the globe. Despite increased attention and efforts towards reunification in child protection, little is known about the experiences which shape the practices and outcomes of reunification for families. With an increasing number of reunified families becoming reinvolved with child protection following children's return home, more is needed to better understand the contexts which facilitate and challenge how families are supported to safely achieve and maintain reunification.

Objectives

The current qualitative study aimed to explore parents' and professionals' insights and experiences of reunification to gain a better insight into the facilitators and barriers to safe and stable reunification for families.

Methods

Individual semi-structured interviews were undertaken online and in-person with 11 parents who have experienced reunification and 16 professionals who work alongside families over the process of reunification. Interviews sought participants' perspectives on the challenges and supports for families in working towards and maintaining reunification, including experiences of current reunification practices and where families may be better supported.

Findings and Implications

Participants reflecting on the process towards reunification expressed a number of systemic and practice-level barriers for families which impacted their progress and subsequent transitions from OOHC to reunification. Experiences of both professionals' and parents' highlighted issues navigating the child protection system which were underpinned by inadequate or inconsistent communication, conflicting information and expectations, and helplessness throughout child protection processes. Discrepancies between ideas and rationales for best interests of the child were reported to undermine parents' progress and capacity for safely caring for their child and drive decisions which impacted familial connections and opportunities for growth. Challenges for families following reunification reflected efforts repairing and strengthening familial bonds, adapting to their child's new and developing needs, and increased self-reliance for many needs where natural supports were not present or broke down over the removal period.

Discussions predominantly pointed to a need for ongoing therapeutic and practical support for families, where parents and children can remain connected to a trusted support system outside the parent-child relationship and are supported in compounding caregiving efforts. Potential improvements to enhance the process and outcomes of reunification additionally outlined greater transparent communication with families and between agencies, shared decision-making processes, and flexibility for continued considerations of reunification beyond current limited timeframes.

The parent and professional insights gathered in the current study serve as an important guide to improving successful transitions from OOHC to family reunification and the practices and supports which impact long-term safety and stability for families.

The Evolution of Kinship Care: Implications for Permanency and Safety

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:30: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. Joe Ryan [1]

1. *Professor*

The focus of the presentation is on formal kinship care in child welfare. The definition does not include the more common and informal practice of private kinship care arrangements made between parents and relatives without assistance from child welfare agencies. Kin homes are an increasingly critical resource to public child welfare systems. The critical nature of these placements and the preference afforded to kin networks is seen in the enactment of public policy and the actual placing of children with relatives. Michigan's own state policy echoes this sentiment. Specifically, "if a child must be removed from their home, preference must be given to placement with a relative." Yet one might question, can systems over-rely on relatives for foster care? What is the right mix of kinship care? Can child welfare systems increasingly prioritize relative homes without compromising permanency and safety? Do children have equal access to these preferred placements? The current study investigates the use of relative care placements over the last 10 years. We follow more than 44,000 children placed in either a relative or unrelated foster home. The preference for relative placements is obvious. In 2013, approximately 50% of children entering foster care started their out-of-home experience with a relative. By 2023, that estimate increased to more than 65% of children. The current presentation will explore which children are most likely to be placed with relatives and how permanency and safety outcomes compare with children placed in unrelated foster care homes.

Ethno-racial identity and child welfare decisions: Using data from the Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:45: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. Kofi Antwi-Boasiako [1], ***Dr. Barbara Fallon*** [2], ***Dr. Kristen Lwin*** [3], ***Dr. Nico Trocmé*** [4]

1. *King's University College at Western University,* ***2.*** *University of Toronto,* ***3.*** *University of Windsor,* ***4.*** *McGill University*

Background: Black, Latin American, and First Nations, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) children are overrepresented in Ontario's child welfare system, but the workforce has historically been predominantly White. In response, child welfare agencies have been trying to diversify their workforce hoping that workers from similar backgrounds as the families they work with will better meet their needs and rely less on courts and out of home placement.
Objective: This study utilizes the Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (OIS) to identify whether child welfare workforce has become more diversified and whether worker race, ethnicity, or indigeneity is significantly associated with child welfare decisions.
Methods: Data from five cycles of the Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (1998-2018) were utilized for this study. Descriptive statistics were used to provide a profile of worker ethno-racial identity over the past two decades. Chi-square tests of independence were used to test whether investigation decisions were associated with worker ethno-racial identity.
Results: The study showed that worker ethno-racial identity changed over time in Ontario. The proportion of White workers has decreased gradually from 90% in 1998 to 76% in 2018, whereas the proportion of workers from FNMI, Black and South Asian backgrounds has increased. In 2018, while across all ethno-racial groups most caregivers had been assigned a White worker, 38% of FNMI caregivers were matched to a FNMI worker, and 21% of Black caregivers were assigned to a Black worker. The study also found that there was not a statistically significant relationship between worker ethno-racial identity and investigation approach or investigation outcome.
Conclusions: While there has been some improvement in the recruitment of non-White workers, the increase in non-White child welfare workers may not be enough to change decision-making practices associated with overrepresentation. Future studies need to look at how assessment tools, service procedures and standards in Ontario may be impacting decisions. More research is also needed to explore the extent to which matching child welfare workers with clients from their ethno-racial background helps reduce overrepresentation.

What helps young people feel valued in their relationships with workers in therapeutic residential care?

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:00: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Ms. Janise Mitchell [1], ***Prof. Lynne McPherson*** [2], ***Dr. Antonia Canosa*** [2], ***Prof. Kathomi Gatwiri*** [2], ***Prof. Robbie Gilligan*** [3]

1. *Australian Childhood Foundation,* ***2.*** *Southern Cross University,* ***3.*** *Trinity College Dublin*

Objectives

In recent years, Australia has implemented various models of 'therapeutic residential care' (TRC) across multiple states and territories. TRC is designed to address the complex needs of young people who cannot thrive in home-based care arrangements. However, a notable gap in the current research on TRC lies in understanding the specific practices—both within and beyond the immediate care environment—that either promote or hinder the development of meaningful relationships. Moreover, there is limited insight into how a lack of certain practices may influence the potential for isolation, poor social connections, and broken trust among young people in TRC settings.

The Australian Research Council funded study, *Strengthening Relationships and Connections in Therapeutic Residential Care*, sought to explore the practices that help young people living in TRC to develop meaningful relationships and social connections. This presentation reports on the second phase of what is a four phased project. This qualitative component of the study critically examined the interpersonal practices that contribute to the establishment of trust in these settings, as well as the institutional conditions—including policies, systems, and processes—that either facilitate or get in the way of building healthy family relationships, cultural safety, and opportunities for young people to engage with their interests and hobbies.

Methods

Acknowledging the importance of amplifying the voices of children and young people in shaping the understanding of their lived experiences in TRC, we conducted qualitative, in-depth interviews with 38 young people aged 12-18 years. Participants were recruited through an invitation extended to ten care providing organisations managing TRC settings. In collaboration with our Young Person Advisory Group (YPAG)—a group of young adults with first-hand experience of residential care—we developed an engaging interview approach designed to encourage active participation and insightful feedback.

Findings

The three primary practices identified by young people as most impactful were those that: (1) demonstrated staff's genuine care, respect, and value for the young person; (2) facilitated connection with family, culture, and community; and (3) supported the pursuit of personal hobbies and interests. Conversely, the absence of these practices, along with specific organisational and systemic shortcomings, were seen as barriers to developing positive relationships and social connections in TRC environments.

Conclusions and Implications

Potential policy and practice implications for the broader Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) context, both locally and internationally will be presented and discussed. Future research priorities which build on these findings will also be proposed.

Sexually exploited adolescent girls: Different ways of coping with their anger

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:15: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Maeva Genin [1]***, Prof. Nadine Lanctôt*** [1]***, Prof. Katherine Pascuzzo*** [1]

1. *Université de Sherbrooke*

CONTEXT: The sexual exploitation of children in prostitution (SECP) refers to situation where a young person trade sexual act for money or other types of compensation in a context where an individual or a group takes advantage of her/his limited resources (social, economic, emotional vulnerabilities; Hickle & Roe-Sepowitz, 2018; O'Brien et al., 2017; Reid, 2018). SECP is associated with a myriad of altered developmental outcomes, such as emotional dysregulation (Laird et al., 2020). A meta-analysis shows that studies have focused on victims' feelings of anxiety and depression, as well as their hopelessness and suicidal thoughts (Laird et al., 2020). The anger of these victims is very rarely studied empirically (Laird et al., 2020), which is a real limitation since this anger is particularly salient in the discourse of girls and women who have been sexually exploited (Barnet et al., 2020; Lanctôt et al., 2018; Robitz et al., 2020).

OBJECTIVE: This study aims to 1) identify different profiles of angry feelings as well as anger expression, regulation, and rumination in a sample of adolescent girls who have reported experiences of sexual exploitation, and 2) examine whether the frequency and variety of sexual exploitation experiences differentiate profiles.

METHOD: Data were gathered in a broader study conducted among a sample of 108 female adolescents placed in residential youth care centers who report sexual exploitation during adolescence (Mage = 15,4 years old). Anger was measured using State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (STAXI-2, Spielberger, 1999), which evaluates felt, expressed and repressed anger. A cognitive measure of anger was also assessed using the Sadness and Anger Rumination Scale (SARI, Peled and Moretti, 2007). This scale assesses how often adolescent girls have repetitive thoughts related to their angry emotions. A latent profile analysis was carried out on Mplus software. Analyses of variance were then carried out to distinguish profiles according to the frequency and variety of sexual exploitation experiences.

FINDINGS: A four-profile solution was retained, which underlines the heterogeneity of victims of sexual exploitation in terms of the intensity of their angry emotions and their ways of coping with this anger. Girls who report having experienced the highest levels of sexual exploitation are more likely to be in the profile that presents the greatest difficulties in terms of angry feelings, and anger expression, regulation and rumination.

IMPLICATIONS: This study is crucial to understanding the anger expressed by sexually exploited girls and the emotional regulation issues associated with it. The different profiles highlight different experiences that will enrich our practice.

Resilience and Well-being Among Adolescents in Out-of-Home Residential Care Compared to Community School Adolescents: The Contribution of Individual, Family and School Environment Variables

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:30: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Mrs. Michal Hanouka [1], ***Prof. Michal Al-Yagon*** [1]

1. *Tel Aviv University*

Objective: The present research focuses on transformative processes in alternative care by examining protective factors for resilience, well-being, and academic and behavioral functioning among high-risk adolescents, who placed in secure residential treatment facilities operated by the Youth Protection Authority in Israel (Shimoni & Benvenishti, 2012).

Theoretical Farmwork: Adolescents in residential care are often characterized by anti-social behavior, criminal involvement, psychiatric problems, and low cognitive functioning. Many of them have suffered from neglect, physical or sexual abuse in childhood (Cohen-Moreno et al., 2020). Thus, their difficulties are manifested in violent behavior patterns, vandalism, self-harm, and suicidal attempts (Attar-Schwartz, 2010).

While previous research has focused on the contribution of risk factors to adjustment and functioning, there is growing recognition of the need to investigate protective factors in alternative care. several central protective factors identified such as parental and peers support and sense of security (Davidson-Arad & Navaro-Bitton, 2015).

integrating factors from different ecological levels enables a multi-dimensional and cumulative examination (Al-Yagon, 2016; Masten, 2021). Thus, this study introduces an expanded approach by identifying and analyzing protective variables across three ecological levels: individual capabilities (academic and social skills, executive functions, coping strategies, and parental attachment), extended family support, and educational environment (school belonging and secure teacher relationships).

Method

Participants: The sample includes 269 (49.2% male, 32.7 female) adolescents aged 15-17.5 (*M*=15.7, *SD*=0.58). This is a work in progress and to date, data collection has just been completed including responses from 109 adolescents living in residential care facilities and a comparison group of 160 adolescents living in the community and their teachers.

Children's Self-Report Instruments: Participants responded to a self-report questionnaire that included the following domains: *Specific Learning Disabilities Scal*e (Margalit & Rosenblatt, 2018); *Social Skills Assessment Questionnaire* (Gresham et al., 2010); *Executive Functions Questionnaire* - BDEFS-SF (Barkley, 2001); *Coping Strategies Questionnaire* - (Moos et al., 1987); Atta*chment Security Scale* (Kerns et al., 1996); *Social Support Network Questionnaire* (Gee & Rhodes, 2007); *Psychological Sense of School Membership* (Goodenow, 1993); *"The Teacher and I"- Teacher as a Secure Base Perception Questionnaire* (Al-Yagon & Mikulincer, 2006); *The Adolescent Resilience Scal*e (Oshio et al., 2003); 10) *Psychological Wellbeing Scale* (Al-Yagon & Russo-Netzer, 2019).

In addition, Instruments Completed by Techers*: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* (Goodman, 1999)**.**

Data analysis: Data analysis will focus on differences between adolescents in residential care and adolescents in community schools in individual, family and school factors. Subsequently, analysis of variance and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010), will be used to test direct and indirect relationships between risk and protective factors and positive adaptation outcomes across research groups and gender.

Results & **Conclusions**: The paper will present initial findings that may contribute to knowledge promoting health, growth, and personal development among high-risk populations in alternative care (Levy & Kahn-Strawczynski, 2014), by integrating the combined effects of individual, family and school-level factors. results

will inform intervention programs promoting personal, family, and school resources in residential care, particularly in preparing youth for successful transition to independent living.

“What would RALF do?”: Impacts of a Reflective Forum on Scottish Residential Child Care

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:00: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Dr. Laura Steckley [1]***, Ms. Sarah Deeley*** [2]***, Ms. Gemma Watson*** [2]

1. *Department of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Strathclyde,* ***2.*** *CELCIS, University of Strathclyde*

Reflection is necessary for developmentally enhancing, ameliorative relationships and environments in residential child care. Yet robust reflective practice and cultures are likely to be the exception rather than the norm due to how difficult they are to cultivate and maintain. Not everyone is naturally reflective, and even reflective practitioners need effective processes to support regular reflective at depth. The more threatening the thoughts, feelings and experiences, the more difficult it will be to reflect on and mentally ‘digest’ them. Instead, practitioners can get caught in unhelpful patterns of rumination, or they can suppress their uncomfortable feelings. Rumination and/or suppression can become the norm in service cultures, making it difficult for individuals and teams to use reflection to really look at practice, to learn, and to change what needs changed.

This paper will present the work of the Reflection and Action Learning Forum (RALF) Project – a project co-produced by the Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group (SPRAG) and funded by The Promise Partnership. The project’s aim was to support the development of reflective work cultures and individual practitioners’ reflective capacity, and to collect evidence of any impact.

RALF is a practical and evidence-based approach designed to support members of the residential child care workforce to develop the necessary habits and skills associated with genuinely reflective practice, even when some behaviour exhibited by children, young people or colleagues can feel challenging. For the purposes of this project, RALF sessions were focused on issues related to physical restraint and other forms of restrictive practice. The RALF model lends itself, however, to a much wider focus on practice.

Over 20 residential child care services were involved in the project, with over 100 residential child care practitioners experiencing one or more forum sessions. Many forum groups remain intact, with sessions continuing beyond the funding period. Data collection addressed to RALF’s impacts included online questionnaires that including the Reflective Capacity Subscale as well as other Likert and open-text questions; research diaries; and focus group interviews. Findings strongly reflected impacts on individuals’ praxis (organised around themes of thinking, feeling, doing and being), as well as at organisational level. Across the data sets, RALF was described as a container for restraint-related anxieties – a container that opened up participants’ thinking, enabled them to tolerate feelings of vulnerability, increased their self-awareness and confidence, and changed the way they provided leadership or mentoring to colleagues. In one service, “What would RALF do?” was used in challenging circumstances as shorthand to interrupt unhelpful habits of thought and open up a more curious, developmental approach to colleagues or young people. Overall, the importance of expressing, sharing and making sense of the emotional impacts of the work was a recurrent theme, with some participants describing a highly beneficial cathartic effect of some RALF sessions. Implications for practice and policies addressed to reflective practice, both generally and related to physical restraint, will be discussed.

What do care workers do? - analysis of the professional competencies and training needs in substitute care

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:15: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Dr. Eeva Timonen-Kallio [1], ***Dr. Tuija Eronen*** [2]

1. *Turku University of Applied Sciences,* ***2.*** *Tampere University*

The substitute care is associated with factors as insufficient preparation and training for the nature of the work of its own: problems presented by youth, relational instability due to shifts, high rates of turnover that contribute to the challenging task to keep on track with educative, healing, therapeutic and rehabilitative actions. The international research indicates that the requirements and qualifications for residential care workers is directly related to the quality of services (Whittaker et al. 2023). In Finland the requirements for staff are relational high but there is a serious concern of recruiting competent and permanent workers to deliver high standard care. The work force is 'multi-professional' in terms of variety of educational backgrounds and competency profiles. The national VAASI research and development project investigates the professional competencies in five wellbeing service counties. This paper presents the competency areas as findings of the survey (n=130) on social workers', residential workers' and corporate parents' perceptions of the basic competence requirements in substitute care. The nature of the professionalism and competence requirements in residential care and professional family care interventions will be discussed.

Supporting Those Who Care: Challenges and Resources for Foster Parents in a Changing System

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:30: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Prof. Marie-Andrée Poirier [1], ***Dr. Marie-Pierre Joly*** [2], ***Mrs. Sarah Coté-Auger*** [3], ***Ms. Joannie Laporte*** [3], ***Prof. Geneviève Pagé*** [4], ***Dr. Sonia Hélie*** [5], ***Mrs. Doris Chateauneuf*** [6]

1. *University of Montreal,* ***2.*** *Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté,* ***3.*** *Université de Montréal,* ***4.*** *Université du Québec en Outaouais,* ***5.*** *Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficultés CIUSSS Centre-sud-de-l'île-de-Montréal,* ***6.*** *Centre de recherche universitaire sur les jeunes et les familles (CRUJeF)*

Introduction. In Quebec (Canada) foster care is the substitute living environment most often used when a child must be removed from his or her family environment. Given the nature of their mandate, foster parents face significant challenges, mainly associated with the vulnerability of children in care, relationships with parents of origin and collaboration with youth protection services (Barnett et al., 2018, De Wilde et al., 2019, Fergeus et al., 2017 Miller et al., 2019; Vanderfaillie et al., 2020). Studies that give a voice to foster parents confirm that these challenges can lead to high levels of stress, as well as symptoms of exhaustion (Newquist, 2023), the foster parent's relationship may also be weakened (Lietz et al., 2016), and the children of foster parents run the risk of feeling left out in particularly difficult situations (Cooley and Petren, 2020).

Objectives: This communication presents the result of a study whose objective is to document personal, conjugal and family challenges that foster parents face, as well as the resources they have at their disposal to deal with them. The subject is of particular importance in Quebec, where foster parents' working conditions have undergone significant change in recent years, as they have acquired the legal status of workers. This shift, which has emphasized the professional dimension of their role, has also had the effect of reducing the support available to them.

Methodology: The communication is based on data from a study launched in 2023 in Quebec with the aim of drawing up a comprehensive portrait of the challenges faced by foster parents. The study is based on a simultaneous mixed-method design that enabled to identify the challenges encountered and the resources available to deal with them (online survey, N=388) and to better understand the complex interaction between the challenges, the conditions of practice and the context of professionalization (semi-structured interviews, N=20).

Results: According with preliminary results foster parents who completed the survey report that fostering has caused often or very often difficulties in their marital life (25%); with other children in the family (34%) as well as on their own mental or physical health (38%). The qualitative interviews confirm that many foster parents experience episodes marked by difficult and sometimes intense emotional states (e.g. exhaustion, stress, hypervigilance, etc.). They also share that when their personal and family equilibrium is significantly threatened, they cannot simply consider "changing jobs", as they would be leaving their entire lives behind. In this context, foster parents stress the importance of adopting self-care practices and having support. The presentation will include more in-depth analyses not available for the moment.

Discussion: In a context where the professional dimension of the foster parent's role is taking on increasing importance, issues concerning personal, conjugal and family balance must be considered in the clinical practices surrounding foster care. Drawing on the principles of trauma-sensitive approaches (Blaustein and Kinniburg, 2018; Collin Vézina et al., 2018), the presentation will highlight promising avenues of intervention to promote the well-being of those caring for children in care.

Rethinking Child Care Reforms Through a Child Rights-Based Lens – The Interplay of Policy and Lived Experience: A multiple case study of Ghana, Kenya and North Macedonia

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:45: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Mr. Eyob NEGASH [1]

1. *SOS Children's Villages International*

Rethinking Child Care Reforms Through a Child-rights Perspectives: Policy-Practice Tensions in Ghana, Kenya and North Macedonia

This comparative multiple case study analyzes contemporary child care reforms through the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Guidelines for Alternative Care (2009), examining implementation challenges across three national contexts. Drawing on policy analysis (n=27 documents), key informant interviews (n=18 stakeholders), and focus group discussions with care leavers (n=32 participants), the research reveals critical disconnects between rights-based policies and their operationalization in Kenya, Ghana and North Macedonia.

The study documents how SOS Children's Villages has influenced reform processes through technical participation in government working groups, particularly in developing Kenya's Children Act (2022) and National Care Reform Strategy. Their model of transforming institutional care into family-like community settings shows measurable success in North Macedonia, where institutionalization decreased by 72% between 2015-2022 (SOS Children's Villages, 2022). However, comparative analysis with Kenya and Ghana reveals persistent challenges: 83% of Kenyan institutionalized children had living parents (Ucembe, 2021), while Ghana's foster care system remains underdeveloped despite 61% public support for family-based care (Department of Social Welfare, 2021). Findings demonstrate that Kenya's care reforms – while theoretically aligned with UN Guidelines for Alternative Care (2009) – face implementation gaps, with 83% of institutionalized children having living parents (Ucembe, 2021) and care leavers reporting systemic barriers to reintegration. The study highlights how SOS Children's Villages has pioneered family-strengthening, family-based and small-scale family-like care and protection models across all three countries, while care leavers organizations like KESCA provide critical advocacy, evidenced by their direct involvement in Kenya's Children Act (2022) reforms. Comparative analysis reveals that North Macedonia's relative success in reducing institutionalization by 72% (2015-2022) stems from robust foster care systems – a lesson for Kenya and Ghana where kinship care remains underfunded despite 78% of institutionalized children having traceable relatives (Maingi & Wairire, 2020).

Care leaver perspectives, collected through structured engagement with the Kenyan Society of Care Leavers (KESCA), highlight systemic barriers including documentation challenges (affecting 63% of participants), inadequate aftercare support, and tokenistic inclusion in policy processes. Their lived experience contrasts with technical approaches, revealing how rights-based principles like Article 12 (participation) and Article 9 (family preservation) become diluted in implementation.

Three key findings emerge:

1) Effective reform requires balancing technical solutions (e.g., Kenya's gatekeeping mechanisms) with care-experienced leadership (KESCA's policy contributions)

2) Economic incentives sustaining institutional care require targeted disruption (Ucembe, 2021)

3) Regional differences in social protection systems significantly impact outcomes, with North Macedonia's success tied to EU-aligned child protection investments

The study proposes a rights-implementation framework emphasizing: (1) mandatory care leaver participation in reform structures, (2) integrated social protection systems, and (3) CRC-aligned monitoring mechanisms. These recommendations are substantiated by cross-case evidence of what works in transforming child pro-

tection systems.

Keywords: Child rights, care reform, deinstitutionalization, alternative care, participatory policy, foster care, gatekeeping, institutionalization, social protection, Kenya, Ghana, North Macedonia, social welfare, family-based care.

Prevention and early intervention services amid increasing challenges: insights from Scotland's children's services workforce

Wednesday, 10th September - 17:00: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Ms. Emma Young [1], ***Ms. Mihaela Manole*** [1], ***Ms. Jane Scott*** [1], ***Dr. Alex McTier*** [1], ***Dr. Nadine Fowler*** [1], ***Dr. Heather Ottaway*** [1], ***Dr. Leanne McIver*** [1], ***Dr. Robert Porter*** [1], ***Ms. Carol Ann Anderson*** [1]

1. *CELCIS, University of Strathclyde*

Objectives:
Through the lens of prevention and early intervention, this paper brings evidence from Scotland on the increasing challenges for children, young people, families and communities amid increasing levels of poverty and inequity of support. It presents the perceptions and experiences of children's services workforce regarding service delivery, and the implications discuss what needs to be in place to best meet the needs of children, young people and families. The paper makes a valuable contribution to EUSARF, given the complex relationships between poverty, child abuse and neglect highlighted by a growing body of research (Bywaters et al.,2022).
Methods:
The findings are based on the Children's Services Reform Research (Ottaway et al.,2023), a multi-strand mixed-method study, including a survey (N=1399) and interviews and focus groups (N=91) with children's services workforce in Scotland –practitioners from social work, health, early learning and childcare, education, youth justice, police and non-governmental sector .
Findings:
Practitioners reported a substantial increase in challenges affecting children, young people and families, because of the enduring impact of COVID-19 pandemic, rising cost-of-living and acute housing crisis. These problems are exacerbated by service cutbacks and long waiting lists for support, with demand outstripping the resources allocated to early intervention. Some practitioners described a tension in the prioritisation of statutory services over early intervention and prevention. Gaps were found in relation to early years provision and for children under five who are not at risk or harm but have needs that cannot be met through universal services. The impact of poverty on children with additional support needs was also highlighted, affecting their life chances and opportunities as they transition into adulthood.
Our research also found promising developments, such as income maximisation interventions, multi-agency co-located community hubs, or a 'practice lead' role that links education and social care to support practitioners to intervene early. However, these typically depend on short-term funding or use eligibility criteria not adapted to the changing demography of families needing additional support. For example, families with a steady income who face financial difficulties often miss out on support because their income slightly exceeds the threshold.
Conclusions/Implications:
Systemic, macro-level and societal factors are affecting the delivery of services and the lives of children, young people and families. The worrying increase in poverty and deprivation levels and the challenges experienced by services because of short-term funding are impacting service thresholds, resulting in increased crisis intervention and missed opportunities to support families earlier. These challenges cannot be tackled by children's services alone, requiring, *inter alia*, a whole-system response, flexible funding and allocation measures best suited to local context, better local level indicators of family circumstances, sufficient workforce with manageable workloads and support from leadership, and structures that enable workforce to work together seamlessly across service and system boundaries.
Ottaway,H., McTier,A., Manole,M., Anderson,M., Porter,R., Scott,J., Young,E., Fowler,N., Soraghan,J., McIver,L., Anderson,C.A., &Mackinnon, K.(2023) *Children's Services Reform Research: Learning and Implications for Scot-*

land: Concluding Report. CELCIS, Glasgow.
Bywaters,P., Skinner,G., Cooper,A., Kennedy,E., &Malik, A.(2022) *The Relationship Between Poverty and Child Abuse and Neglect: New Evidence*. Nuffield.

Under Pressure: Work Engagement, Job Resources and Compassion Fatigue among Residential Care Staff in Italy

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:00: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Dr. Marzia Saglietti [1], ***Mr. Matteo Alpini*** [1], ***Mr. Giovanni Fulvi*** [2]

1. *Department of Social and Developmental Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome,* ***2.*** *National Coordination of Family Communities for Minors*

Drawing on an Italian study conducted in residential care for children in 2023 and guided by the Job Demands-Resources Model, this study aims to investigate the role of work engagement among staff members in relation to work and organizational conditions, as well as their levels of compassion fatigue. Data were collected through a customized anonymous online survey with 243 RCC staff members across Italy. Descriptive statistics, regression, and path analysis were employed for data analysis. Overall, RCC staff exhibit significant levels of work engagement alongside high levels of compassion fatigue, both exceeding normative averages. Work engagement scores are significantly influenced by two key organizational factors—namely, the educator role and positive teamwork relationships—as well as by all burnout sub-dimensions and secondary traumatic stress scores. Findings further indicate that experiencing STS significantly increases burnout, which in turn reduces work engagement. The study identifies specific job demands and resources that impact work engagement among Italian RCC staff and suggests targeted strategies to improve recruitment, enhance job retention, and address staff wellbeing in the face of these specific workplace-related trauma.

Caring for Professional Caregivers: A Study on the Professional Quality of Life of Child Welfare Workers in Belgium

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:15: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Mrs. Camille Verheyden [1], ***Prof. Frank Van Holen*** [1], ***Dr. Stéphanie Chartier*** [2], ***Ms. Ayumi Okawa*** [3], ***Dr. Delphine West*** [1], ***Prof. Johan Vanderfaeillie*** [1]

1. *Vrije Universiteit Brussel,* ***2.*** *ULiege,* ***3.*** *La Sauvegarde Familiale*

Introduction

International research indicates that child welfare workers face a heightened risk of burnout and secondary traumatic stress (STS) due to their work with vulnerable children and families. The sector struggles with high staff turnover, which threatens their professional quality of life and negatively impacts not only the workers themselves but also their clients and organizations. According to Stamm's (2010) model, the professional quality of life consists of both negative (compassion fatigue) and positive (compassion satisfaction) components, influenced by the professional's work, personal and client environment. Compassion fatigue includes burnout (with emotional exhaustion and frustration) as well as STS, which manifests through PTSD-like symptoms, such as anxiety and sleep disturbances.

Research questions

This study examines the professional quality of life of Belgian child welfare workers with the following objectives:

1. Determine the prevalence of STS, burnout, and compassion satisfaction.
2. Identify risk and protective factors within the work, personal, and client environments.

Method

An online questionnaire was completed by 2,683 child welfare workers (1,544 Dutch-speaking workers from Flanders and Brussels and 1,139 French-speaking workers from Wallonia and Brussels). The Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL-5; Stamm, 2010) measured STS (α=.79), burnout (α=.74), and compassion satisfaction (α=.87). Additionally, various personal (e.g., personality traits), work (e.g., work-family balance) and client-related factors (e.g., overinvolvement) were measured in line with the theoretical framework.

Results

Dutch-speaking child welfare workers predominantly reported low (55.6%) to moderate (44.2%) STS and low (44.5%) to moderate (55.5%) burnout, based on U.S.-derived cut-off values. Most of them also reported moderate compassion satisfaction (79.5%). French-speaking child welfare workers scored significantly higher on STS and burnout than their Dutch-speaking counterparts (59% and 71.6%, respectively, reported moderate levels) but had similar compassion satisfaction scores (76.9% scored moderate).

Multiple regression analyses identified key risk and protective factors. Overinvolvement with clients emerged as a significant risk factor for lower professional quality of life (higher STS and burnout, lower compassion satisfaction). Protective factors included social support in one's private environment and the personality traits emotional stability and conscientiousness. Child welfare workers with a people-oriented educational background (e.g., pedagogy) reported a better professional quality of life than those with a society-oriented educational background (e.g., sociology).

Conclusion

These findings help identify at-risk groups and implement targeted support strategies. Maintaining a healthy balance between closeness and distance with clients, as well as fostering strong personal support networks, is

crucial. Organizations should actively monitor and promote this balance through measures such as intervision and supervision.

Protection concepts & Affects and Violence Protection in Residential Care

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:30: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Prof. Sara Blumenthal [1]

1. *Universität Klagenfurt*

Internationally, there is a professionalization deficit in violence protection with regard to sexual violence against children and youth in institutions (Assini-Meytin et al., 2020; Teubert, 2020). Against that background, this presentation points out the significance of affects when protecting children and youth against sexual violence in residential care, drawing on the theoretical framework of the project in planning "Affects and Violence Protection in Residential Care". Approaches from the sociology of emotion and from affect studies understand "affective-emotional phenomena" in their socio-cultural context (Scherke, 2024, p. 209). According to that understanding, affects such as shame structure social behavior such as help-seeking or offering help. Affects associated with experiences of sexual violence, such as shame, fear, pride or anger, can thus be placed in an institutional and social context. Since affects are action-guiding and shame in particular is an essential mechanism of social inequality, an empirical analysis of affects around sexual violence emphasizes connections between affects and their forms of expression, such as silence regarding sexual violence, or resistance practices. The theoretical and methodological approach of the planned qualitative basic research project will be explained. The relevance of this basic research results from the prevalence of sexual violence against children and youth, and from the consequences for those affected. Therefore, the state of international research into the prevalence of sexual violence against and among children and youth is outlined. Children and youth in residential care are a particularly vulnerable group with regard to sexual violence, and residential care facilities themselves internationally have a high prevalence of sexual violence. Based on an inclusive understanding of child and youth research, no distinction is made between children with and without disabilities, hence child and youth welfare facilities and care facilities for the disabled are included in the project. Defining the term *sexual violence* briefly, the international state of research on the development of prevention and intervention measures around sexual violence in child and youth residential care is presented. Measures to protect against sexual violence in institutions have only been developed since the 1980s. These measures are mostly unstructured and are often introduced when incidents of sexual violence have already occurred. Therefore, so-called "protection concepts" have been developed in Germany since 2012 and are now introduced to residential care facilities in Austria. Protection concepts are participatory organizational development processes involving analysis, prevention, intervention and processing, and designed to protect the personal rights of children, youth and young adults (Henningsen et al., 2021). This innovation in the field of residential care in Austria will be critically discusses.

Reduced psychotropic medication usage following implementing the CARE program model – A quantitative analysis of 11 years of medication data. Part 1.

Wednesday, 10th September - 16:45: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Dr. Michael Nunno [1], ***Dr. Christopher Bellonci*** [2]

1. *Residential Child Care Project, Cornell University,* ***2.*** *Assistant Professor at Harvard Medical School and Senior Policy Advisor at Judge Baker Children's Center.*

The child welfare literature has raised concerns about the efficacy of psychotropic medications in a youth's treatment plan in therapeutic residential care. Research indicates that psychotropics are both over- and under-prescribed, with 40% of children in foster care receiving these medications. Seventy-two percent of foster children are prescribed two or more psychotropic medications. In residential care, up to 79% of youth receive psychotropic medications. The goals of these medications are to alleviate suffering and promote competence, but their use carries risks. For some drugs, efficacy is questionable in pediatric populations, with neurodevelopmental impacts of long-term use poorly understood.

Children and Residential Experiences (CARE) is an organizational program model centered around six evidence-informed principles and three key processes. It guides staff practices and interactions in ways that create conditions for change in children's lives. In collaboration with consultants from Cornell University, organizations implement CARE at all levels to cultivate a therapeutic milieu that provides developmental relationships and enriching experiences that build competence and a sense of normality for children.

In rigorous quasi-experimental research across multiple implementations of CARE, CARE is linked to improvements in several outcomes: fewer serious behavioral incidents, reduced use of physical restraint, and enhanced quality of relationships between children living in residential care and their caregivers. This study examines the relationship between the CARE program model and rates of psychotropic medication use.

Method

Waterford Country School (WCS) is a child welfare agency providing residential treatment in the northeastern United States. WCS has maintained an administrative data system that tracks important indicators. This data can examine whether the CARE program model is associated with improved indicators when implemented and sustained. Using an interrupted time series (ITS) study design, we compared the monthly volume of psychotropic medication prescriptions among children living in residential treatment. The study period included 3 years before the start of CARE and 8 years of CARE implementation and sustainment.

The outcome variable was the number of psychotropic medications prescribed to children living in the WCS residential program. A negative binomial regression model was constructed. In addition to an indicator for CARE implementation, the model adjusted for the number of children in the program and controlled for factors associated with the prescribing medical staff and the frequency of physical restraints. The ITS model was structured to estimate the number of psychotropic medications at pre-CARE, and two slopes, the time trend during the pre-CARE and the CARE phases.

Results

At the start of CARE, there were 3.0 prescriptions per child, on average. In the 3-year pre-CARE phase, the trend increased at a rate of 0.9% per month. During the 8-year CARE phase, the trend reversed, and prescription rates began to decline at an average rate of 1.7% per month while controlling for the use of physical restraints and factors associated with the prescribers.

Conclusions

The quasi-experimental study design limits a definitive causal claim about CARE's effectiveness. Yet, the results indicate a strong association between CARE and a reduction in medication usage, even after controlling for

significant covariates.

Reduced psychotropic medication usage following implementation of the CARE program model: Observations on The Role of Residential Staff in Identifying Potential Effects of Interventions – Part 2

Wednesday, 10th September - 17:00: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Dr. Michael Nunno [1]***, Ms. Susan Sullivan*** [2]***, Mr. William Martin*** [2]

1. *Residential Child Care Project, Cornell University,* ***2.*** *Waterford Country School*

This workshop is a qualitative companion to Nunno & Bellonci's Part 1 workshop, *Reduced psychotropic medication usage following implementing the CARE program model – A quantitative analysis of 11 years of medication data. Part 1.* Part 1 documents the downward trend in psychotropic medication usage rates from 2006 to 2016 at Waterford Country School (WCS).

While that workshop highlighted a steep decline in medication rates, the data do not address how changes in practice dynamics at WCS led to this reduction. The collaboration between the leadership and medical nursing staff at WCS and researchers at the Residential Child Care Project (RCCP) at Cornell University began out of concern regarding the level of restraint use and injuries. After working with RCCP staff on their restraint review process, WCS leadership examined and implemented the RCCP's CARE program model. The CARE program's three core concepts include *interactional* and *organizational congruence* in the *child's best inte*rests and a *research-informed systemwide model.* CARE's six research-informed principles guiding the interpersonal and practice dynamics are relationship-based, trauma-informed, developmentally focused, family-involved, competency-centered, and ecologically oriented.

Results

As the three-year implementation process gained momentum, WCS embedded CARE's guiding concepts and principles into their organizational culture and practices in collaboration with CARE's implementation strategies. Supportive and cooperative WCS leadership emphasized reflective practice in supervision, team meetings, and data-informed decisions through observation and graphic visualization. Within this context, the nursing staff grew increasingly aware of the incongruence between the adverse effects of psychotropics and the developmental needs of the youth under their medical supervision, particularly those who were trauma-sensitive. Moreover, the nursing staff documented a change in language among direct care staff, who began referring to the youth's acting out or aggressive behaviors as pain-based. This shift in language diminished the intensity of caregivers' behavioral descriptions when reporting children's behaviors to the medication prescriber. Caregivers appeared more confident in employing their existing behavioral support skills and strategies rather than medication. Through this lens, the medical director and staff suspected that the rate of psychotropic medications was decreasing and wanted to document this assumption.

Given the broader societal concerns, including increased governmental oversight, about the medication of children in residential treatment, the medical director and her staff decided to formally test their assumption as a vital *measure that mattered* for their practice with youth. They documented the number of monthly prescriptions for 3 years before and 8 years following the implementation of CARE. RCCP researchers analyzed this data. The medication rate decline is graphically portrayed in Part 1 and confirms a strong association with the CARE program model.

Conclusion

This workshop presents a narrative centered on engaging practitioners in data gathering, analysis, and reflection on the measures that matter to them. It includes lessons on 1) influencing reflective practices through visual representations, 2) examining the alignment between children's developmental needs and the care they receive, and 3) the impact of interpreting children's behavior as pain- or fear-based.

Frontline Professionals' Discretion in Housing Support for Care-Experienced Young People in Scotland

Thursday, 11th September - 09:00: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Ms. Yiran Zhang [1]

1. *University of Stirling*

As young people leave the care system and enter adulthood, access to stable and adequate housing becomes a foundational step toward independence. For care-experienced young people, this transition is influenced not only by their preparation but also by the systems, policies, and professionals involved in assisting them. This research explores the views and experiences of frontline practitioners in Scotland regarding the housing needs of care-experienced young people, situated within the context of emerging adulthood.

This research draws on interviews with 18 professionals involved in supporting care-experienced young people, including housing managers, housing option officers, housing support workers, social workers, senior social care officers, a care-leaver project worker, an improvement officer, and a policy and public affairs officer across two local authorities and one third-sector organisation in Scotland. Informed by both street-level bureaucracy and critical ecological theory, the study adopts an interpretivist methodology and thematic analysis to investigate how frontline professionals understand and implement housing-related policies for this population. It examines the discrete strategies used by professionals to address systemic limitations, including inadequate housing stock, dispersed services, restrictive eligibility thresholds, and bureaucratic processes.

Initial findings reveal that although many practitioners employ adaptable, compassionate strategies to address young people's needs, resource constraints and fragmented communication between teams frequently compromise their ability to respond adequately. To bridge gaps in policy and service delivery, workers frequently assume complex advocacy roles, serving as intermediaries between young people and systems while navigating competing organisational priorities.

This research argues that housing provision for care-experienced young people should not be viewed merely as a logistical task but as a relational and social process embedded within broader structural inequalities. It calls for proactive policies that provide stronger structural accountability in care transitions, enhanced support for professional discretion, and improved integration between the social care and housing sectors.

Conceptualising 'home': Perspectives from care leavers at risk of homelessness

Thursday, 11th September - 09:15: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

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This presentation highlights the conceptualisation of home among young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness when leaving out-of-home care. For these young people, living arrangements during childhood have often been fragile and short-term. Additionally, establishing a stable living arrangement while transitioning out of care has frequently been challenging. As a result, this transition often intersects with marginalised life circumstances such as sofa surfing or returning to biological parents. Research has frequently highlighted care leavers' vulnerability, characterised, for example, by higher rates of NEET status as well as poorer physical and mental health compared to their same-aged peers. However, their conceptualisation of home has been less explored, meaning we have limited knowledge of how young care leavers experience one of the most fundamental institutions in contemporary Western society (Natalier & Johnson, 2015), and how these experiences intersect with the risk of homelessness.

To conceptualise 'home', Boccagni (2017, p. 1) emphasises that 'Home is an everyday, vernacular notion which potentially holds significant conceptual implications' and cannot be reduced simply to a house or dwelling, as it is 'an emplaced interpersonal process with irremediably prescriptive bases'. This underscores a sense of belonging, understood as a multidimensional experience of feeling at home in one's physical and social surroundings (Bengtsson & Mølholt, 2018; Lähdesmäki et al., 2016; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Exploring the conceptualisation of 'home' among young care leavers is crucial, as research shows they are over-represented among young people experiencing homelessness. It is therefore vital to consider their social and biographical contexts in order to provide them with appropriate support during their transition to adulthood (Bengtsson, 2022; Häggman-Laitila, 2018; Mølholt, 2017). Investigating the concept of 'home' among care leavers at risk of or experiencing homelessness highlights the fragility of home and belonging, thus extending beyond the traditional ideas of house or dwelling.

Empirically, this presentation draws on interviews with 15 young people aged 18 to 24 from a Nordic context (Norway and Denmark) who, during their transition out of care, felt at risk of or experienced homelessness. The interviews were informed by a biographical approach, focusing on their housing pathways both during childhood and as they transitioned out of care. Particular attention was paid to how the young people framed 'home' and their sense of belonging.

The findings emphasise a feeling of rootlessness and a sense of 'non-belonging'. However, the young people also highlight their search for home and reflect deeply on where, what, and how they can define something as 'home'. The biographical approach reveals that their past experiences of entering and frequently moving between out-of-home care settings expose them to temporal instability, which in turn influences their conceptualisations of 'home'.

How does a background of care affect transitions into and through graduate employment?

Thursday, 11th September - 09:30: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

Dr. Zoe Baker [1]

1. *The University of Sheffield*

Care leavers are more likely to be unemployed (Harrison et al., 2023), precariously employed (Arnau-Sabatés et al., 2014), and/or in low-paid employment (Zeira et al., 2022). One of the most cited reasons for this is lower educational attainment and qualification levels among the care leaver population (Cameron et al., 2014; Courtney and Hook, 2016). Yet, little is known about the employment experiences of highly qualified care leavers who have graduated from higher education. Obtaining a higher education qualification is associated with positive labour market outcomes, including less exposure to unemployment (Gov.uk. 2024) and higher earnings (Britton et al., 2020). For these reasons, higher education may potentially be transformative for care leavers, enhancing their opportunities to access well-paid, secure employment.

However, until now, research insights into whether higher education qualifications lead to positive employment outcomes for care leavers are absent. To address this gap, this paper reports on empirical findings from the Care-Experienced Graduates' Project (2021-2024). This qualitative, longitudinal study mapped 14 care leaver graduates' experiences of transitioning out of higher education and into their graduate lives in England and Scotland. In doing so, the study aimed to understand how a background of care affected their graduate transitions. The paper evidences the unique structural constraints that care leaver graduates face when accessing and progressing through graduate employment. These constraints were associated with graduates' care leaver status, and the circumstances arising from their backgrounds of care. These included: needing to balance their graduate job search against the risk of homelessness; experiencing pressure to take a 'survival' rather than 'strategic' approach to job applications; the perpetuation of financial instability beyond graduation due to an absence of local authority support, and needing to negotiate the emotional impact of encountering workplace practices which mirrored their experiences in the care system (see Baker, forthcoming).

In presenting evidence of these constraints, the paper argues that the employability benefits of higher education in the English and Scottish context are currently restricted for care leavers. These restrictions are likely to contribute to the long-term perpetuation of unequal employment outcomes between care leaver and non-care leaver graduates. After highlighting these issues, the paper concludes with a series of recommendations on what higher education institutions, local authorities, and employers can do to redress these inequities.

Mapping Grand Challenges of Leaving Care – a borrowed concept to innovate and transform the process of leaving care

Thursday, 11th September - 09:45: (SEECEL B1) - Accepted with changes

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The world is facing progressively complex challenges, climate change being one of the most serious threats. As demonstrated by recent crises (financial crash, pandemic, cost of living), services are severely strained in such conditions of uncertainty and resource demand. Climate change will place unprecedented pressures on services, social systems, and individual lives, likely to affect most severely the marginalised populations who already suffer from unequal distribution of social, political and economic goods. Worldwide, efforts are being made to strengthen infrastructure resilience, innovation, and societal transformation towards sustainability and environmental justice.

In this project, we aim to raise awareness and start a conversation about the transformations needed today to strengthen the leaving care process around the world in anticipation of the strain posed by climate change. Recurrent evidence shows that, by and large, care-leaving systems are mostly underdeveloped and do not serve equitably the needs of diverse young people. This results in fewer opportunities for a just and fulfilled life than other youth might have. For lasting change, action needs to strengthen the underlying structural foundation of the leaving care offer rather than only focus on the visible consequences.

Our study explored the root causes of the barriers that young people experience before, during, and after leaving care. We are suggesting that meaningful and future-proof improvement to their lived experience can only take place when we address these root causes, or 'grand challenges' of leaving care. We are borrowing this concept from other disciplines who use it to focus energy and innovation on addressing the highest-level causes of 'wicked' problems that should be eliminated to see enduring improvement.

Survey data was collected in 2023, and a scoping review analysed 2013-2023 literature from seven worlds regions. We used the UNCRC classification to collect expertise from Asia & the Pacific, Australia & New Zealand, Europe & Central Asia, Latin America & the Caribbean, North Africa & the Middle East, North America, and sub-Saharan Africa. Ninety-three survey responses from international researchers and care-experienced people offered extrospective reflections on the root causes of the difficulties experienced by care leavers in their countries. The scoping review analysed literature (in English, Spanish and Arabic) from 81 countries for inclusivity, diversity, and decolonisation of knowledge. Data extraction focused on the explanations suggested by authors (mostly researchers, but also some care leaver voices) for the barriers experienced by care leavers in various countries. The analysis was undertaken by four researchers and guided by Interpretive Description, the 'Five Why's' Root Cause Analysis method, concept mapping, Lincoln & Guba's 'authenticity', and multiple peer verification stages. The root causes/grand challenges have been verified and discussed with seven lived-experience advocates with diverse expertise and world backgrounds.

The findings show that the barriers experienced personally by care leavers emerge from intersecting root causes acting concurrently at multiple systemic levels: system architecture, legislation, discourses, conceptual foundations, professional workforce, the format of care, and in society. These, however, have emerged from the data available and are therefore not exhaustive. Gaps and limitations will be outlined.

Foster care – when young people are in the process of leaving care – collaboration with Child Welfare Services

Thursday, 11th September - 10:00: (SEECEL B1) - Oral

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Objectives

Care-experienced young people, like other youths, need support during their transition to adulthood. Foster carers can play a significant role in this process. When the youth turn 18, the care order formally ends. The foster care assignment can continue with a new agreement to support the young person in transition to adulthood. Foster care can continue with a new agreement to support the young person's transition to adulthood. However, this arrangement depends on agreement between Child Welfare Services, the young person and foster carers. Several studies on foster carers retention highlight the importance of the relationship with Child Welfare Services and how it can be a major source of stress. However, there are few studies on foster parents' views regarding their cooperation with Child Welfare Services during the aftercare period, which is the theme of this presentation.

Methods

The presentation is based on qualitative interviews with 35 foster carers from Norway and Sweden about their experiences and collaboration with Child Welfare Services when the young person leaves care. The selection criteria were foster carers who had experience of caring for at least one young person who had aged out of care, with a placement that had lasted at least one year and ended no longer than five years before the interview. The interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and read by both researchers. During the analysis, NVivo was used to systematize the findings. The findings were further analysed in relation to managerial care theory and social support theory since the experience of support, or lack thereof, was highlighted by the carers.

Findings

When analysing interviews with foster carers, we found that several carers described extensive work related to establishing and employing aftercare. The foster carers' descriptions recall aspects of the theory of managerial care, which we found to be useful for understanding their experiences. The foster carers described both positive and negative experiences of collaboration and the different kinds of support from Child Welfare Services needed to manage the task of supporting the young person in transition to adulthood.

Conclusion

This study shows that foster carers take on extensive responsibility to manage aftercare, work that many find unnecessarily demanding regarding the follow-up from Child Welfare Services. Our study highlights the necessity for Child Welfare Services to provide information and facilitate affirmational, emotional, and instrumental support to carers during the aftercare period. This support will enable carers to provide direct care and reduce the need to focus on tasks that can be characterized as managerial care. By exploring carers' experiences through the lens of social support theory and managerial care theory, significant aspects of foster parents' caring roles become more visible. This awareness is critical for planning the process of leaving care effectively.

Parenting After Care: Role Models, Styles, and Gender Dynamics a Decade Later

Thursday, 11th September - 10:15: (SEECEL B1) - Accepted with changes

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Background and Aims

Parenting presents unique challenges for care leavers—individuals who aged out of residential or foster care—due to their histories of abuse, neglect, and lack of family support. While parenting offers opportunities for personal growth and satisfaction, it also highlights the difficulties in breaking intergenerational cycles of trauma. The study aimed to explore the parenting styles adopted by care leavers and the factors influencing these styles. By applying Baumrind's (1966) parenting framework, this research offers new insights into care leavers' parenting a decade after leaving care.

Method

we conducted qualitative interviews with 22 care leavers (11 males and 11 females) aged 28–31, a decade after leaving residential care. The participants, diverse in their familial and educational backgrounds, were selected from a larger longitudinal study. Data were analyzed thematically to identify key themes.

Findings

We identify two main themes:

Reflections on Childhood Experiences: Participants described the influence of their childhoods on their parenting perceptions. Many were critical of their parents, aiming to avoid repeating their mistakes. They sought to provide their children with the warmth, security, and stability they themselves lacked. Some integrated positive aspects of their parents' behaviors while rejecting negative traits. Others looked for alternative role models, such as residential care staff or host families, as sources of inspiration.

Practical Parenting Styles and Gender Roles: Parenting styles varied, with many participants adopting authoritarian approaches, emphasizing discipline and structure. Some preferred permissive or authoritative styles, balancing responsiveness with guidance. Only a few adopted flexible styles that combined clear boundaries with nurturing support. Gender roles often followed traditional norms, with mothers as primary caregivers and fathers as breadwinners. While some participants adhered to these dynamics, others actively challenged them, emphasizing egalitarian relationships and shared caregiving responsibilities.

Conclusions

The findings highlight how care leavers' early experiences shape their parenting, with many striving to break cycles of neglect and create nurturing environments for their children. Tailored support programs are essential to foster resilience, address intergenerational trauma, and promote flexible parenting models that balance warmth and boundaries. Encouraging egalitarian gender roles and reducing caregiving burdens on mothers is critical. Given the lack of family networks, professional role models and residential care staff play a vital role in supporting care leavers' positive parenting practices. Expanding these resources is key to empowering care leavers and ensuring their children's well-being.

The book of life : an innovation in child welfare

Thursday, 11th September - 09:00: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Dr. Nathalie CHAPON [1]

1. *Université Marie et Louis PASTEUR*

The French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights(2020) notes that France does not respect the rights of children in care with regard to their private and family life, particularly with regard to maintaining links with their parents and foster families and meeting their special needs. What about children's right to know their own family and personal history? Although article 7 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises the need for young people to have access to their own history, this is still not a priority for French child protection services. In this context, how do social workers in charge of children take this issue into account in their practices? How can the foster families who take in the children support them so that they can answer the children's questions and have access to their stories? We address these questions by presenting an innovative research and training programme on 'the life stories of young people in care', based on the creation of a writing tool, a book of life.

This approach enables children to have access to their history, to recount their memories, to preserve them and to be the main actor in their institutional and foster family life history. French institution has a duty to remember the children in its care, not just to protect them. This approach has been implemented in several French départements with over 1,000 children, all the placement teams in all the territories, the social workers, all the children's referents and all the foster families for over three years. We will present the approach adopted by 2 départements, children's teams, foster families, institutions and children, and the support required to enable the tool to be integrated into professional practices.

We will discuss the resistance, tensions and positive changes associated with this approach, as well as analysing some of the results of the research with social workers, foster families and children in the form of interviews and focus groups. Photos and videos will show the commitment of young people to the proposed approach.

DOMUS LUDENS: A HOUSE THAT PLAYS

Thursday, 11th September - 09:15: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Dr. Coral Gallardo Masa [1]

1. *Fundació Resilis*

Residential care plays a crucial role in safeguarding the well-being, safety, and development of children and adolescents when their family environments cannot do so. However, despite the fundamental importance of the right to play for healthy development, play is often neglected in these settings. As adolescents grow older, play activities are increasingly sidelined in favor of academic, vocational, and life-skill objectives, leaving little room for recreational experiences that support emotional and social growth. This study, developed within the Erasmus+ Domus Ludens project (Ref. 2020-2-ES02-KA205-015517), investigates the effects of systematically integrating modern board games into the daily routines of residential care centers. The core hypothesis is that structured and sustained play fosters improvements in emotional management, interpersonal relationships, and the overall relational climate within these settings.

The intervention involved regular board game sessions facilitated by trained educators, with data collected through questionnaires and weekly reports from both adolescents and educators. Results show that board games are powerful tools for promoting emotional well-being, creativity, engagement, and social connectedness. The sessions provided adolescents with spaces for relaxation, emotional expression, and conflict management, while also enhancing motivation and collaborative skills. Importantly, the shared experiences during play strengthened bonds between adolescents and educators, offering a valuable counterbalance to technology-driven isolation.

Moreover, the study observed a notable shift in the perspectives of the educational teams. While adolescents' self-assessments of their skills and well-being remained stable before and after the program, educators' evaluations of the adolescents became significantly more positive following participation in the board game sessions. Initially marked by lower expectations, educators' post-intervention assessments aligned more closely with adolescents' own self-perceptions. This transformation underscores the potential of structured play to not only support adolescents' development but also to reshape the attitudes of the adults who guide them.

In conclusion, the integration of board games into residential care settings emerges as a valuable educational and relational strategy. Beyond offering recreational opportunities, these activities foster emotional resilience, improve relational dynamics, and contribute to a more positive and empowering environment. For these benefits to be fully realized, the study emphasizes the importance of equipping educators with specific training in the facilitation of play-based interventions and designing programs that prioritize the strengths and developmental needs of adolescents in care.

Identity Formation and Sense of Belonging in Open Adoption: A Longitudinal Case Study in Israel

Thursday, 11th September - 09:30: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

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While open adoption has been prevalent in Western countries for decades, in Israel it is a relatively new model, developed in the past 15 years primarily to provide permanent homes for children from the welfare system who cannot grow up with their biological parents due to significant parental functioning difficulties. The Israeli open adoption model maintains a more restricted approach, typically involving supervised meetings between adoptees and their biological families at welfare services, with no identifying information shared between the adoption triangle and all contact monitored by social workers.

This longitudinal study aimed to examine how adoptees, adoptive parents, and biological parents perceive the impact of open adoption on adoptees' self-identity formation and sense of belonging to both their adoptive and biological families over time. The study examined the pioneering cases of supervised open adoption in Israel. The research followed 11 adoptees born to eight biological families and adopted by ten adoptive families, conducted through two waves of interviews: 40 interviews in 2010-2011 and 31 interviews in 2020, including representatives from all the pioneering cases.

Key findings indicate that open adoption simultaneously facilitates and challenges identity development and sense of belonging. While contact helps adoptees understand their origins and develop coherent identities, it may also generate identity confusion and divided loyalties, particularly during adolescence and emerging adulthood. The study found that outcomes were significantly influenced by the attitudes of all adoption triangle members toward the supervised meetings and by whether adoptive parents' primary motivation was desire for parenthood or desire to help a child at risk/help society.

The study provides important implications for policy and practice. This includes implementing a coordinated support system and careful assessment of all parties' suitability for open adoption, with specific attention to supporting adoptees through identity formation processes and managing complex family relationships. The findings emphasize the need for comprehensive, long-term professional support tailored to each member of the adoption triangle, particularly during developmental transitions.

“We Want to Make a Difference”: Care-experienced youth navigating identity and purpose in care-oriented higher education

Thursday, 11th September - 09:45: (SEECEL B2) - Accepted with changes

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Background and Objectives

A growing number of care-experienced young people (CEYP) in Flanders and Brussels are entering higher education programs in care-related fields such as social work, psychology and education. This phenomenon raises important questions about how these students navigate identity, belonging, and purpose in the context of their care history. This qualitative study explores the motivations and lived experiences of CEYP enrolled in care-oriented higher education, focusing on how they make sense of their care background, manage stigma, and sustain their journey through key relationships.

Methods

This study is grounded in a qualitative research tradition
that seeks to illuminate how meaning is constructed through lived experience.

A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019) of 30 in-depth interviews with CEYP (aged 20–45), enrolled in associate, bachelor’s or master’s programs in Flanders or Brussels was performed. The interviews explored both the decision to pursue care-related studies and the experiences during their academic journey. Attention was paid to the dynamic role of supportive relationships (linked lives), the interplay of stigma and identity, and the use of lived experience as a resource.

The analysis performed was both inductive and interpretative, drawing inspiration from prior research on identity development, care leaver transitions, and critical youth studies. In doing so, it connected the personal trajectories of CEYP with broader themes of social recognition, resilience, and institutional marginality.

Key Findings

Three interwoven themes emerged: (1) **Care as a Source of Purpose**: For many CEYP, the decision to pursue a care-oriented profession stemmed from a strong desire to “mean something” to others. Their own experiences with youth care—both the pain and the strength—were transformed into motivation to support vulnerable populations, functioning as a form of identity reparation and forward-looking empowerment. (2) **The Role of Relational Anchors (Linked Lives)**: Significant others—including youth care professionals, peers, romantic partners, and educators—provided relational continuity across transitional moments. These “linked lives” offered emotional and practical support, helping students manage academic demands and feelings of otherness. Even one stable relationship often served as a lifeline, countering marginalisation and enabling persistence. (3) **Stigma and Identity Tensions**: While care experiences were a source of insight and strength, many participants faced stigma, self-doubt, and internalised shame. Academic/educational spaces often lacked sensitivity to experiential knowledge, leaving students navigating identity struggles alone. The co-existence of empowerment and vulnerability was a recurring tension in their narratives.

Conclusions and Implications

This study highlights how CEYP actively reframe their care experiences into a generative source of professional identity and contribution. Education becomes a transitional space where identity is reconstructed through meaningful roles, relational continuity, and future orientation. The findings call for more inclusive, experience-aware learning environments and greater institutional recognition of the value of lived experience in care-oriented professions.

Unveiling the Role of Residential Care in Care Leavers' Personal Development and Life Outcomes

Thursday, 11th September - 10:00: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Dr. Netta Achdut [1], ***Prof. Yafit Sulimani-Aidan*** [2], ***Prof. Rami Benbenishty*** [3], ***Prof. Anat Zeira*** [3]

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Background: Residential care is a type of intervention perceived worldwide as a "last resort" solution for at-risk children and adolescents. Over the years, skepticism has arisen concerning the contribution of residential care to care leavers' resilience and life outcomes. While some scholars, professionals, and international organization (UNICEF, 2024; United Nations General Assembly, 2010) have emphasized the potential negative and harmful effects of residential placements, others claimed that residential placement can contribute to the positive development of some youth and may be helpful in promoting recovery and in addressing social, emotional, and behavioural challenges experienced by older children in particular. In light of this ongoing debate, this study quantitively examines: (1) the perceived contribution of residential care (PCRC) to multiple life domains from the perspective of young adults who were in residential care during their adolescence; (2) the associations between pre-care context, in-care and post-care experiences and achievements with PCRC.

Methods: The sample was randomly drawn from the whole population of eight graduating cohorts of alumni of educational and therapeutical residential care in Israel and consists of 2,295 alumni (24-31 years old). The dataset combines an extensive set of longitudinal administrative records and information collected through a structured phone interview. Drawing on care leavers' retrospective reports, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis and identified two constructs pertaining to participants' PCRC. The first focused on contribution to personal development, and the second on contribution to achieving tangible and intangible life outcomes. Bivariate analyses and multiple regression models were used to assess associations between pre-care, in-care and post-care experiences and achievements with both PCRC constructs.

Results: Israeli young adults who were in their adolescence in education residential care hold positive views regarding the impact of their care experiences on their personal development and various life outcomes. OLS regressions results indicated that in-care experiences of peer and staff support were strong predictors of both perceived personal development and life outcomes. Only a few pre-care factors and none of the post-care factors were predictive of PCRC. Specifically, PCRC was lower among men compared with women; compared to Israeli-born participants, PCRC to personal development was lower among Ethiopian immigrants, but higher in the life outcomes domain. PCRC was also higher in both domains among participants whose parents had a criminal conviction.

Conclusions and implications: Care leavers perceive their time in residential care as contributing significantly to their personal development and to their tangible and intangible life outcomes. In-care experience of peer and staff support were strongly related to higher PCRC. This emphasizes the significance of relationships formed during care, both with peers and staff, and suggest the potential of a positive and supportive care environment, to mitigate pre-care challenges. Notably, positive in-care experiences appear more influential than post-care ones, portraying a crucial protective factor as care leavers progress in life. The findings here support a more nuanced view of the impact of residential care, as such facilities might be a suitable out-of-home placement alternative that promotes youths' wellbeing in their young adulthood.

The Role of Social Capital and Identity Capital in the Resilience of Care Leavers

Thursday, 11th September - 09:00: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Dr. Yifat Mor-Salwo [1]

1. *Jerusalem Multidisciplinary College (formerly Hadassah Academic College)*

Care leavers experience emerging adulthood differently, and often more challengingly, than their peers in the general population. These challenges raise important questions about their future aspirations, particularly regarding access to higher education. Indeed, the proportion of care leavers who pursue higher education remains relatively low.

Despite these barriers, some care leavers succeed in accessing higher education. This study examined the factors related to the educational success of alumni from educational residential settings in Israel, as part of their transition into adulthood. Using a qualitative approach, the study draws on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 45 alumni who successfully integrated into higher education.

The study's theoretical framework centers on the concept of resilience. To deepen the understanding of how graduates build resilience that enables them to integrate into higher education, the study incorporates two additional concepts: identity capital (individual internal resources) and social capital (resources provided by the individual's environment).

Findings reveal that resilience was shaped by both identity and social capital. Social capital was reflected in the "key scenario" of pursuing higher education—an aspiration often transmitted by family or the residential setting. Identity capital manifested through personal traits such as ambition, goal orientation, internal locus of control, the ability to mobilize resources, curiosity, a love of learning, and independence.

The study found that the ability of the youth to rely on their individual resources helped them pave their way to higher education throughout various stages of life, and was especially significant at the stage of completing their tenure at the residential setting and the transition to adulthood and higher education. Similar to findings in previous studies, participants described this period as particularly challenging, due to the need to navigate life independently after having been part of a structured framework that had met all their basic needs. Unlike their peers who could rely on family support during this period, many of the youth in this study faced familial hardships and could not count on such support. Their capacity to draw on internal strengths, despite the lack of external support at a time of many options and little clear direction, was a valuable asset.

Crucially, the findings indicated that it was often the synthesis of these two forms of capital—rather than each in isolation—that supported the transition into higher education. Social capital provided the initial vision or aspiration, often through key figures or institutions that encouraged academic goals. Identity capital, on the other hand, enabled participants to act on that vision through personal traits such as motivation, self-discipline, and independence. For example, care leavers who saw higher education as part of their future (due to social capital) were able to realize this vision thanks to their internal resources (identity capital).

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of resilience in the context of care leavers' transition to adulthood and highlights implications for policy and practice. It underscores the importance of fostering both personal and social resources to support care leavers in their journey toward adulthood, independence, and social integration.

What are the outcomes and experiences of care-experienced adults aged 25 years or more? Findings from a narrative rapid review

Thursday, 11th September - 09:15: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Dr. Eavan Brady [1], ***Prof. Janet Boddy*** [2], ***Dr. Lynne Cahill*** [1], ***Prof. Robbie Gilligan*** [1], ***Prof. Stephanie Holt*** [1], ***Dr. Sarah Parker*** [1]

1. *Trinity College Dublin,* ***2.*** *University of Sussex*

Background

International literature to date has demonstrated both the strengths of care experienced young people and adults and the marginalisation and disadvantage that they may face on their journeys through and out of the care system. Much of this literature has focused on young people in care, or on the leaving care transition, and not enough is known about the implications of care experiences as adult lives unfold over time, and the factors, events and experiences that influence differing trajectories and outcomes.

Objective

This paper will present findings of a narrative rapid review designed to capture and synthesise learning from relevant studies involving care experienced adults aged 25 and above. This review was conducted to inform the scope and design of an ongoing research study exploring the lived experience of care leavers (now aged 26-31) in Ireland. This study is part of a wider programme of work – the Care Experiences Programme - being conducted by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in Ireland.

Methods

The approach used to guide this narrative rapid review was deliberately inclusive and flexible, framed by the following research question: *What are the outcomes and experiences of care-experienced adults aged 25 years or more?* Following a robust and iterative search process, 175 sources were identified including a small sub-set of articles that focused exclusively on over 25s (n=13) and a larger proportion that included young people aged over 25 as well as younger participants.

Findings

In this presentation we will outline i) core substantive topics and domains of experience that are addressed in the existing literature; ii) key findings of literature that focuses exclusively on care-experienced adults aged 25 and above; iii) gaps in understanding that need to be addressed, in terms of significant aspects of young adults' lives that are not addressed in the identified literature on care experienced adulthoods; and iv) key methodological and ethical learning from existing research.

Conclusion

Findings from this rapid review suggest that while people with care experience often face distinctive challenges through their adult lives, difficulties are not inevitable and the passage of time may provide opportunities for positive / supportive development and experiences. Review findings also highlight the need for a relational perspective on this issue as pathways are shaped by dis/continuities in support networks associated with care status and care leaving, and through complex ongoing relationships with biological kin networks. Finally, the rapid review provides evidence of the need for, and potential value, of an inclusive and holistic qualitative biographical approach to research with young adults, drawing on creative approaches to provide an alternative understanding that disrupts deficit-focused hegemonic narratives, whilst attending to the complex challenges and varied experiences navigated by adults with care experience.

Crip time - temporality and the transition to adulthood for disabled care leavers

Thursday, 11th September - 09:30: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Dr. Ingri-Hanne Braenne Bennwik [1]

1. *VID specialized Universty*

This paper seeks to challenge ableist notions surrounding the transition to adulthood for care leavers by employing temporality as a lens for exploring this transition.

The analysis draws on qualitative interviews conducted with eight disabled young people aged 19 to 27 who have transitioned from out of home care in Norway. The interviews took place between 2019 and 2021 and were part of a Ph.D. study focused on support for disabled care leavers (Bennwik 2023). A significant theme that emerged from prior analyses of the data concerned the young people's perception and management of time during their transition out of care. This theme has not been addressed in previous publications from the study and serves as the foundation for this reanalysis.

By utilizing the concept of crip time, and the dimensions extra time, wasted time and flexible time (Baril, 2016), the analysis examines how normative time structures impact on the lives of disabled young people as they transition out of care and into adulthood. Instead of questioning the temporality of disabled bodies, the concept of crip time critiques the notion of normality and the normative life course. The main findings from the analysis are described briefly here:

1. In this study, the category of **extra time** refers to instances when the young people required additional time during their transition to adulthood. This need of extra time was partly due to their experiences in out-of-home care and partly related to their disabilities. For example, many spent considerable time interacting with support services, often leading to school absence or slower progress in education or work. This set them apart from their peers, and many experienced that they were labeled as slow, lazy, or "different". Many tried to mask this difference by striving to meet normative standards in education or work participation or by pursuing "independence" through not seeking help. Their need for extra time was not mostly a result of their individual impairments but often stemmed from external factors, such as a lack of access to public transportation and lengthy or demanding assessment processes.
2. The category of **wasted time** refers to how the extra time spent by the young people was often perceived as unproductive, both by themselves and by the surrounding society. For example, many youth spent a significant amount of time waiting for services or outcomes related to their applications for benefits or assistance. In some instances, the young people engaged in activities considered beneficial by child welfare services, but which they themselves viewed as unhelpful or a waste of time.
3. The category of **flexible time** captures how disabled young people often felt older than their peers due to bodily impairments, yet were treated as children lacking autonomy. Additionally, they faced expectations of independence while simultaneously having significant support needs. Many experienced little control over their time, relying heavily on assistance from others.

The implications of these findings will be discussed.

Beyond Stigma: Positive Transitions and Social Inclusion for Young Care Leavers

Thursday, 11th September - 09:45: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Dr. Tuhinul Khalil [1]

1. *UOE*

Children and young people enter residential care institutions for a variety of reasons, but it has had an image, which, at the very least, is not a positive one. The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of residential care from the perspective of a group of young people who had lived in residential childcare institutions in Bangladesh. The study focused on three different types of institutions, namely the NGO Home (for children of sex workers), the State Care Home, and the faith-based orphanage (madrasah).

Qualitative methods were employed for data collection, using in-depth semi-structured interviews with 133 young people (aged between 12 and 26) who had left the care system, and a yearlong observation of the four institutions where they had lived.

The main finding in this study is that time spent in residential childcare in Bangladesh was, on the whole, a positive experience for this group of young people, giving them opportunities for education, healthcare, relationships and social networks that they would not have had otherwise; after leaving care, their life chances of jobs, higher education and marriage and family life were improved as a direct consequence of this.

By examining the experiences of children and young people in Bangladesh, we can see that residential childcare has the potential to offer a positive option for many disadvantaged children or children in need or at risk – thus promoting social equality through inclusion in the mainstreaming society. Thus, the findings of this study are quite challenging in a research context dominated by minority world conceptualisations.

This presentation sheds light on the positive outcomes of residential care for children and young people in Bangladesh. It highlights how residential care can be a positive option for disadvantaged children, promoting social equality and inclusion in society and challenging conventional research perspectives.

The role of the community in the transition to adulthood of foster care leavers in Spain

Thursday, 11th September - 10:00: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Dr. Sara Pérez-Hernando [1], ***Dr. Aida Urrea Monclús*** [2], ***Dr. Anna Mundet-Bolós*** [1], ***Dr. Julio Rodríguez Rodríguez*** [1]

1. *Universitat de Barcelona,* ***2.*** *Universitat de Lleida*

The presentation addresses the importance of analyzing the transition to adult life of young people, especially those in situations of social vulnerability, such as young care leavers, who face greater difficulties and risks during this process. These difficulties include the early development of responsibilities, emotional and social conflicts, and problems related to employment, education, family, health and social integration.

The community plays a crucial role, as it can facilitate or hinder this process depending on its ability to offer a safe and supportive environment. At the state level, there is a strategy aimed at transforming the institutional support system to ensure that all young people, regardless of their needs, can develop their life projects and be included in society.

The transition to adult life is a key moment, as it involves achieving economic independence, training and personal autonomy, through employment and the constitution of an independent household. This process must be approached from a democratic and participatory perspective, in which the voice of young adults leaving care is valued, and their real participation in decision-making about their future is promoted.

In this sense, the role of the community as a key factor in the deinstitutionalization of young people has been analyzed within the framework of the "IMEX Project – Successful Emancipation Itineraries". A three-year project (2022-2024) at the national level of social innovation in the care of care leavers, between 18 and 25 years of age, led by the Federation of Entities with Assisted Projects and Flats (FEPA), financed by European Recovery Funds Next Generation EU, which has the support of the Ministry of Social Rights 2030 and is part of the Recovery Plan, Transformation and Resilience of the Government of Spain.

The results show: 1) the community's perception regarding barriers to inclusion, the need for awareness, and the shift in the community's perspective; and 2) the situation of young people in the community, the challenge of aligning the community approach with reality, participation spaces, the perception of young people's interest in participating, and their involvement in the community as an essential aspect of deinstitutionalization.

Understanding Sexual Exploitation in Residential Care: A Study with Adolescents in northern Spain

Thursday, 11th September - 09:00: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. ALBA ÁGUILA OTERO [1], ***Dr. Noemí Pereda*** [1]

1. *Universitat de Barcelona*

Introduction: Sexual exploitation of children and adolescents a type of sexual victimization, with important health public implications and a severe violation of child rights. This type of victimization is unknown and invisible to most of the population, making prevention and intervention in these situations especially difficult. In Europe, the prevalence ranges between 1 to 2.5% in the general adolescent population (Benavente et al., 2021), ranking us in the highest range, with 2.6% in Spain (Pereda et al., 2025). But this form of victimization is more frequent in children and adolescents within the child welfare system (Brown, 2019; Hickle & Roe-Sepowitz, 2018). Considering that research suggests that adolescents in residential care present more risk of suffering sexual exploitation than the general population, it is essential to prevent, detect, and intervene with this highly vulnerable population.

Objective: The main objective it was to analyze the prevalence of sexual exploitation in adolescents within residential care in Cantabria, Spain, and to identify key characteristics of the victims.

Method: The sample consisted of 121 adolescents (50.4% male, 44.6% female), aged between 14 and 18 years (M = 15.98), all living in residential child care facilities in Cantabria, a region in northern Spain. An ad hoc online questionnaire was administered to assess both knowledge and personal experiences related to child sexual exploitation, including both quantitative and qualitative components.

Results: Nearly 70% of participants reported knowing what sexual exploitation is, and over half indicated having received some form of training on the issue. Regarding experiences, 43% knew someone who had been involved in sexual exploitation, and 17.4% reported having been personally victimized within the past year. Concerning victim profiles, 38% were boys, and half of the victims had run away from the facility in the past year. Moreover, 62% reported experiencing exploitation prior to their current placement, either while living with biological families or in other care settings. Notably, 12.4% of participants acknowledged having involved other adolescents in exploitative situations.

Conclusion: Findings indicate that sexual exploitation is a highly prevalent issue among adolescents in residential care, a particularly vulnerable population within the child welfare system. The proportion of male victims and the fact that many were exploited before being placed in their current care setting underscore the need for early identification, targeted prevention strategies, and specialized training for caregivers and professionals. Moreover, the involvement of some adolescents in facilitating exploitation highlights the complex dynamics of victimization and the urgent need for comprehensive, trauma-informed interventions.

Including young people with lived experience of the youth justice system as peer researchers in a large-scale efficacy trial

Thursday, 11th September - 09:15: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Ms. Hannah Lawrence [1], Ms. Mia Johnson [1], Mr. Narendra Bhalla [1], Dr. Emily Blackshaw [1], Mr. Max Stanford [1], Ms. Elizabeth Raws [1]

1. *Coram*

"At the start when I saw the questions, I was like 'oh not really, nah' [because they were about crime and offending] but [the peer researcher] reassured me … because he's gone through things like me." - Young person on the trial

Since April 2024, the Coram Institute for Children has run a large-scale randomised controlled trial (RCT) of a 12-month restorative mentoring programme for children and young people aged 11 to 17 who are at risk of offending and involvement in youth violence. The trial runs until August 2027 and aims to recruit over 800 young people across England, including those who are in custody. Referral partners include youth offending teams, a secure training centre and pupil referral units. The trial is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund.

Central to the trial is a participatory approach to ground the research in lived experience of the youth justice system. In this abstract, we present our approach to placing young people, who have faced similar challenges to those faced by participants, at the heart of an efficacy trial through the use of an embedded peer researcher programme.

Our team of 6 paid peer researchers, aged 18 to 25, is the first point of contact for participants referred to the trial. Each peer researcher plays a pivotal role by explaining the RCT, gathering informed consent and supporting the young person to complete a set of measures about sensitive topics. With the peer researcher by their side, the young person completes the Self-Report Delinquency Scale in order to measure our primary outcome of volume of offending. Our primary research question is:

What is the difference in self-reported offending rates of young people demonstrating risk factors or affected by offending, between those who receive a restorative mentoring programme and those who receive business-as-usual support?

Secondary outcomes include criminal exploitation and emotional and behavioural problems. Peer researchers follow-up with participants at 6- and 12-months post randomisation to collect outcome data, along with an informal check-in at 3 months. The peer researchers also support with the implementation and process evaluation fieldwork (for example, co-interviewing young people) and co-analysis.

Peer researchers receive a comprehensive training programme from the Coram Institute for Children. The training includes research methods and design, understanding a RCT and the randomisation process, obtaining informed consent, confidentiality, safeguarding and data protection, ethical research and health and safety for researchers. The peer researchers receive ongoing training and supervision from the study team.

In this presentation, we share our learning from this approach and preliminary findings from the upcoming pilot report. We believe including peer researchers is a unique and innovative way to run a RCT in social research settings, enabling meaningful participation and producing credible findings. As one young person told us:

"I answered all the questions honestly, like when they said 'have you carried a knife in the past 6 months?', like, I would either say 'I have' or I would say 'yeah' … it's easy to admit to things to them [peer researchers]."

Advancing the implementation of the Supportive Parenting program in the Netherlands (through the lens of the EPIS Framework)

Thursday, 11th September - 09:30: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Ms. Maaike Keijsers [1], ***Dr. Mariëlle Cloin*** [1], ***Dr. Marieke van Egmond*** [1]

1. *Tranzo - Tilburg University*

Introduction

Supportive Parenting (SP) is a preventive public health program that offers extra support to (future) parents with additional support needs in parenting. The program consists of a series of six pre- and postnatal home visits by specially trained youth healthcare nurses, aimed at improving parents' mental health, addressing insecurities, answering questions, and enhancing children's wellbeing by providing them with a solid start in life.

Despite the proven effectiveness of SP, the intervention is not available in all municipalities in the Netherlands and not uniformly implemented. This project focuses on the differences and best practices of implementation of the program in two Regional Health Service (RHS) regions in the province North-Brabant (the Netherlands). The RHS addressed the need to improve the implementation and expanding its reach to better support families in the regions.

The aim of this study is to anchor the intervention more firmly in the preventive services of youth healthcare in North-Brabant and improve its reach in target communities. The EPIS framework (Aarons et al., 2011) is applied to study, analyze and improve the implementation process. The approach is divided into four consecutive work packages.

Approach

The first work package of the study (Exploration) consisted of acquiring evidence by indexing the outer context of the intervention, the social context in municipalities, on the basis of secondary data. Specifically, we analyzed 31 indicators of the national quadrennial child monitor questionnaire and policy documents about Supportive Parenting. The goal was to identify where the intervention is currently available and where it is most needed, by matching these indicators to the availability of the intervention. In-depth interviews were conducted with youth health care (YHC) professionals for a more qualitative perspective on the outer context.

For the Preparation phase, the experiences of parents were gathered with a questionnaire and deepened using Experience Journey Mapping interviews. The inner implementation context was assessed using a questionnaire for YHC professionals using existing measures from the EPIS framework and elaborated on with a focus group about the results.

Next, in the Implementation phase, an action-oriented study is applied to process and incorporate the evidence in practice and evaluate how learned lessons are taken up by policy-makers and intervention specialists.

The cycle ends with the application and embedding of the changes and the distribution of the knowledge in the Sustainment phase.

Research Evidence Use

This study highlights the importance of Research Evidence Use (REU) and transferring knowledge into practice. By using the EPIS framework, we can identify the contextual factors that influence SP implementation and develop strategies to overcome the barriers. This process promotes the systematic incorporation of research findings into routine practice, ultimately improving the quality and effectiveness of health services.

In this presentation, we will discuss the context analysis and its results, insights and feedback from parents and professionals on their experiences, and how these findings lead to an action-oriented approach in several municipalities. This approach aims to address implementation challenges, gather feedback on implementation

issues, and improve the overall implementation process.

Care Experienced Parenting: Exploring ‘Good Enough’

Thursday, 11th September - 09:45: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. Katie Ellis [1], ***Dr. Shirley Lewis*** [1]

1. *The University of Sheffield*

This paper explores the transition to parenthood for parents with care experience. In an effort to broaden understanding around this area, this Leverhulme Trust funded project worked with care experienced parents to explore everyday parenting practices and to consider interpretations of the term ‘good enough’ parenting.
In-depth interviews were conducted with 34 parents; nine fathers and 25 mothers who discussed their experiences of parenting children aged 6 months to 31 years old. The project considered experiences of parenting children at different ages and stages. Two participants were also grandparents, and shared their reflections of parenting across the lifecourse. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically using NVIVO.
Findings reveal that parents sometimes faced stigma related to their background. Despite parenting their children without input from external agencies, parents disclosed anxiety about sharing their care background with professionals. Participants described a prevailing stigma that care experienced individuals are believed to be more likely to have their own children placed in care. They advocated for the success of care experienced parenting by sharing good practice. A majority shared that their experiences of being a child in care had taught them how not to parent and their unfulfilled needs as children had taught them what children most needed.

Interviews focused on the term ‘good enough’ parenting and explored with parents their understandings of this term. Interpretations often centred around the different types of support that they provided to their children, while material support was referenced frequently, so too were other types of support, such as emotional support and educational help. Despite creating loving, safe and emotionally supportive homes for their children, participants described feeling additional pressure to prove that their parenting was better than ‘good enough’. Parents with older children often expressed relief once their children turned 18, feeling they were no longer at risk of social work scrutiny.
Our research platforms the voices of care experienced parents to advocate for a wider understanding of their transitions to parenthood. We conclude by foregrounding positive narratives, highlighting experiences of positive support and making recommendations for policy and practice.

Supporting Parents Through Five Experiences of Child Placement: Community Service Workers' Perspectives

Thursday, 11th September - 09:00: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Prof. Julie Noël [1], ***Prof. Deborah Ummel*** [1]

1. *University of Sherbrooke*

Intervention with parents of fostered children does not fall solely on youth protection workers. In Québec, one of Canada's provinces, several parents also receive support from workers in community-based organizations. These non-profit organizations offer essential services in tandem with those offered by the government. They operate independently in their approach and practices and offer services in 32 intervention sectors (lodging, early childhood, family, health, social services, etc.). While supporting parents of placed children is not their primary mission, these organizations nevertheless offer these individuals a variety of services since parents in these situations often face several challenges, such as substance use, domestic violence, or poverty, which may have led to their child needing to be fostered.

To understand these interventions, this paper is grounded in the analysis of 28 semi-structured interviews with service workers in community-based organizations who have supported at least one parent of a placed child in the last year. The participants come from diverse backgrounds, which offers a broad view of the possible interventions with parents of fostered children. Most of participants work in organizations that offer lodging for women, men, or children. In terms of external services, they offer assistance to people or families in precarious situations (poverty, substance use, homelessness, or mental health), or they offer support in perinatal care.

Based on the perspective of service workers in community-based organizations regarding the emotions, cognition, reactions, or actions of parents following the placement of their child, our results demonstrate five distinct ways of experiencing the placement of a child. Additionally, we have identified five ways workers may adapt their intervention practices according to these five experiences. 1) raised awareness and mobilization; 2) fluctuating mobilization; 3) acceptance of placement; 4) withdrawal or abdication; 5) indignation. Transversely, we also observed incomprehension regarding the child's placement process. For some, this stemmed from an overwhelm of emotions, while, for others, this comes from cognitive limitations or a lack of introspection on the part of the parent.

Results will be discussed according to the particularities of the participants' relationship with the person receiving support (allyship, respect of pace, openness) and the follow-ups offered by the service workers (support of the parent in different life-spheres, availability, flexibility, willingness). These interventions often differ from regulated interventions by government youth protection workers, the crux of which is b the child's proper development and safety. Regarding these particularities, the complex but necessary collaboration between community-based services and those dispensed by the government will also be addressed.

Empowering Young Mothers: Social Work Collaboration in Supporting Early Motherhood

Thursday, 11th September - 09:15: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Mrs. Mihaela Bujor [1]

1. *University of Bucharest*

Background and Purpose

Early motherhood presents significant challenges for young women, particularly in vulnerable social and economic contexts. Adolescent mothers often face barriers in accessing education, healthcare, and social services, which can lead to long-term disadvantages for both the mother and child. This study aims to explore the role of social work in supporting adolescent mothers through a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach. The research seeks to understand the effectiveness of current interventions, identify gaps in service provision, and propose strategies for improving support mechanisms for young mothers. Key research questions include: (1) What are the primary challenges faced by adolescent mothers? (2) How do social workers collaborate with other professionals to support young mothers? (3) What improvements can be made to existing social work interventions?

Methods

A mixed-methods research design was employed to examine the phenomenon of early motherhood and the role of social work interventions. The qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews with adolescent mothers and women who experienced early motherhood, selected through snowball sampling. These interviews provided in-depth insights into their experiences, challenges, and perceptions of available support. Additionally, data were collected through official requests sent to DGASPC, DAS, SPAS, and DSP institutions, seeking statistical information and qualitative assessments of existing support programs. The analysis involved thematic coding for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative findings.

Results

Preliminary findings indicate that adolescent mothers experience significant socioeconomic disadvantages, including financial instability, educational disruptions, and limited access to healthcare services. Social workers play a critical role in mitigating these challenges by offering case management, counseling, and referrals to medical, psychological, and educational resources. However, institutional barriers such as bureaucratic complexity, inconsistent policy implementation, and limited funding hinder the effectiveness of these interventions. Responses from social service institutions highlight both the successes and limitations of existing programs, with a need for more tailored, flexible, and integrated support strategies.

Conclusions and Implications

The study underscores the necessity of an interdisciplinary and holistic approach in supporting adolescent mothers. Effective social work interventions require close collaboration between social workers, healthcare providers, psychologists, educators, and policymakers. Findings suggest that enhancing policy frameworks, increasing funding for social support programs, and simplifying bureaucratic processes could significantly improve service accessibility and effectiveness. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of these interventions and explore best practices in cross-sector collaboration. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on early motherhood and social work, offering practical recommendations for improving support systems for adolescent mothers and their children.

Parental engagement as a key factor in family reunification: Insights from youth protection workers in Quebec

Thursday, 11th September - 09:30: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Vanessa Lecompte [1]***, Dr. Marie-Ève Clément*** [2]

1. *Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté,* ***2.*** *Université du Québec en Outaouais*

Family reunification, which refers to the return of children placed in alternative care to their family of origin, is not always a guarantee of stability. In Quebec (Canada), re-placement occurs in 61% of cases and the failure of reunification can have significant consequences for children, who may experience further relational ruptures and various disruptions in their emotional, social, and psychological development (Goldsmith et al., 2004; Hélie et al., 2020). This issue is not unique to Quebec, as many child welfare systems face similar challenges in achieving successful reunification (Wulczyn et al., 2020). Previous studies have suggested that a complex array of factors related to the child, the parents, parental engagement, placement characteristics, and policies can influence reunification stability (Davidson et al., 2019; Esposito et al., 2021). The results of these studies highlight the broader relevance of understanding how professional practices and risk factors surrounding families may impact reunification, particularly in contexts with high re-placement rates. Such understanding can help to better tailor programs and interventions to address more effectively the specific and often complex needs of families.

Therefore, this qualitative study aims to identify, from the perspective of youth protection workers, the factors that may positively or negatively influence the family reunification process, including during placement, at the time of reunification, and in the months following the child's return home. Five group interviews were conducted with youth protection practitioners (n = 13) in an urban region of Quebec, Canada, with each group consisting of 2 to 4 practitioners. To participate, the practitioners were required to have supported at least one family with a child aged between 1 and 12 years through the reunification process. The reunification(s) had to have occurred recently enough for the practitioner to provide concrete examples. The group interviews, which lasted approximately 2 hours, were conducted virtually. Several themes were explored during the interviews, including the decision-making process, services provided to families, the parent-practitioner relationship, the parent-child relationship, and re-placement. Data analysis was conducted using the principles of thematic analysis. The interviews were independently coded by three coders, with any discrepancies in coding being resolved through ongoing discussions. The analysis of the practitioners' responses particularly revealed the critical role they attribute to parental engagement in the reunification process, and this engagement is further associated with three main themes: relational characteristics (parent-child and parent-practitioner), parental characteristics (parental issues, social support and perceptions of youth protection), and organizational factors (geographic distance of foster homes, services offered, contacts/supervised visits, rehabilitation educators) of youth protection services.

In conclusion, the discussion will focus on the interconnection between these factors and their impact on parental engagement, both with the services offered and with the child. These factors have significant implications for practice, as they can serve as key targets for interventions aimed at promoting the success of reunification through parental engagement and preventing re-placement in alternative care. Finally, the results highlight the often-overlooked role of key actors in family reunification, specifically parents and children, whose importance is not always emphasized in interventions.

NSW Australian services for pregnant women at risk of removal of their babies into out-of-home care: barriers to and resources for engaging women

Thursday, 11th September - 09:45: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Rosa Flaherty [1]

1. *Barnardos Australia*

Background and Objectives:
Psychosocial, physical and mental health risks during pregnancy may have serious effects on pregnant women and their unborn children. Some of these risks can result in a pre-birth report to statutory child protection services. Over the last decade in Australia, there has been a 200% increase in substantiated pre-birth child protection reports. Recent Australian data shows the infant age group has the highest rate of statutory child protection involvement of all age groups. Australian post-birth data indicates that 28% of removals into out-of-home care are happening in first week of the infant's life, and 45% within the first month of the infant's life. This exploratory study examined service providers' perceptions of the types of risks experienced by pregnant women, barriers to engagement, and the extent to which practitioners believed their efforts to assist women would lead to better woman and baby outcomes.
Method:
A web-based survey of 375 practitioners who provided services for women who were prenatally reported across health, Aboriginal community controlled health, child protection and non-government services in New South Wales was conducted in 2015 as part of a larger PhD study. The practitioner survey was approved for distribution by the University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee (0000033159). To enable the study to be conducted across the various agency types in NSW, 18 additional ethics committee approvals were also obtained. The study was a cross-sectional, point-in-time design in which participants from the four agency types provided responses to items about their experiences of working with or writing policy about pregnant women with multiple and complex needs. Responses to research questions were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.
Findings:
Service practitioners identified high levels of complex risks for pregnant women, and that services were using multiple engagement techniques to attempt to engage pregnant women. Overall, there was a high level of outcome expectancy, where service providers expected that their efforts to assist pregnant women would lead to positive outcomes for women and their newborn babies. Numerous barriers to engagement with women, and resources for doing this work, were identified —particularly structural and relational barriers to service engagement. Alongside this, a large proportion of practitioners perceived that at-risk pregnant women had low awareness of the services available to assist.
Conclusions and implications:
While service providers were using engagement techniques to attempt to engage at-risk pregnant women with health and social care services, there were a large number of barriers to engagement. Notwithstanding the identified risks and barriers to service engagement, there was high agreement between practitioners that they expected that their efforts to assist at-risk pregnant women would result in women having healthier birth outcomes, their unborn babies being born as healthy as they could be, and an improvement in parenting capacity post-birth. The primary implications for practice across these areas include that services must: promote relationship-based care; actively reduce structural and relational barriers to service access; provide practitioners with adequate time to work with pregnant women; and provide practitioners with cross-agency pre-birth policy and guidelines training.

Supporting the Child Welfare Workforce Through Training Partnership

Thursday, 11th September - 10:00: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Ms. Elizabeth Snyder [1], ***Ms. Tracy Crudo*** [2]

1. *University of Minnesota - Twin Cities,* ***2.*** *State of Minnesota*

In May 2019, the Minnesota Legislature authorized funding to develop and implement a statewide training academy under a newly formed State University partnership beginning in July 2019. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Regents of the University of Minnesota, on behalf of the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, entered into a Joint Powers Agreement and officially began working together in September 2019 to launch the Minnesota Child Welfare Training Academy (MNCWTA).

The mission of the MNCWTA is to train, develop, and support the skills, expertise, and well-being of Minnesota's child welfare workforce while nurturing a commitment to equitable child welfare practice. The MNCWTA uses the Minnesota Child Welfare Practice Framework which outlines the competencies required for quality practice among front-line child welfare professionals and their supervisors. The framework provides the foundation for our training and development opportunities. To support our framework and commitment to equitable child welfare practice, the Training Academy has been thoughtful and intentional about the ways we build diversity, equity, and inclusion in all elements of our partnership.

A four-year implementation plan was created to manage the process of training continuation and improvement, evaluation and accountability, curriculum development, facilities and infrastructure, partnerships and training collaborations, budget and finances, communications, technology, and initiatives to address disproportionality in the child welfare system.

In our session participants will learn about the process and reason for partnership between government and higher education to create meaningful change for children and families involved in child welfare. We will discuss the lessons learned in our first five years of implementation and how those can be translated in other areas of child welfare. Presenters will share the background that lead to the development of the Government and Higher Education partnership, the work that went into the legislative proposal resulting in a report to elected officials and continue through implementation and execution of the Partnership.

“What’s the point of PEPs anyway?”

Thursday, 11th September - 09:00: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Ms. Fay Blyth [1]

1. *University of Sussex*

This study examines how Personal Education Plans (PEPs) have evolved since their inception, with a focus on how this evolution converges with their use in practice to improve the education of children in care in England. PEPs were introduced in England over 20 years ago, with a stated aim of addressing the low educational achievement of children in care through enhanced professional accountability and cross-sector collaboration. Initially designed to support care planning and educational outcomes, PEPs today are used for purposes not originally conceived of, such as the distribution of Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) funds. Narratives surrounding the educational challenges of children in care, such as perceived neglect of educational needs by social workers, have shaped the development of PEPs and informed program theories about how PEPs set out to solve a problem.

Using a Critical Realist framework and thematic analysis, this study analyses policy documents, literature, and focus group discussions with key professionals involved in PEP processes. The findings show that while PEPs partially fulfil their intended roles of enhancing accountability and improving data sharing, their purpose is obscured through differing implementation across local authorities, bureaucratic pressures, and concerns that PEPs may further stigmatize children who already feel different from their peers. The use of PEPs to collect educational data and administer PPP funding has introduced complexities that were not foreseen when PEPs were first developed, adding administrative layers and shifting their original focus. Despite these challenges, PEPs continue to play a part in professional accountability, although their role in raising educational achievement for children in care is unclear.

The study concludes that while PEPs have evolved in response to both narratives around children in care and new demands like PPP distribution, significant complexities have developed in their implementation over the last 20 years, shifting focus away from the children they were designed to help. Further research with children in care is needed to address these issues, refine policy and reconceptualise the role of the PEP in supporting children in care to fulfil their academic potential.

Assessing Fidelity in the Implementation of the CARE Model in Spain: Implications for Sustainability

Thursday, 11th September - 09:15: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Ms. Raquel Ordiales Alegre [1], ***Ms. Ana Pulgar García*** [1], ***Dr. Laura García-Alba*** [2], ***Dr. Carla González-García*** [1], ***Prof. Amaia Bravo Arteaga*** [2]

1. *Universidad de Oviedo,* ***2.*** *University of Oviedo*

Background: The CARE model (Children and Residential Experiences) is a way of transforming educational and care practices within residential care based on six principles: relationship based, trauma informed, family involved, developmentally focused, competence centred and ecologically oriented. This implementation began in 2022 in Spain for the first time in six residential care homes. The progressive implementation of the CARE model has involved an ongoing process of training and supervision at different levels of the organization and in residential care homes. The long-term success of an evidence-based program depends on a large extent on its implementation process and the fidelity with which its principles are followed throughout, which in turn will allow for its future sustainability.

Objective: The present study has a twofold objective: (1) describe the implementation process of CARE in the six residential care homes during the first 18 months, and (2) identify those factors that are favouring or hindering such implementation, and that will be linked to the model's sustainability process.

Method: To assess alignment with the model, the CARE model fidelity tool was used, which was adapted to the Spanish language and context. This tool evaluates 28 infrastructure elements and 7 congruence elements on a scale of 1 to 5, also leaving a qualitative margin of justification for the answers. The questionnaire is applied by the implementers in the form of an interview and was completed by all the teams in each home after 18 months of implementation (midterm evaluation). This information is complemented by the observations obtained during the technical supervisions and by the entire data collection process associated with the implementation process. The analysis therefore integrates both quantitative and qualitative scores and contextual variables of a qualitative nature perceived and collected by the implementers.

Preliminary Insights: The results that will be presented show differences in the implemented processes in each children home (which already start from different situations and needs). Some common trends in the process, influenced by the differences and particularities of each context, are being identified. Certain elements emerge that facilitate or hinder the intervention process, such as the degree of alignment between the entity's values or high staff turnover. These observations suggest factors that could influence the future sustainability of the model, although further analysis will be necessary.

Conclusion: The implementation of the CARE model in Spain presents both opportunities and challenges. Through the fidelity tool, we have been able to evaluate the implementation process and detect factors that are facilitating or threatening the model's fidelity and its future implementation. Model fidelity cannot be understood in isolation but must also be analysed in relation to organizational conditions, changes in the teams and the institutional culture of the homes. This presentation will allow us to analyse these important elements in the implementation process of an evidence-based program such as CARE.

The presence and absence of the birth family in adoptive family talk within the context of closed adoption: An Indian perspective.

Thursday, 11th September - 09:30: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Dr. Sushri Sangita Puhan [1]

1. *Royal Holloway University of London*

Over the past thirty years, adoption policy and practice in India have significantly evolved, aiming to promote in-country adoption. Each year, more than 4,000 Indian children are adopted through a closed adoption model. When eligible prospective parents are successfully matched with a child, the privacy of the adoptive family is prioritised and protected, while no personal information about the biological parents is provided to the adoptive parents and adopted child and vice-versa. Due to the confidential nature of adoption, only 12% of adoptive families disclose the adoptive status to their children (Mohanty, 2014).

This paper is based on a qualitative study that explores communicative openness in adoptive family practices in closed adoption. It illuminates how a child's past and birth family are portrayed within adoptive family communication. It draws on in-depth accounts from five adoptees and eight adoptive parents of urban middle-class families in India. Following a narrative inquiry approach, the research illuminates the lived experiences of people who experience adoption. This method allows for the exploration of the complex, multi-layered, nuanced realities of adoptive family lives in an evolving socio-legal context (Clandinin, 2007; Riessman, 2008). Since adoption remains an under-researched area in the social and family landscape of India, this study employed an inductive exploratory research strategy. By applying an interpretive narrative approach, the analysis moves beyond simple descriptions of experiences to uncover the deeper meanings that participants associate with their adoptive family lives, as well as how these meanings shape their practices. This examination focuses on the content of each story while also paying close attention to its construction. This process offers valuable insights into the social function of these narratives, exploring the links between participants' lives and broader contexts and revealing the complexities and ethical dilemmas associated with adoption communication.

The findings indicate a diversity of openness in adoptive family communication about adoption. Communication tends to occur within a defined framework, often leaving little space for birth parents. Topics concerning the birth parents and the child's past are generally uncomfortable for adoptive parents to address. While adopted individuals often express a genuine curiosity about their origins and biological parents, this interest is frequently dismissed or perceived as imaginary by some adoptive parents. The findings suggest that openness about adoption in the early stages can foster a positive identity among adoptees; however, this openness does not always encompass the child's past. Connections to the child's history are viewed as threatening due to the cultural stigma surrounding birth parents, which some adoptive parents are hesitant to confront.

Although the country's Adoption Regulations 2017 include provisions for 'root search' concerning adoptees' rights to identity upon reaching 18 years of age, sociocultural influences on adoption communication point to a gap between policy and practice. This contradiction highlights the need for greater sensitivity toward a child's past experiences and emphasises the importance of providing information that can aid adoptees in developing a positive sense of identity within a closed adoption model.

The Social Worker-Mother-Father Triangle in Family Welfare Services: A Complex Covenant That Weakens the Spousal Bond

Thursday, 11th September - 09:45: (ZICER Room 3) - Accepted with changes

Dr. Nadav Perez-Vaisvidovsky [1], ***Dr. Ayana Halpern*** [1], ***Ms. Reli Mizrahi*** [1]

1. *The Faculty of Social Work Ashkelon Academic College*

Background

Fathers and their role in households and in childcare have become a central topic in family policy. Father Engagement in family- and child-related social work interventions have received growing scholarly attention in recent decades. The absence of fathers from the family welfare systems and its adverse effects on fathers, children, and families have been well documented.

However, this body of literature focuses on fathers' phenomenology or individual social workers' biases and perceptions, ignoring institutional and systemic aspects contributing to the father's absence. Specifically, policy implicitly or explicitly affecting father engagement is often overlooked.

Aim

The presented research seeks to apply a theoretical framework developed by the authors to analyze father engagement in social work intervention from a policy-aware perspective. The theoretical framework employs the concept of care to bridge the specific intervention level to that of the policy. Following the theorization by Daly (2021), the authors analyze father engagement through four vectors of care – Need, Actor/Relationship, Resources, and Values/ideas, enabling a policy-oriented understanding of father engagement.

Methods

This qualitative project is based on a secondary analysis of interviews with 21 Israeli fathers who are clients of the family welfare system. The interviews were analyzed using an analysis method developed for this purpose. Based on Carol Gilligan's Listening Guide (1982, 2017), this method consists of multiple readings of each text, each attenuated to a different care vector. The combined readings allow a multi-level view of the text, combining micro- and macro-aspects.

Findings

The application of the novel analysis method has uncovered several policy-related themes. The findings show how the different causes of appeal to the welfare system are expressed differently within each vector and across vectors. The vector-based analysis allows a better understanding of how low father engagement is entrenched in existing policy, which specific policy programs and procedures exacerbate or abate father exclusion, and which policy changes are expected to promote it. The results also reveal several unexpected themes, common to all is the weakening of the marital alliance. These include the fact that the covenant between the social worker and mother is not as strong and positive as initially thought, as it incorporates patriarchal approaches. Moreover, power is distributed unequally in therapy, and there is tension between trusting the professional and holding them responsible for outcomes.

Conclusion

This preliminary application of the vector-based analysis uncovers its potential for a policy-oriented analysis of father engagement and looking at father engagement in social work – and potentially, on social work interventions in general – as part of the broader family policy discourse.

The experience of burnout, psychological well-being and turnover intention among caregivers in residential care in Portugal

Thursday, 11th September - 10:00: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Prof. Sónia Rodrigues [1], ***Mx. Kai Paulo*** [1], ***Prof. Ana Meireles*** [1]

1. *Universidade Lusíada do Porto*

The demands and complexities inherent with working with children and young people at risk/in danger, particularly in the context of Residential Care (RC), contribute to the development of burnout and impact the psychological well-being (PWB) of caregivers, increasing the risk of turnover. Burnout, low levels of PWB, and turnover in RC leave devastating marks not only on the caregiver but also on the children and young people in RC (which can damage/interrupt bonding relationships).

This study aims to assess, analyze, and characterize the levels of burnout, PWB, and turnover intention in RC caregivers in Portugal and explore the relationship between these variables.

Children and young people in RC were interviewed before the study was carried out about the pertinence, relevance, and appropriateness of the topic and research methodology, respecting their right to participate in issues that concern them, namely scientific research in child protection. This research project assumes an intra-subject, cross-sectional, quantitative, and correlational methodology. Ninety-three caregivers in Portuguese RC settings answered the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) to assess the types and levels of burnout and the Scale to Measure the Manifestation of Psychological Well-being (EMMBEP) to assess PWB. In addition, participants answered a sociodemographic questionnaire to collect data from the caregivers, the RC centres in which they work, and about turnover intention.

Results show burnout is a common phenomenon among RC caregivers in

Portugal and that it is negatively associated with PWB and positively associated with turnover intention. These results and their implications for the Portuguese RC System, particularly in a period of implementation of legislation that will imply great changes in RC centers, will be discussed.

Youth Participation in Alternative Care: The “Zvone” Award as a Model of Practice

Thursday, 11th September - 10:45: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Mr. Kruno Topolski [1]

1. *spec. iur.*

Ensuring the meaningful participation of children and young people with care experience remains a central principle of numerous legal and policy documents. Instruments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, and UN Resolution A/RES/74/133, as well as Croatian legislation like the Social Welfare Act and the Foster Care Act, all emphasize the importance of inclusion and active involvement. Yet, despite this normative foundation, research consistently shows that the actual level of participation among children and young people in alternative care for children is significantly limited, particularly when compared to their peers outside the care system.

In the Croatian context, examples of sustained and structured active participation are relatively rare. This abstract presents the “Zvone” Award initiative, which aims to recognize caregivers in the alternative care for children through a process entirely shaped and led by children and young people with care experience. Since its establishment in 2021—and especially following the full transfer of leadership to youth in 2024—the initiative has operated with the principle that participation means decision-making power. Children and young people nominate candidates, Youth Board evaluate submissions, conduct interviews, and ultimately decide on the award recipient. The Coordinating Committee, composed entirely of care-experienced youth, oversees the process, while an Honorary Advisory Board of professionals provides advisory support when needed. The paper examines the different levels of youth participation at each stage of the process and presents data on nominations collected across four years.

The “Zvone” Award demonstrates what can be achieved when participation is not symbolic, but foundational. It also offers a valuable model of practice where the empowerment of children and young people intersects with the public recognition of dedicated professionals working in alternative care for children.

Child participation in child protection services: A scoping review

Thursday, 11th September - 11:00: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Dr. Cláudia Camilo [1], ***Ms. Raquel Reis*** [2], ***Dr. Eunice Magalhães*** [1], ***Dr. Nadine Correia*** [1]

1. *Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (Iscte-IUL), CIS-Iscte,* ***2.*** *Universidade Lusófona*

Background: Although it is stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the child's right to participate is still poorly promoted, particularly when the child is a victim of maltreatment and is involved in contexts of child protection. Regardless of the development of public policies encouraging children's participation in these contexts, studies point to different results in the fulfillment of these practices.

Objectives: The aim of this study was to map the research carried out on children's participation in child protection decision-making contexts, analyze the different levels and dimensions of participation considered, and disentangle conceptions and practices.

Method: A search was conducted in the electronic databases *APA PsycInfo*, *Academic Search Complete*, and *Web of Science*, using the following search terms: (a) child* participation OR participation right OR child* voice* OR child* audience; and (b) child protection agenc* OR child maltreatment OR child protection system. Based on PRISMA, 42 articles were included, and an inter-judge' agreement was performed during the selection process. Data was analyzed using a deductive-inductive approach.

Results: The results indicate that the studies were mostly conducted in Europe, using a qualitative approach with different informants (children, families, and professionals), and published mostly in the last decade. Regarding participation experiences, more experiences restricting than promoting children's participation were found in the different dimensions of participation (space, voice, audience, influence) and in the different levels of participation (informing, listening, involving). In terms of conceptions, the results are less differentiated, with both conceptions promoting and restricting participation emerging in these dimensions. Also emerged the need to ensure prerequisites for participation, different perspectives on participation, barriers to participation, the importance of the context, the absence or reduced participation, and recommendations for practice are identified.

Conclusions: Our results evidenced the importance of strengthening policies to ensure that children's voices are effectively heard and considered in decisions, with specific effects on the intervention protocols of professionals and institutions. Based on the study's findings, a comprehensive framework of participation in Child Protection Services will be developed.

Adolescents' Voices in Assessment Procedures in Residential Care: Development of a Participatory Tool

Thursday, 11th September - 11:15: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Dr. Lorena Maneiro [1], ***Dr. Laura López-Romero*** [1], ***Dr. Olalla Cutrín*** [1], ***Ms. Nerea Llerena*** [1], ***Ms. Beatriz Díaz-Vázquez*** [1]

1. *Universidade de Santiago de Compostela*

Research indicates that involving children and youth in assessment procedures in out-of-home residential care enhances accuracy by improving the understanding of their needs and strengths, leading to more tailored interventions and greater satisfaction and well-being. However, research on adolescents' meaningful participation in these procedures remains limited, and findings on how their voices are considered are inconclusive. This is further exacerbated by the lack of participatory tools that empower children and young people to be involved in their own assessment processes. This study explores adolescents' perceptions of participation in assessment procedures in residential care and introduces MEDRA, a new participatory tool for assessing needs and strengths in out-of-home care. A qualitative approach was used, including three focus groups and four in-depth interviews with 27 adolescents from four residential care facilities in Galicia (Spain). Additionally, an advisory group of 10 adolescents provided feedback for the development of MEDRA. Findings indicate that most adolescents experience limited engagement in assessment procedures and decision-making, with many reporting they were not informed about the processes affecting them. However, they generally felt heard by their care teams. Adolescents also provided recommendations on how to improve youth involvement in assessment and decision-making, which, alongside advisory group input, shaped the development of MEDRA. The two versions of MEDRA are presented: *MEDRA-Childhood* and *MEDRA-Adolescence*. This tool aims to enhance participatory assessment practices in residential care, ensuring that young people's voices are meaningfully incorporated into decision-making.

What do we want from social workers? The perspectives of care experienced children and young people and caregivers from India and Uganda

Thursday, 11th September - 11:30: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Ms. Emily Delap [1], ***Ms. Angie Bamgbose*** [1], ***Ms. Mai Nambooze*** [2], ***Ms. Sumaeya Nassuna*** [2], ***Ms. Anamika Viswanath*** [3]

1. *Child Frontiers,* ***2.*** *Association of care leavers Uganda/ Child's i Foundation,* ***3.*** *Miracle Foundation India*

This project covers research, the development of training tool and advocacy designed to bring the voices of those with care experience to social work practitioners and policy makers.

230 care experienced children and adults from India and Uganda shared their perspectives on desired roles and qualities for social workers using interactive exercises. The research was carried out by national Non-Governmental Organisations. In both settings, young adult care leavers with social work experience took the lead in data collection, with these contributions vital for identifying participants, building rapport, and ensuring relevance to context of tools and recommendations.

In both contexts, rather than focusing on roles related to child protection or alternative care, participants wanted social workers who could support them with livelihoods and education. In India, help with education was valued most highly, whilst in Uganda support to livelihoods was mentioned most frequently.

Participants in both countries described similar categories of attributes they value in social workers. First, personal attributes and attitudes, which include being emphatic, friendly, encouraging and kind. Second, being effective and operating with integrity, such as social workers being reliable, achieving change, treating people fairly and not being corrupt. Third, participation and connection to the community, such as visiting homes and communities and listening to and respecting the perspectives of care leavers. Although similar attributes were mentioned in both settings there were notable variations. For example, the importance of offering encouragement and hope, and of not being corrupt, were highlighted more often in Uganda, whilst in India taking action to improve lives and not scolding children were mentioned frequently.

These findings have been used to develop interactive training tools for social workers, which bring the voices of care experienced individuals, and the value of learning from their experience, directly to practitioners. Testing of these tools showed that this is often the first time that social workers have heard directly from children and young people, leading to reflection and commitments to adapt practices. Many of the recommendations emerging from the consultations require debate and reforms at a policy level. For example, the consultations raise fundamental questions around the role that social workers should play in accessing services and livelihoods support, as opposed to around case management and child protection. The findings from the consultations are being used to stimulate discussion and advocate for reforms.

The research and training methods are easy to use and low cost. They are currently being further tested in Brazil, after which they will be made publicly available so that this process can be replicated in other settings.

This project was led by the Global Social Services Workforce Alliance, Mircale Foundation India, and Child's i Foundation Uganda, with support from Child's Frontiers and funding from the Martin James Foundation.

Understanding the relationship between the police and the child welfare services through assessments of police reporting

Thursday, 11th September - 10:45: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Elisiv Bakketeig [1], ***Dr. Anja Bredal*** [1]

1. *Oslo Metropolitan University*

Collaboration and coordination between public services are understood as a key for securing better services for children as victims of violence and abuse. In Norway, both research and policy have focused on factors that inhibit collaboration, and several steps have been taken to reduce such barriers. In this paper we investigate the collaboration between the Norwegian child welfare services and the police, focusing especially on the child welfare services' assessments related to police reporting, as police reporting by Norwegian welfare services are understood as a type of collaboration. Our ambition is to get a better understanding of how the child welfare workers on an institutional level understand and position themselves in relation to the police.

According to Norwegian legislation it is not mandatory for the child welfare services to report cases about violence and abuse to the police. They can only report to the police if this is deemed necessary in relation to their mandate and when reporting is assessed to be in the best interest of the child. Former Norwegian studies have however found that the child welfare services have based their decision about police reporting on arguments related to the penal case which is not in line with the Norwegian legislation (Brottveit, 2014). In this study we investigate whether this still is the case, or if there has been a change in how the child welfare services assess police reporting in cases about violence and abuse.

To investigate this, we have reanalyzed interviews with child welfare leaders and employees from two research projects; a study of the child welfare services' handling of cases involving violence and abuse (Bredal et al. 2023) and an evaluation of Norwegian barnahus (Bakketeig et al. 2021).

Our analysis identified two different understandings related to police reporting: one dominated by the penal arguments, and one dominated by the child welfare arguments. Compared to former studies we found a shift toward the latter, as both leaders and case workers put more weight on the best interest of the child and what benefits their own casework than what was common before. In this paper we discuss possible explanations for this shift and what it might tell us about the relationship between the child welfare services and the police at least in a Norwegian context.

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How child protection costs accumulate, the cost of late assistance - a Finnish example

Thursday, 11th September - 11:00: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Mr. Petri Paju [1]

1. *The Central Union for Child Welfare Finland*

The presentation is based on the January 2025 report “How child protection costs accumulate”. The report is available for free on: https://www.lskl.fi/julkaisut/how-the-costs-of-protecting-children-accumulate-2/. The report is a follow-up to the one published in 2012. In the first part of the report, it was stated: “From an economic perspective, the need to reduce placements should be obvious.” Finland has not progressed in this direction.

The report illustrates the costs of child protection and other services through six descriptions. The descriptions are based on interviews and written sources. When talking about children, it is important to note that all effective services are also economically viable. However, in child protection, it is often the case that the forecast for the clients of the most expensive services is the weakest.

In Finland there has long been a desire to act timely so that families can be better helped while also saving costs. However, child protection has gone in the opposite direction. Child protection costs have been increasing, even though the number of children has clearly dropped. The primary cause of the cost increase is the high proportion of institutional placements. This, in turn, is related to the growing proportion of young people among the placed. The number of child protection notifications has doubled in ten years (from 100 000 annually to 200 000). The number of urgent placements has increased by a quarter, and the proportion of involuntary custody among all placements has risen by 40 percentage points.

Of the six descriptions, the highest costs accumulated from “Helena’s” service path. Over a few years, the services amounted to over €700,000. Based on the interview, we suggest that with costs of around €250,000 (outpatient services and special education), the child protection placement could have been avoided. Obviously, the calculation was made with hindsight. The difference between the costs of the institutional path and outpatient services is about €500,000. This corresponds to the costs of approximately 5,800 basic mental health patient visits or 6,500 school psychologist visits. The money could be used to hire a school youth worker for 12 schools.

On the other hand, the descriptions also show that more is not always more in helping either. If different actors do not know about each other’s activities, the large number of support measures can be problematic for those in need of help.

There are things that suggest the situation could change. Firstly, child protection costs in Finland are high, over €1.5 billion per year. That should be enough to attract attention. Secondly, the number of children is rapidly decreasing. Thirdly, effectiveness is clearly an interesting issue; preventive services are extremely effective at their best. Fourthly, there are existing good practices for helping and financing services. There is no disagreement that it is worth choosing a better and cheaper option if possible.

Avoiding care through community-led decision-making: shifting power in colonial contexts

Thursday, 11th September - 11:15: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Prof. Emily Keddell [1], ***Mr. Andrew Rudolph*** [1], ***Prof. Shayne Walker*** [1], ***Ms. Jonette Chapman*** [2], ***Dr. Karen Hale*** [2], ***Ms. Jude Hughes*** [2], ***Mr. William Kaipo*** [2]

1. *University of Otago,* ***2.*** *Tai Timu, Tai Pari*

Avoiding care through community-led decision-making: shifting power in colonial contexts
Decision-making about reports of potential child abuse and neglect are vulnerable to key problems. These include superficial information and the potential for bias at the start of a string of decisions that shape inequities in the system. Due to the 'notify-investigate' institutional structure that separates statutory and community-based services in many settler-colonial states, decisions about how to respond to reports are usually made by the statutory agency alone, reinforcing state control. System factors include problems with workforce capacity, delays between the report and any decision being made, and a lack of timely access to preventive services. In line with the conference theme of transformation and innovation, and the key topics of prevention, responses to families at risk, and cultural sensitivity, this talk will report findings from a qualitative process evaluation of a joint decision-making triage process between state and community/Indigenous services in Aotearoa New Zealand. The methods reflected Indigenous research principles focused on tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty and community power), whakawhanaungatanga (relationships), utu (reciprocity) and continuing co-production, to ensure processes and findings were aspirationally resonant and culturally aligned. Multiple meetings, interviews and focus groups were used to form relationships and qualitatively understand the perspectives of key participants. These included initial relationship building, then interviews with eleven community workers, five statutory workers and one impacted family, and a focus group with five statutory workers and six community workers. A follow up co-analysis focus group was also held, along with informal discussion meetings. Analysis was both deductive and inductive thematic analysis, to answer the research questions and generate unexpected insights from the data. Key findings are that information depth is improved because community workers hold extensive knowledge of local families and their context, leading to more accurate appraisals of relational belonging, risks, protective factors and needs. Families receive immediate informal support, and are more likely to engage voluntarily with workers from a community agency. This helps de-escalate families, reduces stigma and re-reports to the child protection system, engages families in sustainable change, and helps them access key resources. This hybrid triage system relies on key relationships and shared aims between all levels of the statutory and community agencies. While these relationships help smooth tensions that may arise and reduce resistance by some workers, the shared aims of community devolution help continually create movement towards community empowerment. Key challenges include the significant time investment involved, which challenges organisational capacity and consistency of attendance. Establishing norms around the risk threshold that determines who should take responsibility for each case can be difficult, with the most tension around moderate risk cases. Due to information-sharing challenges, the statutory agency may receive and retain information for some time before making it available to the community. Developing joint practice approaches and more expansive interpretations of privacy legislation has helped ameliorate these concerns. Societal threats to further development are the current neo-liberal, anti-Indigenous rights political context that may reduce access to authority and funding for Māori community agencies.

Seeing the invisible: Educators contending with childhood neglect among their students

Thursday, 11th September - 11:30: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Eran Melkman [1], ***Dr. Laura Sigad*** [2]

1. *Tel Aviv University,* ***2.*** *Oranim Academic College of Education*

Background: Child neglect, is the most common form of maltreatment, inflicting lasting harm comparable to physical or sexual abuse. As laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3 (1989), it is the responsibility of modern democracies "to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being". Whereas providing children with such protection is considered primarily the role of social workers, professionals working with children across a wide range of sectors contribute to the recognition of and response to child neglect and abuse and are mandated by law to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect in many countries across Europe. Of all professions, teachers have the most interactions with children and are arguably in the best position to recognize signs of child neglect in its earliest stages. Nevertheless, there is a notable gap in research examining their role in this context. This study examines the perspectives of educators in Israeli schools and explores how they experience, define and attribute meaning to childhood neglect among their students.

Methods: In-depth interviews were conducted with 31 Jewish female educators, including 22 teachers and 9 counsellors, who have encountered neglect within their professional role. Findings: The results show that educators experience neglect among their pupils in a multifaceted and contradictory manner. On the one hand, a spectrum of neglect types were encountered in schools. Physical neglect was the most frequently noted, marked by clear indicators such as inadequate food, hygiene and clothing. However, subtler forms of neglect, often overlooked by social workers, like supervisory, educational and emotional neglect, were also prevalent, though these were less visible and harder to detect. Further compounding educators' ability to successfully identify and respond to neglect are the lack of a clear definition of neglect and the subjective nature of its identification, that often leave educators uncertain about when and how to report cases to child protection workers, particularly in cases influenced by broader socioeconomic factors. Interestingly, whereas impoverished parents often feel that social services wrongfully label them as neglectful and fail to consider the reasons limiting their ability to provide for their children (Elias et al., 2018), educators in the present study seemed to be able to adopt a more empathetic perspective, acknowledging problems created by economic circumstances rather than viewing all "neglect" as an intentional parental behavior .

Conclusions: This study calls for a more nuanced understanding of child neglect that considers both the overt and covert dimensions of the issue. It highlights the various advantages educators may present as professionals at the forefront of responses to child neglect. At the same time however, the study suggests that in order for educators to fulfil their critical role in identification and response, they require clearer guidelines and support from child welfare agencies.

Family discipline and violence: moderating effects of parenting and contextual variables on the link between corporal punishment and physical abuse

Thursday, 11th September - 11:45: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Prof. Johan Vanderfaeillie [1], ***Mrs. Camille Verheyden*** [1], ***Dr. Delphine West*** [1], ***Mr. Tim Stroobants*** [2], ***Prof. Frank Van Holen*** [1]

1. *Vrije Universiteit Brussel,* ***2.*** *Vlaams Expertisecentrum Kindermishandeling*

Background and objectives: In this study the moderating effect of parenting and family variables on the association between corporal punishment (CP) and physical abuse (PA) was examined. More specific, it was investigated if psychological aggression and positive discipline (as co-occurring disciplinary strategies), level of parental impulsiveness and anger when disciplining (state of the parent), consistency of discipline, parental warmth/support (parenting styles), intimate partner violence (IPV), quality of the parent-child relationship and social support of parents (as aspects of relational and the socio-cultural context) moderated the relationship of CP-frequency with PA. In addition, it was examined if the aforementioned parenting and family variables added to the risk of PA.
Methods and Participants: A sample of 296 Flemish university students filled in a questionnaire on their disciplinary experiences at age 10.
Results: While controlling for gender and SES, participants were about 60% more at risk of PA with each unit increase of the CP-frequency variable. The association between CP-frequency and PA was not moderated by any of the variables measuring co-occurring discipline methods, parental and context characteristics. However, the presence of physically IPV heightened the risk of PA. Results showed that a context of familial violence including CP and physical IPV were associated with a higher risk of PA.

Conclusions: Tackling violence in the family as a package by changing attitudes regarding (family) violence and in particular regarding CP and IPV is important. Installing interventions that attempt to change parental behaviour directly by training parenting figures in alternate ways of disciplining and resolving couple disagreement is needed, alongside sensibilisation on the risks and the harmful effects of (mild) CP.

Engagement in child protection casework across the perinatal period

Thursday, 11th September - 10:45: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Prof. Sarah Wise [1], ***Dr. Ellen Pittman*** [1], ***Mrs. Ann MacRae*** [1]

1. *The University of Melbourne*

Background: Infants are the age group with the highest rate of involvement with Child Protection Services, and in Australia, the number of children reported prenatally and in infancy has been rising. This warrants greater exploration of the effectiveness of Child Protection casework designed to increase the safety of newborn babies and infants.

Aims: More information is needed about engagement with, and feelings about, Child Protection prenatally and during infancy. This study sought to gather the views of birth mothers about the Child Protection services they received in the perinatal period to guide practitioners and policymakers towards approaches that can improve client engagement.

Method: Drawing on first-person accounts, the *Motherhood and Me* study collected both quantitative and qualitative data on birth mother's engagement in, and feelings about, Child Protection during pregnancy (n=16) and when their children were infants (n=10). Women were recruited from a specialist maternity clinic for women with complex drug use and specialist family preservation and reunification services in Metropolitan Melbourne, Australia.

Results: Our findings suggest some birth mothers have significant emotional and attitudinal barriers to working with Child Protection prenatally, and do not consent to Child Protection casework (as required by legislation). Birth mothers involved with Child Protection prenatally also perceive few benefits and experience it as 'stressful'. While birth mothers reported lower levels of 'mistrust' in Child Protection following birth, engagement on dimensions of 'receptivity', 'buy-in' and 'working relationship' varied according to perceptions about the attitudes, actions, and skills of practitioners.

Conclusion: Child Protection casework designed to increase the newborn baby's safety is often unwanted, perceived as having little benefit and is experienced as stressful. Following birth, mothers' feelings about, and engagement with, Child Protection were dependant on the attitudes, actions, and skills of practitioners. Findings suggest strengths-based casework practice approaches are needed that reduce fear and increase engagement.

How research can help build capacity in the field of kinship care - Insights from a Focused Narrative Review

Thursday, 11th September - 11:00: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Prof. Robbie Gilligan [1]

1. *School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin*

It is widely accepted that kinship care remains under-researched and under-theorised. These deficits apply to both formal kinship care (care within child welfare systems) and informal kinship care (care outside the child welfare system but possibly with other forms of state support). These limitations are significant given the growing importance of kinship care in formal and informal arrangements, and especially given the challenges facing traditional foster family care (recruitment, retention of carers) and residential care (range of concerns based on cost, consistency of quality, staffing, safety etc). Formal kinship care provides for a growing share of children placed in out of home care in child welfare systems, and arguably it is poised to become even more important in the coming years given the issues facing traditional foster family and residential provision in many jurisdictions.

The presentation draws on selected findings from a focused narrative review of recent studies of kinship care (see published chapter - Author, 2025). This review gives special attention to qualitative evidence on the perspectives of children, carers and social workers in relation to kinship care . Following searches through Google Scholar (using kinship care and related terms), thirty eight studies were identified as relevant for inclusion in the study (Qualitative studies addressing evidence on the perspectives of these key actors, or other studies with high policy relevance for kinship care). Of these, thirty one are published in the last ten years, with 24 published since 2020. These studies were conducted across ten countries in three continents - Australia, Europe and North America. The author brings experience of research in different aspects and contexts of alternative care, including publications in relation to kinship care.

The focus of the review is on illuminating two key aspects of the kinship care drama: the power of professional (mainly social work) discourses about kinship care, and the importance of the lived experience of two sets of key actors in the kinship care drama - children in kinship care and carers. Experiences of birth parents in kinship care are largely absent because of the limited availability of studies presenting their perspective.

The presentation will make the case for developing models of support and social work practice that are well attuned to the specific challenges and dynamics inherent in the kinship care context. It will identify certain priorities for attention in such a model, taking account of the findings of the review. These will include foregrounding the child's experience in the process, acknowledging the distinctive characteristics of each separate kinship care placement and household, recognising the emotional demands posed by the dynamics of kinship care, responding to the risk of family 'secrets' constraining open communication, and the potential influence of social work discourses colouring expectations as to the value of kinship care. It will also draw attention to policy level issues that need attention such as poverty, stigma, the experience of ethnic minorities, and enhancing the range and depth of research evidence on kinship care realities.

Balancing Regulation, Care and Quality: Challenges in Implementing Legislation in Children's Residential Homes in Finland

Thursday, 11th September - 11:15: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Ms. Jenni Repo [1]

1. *Tampere University*

Despite the state's mandate and institutions' responsibility to protect and care for children placed outside their homes, international observations have revealed breaches of children's rights and instances of abusive or inadequate treatment in residential care settings. Thus, the increase in and elaboration of regulation have been suggested as one of the responses to malpractices in children's residential care especially in Finland which, according to an international typology of child protection systems, is characterized as shifting towards a child rights-protective approach.

Due to challenges in implementing legislation in Finnish residential care, as reported by monitoring authorities, the study examines the underlying factors contributing to these issues. It focuses on the consequences of the regulatory response to malpractice and balancing of care, control and various legal and rights-based frameworks. Empirically, the study examines the challenges care workers describe facing when implementing legislation in their work. That is, the study concerns the interface between 'the legal' and 'the social', drawing from socio-legal studies. The data consist of interviews with 15 care workers working in residential homes, analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis centers on how workers identify, reason through, and manage the challenges of working with legislation.

At best, legislation offers a framework and basis for care that secures a child's ultimate right to protection. However, according to the workers, the intent of the law does not always translate into practice. They report that legislation sometimes conflicts with the practical challenges of their work, partly because they feel that their roles and realities are not fully understood by legislators, for example. Additionally, the ambiguity of legal provisions and inconsistent interpretations from other authorities often make it difficult to determine the correct course of action in complex situations. The bureaucratic demands of implementing legislation—particularly documentation—also reduce time available for direct engagement with children. To navigate these challenges, workers report spending considerable time seeking guidance and negotiating with colleagues, supervisors and other authorities to find appropriate solutions. Occasionally, they feel compelled to bend formal rules and preferring to act based on 'common sense' or refrain from certain actions out of fear of making mistakes.

The results highlight tensions between 'law on the books' and 'law in action', revealing a disconnect between legislative ideals and practical realities in residential care as perceived by the care workers. These issues also reflect risks associated with relying solely on regulatory responses, as identified in prior research literature. The results thus highlight the complexities involved in implementing a rights-based approach to everyday care work in residential homes. By centering practitioners' experiences, the study contributes to critical discussions on regulation, professional discretion, and the relational dimensions of child protection.

Driving Practice through Evidence: Implications of 'Beyond 18' Study in supporting transition of care leavers to independent living

Thursday, 11th September - 11:30: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Dr. Kiran Modi [1], ***Dr. Gurneet Kaur Kalra*** [1]

1. *Udayan Care*

Care Leavers are a unique category of young people, with lived experience of being in state care or more specifically in child-care institutions (CCI) in India, whether government-run or CSO-run, as foster care is still at a nascent stage, and have transitioned to independent adult living, on attainment of 18 years of age. Most of them have had early, adverse traumatic experiences, go through multiple placements, lack of individual attention and lack of attachment with their caregivers, as well as lack of mental health support in the CCIs. They face challenges of housing, funds for education and vocational training, psycho-social support and health services, employment, and absence of a supportive ecosystem, which is necessary for a continuum of care approach. Aftercare programming is key pillar in delivery of rehabilitative services for adolescents and youth in out-of-home care.

Udayan Care, an NGO based in India, for over 28 years has been providing support to children and youth in need of care and protection. This experience gave rise to a desire to create evidence for youth, who are exiting from CCIs and need aftercare support, and the absence thereof leads to more vulnerabilities for them. The first ever study in India on aftercare, titled, "Beyond 18", by Udayan Care, was conducted in order to understand the situation and challenges of Care Leavers in India and how they can be supported further.

Findings and recommendations from this study has led to development of a variety of programs at Udayan Care, in order to support care leavers during and after their transition journey from CCIs to independent living. Some of these programs include Aftercare Outreach Program (AOP), Living in Fellowship Together (LIFT), and formation and strengthening of local and regional Care Leavers Networks in India. These programs are designed to address less addressed issues of care leavers, who are exiting CCIs and those who are already care leavers, based on 'Sphere of Aftercare'; a theoretical framework proposed in this study, a framework that outlines 8 domains of support needed: Housing, Physical health, Independent living skills, Education and vocational skills, Social support and interpersonal skills, Emotional Wellbeing, Identity and legal awareness, financial independence and career.

AOP project, using this framework, provides rehabilitative and transitional support to Care Leavers reaching adulthood from different CCIs, providing financial support for their vocational training/ education and skills, accommodation, and other needs, training and development in life skills and employability skills.

Another program, titled, 'Learning In Fellowship Together (LIFT)', is a first-ever fellowship of its kind in India, which focuses on developing and nurturing Care Leavers in India as agents of change, who will contribute to the cause of improving the overall situation of Care Leaving in India. Across all projects, the idea is to empower the care leavers and make them strong citizens who can give back to the society and continue to advocate for the cause of care leaving in India. The presentation will deliberate on various programs assisting youth during and after transition from the care homes.

Care-experienced young people: understanding their perspectives of accessing primary healthcare services in England

Thursday, 11th September - 10:45: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Dr. Claire Powell [1], ***Dr. Lauren Herlitz*** [1], ***Ms. Emily Ashford*** [1], ***Mr. James Baldwin*** [2], ***Prof. Jenny Woodman*** [1]

1. *University College London,* ***2.*** *Toucan Theatre Limited*

Background
Young people in care have poorer physical and mental health outcomes compared to their non-care-experienced peers. However, we know little about their perspectives of accessing primary healthcare services which are often the first step to reaching specialist physical and mental health services.
Methods
We carried out a qualitative study using podcast production as a creative data capture approach. We recruited young people with care experience from two local authorities in England and held paired discussions and focus groups with 14 participants aged between 13 and 22 years. We analysed the data thematically using candidacy theory as a framework.

Findings
We found that mental health was a primary concern for young people but they did not feel they could discuss it in primary healthcare services. Young people felt that their relationships with professionals were distant and they felt opening-up could be risky. Young people reported experiences of feeling judged or dismissed which affected their ability to discuss mental health or relationship difficulties.

Conclusions
We suggest that any presentation by a care-experienced young person in primary care should trigger professional curiosity from professionals. In addition, healthcare professionals should aim to build trust and rapport whilst carers and other professionals should support care-experienced young people to understand the role of primary care.

Reforming South Africa's child care and protection system: Insights and child outcomes from critical pathway programmes in alternative care and community-based prevention

Thursday, 11th September - 11:00: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Mrs. Victoria Olarte [1], ***Ms. Lourenza Steytler Foghill*** [1]

1. *Hope and Homes for Children*

The evolving alternative care landscape in South Africa requires evidence-based processes and policies to drive reform of the child care and protection system. This study focuses on transitioning from residential institutions to family-based care, while strengthening community capacity to prevent unnecessary separation. We present findings from three critical pathway programmes - the Moratorium on the Entry of Children Aged 0–3 into Institutional Care, the Reduction of Long-Stays Programme, and the Independent Living Programme - alongside the AFS-Khusela Community Prevention model. The research evaluates their effectiveness in improving child well-being, increasing protective factors, and reducing risks, while identifying key policy and practice gaps.

A mixed-methods longitudinal study was conducted by OCOF-HHCSA in collaboration with the Gauteng Department of Social Development, First Community Resource Centre, and the ACTIVE Family Support Khusela Networks. The study spanned 24 months across Gauteng Province and the Cape Flats, assessing 170 children across two cohorts - those supported to remain with families, and those reintegrated from institutions. Data sources included case management records, in-depth qualitative interviews and the AFS Khusela Well-Being Index assessing domains such as safety, stability, health, education, economic resilience and participation.

Findings revealed a 14% increase in overall well-being among reintegrated children, with notable gains in emotional and relational stability. Preventive interventions reduced risk factors by 9% in domains such as poverty, neglect, and parental stress. Protective factors increased across seven domains, while risk decreased in five. Caregiver confidence rose markedly, with 82% reporting improved parenting capacity due to mentorship and community support. Systemic barriers were identified, including gaps in case management, limited financial support for families, and weak cross-sector coordination.

The evidence highlights the urgency of a nationally led, multi-sectoral approach to sustainable care reform policies and processes that improve child well-being. Structured, data-driven interventions - combined with community consultation and intergovernmental collaboration - can accelerate progress. Recommendations emphasise government accountability, coordinated service delivery, and the development of deinstitutionalisation roadmaps. Policy recommendations are already shaping provincial and national strategies - including South Africa's presidential plan on alternative care and deinstitutionalisation summit in 2025 - and actionable insights support policymakers, researchers and practitioners seeking to transition from institutional to family-based care and advance policies and processes for sustainable alternative care system reform.

Caught in Child Welfare: Recidivism in a Swedish Longitudinal Study of 2,123 Children

Thursday, 11th September - 11:15: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Dr. David Palsson [1], ***Prof. Stefan Wiklund*** [1]

1. *Stockholm University*

Background and Objectives

Child welfare systems serve as a crucial safety net for vulnerable children, aiming to prevent maltreatment and improve the well-being of children and their families. A key indicator of the system's lack of effectiveness is *recidivism*, referring to children who return to the system after previous investigations or interventions. Previous studies in Sweden and internationally have highlighted that many children experience re-entry into the child welfare system, suggesting a potential gap between service provision and the actual needs of families. In Sweden, child welfare emphasizes early, voluntary interventions in partnership with families, with out-of-home care reserved for more severe cases. However, limited research exists on the characteristics of children who cycle through the system and how different groups benefit from services. The aim of this study is to analyze the outcomes over time for a cohort of children who have been investigated by Swedish child welfare authorities.

Methods

This article is part of a longitudinal study tracking 2,123 children investigated by eight child welfare authorities in the Stockholm region. Data is collected from child welfare workers at the end of investigations and again one year later. Descriptive variables include whether the child had prior contact with the system and whether they received services one year after the investigation. Regression analyses are used to examine determinants of recidivism, considering child-related factors (such as gender, age, household demographics) and case-specific variables (such as referral source, reason for referral, and services provided). Ecological systems theory underpins the study, which views child welfare issues as multifaceted, influenced by both individual and contextual factors, and subject to change over time.

Findings

Preliminary findings indicate that nearly half of the children had prior contact with child welfare services before the first investigation. Around half remain in contact with the system (via investigations or services) one year after the initial investigation. About one-third of children that did not receive services are re-investigated after one year, without any intervention. One-third of children who received intervention continue to have ongoing or new interventions. Ongoing analysis explores whether children assessed as needing services differ from those who were not. Further analyses will identify child and case-specific factors that predict recidivism, examining whether recidivism is influenced by the type of service provided (e.g., in-home services versus out-of-home care) and whether these services lead to continued support from child welfare authorities.

Conclusions/Implications

The results will be interpreted within the context of Sweden's child welfare system and ecological systems theory. It is expected that recidivism may be difficult to fully prevent, given the complexity of child welfare issues and the limitations of external interventions. However, the study will discuss that supportive services must be continually adapted to meet the evolving needs of children and families.

The range of the Swedish foster care market: IFAs providing everything from enhanced care for children with complex needs to a recruitment service of dubious quality

Thursday, 11th September - 11:30: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Mrs. Evelina Fridell Lif [1]

1. *Stockholm University*

The presentation aims to summarise and discuss the results of the soon to be defended thesis *The Swedish Foster Care Market: Structural, professional and foster carer perspectives*, emphasising practice and quality aspects of foster care in light of marketisation.

Traditionally, local child welfare authorities have recruited and contracted foster carers. However, local child welfare authorities and foster carers in several countries have for the last couple of decades had the option to go through independent foster care agencies (IFAs). In Sweden, as in for example also England and Australia, these IFAs are mostly part for-profit companies. The foster care markets created has received limited attention but a recent review indicate that the quality of services is not substantially different from those of the child welfare authorities provides in-house. However, IFA use has been suggested to be associated with higher costs and questions regarding for-profit child welfare services has been raised in by UN as well as by politicians and professionals in some countries. Despite the international spread of the phenomenon and questions regarding the services, there is a paucity of research across IFA using countries about its implications.

To fill the research gap regarding the Swedish foster care market, IFA use was approached from structural, professional and foster carer perspectives. The thesis has three main results. Firstly, it indicates that a substantial part of Swedish foster care is provided in collaboration with IFAs (25%) and the phenomenon is widespread, with IFA use estimated in 90 percent of most child welfare authorities. Particularly child welfare authorities with small populations appear to use IFA for at least 20 percent of their placements while otherwise IFA use appear prevalent regardless of the local conditions. Secondly, the study shows that child welfare professionals and foster carers perceive IFAs to provide services of varied and unpredictable quality, ranging from problematic to high-quality. Thirdly, despite the unpredictable quality, the study shows that both child welfare professionals and foster carers may turn to IFAs particularly to provide care for children with complex needs. The presentation will discuss these results in relation to current foster care research and possible implications for children and practice.

The Role and Function of Independent Experts in Child Protection Care Proceedings – a study from Norway

Thursday, 11th September - 11:45: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Mrs. Tone Jørgensen [1], ***Dr. Øivin Christiansen*** [2], ***Mrs. Rakel Aasheim Greve*** [1], ***Mrs. Vibeke Samsonsen*** [1], ***Prof. Hanne Cecilie Braarud*** [1]

1. *Western Norway University of Applied Sciences,* ***2.*** *Regional Centre for Child and Youth Mental Health and Child Welfare West, NORCE Norwegian Research Centre AS*

Background and Objective: In child protection cases where alternative care is considered, experts independent of the Child Welfare Service (CWS) can be consulted prior to court applications. These external experts conduct care assessments and deliver reports under specific mandates. The reports, supplementary to CWS assessments, carry significant weight in court decisions. Despite this, there is a lack of research on the role and function of independent experts in these processes. The presented study aims to bridge this knowledge gap by exploring the perceptions of Norwegian social workers and independent experts regarding the role, function, and benefits of such experts in care order cases.

Methods: The presentation is based on two separate studies conducted in Norway (Greve et.al, 2023, Jørgensen et.al, *in review*). The first study involved qualitative individual interviews with 12 independent experts. The second study consisted of six focus group interviews with 31 social workers. Both studies aimed to explore the experiences of the expert's role and their perceived contributions in care assessments prior to court decisions regarding alternative care.

Findings: Comparative analysis of the two studies revealed two common themes highlighting the ambiguity in perceptions of the expert's role and function:

1. Positive Contribution: Both experts and social workers acknowledged the value of the expert's independence and "fresh look" at a case. Experts emphasised their distance from CWS, which allowed them to challenge the often rigid understanding held by social workers. Social workers appreciated the "second opinion" from independent experts, particularly in complex cases that had proven difficult to resolve or where conflicts with families were escalating.

2. Validation Role: Conversely, experts sometimes serve merely to validate the CWS's existing assessments. Both experts and social workers experienced that expert reports do not always provide new insights and, in some cases, act as a 'rubber stamp' of approval. This validation is valued due to the expert's authoritative status in care proceedings. However, social workers are concerned that using experts for validation may undermine the competence of social workers.

Conclusion/Implications: The findings highlight the importance of discussing and defining what constitutes valid expertise in child protection care assessments when decisions about alternative care are made. A significant concern is the establishment of professional boundaries when an expert is commissioned to assist CWS care assessments. If the use of independent experts in child protection cases risks undermining the professional status of social workers, it is crucial to rethink the role and function these experts should play. There is a need for dialogue on establishing clear guidelines to ensure that both social worker assessments and independent expert contributions are supported without compromising the quality of care assessments in child protection cases.

A latent profile analysis of potential foster parents in Portugal

Thursday, 11th September - 14:45: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Dr. Eunice Magalhães [1], ***Prof. Patrício Costa*** [2], ***Ms. Leonor Eça*** [1], ***Ms. Mariana Matoso*** [1], ***Dr. Vânia S. Pinto*** [3], ***Ms. Sofia Ferreira*** [1], ***Prof. Joana Baptista*** [1], ***Dr. João Graça*** [4]

1. *Iscte,* ***2.*** *University of Porto,* ***3.*** *University of East Anglia,* ***4.*** *Groningen University*

Background: Child maltreatment poses significant risks to children's development. When the removal of a child from their birth family is required, foster care should be prioritized over residential care, particularly for younger children. However, the shortage of foster families to protect these children compels urgent and effective solutions supported by theoretical and evidence-based frameworks. The prevention of institutionalization demand for further efforts to develop and maintain a strong foster care system that effectively recruits and retains qualified foster families. This study introduces a novel approach employing the COM-B model as a theoretical framework to map and understand key barriers and facilitators within the field of foster care. Most research has focused only on the perspective of foster parents and has not been theoretically grounded. To the best of our knowledge, profiles of prospective foster families with representative samples from the general population have not been identified.

Objective: a latent profile analysis (LPA) was applied to identify the profile(s) of Portuguese adults most likely to become a foster family. Also, we aimed to explore socio-demographic variables and factors related to capability, opportunity, and motivation (COM-B model) as predictors of profile membership.

Method: This study was conducted with a demographically representative sample of the Portuguese population (gender, age, and geographical location), which was targeted by a market research company. A total of 1082 adults participated in the study, ranging in age from 25 to 94 years (M = 52.73; SD = 14.95), and who completed a survey comprising several self-report measures based on the theoretical dimensions of the COM-B model. The R-package "*mclust*" (Scrucca et al., 2023) was used to perform the Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) in order to identify distinct clusters or latent profiles among Portuguese adults using their levels of awareness, willingness, and intention to foster as indicators.

Results: Three profiles were identified: *Ready Responders* (highest scores on awareness, willingness, and intention), *Willing Waverers* (high scores on willingness and moderate scores on awareness and intention), and *Reluctant Bystanders* (lowest scores on all indicators). Having children, contact with the child protection system, conscientiousness, social well-being, parental self-efficacy, family communication, and family related, self-oriented, and child-centred reasons were significant predictors of profile membership.

Conclusions: This is the first study to apply the COM-B model to the foster care context using a representative sample. The COM-B model proved to be a useful framework for identifying variables related to openness to foster the mapping of the associations between these variables and the three profiles of prospective foster families identified here. This is also the first study to use LPA to identify profiles of prospective foster families and explore differences across these profiles. These findings are discussed to inform policies and practices for protecting maltreated children.

Pathways in child welfare cases: Insights from a Latent Class Analysis

Thursday, 11th September - 15:00: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Ms. Marie Kvalø [1], ***Prof. Sabine Kaiser*** [1], ***Dr. Geraldine Mabille*** [1], ***Dr. Sturla Fossum*** [1], ***Prof. Svein Arild Vis*** [1]

1. *UiT The Arctic University of Norway*

In Norway, adolescents who exhibit behavioural disorders can be placed involuntarily in locked residential care by the child welfare services (CWS). There is limited knowledge about this specific group, how their problems develop, and which interventions have been implemented prior to placement. The present study explores the diverse case trajectories of children and adolescents placed in locked residential care, highlighting the various pathways leading to institutional placement by CWS for treatment of behavioural problems. The primary aim of this study is to enhance our understanding of factors leading to these placements. The present study utilizes a prospective longitudinal design to investigate children and adolescents who had their initial contact with CWS between 2013-2022 and were subsequently placed in locked residential care. We conducted an exploratory latent class analysis to study the pathways into the CWS. Temporary findings suggest six classes which describes the trajectories. Findings and implications will be discussed.

The therapeutic encounter in poverty: Preliminary findings of a year-long observational study in residential family care

Thursday, 11th September - 15:15: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Prof. Caroline Spaas [1]

1. *KU Leuven*

Objectives. Scholarly literature indicates that poverty, understood as a multidimensional experience of deprivation across various life domains, significantly impacts relationships, including those between families and caregivers. indeed, we know that caregivers and families in situations of poverty can face complex challenges. However, the precise ways in which poverty shapes youth care services and, in particular, the everyday therapeutic/care relationships between families and caregivers remains little studied. In this context, this study aims to provide an in-depth description of prototypical relational dynamics in the context of poverty within a residential family care setting in Belgium. The study is part of a larger research investigating the role of the therapeutic encounter in evaluating the effectiveness of complex, long-term, residential interventions for families.

Methods. The study employs a participatory observational approach over the course of one year, between January and December 2025, with weekly observations and supplementary interviews and focus groups with families and caregivers. This methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of the relational dynamics at play.

Findings. The study is currently at its midpoint. In this contribution, we present our study design and discuss preliminary findings from the first period of observations. Early insights suggest that poverty is highly palpable and visible in the interactions between families and caregivers. The presence of poverty poses complex challenges for caregivers, influencing their approaches and strategies in providing support.

Conclusions. Our study insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how poverty shapes relational dynamics in residential care settings. As such, they provide a valuable basis for reflection on the implications of our findings for shaping family residential care in the context of poverty.

Family-Centered Approach for Children with Communication, Language, and Speech Disorders – A Support Group for Parents

Thursday, 11th September - 15:30: (SEECEL Main venue) - Accepted with changes

Mrs. Ana Stipic Lihic [1], ***Mrs. Karmela Ivić*** [1]

1. *Polyclinic SUVAG*

In 1974, Bronfenbrenner introduced the concept of a “family-centered approach” to describe the need for a shift in focus from a “child-centered approach.” The family, rather than the therapist, is a constant in the child’s life, and his role shifts from solely working directly with the child to teaching, supporting, and building capacity in the child’s communication partners. The scientific evidence supports the impact of such approaches on therapeutic outcomes, as parents feel a stronger sense of control they become more actively involved in the therapeutic process and they are more satisfied with the results.

Currently, 226 children with communication, language, and speech disorders are enrolled in a comprehensive rehabilitation program at the Children’s Kindergarten of the Polyclinic SUVAG. This has highlighted the need to create a specific form of support for their parents, based on the family-centered approach. All parents were invited to participate in a support group designed to clarify uncertainties related to their child’s development, diagnostic and therapeutic procedures, and upbringing, as well as to foster a sense of community among parents and professionals. The group was led by a psychologist and a speech and language pathologist and consisted of eight sessions throughout the academic year, with 20 parents participating. At the end, an evaluation was conducted through an online survey. Parents expressed a strong need for further clarification regarding speech, language and psychological assessment tools, therapeutic options and final diagnoses. This is a crucial piece of information for all professionals involved in therapeutic work with children with communication, language, and speech disorders. Parents also reported great satisfaction with the experience and support provided by the group and mentioned that they now have a better understanding of their child’s difficulties.

A parent who understands their child’s challenges becomes an active participant in the therapeutic process, contributing to the therapeutic outcome, which is the primary goal of any form of support, including this one.

Key words: Family-centred approach, children with communication, language and speech disorders, support group for parents

Collaborating with children and parents to train professionals and promote family participation in social services

Thursday, 11th September - 15:45: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Prof. Marco Ius [1], ***Dr. Francesca Maci*** [2], ***Ms. Anna Salvò*** [3], ***Ms. Angela Vignozzi*** [4], ***Ms. Ana Maria Blanaru*** [5], ***Prof. Paola Milani*** [3]

1. *University of Trieste,* ***2.*** *University of Parma,* ***3.*** *University of Padova,* ***4.*** *Regione Toscana,* ***5.*** *Società della salute Pratese*

The Italian Programme of Intervention for Prevention of Institutionalization (P.I.P.P.I.) integrates research, training, and intervention to support families living in vulnerable situations. It relies on the Participative and Transformative Evaluation Method to guide multi-professional interventions aimed at reducing educational poverty and social exclusion. Recently recognized by the Italian Government as an Essential Level of Social Benefit, P.I.P.P.I. stems from a longstanding collaboration between the Laboratory of Research and Intervention on Family Education (LabRIEF, University of Padova) and the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which has funded and promoted it since 2011 (Milani, 2022).

Inspired by the Framework for a Participatory Approach in Child Protection (Lacharité et al., 2022), which values children's and parents' voices as well as professional training, this paper reflects on the methodological orientation that promotes families' participation in their care paths. Parents and children are not only agents of participation in their own cases but also citizens who, as "experts by experience" (McLaughlin, 2009; Maviglia et al., 2021), can contribute to the training of professionals by sharing the knowledge developed through their lived experience.

The paper presents an innovative participatory action research project within P.I.P.P.I.: *Families and Professionals Together*, strongly supported by the Health, Welfare and Social Cohesion Department of the Tuscany Region, the Istituto degli Innocenti in Florence, and LabRIEF (Maci et al., 2025). The project originated from key questions: How can experiential knowledge be integrated with academic knowledge to strengthen welfare services in supporting families? What contribution can families offer to professional training? How can their perspectives improve professionals' relational and communication skills and the quality of family-service relationships?

Launched in 2023, the project has involved around 40 people: 9 families (10 children and adolescents with their parents), 9 social professionals, one teacher, and 4 researchers. Families, previously engaged in P.I.P.P.I., were invited as "experts by experience." The idea is that, having developed agency during their care paths, they can now contribute by sharing the knowledge gained.

After presenting the conceptual framework, the structure of the path, and the methodology used to facilitate meetings, the paper illustrates results emerging from the exchange between families, professionals, and researchers who experienced a new modality of collaboration. Findings show that parents' contributions can enrich professional training while fostering authentic relationships and reciprocal empowerment.

Among the main outcomes of the exchange between parents and professionals, parents stress the importance of being directly involved in several phases of the intervention—particularly the first meeting with the family, parent–child groups, and informal support ("solidarity proximity"). In the training of new P.I.P.P.I. professionals, they see their role not as co-trainers but as witnesses, "experts by experience," able to translate theory into everyday life, use accessible language, humanize knowledge, and link theory with the lived parent–child relationship.

The discussion highlights the innovative dimension of this experience: it generates new knowledge that can serve as a methodological and operational reference for professionals, while enabling families to approach services with greater confidence—an essential aim of P.I.P.P.I.

Insights from working with co-researchers with lived experience of children's services to explore why families do not take up the offer of a family group conference to prevent children going into care.

Thursday, 11th September - 14:45: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Mr. Max Stanford [1], ***Ms. Elizabeth Raws*** [1], ***Ms. Hannah Lawrence*** [1]

1. *Coram*

A family group conference (FGC) is a family-led decision making process in which the family network comes together to make a plan for a child. The government has set out legislation which will require all local authorities in England to offer family-group decision-making (of which an FGC is one form) to all families who enter pre-proceedings - the stage before proceedings are initiated to remove a child from those with parental responsibility.

While there is growing evidence base for the effectiveness of FGCs in pre-proceedings in preventing children going into care, there is substantial variation across local authorities in terms of the number of FGCs offered. However, it is unclear what is driving this disparity. In the world's largest RCT of FGCs in pre-proceedings we conducted, acceptance rates varied across the 21 local authorities from 23% to 78%. A number of studies suggest there are a range of factors at the organisational, service and family level which play a part in this variation.

We set out to explore this variation, with a particular focus on the intersection of disadvantage and discrimination which could be driving this variation.

A fundamental part of our approach was its co-creation with experts by experience. We built upon an experts by experience group who worked with us on a previous project in an advisory capacity and expanded it to include a wider mix of parents and carers with a diverse mix of demographics and family circumstances, all of which have previously been involved with children's social care and many had experience of an FGC. We originally set out to co-design the research methods and materials, but upon meeting with the panel, a number recommended that they should become co-researchers to support fieldwork families and professionals we were looking to interview as part of our deep dives in six local authorities. We used our experience of training those with lived experience in previous projects to train a group of co-researchers to work alongside us in our fieldwork. In addition to supporting us analyse data from across the study and draw out core themes. We then took these to a wider group of local authorities where we worked with them and our experts by experience advisory group to co-develop solutions to the key barriers we identified.

In this presentation, we share learning from our approach to training and then undertaking fieldwork with co-researchers to understand the views of families and professionals to enable meaningful participation. We also share our framework to co-develop solutions to identified issue with both professionals and those with lived experience. We highlight ways in which FGCs can be offered to families who may face additional barriers to undertaking an FGC due to a number of complex and multiple issues including cultural differences within their network or their own disabilities for example. We hope this presentation will offer ways to co-produce research as well as policy and practice solutions to support families where their children are at risk of being taken into care.

“I’m a professional mom” - Emergency foster homes in the Norwegian welfare state: Implications for the organization, guidance and recruitment.

Thursday, 11th September - 15:00: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Mrs. Ellen Strømsø [1]

1. *Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Department of Mental Health*

Emergency care orders represent one of the most intrusive measures that the Norwegian child welfare services can implement, used only when there is an immediate risk of significant harm to the child. In Norway, the primary method for caring for children following such orders is placement in emergency foster homes. Despite their critical role in providing care for children in a critical situation, there is limited knowledge about the characteristics, framework and experiences of those who hold contracts as full-time paid emergency foster homes.

This study aims to reduce the knowledge gap on the emergency foster homes in Norway. Data about characteristics of the emergency foster homes, their experiences with providing care, and with the framework of their assignments, as well as the perceptions of their roles, is being collected.

The study has a mixed methods approach. A survey is conducted among emergency foster homes. Together with the survey data, semi structured interviews with emergency foster homes aim to get insight into the experiences on taking care of children in emergency situations. In addition, focus group interviews with supervisors add to the knowledge of the needs and challenges of these homes. The study is a Ph.D. project in Child Welfare.

Preliminary results from analysis of the survey data reveals that the workforce of emergency foster homes is predominantly homogenous, and from traditional family structures with all-Norwegian backgrounds. This homogeneity raises questions about the ability of the system of emergency foster care to uphold the cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds of children. Preliminary results from analysis of the interviews indicate contradictions in the role of emergency foster homes, both on a systemic and individual level. The findings also indicate that there is a great deal of expectations and responsibility put on the emergency foster homes.

The preliminary findings suggest that there is a need for discussion both about the structures of support and the legal framework, and about the recruitment of and demands put on the homes. Enhancing the recruitment process and providing more stable and predictable support structures could improve the organization of emergency foster homes. These improvements could ultimately lead to better outcomes for children in emergency foster care.

Understanding carers' roles in social work with children and young people in care: Learning from Lifelong Links in Scotland

Thursday, 11th September - 15:15: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Dr. Nadine Fowler [1], ***Dr. Robert Porter*** [1]

1. *CELCIS, University of Strathclyde*

Objectives

How carers help children and young people living in alternative care navigate social work systems, services and practitioners is not always fully understood or clearly articulated. To explore the role that carers fulfil in these circumstances, this paper will draw on the findings of an independent evaluation of Lifelong Links in Scotland. Lifelong Links is a service which seeks to (re)connect children living in care with the people that are important to them. The aim of our evaluation was to understand the impact of Lifelong Links on children's care experiences, and explore the implementation of the service in three local authorities.

Methods

Between 2018 and 2024, we conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with children (n=9), their carers (n=27), a family member (n=1), social workers (n=21), Lifelong Links practitioners (n=19), and service managers (n=2). Data was analysed thematically using NVivo software. Views were captured after children's work with a Lifelong Links coordinator ended and participants were recruited with the assistance of the Lifelong Links coordinators. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in-person, online, or via telephone, depending on local COVID-19 related restrictions in 2020-21 and participants' preference. While the study is limited by evaluating a single Scottish service, there is international relevance to the findings we will outline.

Findings

Highlighting a theme from our findings, we identified that carers can fulfil at least three key roles when helping children working with social work services. They can act as:

- *Conduits* between services and children - passing information between both when they cannot speak directly, and supporting children to process any information received.
- *Gatekeepers* of information - deciding what to tell their child and when, usually because they wish to protect them from harm and ensure they have the necessary support for receiving emotionally charged news.
- *Memory holders* - helping their child to record any information that they have received, for instance in family trees or life story books, and repeatedly recalling and retelling this information to help their child integrate it into their sense of self.

Underpinning all three roles was the need for carers to support their child emotionally and practically through the services involved, ensuring they had help to mentally process any information received, and assisting them to arrange spending time with their (re)connections or the service practitioners.

Conclusions/implications

Understanding the potential role(s) of carers in the delivery of supports to children living in alternative care is critical. Identifying these roles enables us to consider what supports or training carers may need, and how we can effectively ensure that they are actively identified by social workers and other practitioners to support their work with children.

Nonetheless, we need to consider the impact of asking and allowing carers to undertake these roles in social work services, and fully explore the consequences of doing so. This paper will consider the impact of carers'

multifaceted roles on children, social work services, and carers themselves, and explore what this could mean social work practice more widely.

50 years of alternative care for vulnerable children - Australian policy and practice 1975-2025

Thursday, 11th September - 15:30: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Ms. Deirdre Cheers [1]

1. *Barnardos Australia*

Background:
In Australia, organizing and providing alternative care for children unable to live with their parents is the responsibility of both government and non-government organizations, including charities such as Barnardos Australia focussing exclusively on child rights and children's social care. Alternative care for children removed from their family by the state is governed by discrete child welfare laws in six States and two Territories, with National Out-of-Home Care Standards and national data reporting requirements.
Objectives:
This non-empirical presentation attempts to provide insight on the impact on children of government child welfare legislation policies and practices over time, via the use of historical mapping techniques. The extent to which Australian and international research and formal Australian Inquiries at multiple levels of government have influenced child related policy will be presented to stimulate critical thinking about ways in which political processes and influence may directly impact life outcomes for vulnerable children.
Methods:
The paper draws on a structured historical analysis of legislative reform in the Australian state of New South Wales over a 50-year period 1975 to 2025. This approach reflects an extended period of child rights advocacy and sector leadership by Barnardos Australia, in combination with a practitioner lens that is systematic, rigorous, and grounded in evidence-informed practice. Primary sources include government inquiries and associated reports, legislative records, and publicly available outputs and outcomes data.
Findings:
Using an Australian Government and local State/Territory analysis approach and New South Wales as a specific case example, it will be illustrated and argued that

- child welfare legislation is a powerful instrument of government control over vulnerable children and their families
- policies, processes and practices associated with government child welfare legislation are affected by political processes, both at political party and public sector levels
- political decision making and influence can directly affect the immediate lives and extended life outcomes of children at risk of being placed into alternative care, as well as those already in care
- public reform focusing on alternative care for children can have unintended consequences because of political processes in addition to implementation issues
- the use of both international and Australian research evidence in alternative care policies and practices is variable over time, and impacted by political changes and processes
- evidence exists that Australian non-government organizations (including charities) can play an important role in influencing alternative care systems over time

Conclusions:

- Alternative care for vulnerable children is directly impacted by political processes and directions
- A Child Rights approach more appropriately underpins alternative care

- Policies, processes and practices for children in alternative care, while underpinned by legislation, should not be solely directed by law
- Non-government organizations, including charities, must be politically aware to play an effective role in advocacy for children in alternative care

You are Our Son, Through Thick and Thin": Young Adults' Insights into Their Experiences in Kinship Foster Care

Thursday, 11th September - 14:45: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. shimrit prins engelsman [1], ***Prof. Shalhevet Attar-Schwartz*** [2], ***Prof. Avihu Shoshana*** [3]

1. *The Faculty of Social Work Ashkelon Academic College,* ***2.*** *the Hebrew University of Jerusalem,* ***3.*** *University of Haifa*

Aims: Kinship foster care offers both advantages and challenges. There is relatively little research on the kinship foster care phenomenon from alumni's
point of view, particularly studies that highlight positive in addition to negative experiences. The present study brings the voices of fifteen young adults, aged 18-23, who have lived in kinship foster care families as children. It examines their transition experience, adjustment and stay at the foster home, and offers practical implications for the placement stage and subsequent stay with the foster family.

Methods: The participants were recruited through a major foster care service in Israel. The inclusion criteria were foster care alumni aged 18-25 who have been raised by relatives for at least three years prior to adulthood. This study is conducted in the narrative approach in order to understand the interviewees' experiences through their own worldview. It is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews. The data were analyzed thematically.

Findings: The findings indicate that for most, the fostering arrangement was initiated by the birth family, without official intervention. Subsequently, welfare authorities intervened in providing foster service. Upon their transition to kinship foster care, the alumni felt a sense of commitment by their foster parents, combined with uncertainty regarding their own future. Some found it difficult to share personal experiences, meet boundaries, and adjust to a different family life environment. For some, coping mechanisms such as emotional numbness helped adjust to the transition given their past traumas. Coping methods that enabled emotional release included physical exercise, the use of imagination, emotional therapy and listening to music. Most alumni experienced a positive relationship and sense of belonging and protectedness. Nevertheless, about a third described abuse and neglect experiences, with complex implications during their stay with the foster family, such as eating disorders, anxiety and depression to the point of suicidality.

Implications for Practice and Policy: These findings highlight the need for appropriate support, training, and tighter supervision on the quality of kinship foster care in order to allow children removed from their homes to live in a protective family environment and in order to help the kinship foster families to adapt to raising their traumatized relative . Child welfare professionals must be alert for worrisome signs among foster children and address their needs. They should also provide foster parents with childrearing mentoring. In addition, foster authorities have yet to develop indicators to evaluate the adequacy of kin foster parents, and look closely into the motivations of relatives expressing interest on in foster parenting, and evaluate the foster children's needs and their relatives' ability to meet them.

A Multi-Sectoral Review of Child Protection: Trends and Transitions in Administrative Data from Pre- to Post-Pandemic

Thursday, 11th September - 15:00: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Ms. Nicole Eicher [1], ***Mr. Dragan Stoll*** [1], ***Ms. Kaj Flurina Affolter*** [1], ***Dr. Tim Tausendfreund*** [1], ***Prof. David Lätsch*** [1]

1. *ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work*

Background: The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges to child welfare worldwide, amplifying risk factors for child abuse and neglect (CAN), such as economic hardship, social isolation, and parental stress. While previous research points to a significant decrease in reports to child protection (CP) services in the first phase of the pandemic, the consistency of this finding across countries and the pandemic's course remains unclear.

Objective: To examine possible trends and associated factors, we conducted (1) a systematic review and (2) analyzed administrative child welfare data from the canton of Zurich, Switzerland. The systematic review synthesized studies using administrative data to assess the pandemic's impact on the identification and response to CAN globally. Additionally, we explored trends and identified factors to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic altered or exacerbated regional trends during and after the pandemic in detail.

Method: The systematic review followed the PRISMA guidelines, searching ten databases for articles published between January 2020 and October 2023. A total of 98 studies from 26 countries were included, focusing on trends in institutional responses to CAN observed in administrative data. On this basis, we additionally analyze trends in administrative data from Switzerland's largest CP service provider, including 19,615 CP cases. We compared projected and actual data from the pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic periods (2016-2024), focusing on interventions: family support, parenting guardianships, and residential care.

Findings: The included studies (N = 98) examined a range of outcomes: 55% focused on medical encounters, 22% on CP services, 9% on police calls, criminal charges, or court decisions, 7% on helpline contacts, and 6% on other services addressing CAN. The systematic review indicated that most studies reported a decline in CAN-related outcomes during the pandemic, particularly those analyzing administrative data from the child welfare, criminal justice, and healthcare systems. Specifically, 56% of outcomes decreased, 21% increased, and 12% remained unchanged compared to pre-pandemic levels. Conversely, studies on helpline contacts showed mixed results, with most indicating an increase in contacts, suggesting a shift in how individuals accessed support. Notably, there was a significant gap in studies extending their analysis into the post-lockdown period. Preliminary findings from the Swiss trend analysis suggest that service provision, especially in placement rates, peaked in 2021 and 2022 before returning to pre-pandemic levels by 2023.

Conclusions: This study integrates a systematic review with empirical trend analysis, offering a comprehensive view of how the pandemic impacted responses to CAN. The review suggests that underreporting during the pandemic likely resulted from reduced detection, although some forms of abuse may have genuinely declined due to changes in protective factors. The Swiss trend analysis provides insights into post-pandemic shifts in CP service provision, particularly in response to a backlog of complex cases. Together, these findings highlight the importance of long-term effects of the pandemic on child welfare, emphasizing the need for longitudinal research to fully understand the pandemic's impact on CP systems. By combining evidence from administrative data and systematic reviews, this study can contribute deeper insights for shaping policies and practice in future crises.

Child welfare professionals' conceptualizations of care and maltreatment. A narrative analysis.

Thursday, 11th September - 15:15: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. Margrete Aadnanes [1], ***Dr. Ellen Syrstad*** [1]

1. *VID specialized Universty*

Addressing the theme: *Processes and policies in alternative care for children and Quality of alternative care for children.*

The paper explores understandings and conceptualizations of care and maltreatment at a structural and professional level, which will influence child welfare assessments of children's care situations and potential alternative care situations, such as foster homes or institutions.

Abstract:

This paper will present preliminary analysis of how the concepts of *care* and *maltreatment* are expressed in interviews with child welfare workers. These phenomena are at the core of child welfare assessments, when a child and its family have been referred to child welfare services. Thus, it is important to investigate how they are understood and conveyed in professionals' stories of assessments in maltreatment cases.

The study builds upon interviews with 11 child welfare professionals. Using narrative analysis, we have read through the interviews looking for explicit and implicit meanings of maltreatment. It became clear that the professionals struggled to define maltreatment without contrasting it to examples of "good care". What constituted "good care" was talked about in general terms, as well as it was specified and exemplified in relation to a particular child's needs. For most of the time, "good care" meant "emotional care". Furthermore, few references were made to the knowledgebase such notions came from.

The narrative lens, and more specifically the concept of "storylines" (Mishler, 1997), helped us to analyse how the references to "good care" as "emotional care" has implicit references to narratives and notions on a societal and cultural level, of preferred parental care practices. The concept of storylines directs our attention to how individual meanings and understandings are informed and formed by cultural narratives of the phenomenon in question. However, such norms and values often reflect the majority population and its preferred practices. Child welfare services necessarily manage norms and values regarding childcare practices on behalf of the society. Gulløv (2003) perceives childcare as a social practice where the exercise of care is part of a negotiation of cultural values. Within the Norwegian context, ideals and norms for childhood, upbringing and care practices will be influenced by the socioeconomic and material features of the society. In the Norwegian society, the level of welfare is high. Such social context creates certain conditions for upbringing, family life and parental practices. Gauthier et al. (2021) suggests that we see a new standard for childcare, which is child-centred, informed by experts, emotionally intensive and financially costly.

The analysis in this paper is not completed. However, we see some preliminary contours of findings indicating that the notions of "good care" at the cultural level strongly affects the assessment of maltreatment,in addition to the developmental psychology knowledge base. The concept of storylines may help us to study the links between cultural norms and values regarding childcare standards at a societal level, and how these norms and values are reflected in child welfare assessments. This is important to promote just and qualitative good measures for children experiencing maltreatment.

Family Relationships Between Normative Orientations and Lived Diversity – Experiences of Care Leavers with their Mothers and Fathers

Thursday, 11th September - 15:30: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. Georg Streissguertl [1], ***Prof. Stephan Sting*** [1], ***Ms. Julia Weissnar*** [1]

1. *University of Klagenfurt*

Numerous international studies highlight the significant role of family in the transition from care to adulthood for youth with out-of-home care experience. Family relationships seem to be central to social inclusion, shaping social connections and social participation. Our presentation is based on a qualitative study from Austria, that intends to discover what links are made to the family of origin during the transition from care to adulthood and how dealing with the family affects processes of identity formation, self-education and the establishment of social affiliations. During data analysis, it became evident that the general term 'family' needs to be differentiated with regard to the significance of different family members. Our presentation specifically explores how care leavers navigate their relationships with their biological mothers and fathers.

The study focuses on the biographical experiences of 18-to 27-year-old care-experienced youth. A biographically oriented interview study is carried out, using the grounded theory method. The data were collected using problem-centered interviews, combined with the creation of egocentric network maps. Through this approach, a total of 41 participants were recruited for the study across two data collection waves. The analysis followed the procedures of grounded theory and qualitative structural network analysis. The implementation of the study includes a participatory element. A reference group of eight co-researchers with experience in child and youth welfare was formed to advise the research team during the research process from beginning to end.

The results illustrate that care leavers' relationships with their biological parents generally do not conform to the societal established image of family, but the specific mother-child and father-child constellations reflect gender-specific normative expectations of mother- and fatherhood. When considering their social networks, mothers and fathers are not central figures. However, individual cases reveal that parent-child relationships manifest in diverse constellations, which can be biographically significant in different ways. These relationships provide a sense of belonging and crucial support, particularly due to limited social resources during the transition out of care. Contact with mothers is more frequent than with fathers, but these relationships are often challenging and only occasionally perceived as supportive. The tension between socially established normative images of mothers and fathers and the diversity of diverging family-related experiences influences relationships with fathers and mothers. This tension also shapes the practices and interventions of the child and youth welfare system.

Violence Among Sámi Adolescents in Norway: The Mihá Questionnaire Study

Thursday, 11th September - 14:45: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Prof. Ketil Lenert Hansen [1], ***Prof. John Fluke*** [2]

1. *RKBU North, Faculty of Health Sciences, UiT The Arctic University of Norway,* ***2.*** *Kempe Center, University of Colorando*

Aims: To assess the prevalence of emotional, physical, and sexual violence among a population of Sámi adolescents in Norway. The study helps to fill a gap in our understanding of how violence affects Sámi adolescents and addresses the limitations of data that do not include information about Indigenous identity. The main objective of this project has been to map the mental health and well-being of young indigenous Sámi in Norway, with a focus on identifying factors that affect risk and resilience.

Methods: This study is based on the Mihá (a Lule Sámi word meaning heartfelt pride in one's self) questionnaire study, a survey on health and living conditions among Sámi adolescents in Norway. Our study includes a total of 256 Sámi adolescent participants aged 16 to 31 years. Indigenous identity is self-reported across multiple indicators. The survey domains include demographics of the respondents and their families, forms of violence, as well as risk and protective factors such as racism and discrimination suicide mental health status, physical health, connection to nature access to culturally sensitive health services.

Results: Indigenous Sámi people are at a higher risk of being exposed to violence, including physical, psychological, and sexual violence during childhood. In our sample, approximately 1 in 2 reported experiencing emotional violence at some point in their lives. Around 1 in 4 have experienced physical violence, while about 30% reported having been exposed to sexual abuse. Violence was typically reported to have occurred during childhood. The majority of those who reported sexual abuse were girls. For all types of violence, the perpetrator was typically known to the victim. The extended family and close family ties can act as barriers, preventing violence and abuse from being reported to the police or other public authorities.

Conclusions: Sámi adolescent respondents were likely to report interpersonal violence. The extended family and close family ties can act as barriers, leading to violence and abuse not being reported. From interviews it was determined that future work in this area should include domains of cultural health such as the opportunity to have a future on Sámi terms, for example being able to practice traditional Sámi industries such as reindeer husbandry and fishing or live as Sámi young people in urban areas. These issues touch upon not only the well-being of Sámi young people, but also more existential questions about the place of Sámi young people in society, and about their rights as indigenous people and a minority in Norwegian society.

Keywords: Emotional violence; Norway; Mihá; Sámi; adolescents; abuse; ethnicity; physical violence; sexual violence.

Recognising and supporting children with disabilities in Victoria's foster care system

Thursday, 11th September - 15:00: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Ms. Madeleine Dowling [1]

1. *Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare*

In 2023, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare launched a pioneering research initiative in Victoria to examine the prevalence and characteristics of children with disabilities in foster care. The research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the unique needs of these children within the out-of-home care system, an area previously lacking targeted data.

This study drew on data from 23 out of 24 foster care agencies as of March 2023, encompassing 1,480 children out of an estimated daily average of 1,526 children in foster care. The results offer the most accurate estimate to date of the disability prevalence among children in foster care in Victoria. Approximately 41% of children in foster care have disabilities, compared to 7.7% of children in the general population under the age of 15. This includes 31% of children with disabilities who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Furthermore, the study revealed that only 53% of children with disabilities in foster care have a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) plan, indicating significant gaps in access to vital supports and services.

These findings highlight the urgent need for policy reforms to address the complex needs of children with disabilities in foster care. The recruitment and retention of foster carers remain pressing issues, with a growing demand for carers specifically trained to support children with disabilities. Without an adequate supply of skilled carers, children may face unsuitable placements, higher rates of placement disruption, and, in some cases, be placed in residential care instead of home-based environments.

The research underscores the importance of considering the prevalence of disability in the foster care system and the significant role that foster carers play. There is an urgent need for targeted reforms to better support both children with disabilities and the carers responsible for their care.

Recommendations from the research include: improving support structures for foster carers through tailored training programs, promoting systemic changes to ensure equitable access to resources and services for children with disabilities, addressing socio-economic pressures that contribute to the declining number of foster carers, and fostering collaborative efforts among policymakers, child protection agencies, and advocacy organizations to improve outcomes for children with disabilities in foster care.

Does the Screening of Well-Being and Learning Skills Influence Decisions in Social Work with Children in Family Foster Care?

Thursday, 11th September - 15:15: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Mr. Siddhartha Baviskar [1], ***Ms. Charlotte B. Jacobsen*** [1], ***Dr. Sofie Dencker-Larsen*** [1]

1. *University College Copenhagen*

Background and purpose:
Research shows that many children and youth in out-of-home care have significant mental health needs and perform poorly at school, increasing their risk of entering adulthood with only compulsory education. About 25% of these children do not receive mental health services, and roughly half of those underachieving do not receive special education services. This gap may be due to undiagnosed needs within out-of-home care populations. Social workers use a range of assessment and screening tools in their work. Whether and how the information they gather from these tools influences their decision-making has been examined in several studies, in particular qualitative research. However, few studies have examined how social workers independently use data collected with standardized questionnaires to inform their actions in the context of routine practice. This under-explored topic led to our research question: Do the results of multi-respondent screening of well-being and learning skills influence decisions in routine social work practice with children in family foster care?
Method:
To answer the question, we conducted a logistic regression analysis on data on 127 children collected in a feasibility study of an intervention, *Me and My Foster Family*, conducted in eight Danish municipalities. The intervention aims to improve the well-being and learning skills of children placed in family foster care by providing social workers with valid screening tools to inform their decision-making. They include data from two screening questionnaires, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and the Attentive to Learning questionnaire measuring foster children's well-being and learning skills, respectively, and social workers' data entries regarding their subsequent decision on supplementary interventions provided to the children and control variables.
Findings:
While screening results revealing greater learning difficulties are directly associated with social workers' decision to provide an intervention, those revealing greater problems with well-being are inversely related to the outcome.
Conclusions and Implications:
We offer the following three explanations for some of these surprising results: The prevailing attitude among social workers that children in poor well-being should be 'spared' from learning demands; the availability of municipal resources to address the needs uncovered by screening results, and the ability of screening tools to affect decision making in routine social work only when they reveal something new. Overall, the results suggest that, while screening tools can independently inform social workers' decisions, potentially narrowing the gap between service need and receipt, this benefit is dependent on the prevailing attitudes among social workers and municipal priorities and resources.

Impact of guaranteed income for young adults aging out of foster care in the U.S.

Thursday, 11th September - 15:30: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Bridgette Lery [1], ***Dr. Sarah Benatar*** [1], ***Dr. Jaclyn Chambers*** [1]

1. *Urban Institute*

Objectives: This study aims to investigate the impact of unrestricted guaranteed income (GI) cash payments for young adults aging out of foster care at age 21 – a group who experiences unique complexities and highly unequal outcomes compared with their peers who were not in foster care at this critical life transition point.
Most young people transition to adulthood gradually, continuing to receive financial and emotional support from family well into adulthood. In contrast, young people who are in foster care primarily receive support through the foster care system and this support ends when they "age out" of the system. However, depending on their state of residence, young people still in the system on their 18th or 21st birthday lose access to these critical services and face a benefits cliff.
In 2023, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) began administering a state-legislated intervention to provide former foster youth (FFY) unrestricted monthly GI payments of $750 for 18 months. This study examines whether GI improves outcomes for FFY across a range of outcomes including health, mental health, financial well-being, housing, food security, employment, and education.
Method: This study employs a randomized controlled trial design (RCT) across two sites enrolling FFY (N=774). Data sources include a longitudinal survey using validated scales. The survey was designed in collaboration with the study's Guidance Committee comprised of former foster youth and other community members. The survey is being administered at baseline, 3 months post-randomization, 9 months post-randomization, program exit, and 6 months post-program exit.
Results: Results from the 3-month survey indicate that FFY in the treatment group are experiencing better outcomes in several areas compared to FFY in the control group. Youth in the treatment group are less likely to have experienced homelessness/couch surfing (29% vs. 45%, $p<0.001$), less likely to report financial stress (60% vs. 79%, $p<0.001$), have higher current wellbeing scores ($p<0.001$), and have lower perceived stress scores ($p<0.05$).
Conclusions: Young adults aging out of foster care at age 21 face an array of less favorable outcomes compared to youth who are not child welfare involved. This study suggests that unrestricted GI cash payments can help them thrive. Some impacts emerge quickly, within 3-months of aging out and starting to receive GI, including reduced homelessness, anxiety, and financial stress, and greater well-being scores. Future waves of the study survey will determine if these results sustain over time.

Assessing a Measure of Foster/ Adoptive Caregiver Readiness to Care for LGBTQ+ Youth

Thursday, 11th September - 15:45: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Amy Salazar [1], ***Mx. Jaidyanne Podsobinski*** [1]

1. *Washington State University Vancouver*

Objectives: Youth who identify as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer/questioning) are overrepresented in many foster care systems around the world, including the United States. Relatedly, many foster care systems struggle to meet the needs of these youth due to discrimination and lack of acceptance from a variety of entities including caregivers, caseworkers, and government and agency policies. More research on effective practices and assessment tools are needed to mitigate these challenges. This presentation aims to share information about the psychometric properties of an instrument developed for assessing foster/ adoptive caregiver perceived readiness to care for youth who identify as LGBTQ+. It also aims to assess whether other caregiver qualities and characteristics indicating more general readiness to foster/ adopt are associated with readiness to care for LGBTQ+ youth.

Methods: Data used in the current study were collected as part of a larger evaluation of a foster/ adoptive caregiver training curriculum. Analysis includes data from 2,284 participants from six states and one tribal community in the United States. Data were collected via an online survey between 2020 and 2022. The original 6 items included in the LGBTQ+ readiness scale were developed by the research team, and were informed using a combination of practice experience and the scientific literature on acceptance. In addition, 14 additional pre-established measures assessing readiness to foster/ adopt were assessed for their association with readiness to care for LGBTQ+ youth, including the Trauma-Informed Parenting Scale, Cultural Receptivity Scale, Available Time Scale, and Family Environment Scale, among others.

Findings: Examinations of internal reliability found that the 6-item scale had strong reliability (α=0.891), but was slightly improved by leaving one item out (α=0.893); thus, the final recommended scale has five items. Regarding associations between readiness to care for LGBTQ+ youth and other indicators of readiness to foster/ adopt, 12 of the 14 indicators had statistically significant, positive associations. Effect sizes were mostly small, but approached medium with two indicators, cultural receptivity and potential to care for children considered challenging.

Conclusions/Implications: The readiness to care for LGBTQ+ youth scale is a new tool that can be used to help ensure that caregivers are prepared for their role to foster or adopt youth with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities. This is one contribution to an area of practice that is still in great need of increased understanding about how to best meet youths' needs. In addition, it is hoped that knowledge about other caregiver readiness factors associated with caregivers' readiness to care for LGBTQ+ youth will provide helpful insights into other trainable factors that may possibly bolster an accepting and supportive environment.

Scoping review: Father Figures, Paternal Roles, and Male Representation in Kinship Foster Care — An Intersectional Perspective

Thursday, 11th September - 14:45: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Ms. Almendra Espinoza-Rivera [1], ***Prof. Nuria Fuentes-Peláez*** [1], ***Dr. Ainoa Mateos*** [1]

1. *Universitat de Barcelona*

This work explores the role of male caregivers in kinship foster care within the framework of the Project (PID2022-137305NB-C22) “Innovation and Quality in Group Methodology for Parenting Support with Families at Risk and in Child Protection: An Intersectional and Community-Based Perspective.”
The main objectives: 1) analyse how the father figure, paternal roles, and male kinship caregivers are conceptualized from an intersectional perspective; 2) explore how the role of male kinship caregivers is addressed in scientific literature, considering their diverse social and cultural realities.
This research adopts a situated intersectional approach, with particular emphasis on gender and cultural dimensions (Crenshaw, 1989; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2017), to examine the implications of male caregiver involvement in social and educational interventions. Due to the limited research available on this specific topic, existing studies on fatherhood provide a valuable starting point.
Recent research has increasingly examined how fatherhood influences the development of children and adolescents (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013). Nevertheless, no comprehensive theoretical framework has yet been established to guide research on father figures, their roles, and how their involvement directly or indirectly impacts child development (Cabrera et al., 2014; Jia et al., 2012; Lamb et al., 2013). Evidence on male figures in kinship foster care remains scarce (Fuentes-Peláez & Rabassa, in press).
Research on fatherhood has shown that differences between maternal and paternal behaviors are shaped by biology, family structures, educational background, cultural beliefs, and social values (Cabrera et al., 2009). However, tools for studying fatherhood are often based on maternal caregiving models, overlooking paternal experiences (Adamsons & Buehler, 2007). This gap is particularly relevant in the context of foster care.

Between March and September 2024, a scoping review was conducted to analyse father figures, paternal roles, and male kinship caregivers from an intersectional perspective, focusing on gender and culture. The review followed PRISMA guidelines and included sources such as Web of Science, Scopus, PUBMED, ERIC, JSTOR, Science Direct, ProQuest, and Cercabib. Grey literature was consulted through websites of organizations such as PETRA Maternidades Feministas, Fundación Cepaim, Equimundo, MenCare, MiC, and the European Institute for Gender Equality. The search focused on English and Spanish publications from 2016 to 2024.

Findings reveal a shift from the traditional “breadwinner” role to concepts of “new fatherhoods” (Gregory & Miller, 2011; Lucas et al., 2021), linked to broader sociocultural changes: women’s workforce participation, gender equality policies, and views on masculinities (Sigle-Rushton et al., 2013; Gartzia Fernández, 2016). Yet, these “new fatherhood” ideals reflect middle-class, white, Western perspectives, disconnected from realities of men in other contexts (Daniel & Taylor, 2001). Studies highlight the low participation of male kinship caregivers in positive parenting programs (Harty & Ethier, 2022), with most reports on family dynamics relying on female caregivers, reinforcing gendered patterns in research (Holtan & Thronblad, 2009).

Male kinship caregivers remain underrepresented in research and programs. Addressing this gap through intersectional approaches is key to promoting more inclusive foster care

Note: (PI) Nuria Fuentes-Peláe, (Co-PI) Ainoa Mateos. Research Group on Socio-Educational Interventions in Childhood and Youth - GRISIJ, University of Barcelona.

Growing up between expectations and explanations – Findings from the mixed methods longitudinal Zurich Adoption Study

Thursday, 11th September - 15:00: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Dr. Samuel Keller [1], ***Prof. Thomas Gabriel*** [1]

1. ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work

BACKGROUND: Although placement in an adoptive family offers the opportunity to grow up in a safe family environment with multiple parental contacts, both pre-adoptive experiences and unique developmental challenges for adoptive parents and children can affect the child's well-being and positive development. To capture this emergence of challenges and conditions for well-being from a processual perspective, the Zurich Adoption Study was designed as longitudinal mixed-methods research. One of the main objectives is to understand the long-term consequences of interventions (adoption assessment) and to derive recommendations for assessment and post-adoption services - but also for the support of comparable family forms, such as families with children from sperm donation or surrogacy.

METHODS: In 2009 (t1), all 195 families who had adopted a child in the Canton of Zurich between 2003 and 2009 were surveyed using the standardized CBCL questionnaire. This questionnaire was completed by 119 adoptive families. Of these families, 23 were selected in a quantitatively controlled manner. These adoptive parents were interviewed qualitatively about their experiences and impressions on the path to becoming an adoptive family. In 2014/2015 (t2) and 2022/2023 (t3), the quantitative and qualitative surveys were repeated using the same mixed methods and with the same samples. The children's perspective was considered from the beginning using creative methods and increasingly also using standardized questionnaires (YSR) and qualitative interviews (n=16) with the support of a peer researcher.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION: The quantitative CBCL results show in the long term: after the honeymoon phase with few behavioural problems at the very beginning (t1), there were "normalization tendencies", but also an increase in clinical behavioural problems from t2. From t1 onwards, attention problems and externalizing problems are consistently overrepresented compared to the CBCL norm group. There is also a high degree of consistency in these problems and consequently a potential opportunity for early detection: most of the critical behaviours shown in t1 and/or t2 persisted in t3. The results of the qualitative interviews show that even if problems were recognized early (t1), adoptive parents often hesitate to seek help for a long time. If they do, they often start child-centred help and therapy because they do not want to fail as officially certified parents. From the point of view of the 14 young people interviewed (t3), however, their well-being depends above all on the quality and stability of their social relationships. These are important to cope with the various transitions and with the diverse experiences of othering or racism outside the family. At the same time, they try to actively negotiate their ideas of (adoptive) family and youth with multiple parenthood within the adoptive family. Taboos or gaps in knowledge about their origins can make this very difficult. In order to reach these adolescents or families who feel helpless or even worthless, low-threshold, trust-based services must start before the arrival of the adopted child. This also applies for other forms of childhood with multiple parents. Finally, the influence of current reappraisals of illegal international adoptions must also be taken into account.

Cosup75: A multi-actor participation process in Paris

Thursday, 11th September - 15:15: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Prof. Hélène Join-Lambert [1], ***Dr. Séverine Euillet*** [1], ***Dr. Anna Rurka*** [1], ***Mr. Jerome Delfortrie*** [1]

1. *Université Paris Nanterre*

In French child protection, participating in decision-making is a right both for children and for parents, while professionals and institutions are also involved. Cosup75, a research project funded by ONPE and the city of Paris from 2023 to 2025, started with the idea that sharing perspectives between these stakeholders is necessary to better implement the right to participation stated in the ICRC and in French law.

The overall objective of this project was to identify barriers and tools for meaningful participation in child protection, through a holistic approach that acknowledges the impact of interactions between institutions, professionals, children and parents. While the project had two parts, both involving young people, parents and practitioners, in this presentation we will focus on the part which is based on qualitative methods. In 2023, as part of the project that was submitted for funding to ONPE, the City of Paris made a commitment to set up a participative process involving people with lived experience of child protection alongside practitioners and actors at the top of the hierarchy of child protection administration. The aim of this process was to collectively generate tools for enhanced participation of people with lived experience. A 'project group' was set up in order to design the process. This group included representatives of the administration of the city of Paris, parents and young people who had been previously in care.

The research follows up and analyzes this collective participative process, through systematic observation of all group meetings (N=10 as for July 2025), individual interviews at the beginning (N=10) and at the end of the process (N=5 as for July 2025).

Strong attendance shows the commitment of its members to this project. This group designed and prepared two workshops which were implemented with young adults, parents and professionals from the same area in June 2025. Throughout the preparation of these workshops, it was possible to identify some barriers and facilitators to a collective participation process.

Preliminary findings are related to the 'project group' itself. While it was easy to recruit volunteers amongst parents who had participated in a previous research project, no young person was able to join the group on the long term. Explanations may be a lack of time and means for young people living in precarious contexts, as well as a lack of understanding of what this project will eventually bring to them.

Some institutional barriers have been identified. Members of the group noticed a lack of transparency over decisions and felt there was a hierarchy within the group. Furthermore, people in charge of this project changed or were on sick leave for several months. Both aspects also reflect the state of Child protection in Paris.

We will conclude the presentation with some factors which have contributed to overcoming barriers to collective participation, including strong communication, clear setting of goals, responsiveness to participants' needs and requests.

Helping Care Leavers Develop Life Skills: A Review of Interventions Available

Thursday, 11th September - 15:30: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Ms. Diana Cruz-Álvarez [1], Dr. Laura García-Alba [1], Dr. Federica Gullo [1], Prof. Jorge Fernández del Valle [1]

1. *University of Oviedo*

Background. Child welfare systems worldwide face significant challenges supporting care leavers' transitions into adulthood. Consequently, there is growing research interest in identifying effective strategies to facilitate a successful transition and in developing interventions aimed at preparing young people for leaving care. However, a critical gap remains in understanding how to equip youth with the necessary skills and knowledge for adult life, as well as fostering a sense of readiness and preparedness. This paper presents a scoping review of the available evidence on interventions designed to enhance life skills among young people leaving care and the methodologies employed to achieve this goal. **Methods.** This study was conducted following the PRISMA-ScR guidelines. A systematic search across 13 online databases yielded 1,835 references, of which only 35 met the inclusion criteria. Eligible studies were published in English within the last 13 years and described an implemented intervention that explicitly incorporated independent living skills training, with a minimum level of detail regarding the intervention's design and implementation. **Results.** The 35 selected studies identified 24 distinct interventions, which were categorised based on their defining component: (1) Casework, (2) Personal Advisor or Holistic Interventions, (3) Transitional Housing, (4) Mentoring or Coaching and Skills Training. While a variety of methodologies were employed, most programs emphasized the importance of relationships and social support in achieving successful outcomes. Some interventions explicitly highlighted emotional and instrumental support, while others prioritized the development of social skills and trust-based relationships, particularly in Mentoring and Coaching programs. Regarding the approach to life skills training, interventions generally followed either a classroom-based format or an experiential learning model integrated into daily activities. However, detailed descriptions of how life skills were developed were scarce, with most studies providing only brief overviews of program objectives and components. Moreover, few interventions referenced an underlying theoretical framework or theory of change. **Discussion.** Based on this review, several key recommendations emerge for designing interventions aimed at fostering life skills development among young people leaving care. Programs should adopt a person-centered approach tailored to individual needs, incorporate practical application of learned skills, and emphasize the development of interdependence by strengthening social capital and relationships.

Trauma Sensitive Schools as central pieces of resilient communities: Outcomes of a capacity building and certification program.

Thursday, 11th September - 15:45: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Prof. Mariana Negrão [1]***, Prof. Elisa Veiga*** [2]***, Prof. José Carlos Rocha*** [3]

1. *CEDH, Portuguese Catholic University,* ***2.*** *Research Center for Human Development, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Porto, Portugal,* ***3.*** *CESPU*

A multisystemic approach to adversity and trauma is urgent in our society, benefiting all children, but especially the ones most affected by such events, amongst which we encounter looked after children. Therefore it is important to promote a trauma sensitive culture in several institutions children inhabit. Schools are a front-line institution, present in the life of every child and youth, and therefore can display a critical role in the provision of trauma sensitive care. In fact, the epidemiology of developmental trauma, and the recognition of its consequences for learning and development, demands a greater accessibility to trauma sensitive care that can reduce the risk of re-vitimization and other negative effects, contributing to protect children´s rights.

This presentation will share the roadmap, insights and main outcomes of a program of capacity building and certification on trauma sensitive schools being developed and implemented in Portugal. This program, based on a whole school approach - which summons for the participation of school leaders, teachers, assistant staff and psychologists - is aimed at: a. spreading basic knowledge on trauma and trauma sensitive care provision amongst school communities; b. support the distinct roles of school staff in understanding and acting with students considering the effects of adversity and trauma in their life trajectories; c. promote change in schools policies and practices, fostering further alignments with the principles of trauma sensitive care. To fulfill these goals, the program comprises a. basic training activities targeting the elementary knowledge of all school staff; b. advanced training activities in particular themes (eg. mourning, domestic violence, staff self-care) available to school staff; c. regular supervision of a workgroup of professionals responsible for the revision of policies and practices within each school, adjusting them to a trauma sensitive context. All these activities are based on a first assessment of schools regarding their preparation and implementation of trauma sensitive care that encompasses training, policies and practices (for screening, assessment and trauma focused intervention), supervision and infrastructures. This project, pioneer in Portugal, was implemented in a municipality in Northern Portugal involving 36 schools from kindergarten to secondary.

First assessment of school environment regarding provision of trauma sensitive care (N=252), following a questionnaire assessment (QATSC-SS - Veiga, Rocha & Negrão, 2022) highlights training and supervision as most critical areas. Following intervention, positive impacts on training, school policies and practices and child-teacher conflict reduction are observed.

The results are important especially because they signal the change of perspective accomplished by school staff and the mobilization of school community in analyzing, discussing, and creating change in a culturally silenced topic not immediately perceived as their territory and competence (mental health vs. teaching and education).

Keys to Retention and Longevity of Residential Childcare Educators – Research to Practice

Thursday, 11th September - 14:45: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Dr. Patrick Tyler [1], ***Mr. Giovanni Fulvi*** [2], ***Prof. Marzia Saglietti*** [3]

1. *Boys Town,* ***2.*** *National Coordination of Family Communities for Minors,* ***3.*** *University of Rome*

Turnover in residential childcare educators (RCE) is related to placement instability for youths in therapeutic residential care. Staff changes disrupt the education and treatment provided and the relationships between youths and RCEs. Therefore, understanding the keys to retention of RCEs is important for improving the quality of residential childcare. This oral presentation will present highlights from two independent studies conducted in 2023. Study One occurred across Italy with RCEs on the topic of burnout and worker engagement. Study Two occurred across the U.S. with RCEs called Family Teachers on the topic of staff retention and sustainability. This oral presentation aims to share the convergence of these two studies and transfer research to practice that can help improve training and support of RCEs globally.

Methods: The first study in Italy examined compassion fatigue and work engagement in 215 RCEs across Italy. In this sample, 47% of participants had more than 5 years of experience. A survey was used to measure burnout, secondary posttraumatic stress, and work engagement. Comparisons were made based on gender, living with children, years of experience, roles, and perception of teamwork. The second study in the U.S. included 119 RCEs called Family Teachers. Family Teachers are married couples who work and reside with youth in family-style group homes called the Boys Town Family Home Program. In this sample, 34% had more than 5 years of experience. The survey included items related to program operations, wellness, wellbeing, resilience, hope, and overall satisfaction in their role. Focus groups were conducted to answer two questions 1) What are the biggest challenges to family teaching? and 2) In what ways have you made family teaching work for you and your family? For the focus groups, Family Teachers were grouped based on length of service. Survey and focus groups were triangulated to provide a better understanding of keys to sustainability.

Findings: In the Italian study, researchers found higher ratings of work-related burnout in women compared to men and those who did not live with children. Most notably, RCEs who rated relationships with colleagues higher had lower ratings of work-related burnout. Additionally, less favorable teamwork ratings were related to reduced work engagement. In the U.S. study, triangulating the results from the surveys and focus groups revealed teamwork with their spouse, assistant, and supervisor was a key theme related to longevity. Factors related to preventing burnout included remembering purpose, prayer, being able to adapt, and having fun. Additional themes related to longevity included protecting and being organized with their time, balancing work and family needs, being assertive, taking ownership of their program, and training and support from supervisors.

Conclusions/Implications: Comparisons from Italy and the U.S. revealed converging findings from two independent studies. Most notably, teamwork and relationships with colleagues were emphasized as important factors related to work engagement, sustainability, and reduced burnout. Ongoing international collaboration through surveys and focus groups should continue to explore universal strategies to improve teamwork and co-worker relationships that can inform training and support of RCEs globally.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Intensive Family Preservation Services: A Multi-Level Meta-Analysis

Thursday, 11th September - 15:00: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Mr. Lou Lippens [1], ***Ms. Maja Mallefeydt*** [1], ***Prof. Stijn Vandevelde*** [1], ***Prof. Sarah De Pauw*** [1], ***Prof. Geert-Jan Stams*** [2]

1. *Ghent university,* ***2.*** *University of Amsterdam*

Intensive Family Preservation Services (IFPS) are widely used in child welfare systems to prevent the imminent out-of-home placement of children by offering short-term, intensive, in-home support to families in crisis. Despite their long-standing implementation, the overall effectiveness of IFPS remains uncertain. This study presents the most comprehensive meta-analysis to date on IFPS, synthesizing 33 controlled trials encompassing 226 effect sizes. Using a three-level meta-analytic approach, we examined a broad range of outcomes, including out-of-home placement, family functioning, parenting skills, child behavior, juvenile delinquency, parental psychopathology, and service use, while also exploring the moderating influence of study, program, client, and outcome characteristics. Results showed that IFPS had a modest but statistically significant overall effect (g = 0.18). Notably, small positive effects were observed for out-of-home placement prevention (g = 0.31), family functioning (g = 0.19), juvenile delinquency (g = 0.19), and parental psychopathology (g = 0.34), while no significant effects were found for service use, parenting skills, child behavior, or maltreatment outcomes. Interestingly, more intensive programs were associated with smaller effects, and follow-up assessments revealed larger effect sizes than immediate post-tests, suggesting that intervention effects may increase over time. These findings highlight the nuanced and context-dependent impact of IFPS, with implications for both practice and policy. The study underscores the importance of examining not only short-term outcomes but also long-term effects and implementation fidelity, and calls for future research to focus on outcome diversity, family heterogeneity, and the mechanisms that drive change in IFPS interventions.

Kinship Care: A Review of International Literature and Its Policy Implications in the French Context

Thursday, 11th September - 15:15: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Ms. Lucile Basse [1]

1. *Observatoire national de la protection de l'enfance*

Kinship care has been receiving increasing attention from French public authorities, with the legislative system since 2022 requiring that, when a child must be removed from the parental home for protection, priority be given to this placement option. Developing this deinstitutionalized placement option marks a shift in child protection policy in France. However, this type of care remains rarely used, as it accounted for 9% of children in out-of-home care in 2023.

In this context, the *Observatoire national de la protection de l'enfance* has undertaken a literature review on kinship care, defined as the care of children by members of their extended family or other individuals with a pre-existing relationship with the child or their parents. This review includes both legally formalized placements and informal arrangements, acknowledging the diversity of kinship care across cultural and legal contexts.

The methodology is based on a systematic review of international scientific literature published between 2008 and 2023. The research focused on studies conducted in Europe, North America, and Australia, written in French or English. It covers quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies from various disciplines, including demography, sociology, psychology, and law. The publication includes a 30-page synthesis of key findings. Additionally, thirty-two selected references have been summarized into concise fact sheets. The analysis considered the socio-demographic profiles of children and kinship carers; the pathways into kinship care; the lived experiences of children, parents, and carers; the role of public action; and the evaluation of the quality and outcomes of kinship care.

Key findings reveal the socio-economic vulnerability of families involved in kinship care. Grandparents are frequently the primary kinship carers, with a significant involvement of women. Kinship care pathways are diverse, encompassing informal arrangements and various legal statuses, with potential for transitions between these statuses over time. Children in kinship care often report a sense of normalcy and belonging, appreciating the pre-existing relationships and shared history with their carers. However, they may also experience ambiguous feelings, social stigma, and anxieties about the stability of the arrangement. Parents may also express feelings of loss and frustration. Kinship carers often face financial strain, administrative burdens, and emotional stress, sometimes receiving less support than foster carers. The review highlights institutional barriers to the development of kinship care within child protection systems, including professionals' reservations about the quality of care and a lack of standardized procedures for identifying and supporting kinship carers. While legislative frameworks increasingly favor kinship care, the level and nature of public support vary significantly across countries and even within France between local authorities. Evaluations of kinship care outcomes compared to foster care present mixed results, with some studies suggesting benefits in terms of emotional well-being and placement stability, while others indicate no significant differences.

The review concludes by emphasizing the need to consider kinship care not solely as a child protection service but also as a distinct family configuration requiring tailored support and recognition. Future research should focus on informal arrangements, parental perspectives, and longitudinal studies to better understand evolving family dynamics.

Intensive Parenting and Child Welfare Attitudes in Residential Care: Predicting Professionals' Reunification Recommendations

Thursday, 11th September - 15:30: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Mrs. Selina Steinmann [1], ***Dr. Joel Gautschi*** [1], ***Dr. Julia Quehenberger*** [1]

1. ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work

Background: Residential childcare professionals play a pivotal role in decisions about whether a child should be reunified with their family of origin, yet their recommendations have received limited research attention. Studies show that child protection professionals often disagree when assessing identical child protection cases—posing ethical and legal concerns and reducing the accuracy of judgments. Kahneman et al. (2021) define such unwanted variability as 'noise.'

Research suggests that a significant proportion of this variability originates at the level of caseworkers. While previous studies have explored professionals' attitudes toward out-of-home care versus family preservation, as well as the influence of stereotypes, much of the variation in judgments remains unexplained.

Qualitative studies indicate that professionals' societally shaped images of families may influence decision-making. Research shows that child protection professionals tend to predominantly focus on mothers, often holding them accountable for perceived risks or harm to the child's well-being. Emphasis is commonly placed on mothers' demonstration of commitment to appropriate parenting styles. These findings suggest attitudes related to gender norms and parenting styles may shape professionals' decisions. However, to our knowledge, this has not yet been studied using (experimental) quantitative methods, and the distribution of such attitudes among residential care professionals remains unknown.

Objective: This study examines the extent of variability ('noise') in reunification recommendations made by residential childcare professionals. It also investigates whether professionals' child welfare attitudes, and their views on parenting styles, and gender norms influence their recommendations.

Method: An online experimental vignette survey study was conducted with residential care professionals in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Participants were randomly assigned one of two vignettes describing a child protection case. In one, the mother demonstrates greater parental improvement; in the other, the father does. Participants rated the likelihood they would recommend reunification.

Attitudes towards parenting styles and gender norms were measured using an adapted version of the Intensive Parenting Scale (Gauthier et al., 2021; Liss et al., 2012), which includes five dimensions: child-centred approach (belief that children should be the focal point of parental attention), focus on stimulation (importance of fostering development through activities), parental responsibility (obligation to prioritise children's well-being), reliance on expert guidance (need for professional advice in parenting), and essentialism (belief that women are inherently better parents than men).

Child welfare attitudes were measured using two subscales of the Child Welfare Attitudes Scale (Arad-Davidzon & Benbenishty, 2008): Attitudes towards (1) the ability of residential care to promote children's development and well-being, and (2) reunification and optimal duration of alternative care of out-of-home placements.

All 64 residential care units in the German-speaking part of Switzerland serving children of the age portrayed in the vignette were invited to participate by distributing the survey to their professionals.

Conclusions/implications: Data collection has been completed (N = 226). Data analysis is currently ongoing. This study may identify new predictors of noise and examine the influence of professionals' attitudes on reunification recommendations. Findings may inform training efforts to improve consistency and promote equity in child welfare decision-making.

Care pathways in youth care for children and adolescents with severe emotional and behavioral disorders and multiple and complex needs

Thursday, 11th September - 15:45: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Ms. Heleen Van hove [1], ***Ms. Maj Van Hee*** [1], ***Dr. Franky D'Oosterlinck*** [1], ***Dr. Jan Naert*** [1], ***Prof. Wouter Vanderplasschen*** [1], ***Prof. Stijn Vandevelde*** [1]

1. *Ghent university*

Background and aims: this research focuses on children and adolescents with severe emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) who navigate the complex intersections of various care sectors. Internationally this vulnerable group receives growing attention, as they often face a combination of complex challenges at individual, familial, and societal levels. These multifaceted difficulties place them at the crossroads of care sectors, increasing the risk of them moving towards the "far end" of the care continuum in intensive interventions.

Despite growing awareness among care providers, existing care and support structures often fail to meet their complex needs. This results in fragmented and poorly coordinated care, negatively impacting their well-being and quality of life. Despite this awareness, there remains a lack of studies, mapping care trajectories for youths with multiple and complex needs.

This research addresses four questions: (1) What evidence-based interventions are best suited for this vulnerable group? (2) How are referral and admission processes for their support organized? (3) What support is currently provided and where do disruptions occur in care pathways? (4) How can the findings be translated into recommendations for the broader youth care system?

Note: this study was conducted as part of a research project commissioned by the Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities and the Support Centre for Welfare, Public Health and Family in Belgium.

Methods: a qualitative multi-method design was used. First, a literature review was conducted to identify evidence-based practices. Second, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 experts across various domains, exploring referral processes and systemic challenges. Third, an retrospective analysis was conducted on 12 cases from 8 youth care facilities. The focus was on key transition points, disruptions, and stakeholder experiences. In total, 32 interviews were conducted with 39 stakeholders, including, where possible, the adolescent, a network member, and care professionals- to provide a multi-perspective understanding.

Results/ outcomes: preliminary results provide insight into four key areas. First, evidence-based interventions for this group require a holistic and integrated approach that includes a systemic and family-oriented focus. Second, the study reveals significant fragmentation in referral and admission processes, including inconsistent criteria and limited intersectoral coordination. Lastly, adolescents with EBD face both individual and systemic barriers at key transition points—such as limited participation, weak partnerships with professionals, and disrupted care continuity. The results identify key enabling conditions to improve support, including flexible services, responsive diagnosis and assessment procedures and shared decision-making. – In-dept results will be shared at the congress, as findings have not yet been officially released.

Conclusion: this study highlights how fragmented trajectories affect the well-being of young people with severe EBD. Effective care must be flexible, context-sensitive, and based on collaboration and shared responsibility. A one-size-fits-all approach proves inadequate to address the complex and diverse needs of this group. The findings offer fundamental principles at individual and systemic levels to guide more coherent and future-oriented youth care. They also underline the urgent need for systemic reform and further research to ensure sustainable, inclusive, and high-quality support for this vulnerable group.

LIVING CONDITIONS AFTER LEAVING THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM IN SPAIN- AROPE REPORT

Thursday, 11th September - 16:30: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Prof. LAURA VALLEJO-SLOCKER [1], ***Ms. Celia García de León*** [2]

1. *SOS Children's Villages Spain and Complutense University of Madrid,* ***2.*** *SOS Children's Villages Spain*

BACKGROUND: Every year, the percentage of people at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion is known, and the determinants associated with their situation are analyzed, both in Spain and in Europe as a whole. In addition, the AROPE report focuses on the situation of children and minors, young people, or on those families at greatest social risk (single-parent, single-parent or low-income). The reality of other groups, such as women, the elderly, the disabled and rural areas, is also made visible. However, attention has never been focused on the situation of those who, as minors, lived in residential care.

AIMS: The present study has focused its analysis on the conditions of those young people who were under guardianship, in order to understand the weight of the welfare system in their lives. This situation is compared with that of the general reference population.

METHOD: The effective sample of the study is made up of 67,000 people, of whom 31,434 have been part of the analysis carried out in this study. Of these, 31,221 persons resided in a private household and 213 persons had lived in residential care during their adolescence. Data drawn from the living conditions survey carried out by the national statistics institute of Spain

RESULTS: People that leaved care are the group with the highest risk of poverty and social exclusion in Spain. The AROPE rate for this group in 2023 stands at 40.9%, being the highest figure recorded in Spain since these statistics began, 20 years ago, exceeding the target set by the 2030 Agenda (located at 21%) and doubling the risk found for the general population.

CONSLUSIONS: Young people leaving the welfare system have greater difficulties in developing themselves, as they are in the population group aged 16 to 29 years with the greatest precariousness in society and come from environments considered vulnerable. It is necessary to recognize young people deprived of parental care as a vulnerable group.

Comprehensive Psychosocial Support for Children in Alternative Care: SOS Children's Villages Kyrgyzstan

Thursday, 11th September - 16:45: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Ms. Nuriza Batyrbekova [1]

1. *SOS Children's Villages Kyrgyz Republic*

Abstract

Objectives

This presentation aims to share the experience of SOS Children's Villages Kyrgyzstan in developing and implementing a comprehensive psychosocial support (PSS) model for children in alternative care. The model was designed to address the high prevalence of mental health challenges, attachment difficulties, and trauma among children who have lost parental care and often experience instability in their living arrangements.

Methods

The PSS model integrates trauma-informed care, developmental psychology, and community-based approaches. Key components include early detection and assessment of mental health issues, individualized care planning, therapeutic interventions, capacity building of caregivers, and close collaboration with public mental health services. The model was adapted to the specific socio-cultural and economic context of the Kyrgyz Republic, which is characterized by high levels of labor migration, limited specialized services, and significant social stigma around mental health.

Implementation involved a structured training program for SOS parents, social workers, and psychologists in trauma-informed care, use of standardized assessment tools (SDQ, CBCL, and internal case monitoring forms), and provision of both group and individual therapeutic interventions for children. Data collection drew on service records, staff reports, focus group discussions, and pre- and post-intervention assessments of children's psychosocial well-being.

Findings

Implementation of the PSS model demonstrated measurable improvements in children's emotional regulation, school attendance, peer relationships, and sense of safety. Caregivers reported increased confidence, improved communication skills, and greater ability to respond to trauma-related behaviors. Quantitative assessments indicated a significant reduction in emotional and behavioral difficulties (average SDQ total difficulty score decreased by 25% over 12 months), while qualitative feedback from children reflected enhanced self-esteem and hope for the future.

Challenges included persistent stigma around mental health in communities, high staff turnover, limited access to specialized psychiatric care, and difficulties engaging public health services. These challenges were addressed through strengthened multidisciplinary teamwork, continuous professional supervision, and closer partnerships with local authorities and health providers.

Conclusions/Implications:

The experience of SOS Children's Villages Kyrgyzstan highlights the urgent need for integrated psychosocial support in alternative care settings, particularly in contexts with limited resources. The PSS model demonstrates that targeted interventions, implemented within a structured and trauma-informed framework, can significantly improve the well-being, resilience, and developmental outcomes of children who have experienced trauma and family separation. Lessons learned from this initiative may inform national child protection policies, strengthen foster care and residential care systems, and guide the development of scalable mental health support programs in similar low- and middle-income country contexts across the region.

Day Care Centers in Cantabria (Spain): A Safe Haven for At-Risk Children

Thursday, 11th September - 17:00: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Mr. Jaime Burón [1], Dr. Laura García-Alba [2], Dr. Iriana Santos [3], Dr. Julio Rodríguez-Suárez [2], Prof. Amaia Bravo Arteaga [2]

1. *Universidad de Oviedo,* ***2.*** *University of Oviedo,* ***3.*** *University of Cantabria*

Background: Day Care Centers for Children and Adolescents (CDIA) are programs that provide daytime care from Monday to Friday, covering after-school hours and holiday periods, for children and adolescents (aged 6 to 17) whose families are unable to fully address their care, supervision, and educational needs. These programs are widely utilized by Social Services to support at-risk families, improve children's well-being, and promote family preservation. They are particularly designed for children and adolescents identified as being at risk due to factors such as social, economic, or family-related vulnerabilities. The centers offer educational, emotional, and social support, which can play a critical role in mitigating vulnerability factors among children and adolescents. However, ensuring high standards of service quality remains a challenge due to structural, procedural, and contextual limitations. This study presents a quality assessment initiative aimed at evaluating and enhancing the services provided by CDIA in Cantabria, Spain. **Methods:** A total of 357 participants from 16 Day Care Centers were assessed using an adapted version of the ARQUA-CDIA. The sample included children, adolescents, families, and professionals working in these programs. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection through structured surveys, direct observations, and in-depth interviews. Key quality indicators—such as infrastructure, staff training, intervention models, and program outcomes—were analyzed to identify strengths and areas for improvement. **Results:** The findings indicate a high level of satisfaction with the services provided, particularly regarding the positive impact on children and families. The relationship-based intervention model, implemented within a structured and safe environment, was highlighted as a critical success factor. The assessment also identified significant improvements in educational support, staff preparedness, and child engagement in structured activities. However, the need for enhancements in physical infrastructure and resource allocation were highlighted. Various challenges persist, including financial constraints and the need for ongoing professional training. **Discussion:** The study underscores the effectiveness of structured assessment frameworks in improving service provision in CDIA programs. Findings suggest that a well-defined evaluation model can inform policy decisions and drive the continuous improvement of child welfare programs. The results support the need for sustained investment in quality monitoring and resource allocation to strengthen protective environments for vulnerable children and families. Future research should explore the long-term impact of these interventions and consider cross-regional adaptations to refine best practices in child protection services.

Transforming Living Environments to Enhance its Preventive Power for Upbringing: Integrating Children's Perspectives

Thursday, 11th September - 17:15: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Ms. Eva Onstenk [1], ***Dr. Hilde Wierda-Boer*** [1], ***Dr. Marion van Hattum*** [1]

1. *HAN University of Applied Sciences*

Introduction

The social and physical characteristics of neighborhoods play a crucial role in child development (Minh et al., 2017). A child-friendly physical environment, including destinations, services, and green spaces, is positively related to children's physical health, social competence, and overall well-being (Christian et al., 2015; Villanueva et al., 2017). Likewise, the social environment, such as belonging to supportive groups (Yen & Syme, 1999), can serve as a protective factor counterbalancing risks and challenges during childhood (Van Yperen et al., 2019). A positive living environment can also reduce the need for professional care. Despite the importance of the environment, children's perceptions of their surroundings are underexplored (Martin et al., 2017). Understanding these perceptions offers valuable insights for improving the environments they live in (Dedding et al., 2013). As experts of their own lives, children should be central in research that impacts them (Mitchell et al., 2007). Furthermore, every child has the right to express their views on matters affecting them (United Nations, 1989).

Two Studies

This presentation discusses two studies. First, a systematic review of international research from 2002 to 2025 is presented that explored how children aged 10 to 14 years perceive their living environment. The review revealed that children have clear and defined views on what an ideal living environment should offer. Children emphasized that their environment should support them by fostering a sense of belonging and safety. There is a strong connection between the presence of supportive elements in a child's environment, including the role of adults, and their overall development. These findings stress the importance of creating environments that help children thrive emotionally, socially, and physically.

The second study, conducted in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands, examined how public outdoor spaces can be redesigned to better meet the needs of girls aged 12-23. The study highlights the necessity of collaboration between municipal professionals and the girls themselves to ensure the redesign of spaces addresses their needs. This approach prioritizes the girls as co-researchers in designing more inclusive and responsive spaces. Using Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Lundy's (2007) model of youth participation, the study gave voice to the girls, ensuring their experiences and challenges in public spaces were heard and understood. Through this collaborative process, key issues were identified, such as the need for safer, more comfortable, and engaging spaces for girls. The study also stressed the importance of interprofessional collaboration in urban planning, highlighting how inclusive spaces can foster social inclusion and provide positive outcomes for girls, especially in areas with fewer resources and opportunities.

Conclusion

Both studies highlight the importance of integrating children's perspectives into the development of living environments that support their growth. By involving children in the design process and truly listening to their needs, professionals can create spaces that are safer, more supportive, and better suited to their well-being. With this presentation, we aim to encourage the audience to reflect on the role of children in their own research and explore ways to enhance their participation.

Ensuring children's views on participation shapes future child participation: Transforming child participation with a 'What Matters' approach.

Thursday, 11th September - 17:30: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Dr. Paul Shuttleworth [1]

1. *Kingston University*

Introduction: Traditional approaches to child coproduction, participation, and the concept of the participatory child are increasingly scrutinised, especially for children in alternative care. While child participation is prioritised in rhetoric, achieving it is challenging due to multiple interpretations, dismissal of it as an ongoing political act, and a lack of recognition of 'voice' as relational. These challenges are particularly evident in child welfare contexts, shaped by concerns regarding children's vulnerability and innocence. Despite these challenges, children have the right to be heard and included in all matters affecting them, and their participation holds both instrumental and intrinsic value for services and their safety, social inclusion, mental health, and wellbeing.

Objectives: This conference paper shares insights from the research "What Matters to Children Living in Kinship Care" and its subsequent journal, book publications, and government-funded initiatives. It uniquely draws from generative international interdisciplinary perspectives provided through various Post-Doctoral Fellowship and subsequent research activities. The paper demonstrates that integrating multiple perspectives, particularly those of children, can develop and theorise more ethical and meaningful child participation.

Methods: The initial study and subsequent activities utilised an iterative and reiterative dialogical relationship-based process to theory-build and develop child participation practices. The views of 19 children from the qualitative thesis were the starting point and centre of development. The innovative methodology employed critical realism as an underlabourer, particularly Sayer's work on reasoning. Using a dialogical participative approach, methods such as child-led tours, photo-elicitation, and visual techniques were initially used to illuminate the children's valuations of their lives and the value of participation. This was augmented by creating space for interdisciplinary and international learning through activities that brought multiple stakeholder views together, including those of other children.

Findings: Without an appropriately inclusive, meaningful, ethical, child-led methodology, participation and voice, especially with children, can remain ineffective and tokenistic in how they are applied and theorised in research, policy, and practice, particularly in child welfare contexts. The complexities of childhood are often obscured by monological, either/or thinking regarding ethical concerns. However, there are many valuable cross-disciplinary and international perspectives on child participation methods, including insights from the children themselves.

Conclusions: Including children's perspectives and exploring their values in how participation should be conceptualised and applied transforms child participation into a more effective, sustainable, and successful process. More honest, robust, and collaborative child participation can be achieved by creating value-led dialogical spaces and ensuring that research, policy, and practice ethically and meaningfully engage with children about their struggles for recognition. By starting from children's views and using "what matters" approaches, intergenerational dialogical spaces can be developed that focus on navigating relational spaces and complexities rather than outright solving them. Notably, the child-led innovative approach embraces the politics of participation by recognising children as political actors with agency. This encourages children, researchers, social work practitioners, communities, and policymakers to develop relationships and inclusion that ultimately attend to children's safety and wellbeing and their right to be included in all matters that affect them.

Does Shared Residential Care ensure family participation? A national study on parental and program factors and effects on outcomes

Thursday, 11th September - 16:30: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Ms. Chiara Monti [1], ***Prof. Laura Palareti*** [1], ***Prof. Marzia Saglietti*** [2], ***Ms. Giorgia Olezzi*** [1]

1. *University of Bologna,* ***2.*** *University of Rome*

Family-Centered Practice (FCP) is recognized as a best practice in child welfare, emphasizing the active participation of families in decision-making and care planning. Even when children are considered at-risk and placed in residential settings, parental involvement in daily activities and care processes has been associated with positive outcomes (Geurts et al., 2012). Shared Residential Care (SRC) is an innovative program model in which mothers and children co-reside under professional supervision, fostering parenting skills while ensuring child safety. Compared to traditional group homes for children, SRC offers greater opportunities for parental involvement and is therefore regarded as a promising application of FCP (Tang et al., 2024). However, due to the limited body of research on SRC methodologies, approaches, and outcomes, the extent and impact of family participation in these settings remain unclear.

Objectives

This study examines how different SRC programs in Italy implement family involvement in decision-making, the factors influencing participatory approaches, and the extent to which family involvement affects the outcomes of families transitioning out of SRC.

Methods

This research is part of a broader national study involving 31 SRC programs across Italy, employing a mixed-methods approach. Data collection included: (1) a questionnaire administered to SRC managers assessing organizational and methodological aspects through both close- and open-ended questions, and (2) a quantitative database tracking the pathways of 790 families in SRC, with information on maternal characteristics, family and community services involvement, and exit outcomes. Qualitative data from managers' responses were analyzed through thematic analysis, while statistical analyses explored associations between family involvement, maternal characteristics, SRC organizational aspects, and family outcomes.

Findings

The qualitative analysis of managers' responses revealed varying levels of family participation across Italian SRC programs. The implementation of FCP within these programs was influenced by both individual and organizational factors. At the individual level, mothers experiencing more risk factors and fewer resources were less likely to participate in decision-making processes, in particular, foreign mothers with language barriers and those who had unwanted pregnancies. From an organizational perspective, SRC programs that effectively implemented participatory approaches exhibited key characteristics, including highly trained and interdisciplinary staff, and connections with external family members (e.g., fathers, extended relatives) and community services. Notably, the most participatory programs served the most vulnerable mothers, highlighting the crucial role of program approach in fostering parental involvement despite individual problems. Finally, higher levels of maternal participation were associated with more favorable exit outcomes, with the involvement of both mothers and fathers correlating with improved outcomes for children.

Conclusions

Merely co-residing mothers and children in SRC does not guarantee the implementation of FCP. Effective parental participation requires structured, high-quality support and active integration with community services. This study underscores the importance of adopting a holistic, bioecological approach to child welfare that extends beyond caring for the mother-child dyad. Findings provide valuable insights for practitioners, em-

phasizing that family-centered interventions not only improve child and family outcomes but also strengthen broader social networks, facilitating the (re)integration of vulnerable families into the community.

Childhood experiences of maltreatment in foster care: using arts-based methods for sharing and research

Thursday, 11th September - 16:45: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Dr. Marianne Notko [1], ***Dr. Antti Malinen*** [2]

1. *University of Jyväskylä,* ***2.*** *Tampere University*

Maltreatment, neglect and abuse in foster care are marginal phenomena in Finland: these experiences often remain private and do not receive public attention. Due to this nature, they are often difficult to study. Our ongoing project "Rejected, Silent, and Gaining a Voice: Children's Experiences of Abuse in Foster Care and the Barriers and Opportunities for Disclosure, 1950–2025 (KUULLUKSI)" aims to develop understanding on why and how children in foster care are often left alone with their experiences. We investigate the cultural, social, and institutional mechanisms that influence both the sharing of difficult experiences and the responses they receive. As part of our methodology, we organized Kuulluksi-forums, where we used Playback Theatre – an interactive form of improvisational theater created by Fox and Salas. In this method, participants shared personal stories, which then are enacted on the spot by performers. Our data consists of videotaped playback theatre performances, audiotaped group discussions and researchers' field notes. The playback theatre group (Tarinateatteri Storia) also produced short films based on their performances and researcher's compilations of the forums. In this presentation, we reflect our experiences of using this kind of methods for research, and discuss participants' shared narratives of maltreatment in foster care both in institutions and family care covering times from 1970's to 2010's.

Strengthening the Residential Care Workforce: A Collaborative Strategy for Stability, Skills, and Recognition

Thursday, 11th September - 17:00: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Ms. Vivienne Interrigi [1]

1. *Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare*

A skilled and supported residential care workforce is essential to improving outcomes for children and young people in care, yet the sector faces significant challenges, including high staff turnover, the emotionally demanding nature of the work, and the need for ongoing professional development. In response to these challenges, the Residential Care Learning and Development Strategy (RCLDS) offers a comprehensive, sector-wide approach to workforce training and support, funded by the Victorian government and delivered by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare in partnership with community service organisations.

Central to the RCLDS strategy is the Resi ROCKS event, which has become a cornerstone of professional recognition within the sector. This annual event, now one of the largest in Victoria, celebrates the contributions of residential care workers by fostering a sense of professional identity, showcasing best practices, and promoting a culture of innovation and learning. Resi ROCKS brings together hundreds of sector professionals, strengthening the workforce while emphasising the vital role residential care workers play in improving the lives of children and young people in care.

The RCLDS also provides ongoing professional development through fully funded training, learning forums, conferences, scholarships, and excellence awards. In 2024 alone, the strategy engaged 22 community service organisations, trained over 900 staff, and contributed to the development of a strong professional learning culture within the sector. This training and support are essential in addressing high turnover and emotional burnout, providing residential care workers with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in their roles.

The significance of this workforce development initiative is further highlighted by the ongoing reforms to residential care in Victoria, which include substantial funding to ensure all young people in residential care have access to therapeutic supports by 2025-26. These reforms are part of a broader transformation of the sector aimed at improving the quality of care and outcomes for children and young people. The focus is increasingly on trauma-informed and therapeutic care, making it crucial to maintain a skilled, well-trained, and stable workforce to support these changes.

This presentation will explore how a strategic, collaborative approach to workforce development—incorporating training, sector-wide learning, and professional recognition—can build a stronger, more resilient residential care workforce. By focusing on these areas, the RCLDS model is helping to improve the quality of care for children and young people in residential care, and the lessons learned from this initiative can be applied internationally to strengthen residential care workforces globally.

From “About” and “With” to “By” – From Being-Researched to Collaborative Peer Research in Care Leaving Communities

Thursday, 11th September - 17:15: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Ms. Tanja Abou [1]

1. *University of Hildesheim*

“One cannot use the same techniques to study the knowledge of the dominated as one uses to study the knowledge of the powerful.” (Hill Collins 1989, p. 751)

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in collaborative research approaches that ‘involve the “researched” in the sense of a transformative and decolonial knowledge practice’ (Nimführ & Blank 2023, p. 10; Higgins & Lenette 2024). These approaches are pivotal in addressing the question of how research can be structured to critically analyze and challenge existing power structures. By employing terms such as ‘co-researcher,’ ‘research partner,’ or ‘co-investigator’ (ibid.), these methods aim to prevent target groups from being conceptualized merely as research objects or passive participants.

Despite efforts to bridge the gap between researchers and the researched, a distinct separation persists between ‘lived-experience knowledge’ and ‘research interest.’ In studies involving marginalized populations, such as care leavers, this division remains firmly entrenched. Since the mid-2010s, care leavers have increasingly mobilized and begun to assert their political – and academic -voices through various organizations. However, academic discourse has largely maintained an objectifying perspective (Pluto, Schrapper, & Schroer 2020, p. 10), as noted by Klaus Esser, who highlights that ‘almost all previous researchers lament the lack of capturing the subjective evaluations of the addressees’ (ibid.).

However, significant critiques of current collaborative and participatory frameworks persist. These include hierarchical language, the instrumental use of lived experiences as a form of tokenization, and the unequal benefits perceived by co-researchers compared to academic researchers—both monetarily and symbolically. Even when framed as ‘engagement on equal terms,’ the prevailing dichotomy between researchers and the researched endures. Often, even when framed as ‘engagement on equal terms,’ the prevailing dichotomy between researchers and the researched endures. Often, there is a hierarchical selection and decontextualization of individuals’ narratives, as highlighted by Higgins and Lenette (2024).

Collaborative peer-research emerges as a methodology, distinguished by its constitution by individuals with lived experience and its recognition of diverse lived realities. It operates as a corrective to research agendas driven solely by instrumental logics and ‘aims to cede space in the academy for those who hold first-hand knowledge on the very issues others have claimed expertise on’ (Higgins & Lenette 2024). Moreover, researchers with lived experience benefit from the collective insights of peer knowledge, enriching the research process and enhancing authenticity.

The planned contribution underscores these critiques and outlines a new community-based model of research that genuinely elevates the contributions of all participants, ensuring an equitable and inclusive research environment. By fostering an approach that values and integrates the rich narratives and experiences of care leavers, collaborative peer research can move towards a more authentic and empowering practice. This paradigm shift acknowledges the unique insights of those with lived experiences, paving the way for a research framework that not only challenges traditional power structures but also enhances the academic discourse with emic perspectives.

“Because we hear so much of the negative, we want to share the positive.” Exploring care experienced parenting with objects.

Thursday, 11th September - 17:30: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Dr. Shirley Lewis [1], ***Dr. Katie Ellis*** [1]

1. *The University of Sheffield*

The power of objects in exploring kinship relationships and bonds has been demonstrated in research (Carsten 2000). Objects chosen by research participants can act as ‘windows’ through which to observe everyday life, and allow for space to explore aspects of experience which may otherwise remain unspoken in research interviews (Mannay, 2019).

This study explores the transformation to parenthood for parents with care experience, through the use of objects shared by parents. Research has highlighted poor outcomes for children of care experienced parents such as educational disadvantage and poor mental health outcomes (Parsons et al. 2024). Our study hopes to add to the knowledge around the experiences of care experienced parents through highlighting positive narratives and achievements of parents with a care background.

This study is a qualitative study exploring the everyday parenting experiences of parents with care experience, funded by The Leverhulme Trust. The study aims to explore with care experienced parents whether and how their upbringing influenced their parenting ideals, practices and views of ‘good enough’ parenting.

We used an appreciative inquiry approach (Leibling 2015) to undertake interviews with 34 care experienced parents. Appreciative inquiry seeks to understand the complexity and diversity of human experience through the explicit encouragement to reflect on positive experiences. We spoke to nine fathers and 25 mothers across a range of ages, from those who had recently become parents to parents with adult children and grandchildren. Prior to the interviews, parents were given the option to bring one or more objects related to their experience of parenting that they felt represented an achievement or stand out moment.

This presentation outlines findings from the objects shared by parents. The use of objects allowed participants to manage the discussion of difficult or upsetting topics, such as loss, in a controlled way. Participants also shared objects which led to insights that otherwise may not have been spoken about within the interviews. The findings illustrate how objects not only symbolised aspects of everyday parenting but also took on a greater significance around the participants identity as a care experienced parent. The findings highlight the complexities of the intergenerational aspects of parenting as a care experienced parent. Parents often distanced themselves from their own experience of being parented, and objects presented served to illustrate their transition and transformation to their identity as parents.

A Comparison of Two State Quality Initiatives in Children's Therapeutic Residential Care

Thursday, 11th September - 17:45: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Dr. Shamra Boel-Studt [1], ***Dr. Jonathan Huefner*** [2]

1. *Institute for Quality Children's Services, Florida State University,* ***2.*** *Boys Town*

Objectives: Concerns over service quality have long plagued therapeutic residential care (TRC) in the United States and internationally. The Quality Standards framework supports quality TRC and evidence-informed practice. The Quality Standards Assessment (QSA) measures performance on the Quality Standards to inform quality improvement. In this presentation, we describe how the QSA is being used to advance high quality, evidence-informed TRC in Southern and Southeastern states in the U.S. We describe implementation in both states and findings on impacts in TRC service quality.

Method: Data were collected from two quality initiatives overseen by state child welfare agencies in Florida and Texas. Florida's quality initiative (2014-2024) entailed developing, validating and implementing the QSA as part of a statewide accountability system for children's TRC. The study sample included the full population of TRC facilities (N = 259-309 from year-to-year). Texas's quality initiative (2023-present) is using the QSA in TRC programs on probationary status due to performance violations. The Texas initiative aims to establish a quality assessment and improvement system supported by technical assistance and training. A feasibility pilot was completed with six residential facilities.

Using similar methods for each site, we applied a 4-stage implementation science approach adapted to fit the service context and project aims. Implementation was evaluated using mixed methods. The QSA is used to assess practices across eight domains: 1) Assessment, Admission, & Service Planning, 2) Safe, Positive Living Environment, 3) Monitor & Report Problems, 4) Family, Culture, & Spirituality, 5) Professional, Competent Staff, 6) Program Elements, 7) Education & Skill Development, and 8) Transition & Discharge Processes. For each TRC program, QSAs are completed by childcare professionals (e.g., state licensing specialists, case managers, residential care directors and staff) and youth.

QSA results and change in service quality were examined using descriptive and bivariate analyses. Emerging impacts on TRC services were explored using participant feedback. Change in program incidents and youth symptoms assessed via the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire were examined using ANCOVAs and negative binomial regression.

Results: Findings support that the QSA can be successfully implemented in multiple contexts to facilitate quality improvement and highlight the importance of effective project management, and teamwork. QSA results showed, in both states, TRC programs scored lowest on Assessment, Admission, and Service Planning and Transition and Discharge Processes. In Florida, trend analyses showed improvements on all eight quality domains from 2018-2022 based on combined childcare professional ratings (score increases ranged from .29-.83 SD above three-year sample mean). TRC programs that scored higher on the quality domains reported fewer law enforcement calls for crisis intervention (effect sizes for domains ranged from $\eta 2$=.11-12, p<.05), youth runaway episodes ($\eta 2$=.07-12, p<.05), and lower staff turnover ($\eta 2$=.10-12, p<.05). Higher quality ratings were associated reductions in youth internalizing symptoms (effect sizes for standards ranged from B= -.35, -2.66), conduct problems (B= -.47), and total difficulties (B= -.22, -1.62).

Conclusion: The QSA bridges the research-to-practice gap in TRC using a data-driven, quality improvement approach. This multi-state demonstration supports the feasibility of implementation across contexts and positive impacts on service quality.

Foster Placement Breakdown: A Scoping Review of Care-Experienced Narratives

Thursday, 11th September - 16:30: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Ms. Sinead Tobin [1], ***Dr. Louise Caffrey*** [2], ***Dr. Eavan Brady*** [2], ***Dr. Sinead Whiting*** [1], ***Prof. Robbie Gilligan*** [2], ***Dr. Paula Mayock*** [1], ***Mr. Greg Sheaf*** [2], ***Ms. Nimali Quinn*** [1]

1. *School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin,* ***2.*** *Trinity College Dublin*

Background and objectives: While there is an extensive and expanding body of international literature on the phenomenon of foster care placement breakdown, the existing research is largely concerned with risk factors and outcomes. In contrast, little attention has been dedicated to the lived experience of breakdown, particularly the narratives of those most deeply impacted by it, the foster child at the centre of the process. Via a scoping review method, the study collates and synthesises what is known about care-experienced people's lived realities of unplanned endings in foster care.

Methods: The study followed Arskey and O'Malley's (2005) five stage approach to conducing scoping reviews. A search of three databases yielded 2,845 studies, which were screened using a child-centred definition of breakdown created by researchers to overcome significant methodological challenges. With rigorous adherence to the study's inclusion and exclusion criteria, the review ultimately identified 20 international peer-reviewed studies published between January 2015- December 2024, which contained care-experienced narratives of breakdown.

Findings: The 20 studies comprise both children still in the care system, and adults who are reflecting on their childhood experiences. Thematic analysis of the findings shed light on, and add depth of understanding to existing research on the topic, for example, the review illuminates why a child's behaviour is a risk factor for breakdown, as it is often a measure of their (un)happiness during placement and rather than being onlookers within breakdown children instead are active agents, choosing to take control of their situations and 'orchestrate' placement breakdown. In contrast, the review also reveals how care-experienced people often endure a disenfranchised and disempowered position during the placement ending itself, with very little knowledge of, or involvement in, decisions about their onward move. The review uncovered complex and highly personalised narratives about the impact of placement breakdown, which was often, but not always, experienced as a time of multiple losses, and a process which has an enduring and pervasive impact with the potential of causing identity harm.

Conclusions: The study offers a distinct contribution to the existing body of literature on the topic of foster placement breakdown, particularly in its exclusive focus on foregrounding care-experienced voices. Findings highlights that breakdown is a complex, highly personalised and multifactorial process. The review identifies the need for all actors involved in a child's life to understand young people's behaviour as an expression of, and response to, difficult and traumatic experiences and unmet needs. The review also underscores the need for child welfare systems, practitioners and carers alike to continuously seek ways to empower young people and minimise the potential for loss of control and agency, particularly in high stress conditions of placement breakdown. Finally, the study calls for more research on the topic of breakdown which foregrounds care-experienced voices.

What was helpful…? Findings from retrospective life-story interviews

Thursday, 11th September - 16:45: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Dr. Zsolt Balázs Major [1], ***Ms. Kata Barabás*** [2], ***Ms. Anna Demjén*** [3], ***Ms. Annabella Egyed*** [2], ***Ms. Ildikó Háromszéki*** [2], ***Ms. Diána Nagyné Balka*** [2], ***Ms. Éva Pap*** [2], ***Ms. Tünde Proksa*** [2], ***Ms. Orsolya Szőke*** [2]

1. *University of Sopron, Benedek Elek Faculty of Pedagogy,* ***2.*** *Győr-Moson-Sopron County's CYC Center,* ***3.*** *Sapientia College of Theology of Religious Orders*

INTRODUCTION

Residential child and youth care (CYC) remains an area with limited scholarly attention in Hungary (Major, 2018; Rácz, 2015; Rácz & Korintus, 2013), with existing research often failing to incorporate the perspectives of individuals who have directly experienced residential care. This study aims to address this gap by amplifying their voices, translating personal insights into professional advancements in CYC. The research specifically seeks to foster innovative and transformative practices that support the transition to adulthood for those leaving residential care.

OBJECTIVES

For this purpose, 50 semi-structured life-story interviews were conducted with individuals (aged 18-65) who had spent a minimum of two years in children's homes.

METHODS

Using a qualitative methodology (Wertz et al., 2011; Willig, 2001), the study employed a narrative approach (László, 2005) to examine participants' life experiences from birth to the present. These interviews explored both positive and negative memories across various stages of their upbringing. To complement the qualitative findings, quantitative measures of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985; Martos et al., 2014) and resilience (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Járai et al., 2015) were incorporated.

ANALYSIS

A qualitative content analysis was performed to identify recurring themes and key factors that contributed to resilience and successful transitions to adulthood. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the analysis examined the implicit use of first-person singular grammatical forms, hypothesizing their relationship with an active versus passive stance toward challenges (Domschitz, 2013; Major, 2021). The frequency of first-person singular usage was compared across descriptions of positive and negative life events and analysed in relation to life satisfaction and resilience scores. These correlations offer insights into the factors that support long-term success in transitioning from residential care to independent adulthood.

FINDINGS

Preliminary results underscore the value of personal narratives in shaping practical applications for CYC practices. The findings highlight the importance of resilience-building within residential care settings, establishing resilience as a crucial tool for navigating life's challenges. Furthermore, the results align with contemporary research emphasizing the essential role of residential care for children for whom family-based alternatives are unsuitable (Anglin & Henderson, 2024).

Key words: narrative retrospective life-interview; resilience; residential care; transition

National Study on Kinship and Non-Kinship Foster Care in Israel: Characteristics of the Caregiver, the Child, and Contact with the Birth Family

Thursday, 11th September - 17:00: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Mrs. Fida Ektelat [1], ***Prof. Shalhevet Attar-Schwartz*** [2], ***Dr. Yoa Sorek*** [1]

1. *Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute,* ***2.*** *the Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), recent legislation in Israel has led to a growing reliance on kinship foster care for children removed from their birth families. This national study aimed to compare the characteristics and functioning of foster children and their foster mothers, as well as the nature of contact between foster families and birth parents, in kinship versus non-kinship foster care.

The study was based on a representative sample of 257 Arab and Jewish foster mothers, 63% of whom were relatives. Structured interviews were conducted in Hebrew or Arabic.

Key findings indicate that kinship care was associated with lower socioeconomic status, higher levels of health problems among foster mothers, and a greater proportion of Arab families. Kinship foster mothers also reported receiving less formal and informal support than their non-kinship counterparts.

Regarding parental functioning, kinship foster mothers experienced higher levels of parental stress, lower parental availability, greater difficulty in setting boundaries, and less frequent use of non-punitive discipline. However, they reported better emotional-behavioral adjustment and fewer academic difficulties among the foster children compared to those in non-kinship care.

In terms of birth family contact, kinship foster families tended to live closer to birth parents, had more frequent interactions with them, but also reported greater tension in these relationships.

The findings underscore the need for targeted resources and enhanced support for kinship and Arab foster families. Additionally, interventions should be developed to provide guidance and mentorship for kinship foster caregivers, fostering a more nurturing environment for the children.

Non-Formal Education as an Educational Pedagogical Approach to Prevent Dropout and Out-of-Home Placement among At-Risk Youth

Thursday, 11th September - 17:15: (SEECEL C1) - Poster

Dr. Ester Halfon [1]***, Prof. Shlomo Romi*** [2]

1. *Shaanan College of Education,* ***2.*** *Bar -Ilan University*

At-risk youth face multiple challenges, including academic difficulties, economic hardship, emotional deprivation, and complex family backgrounds. These challenges significantly increase the risk of dropout from the formal education system or even enhance the need for out-of-home placement. Both solutions might have far-reaching negative consequences for the at-risk youth social and civic futures. Non-formal education is defined as an educational-pedagogical concept that was developed in educational and community organizations. Non-formal education frameworks operate both within and outside school settings. They are based on voluntary participation and individual choice (e.g., student councils, youth movements). These frameworks are characterized by high pedagogical flexibility and responsiveness, aiming to meet the evolving developmental, social, and emotional needs of youth through meaningful, interest-based engagement.

Studies provide evidence supporting that voluntary active participation in non-formal education programs may serve as a precaution and a solution for preventing deterioration into risk situations, including dropout rates and the need for out-of-home placements (Halfon & Romi, 2021). We suggest that non-formal education's impact is expressed in three key areas: (1) *Personal empowerment and the development of socio-emotional skills* – non-formal education frameworks provide at-risk youth with a supportive and safe environment that enables success experiences, foster personal and communal resilience, emotional support, and personal guidance. These frameworks promote the development of emotional intelligence, conflict management, communication skills, and decision-making abilities, thereby contributing to the strengthening of participants' sense of competence, self-confidence, and personal responsibility; (2) *Encouraging community engagement* – at-risk youth involved in non-formal programs tend to exhibit higher levels of civic and social engagement. They participate in community initiatives, volunteer activities, and social change leadership, which strengthens their sense of belonging, reduces the likelihood of risk behaviors, and fosters a commitment to their environment. (3) *Flexible response in times of emergency* – non-formal education has proven particularly effective during times of crisis (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic), during which formal educational frameworks struggled to provide at-risk youth with continuous support.

We offer the following educational recommendations in order to harness the potential of non-formal education in preventing dropout and out-of-home placement: (1) Expanding access to non-formal education – by establishing community-learning centers, developing mentoring programs, and ensuring access to educational activities for at-risk youth; (2) Encouraging parental involvement in educational and social processes – through creating joint frameworks for parents and children, thereby positioning parents as positive role models; (3) Promoting collaboration between educational, welfare, and community systems – by integrating non-formal programs into educational welfare policy;)4) Implementing innovative educational technologies – by means of utilizing digital platforms that enable flexible learning tailored to unique needs.

In conclusion, non-formal education is not merely a complement to formal education but an educational pathway capable of reducing the risk of dropout and out-of-home placement among at-risk youth. These frameworks provide a space for personal development, reinforce their sense of belonging to the community, and cultivate life skills that help to support their successful integration into society.

Effecting links between research and practice: Disseminating your work through publication

Thursday, 11th September - 16:30: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Prof. Elizabeth Fernandez [1]***, Prof. Darcey Merritt*** [2]***, Prof. Shawna Lee*** [3]

1. *University of New South Wales,* ***2.*** *University of Chicago, Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy and Practice,* ***3.*** *University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, School of Social Work*

Aim*: To enable intending authors to prepare the foundation for publishing to achieve transformations in policy and practice*

The completion of a research project or practice innovation opens opportunities to draw insights relevant to policy and practice. Publication is a powerful and constructive means of sharing insights from research that promote the interests of service users and achieving transformations in policy and practice, besides sharing the methodological journey and its challenges to drive innovations in future research.

Extending the insights from research or practice innovations through publication has the potential to improve practice outcomes for service users while effecting closer links between theory and practice. There is increasing pressure to integrate research into practice. Publication offers a way of raising awareness where there is limited knowledge for practitioners to draw from. There are further benefits attached to dissemination including its potential capacity to support and empower service users and frontline practitioners through increased knowledge and understanding.

Further impetus for scholarly publishing comes from substantial pressure to publish that is exerted on scholars, early career researchers and untenured academics from organisations and funding bodies as evidence of scholarly achievement.

This presentation will explore how dissemination can drive meaningful transformation in child welfare. Effective publication extends beyond reporting findings; it involves communicating methodological journeys, challenges, and learning that can empower future research and practice, bridging knowledge gaps and offering practitioners evidence-based insights. By encouraging researchers and practitioners to share their insights in diverse formats—including scientific journals, practitioner-oriented publications, books, and emerging media like webinars and podcasts—publication becomes a tool for career advancement and for sustained transformation.

The fields of child welfare and child and family social work have numerous specialized journals, including *Children and Youth Services Review*, Child *& Family Social Work*, and *Child Abuse & Neglect,* offering new opportunities for knowledge sharing. To fully leverage these opportunities, intending authors need to engage diligently with the publication process: preparing manuscripts with rigor and integrity, selecting appropriate outlets to reach targeted audiences, and navigating editor and peer reviewer feedback with professionalism and responsiveness.

To avail of these opportunities intending authors need to prepare manuscripts with diligence and attention to issues of rigour and integrity, select and appraise outlets to which they submit their work, communicate with editors, respond to peer reviewers and engage with the publication partnership.

This presentation will address issues related to the publication journey and steps authors may take to achieve successful submission including:

- Publishing models, including traditional, open access, and innovative dissemination platforms
- Making decisions about where to submit
- Strategies for selecting publication outlets that align with research/practice goals and reach intended audiences

- Best practices for preparing manuscripts with attention to rigor, ethics, and clarity
- The peer review process and strategies for engaging constructively with reviewer feedback
- Authorship, copyright and ethical dissemination protocols
- The role of dissemination in promoting systemic change and supporting practitioner and service user learning

Researchers, practitioners, graduate students and intending authors will have opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences to enrich the discussion on publishing.

The TIC-Y: a self-report tool for children to evaluate the group home living climate from a trauma-informed care perspective.

Thursday, 11th September - 16:45: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Mr. Roel Kooijmans [1], ***Dr. Gabriëlle Mercera*** [2]

1. *Koraal Centre of Expertise / De Hondsberg and University of Amsterdam, Research Institute of Child Development and Education,* ***2.*** *Koraal Centre of Expertise / De Hondsberg and Maastricht University, department of Psychiatry and Neuropsychology*

Introduction

The principles of trauma-informed care (TIC) are embraced as a model for transforming the care for children and their families who have experienced adversity. Implementing TIC provides an important basis for professionals to recognize the consequences of adverse experiences and limited exposure to protective factors, understand pathways to recovery and prevent (re)traumatization. At the heart of any organisation that endorses TIC is a 'trauma-sensitive' living climate. The foundation for such a positive, recovery-enhancing climate is formed by the three pillars of safety, connection and regulation.

Including a first-person perspective of service-users is essential to evaluate whether the implementation of TIC actually leads to care that better meets children's needs. Involving children and youth directly in quality-of-care evaluations and care improvement programs may serve to promote advocacy and a sense of autonomy for children living in alternative care. Until recently, there was no suitable self-report instrument to include the views of children about the trauma-sensitivity of the group home living climate. Our research describes the cocreational process and psychometric evaluation of the Trauma-Informed Care-Youth questionnaire (TIC-Y).

Methods

The TIC-Y questionnaire was developed at Koraal, a Dutch multicentre organisation for care and education. Items are based on several principles underlying trauma-informed practices, including the 6 SAMHSA principles of TIC and Bath's three pillars or creating environments of healing and resilience. To match items with the lived experiences of children in a residential group, the concepts of safety, connection and regulation were conceptualised in focus groups with the children. To promote inclusivity, children and youth with mild to borderline intellectual disability (MBID) were included in the participatory activities. Children with disabilities were also included in cognitive interview rounds, to ensure that as many children as possible could meaningfully complete the questions. The combined output of the cocreational process and formal psychometric evaluations (N = 350) informed several iterations of the measure.

Results

The participatory research provided invaluable insights that complemented the results of literature studies on the elements of TIC. These insights informed the creation of earlier versions of the TIC-Y. The items and structure were further refined based on several rounds of psychometric evaluation, including factor analyses. TIC concepts partially overlapped (e.g. 'trust' was an important element for both safety and connection). Because of partial overlap between the preconceived subscales Regulation, Connection and Safety, a single-factor model emerged as best fit. Internal consistency was good. Results from the cognitive interviews showed that in general, the scale was well-understood by youths, even with MBID. A final round of factor analysis and a cognitive interview study resulted in the definitive version of the TIC-Y.

Our presentation

In this presentation we will present the children's perspectives on essential elements of a trauma-informed living climate in residential care and provide a substantiation of the reliability and validity of the TIC-Y. We will also share our experiences with using the TIC-Y in group homes to promote a constructive dialogue between

children and carers about the quality of care and how to improve it.

Trajectories of Psychiatric Disorders Across the Lifespan Among Out-of-Home Placed Individuals in Sweden

Thursday, 11th September - 17:00: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. Süheyla Seker [1], ***Dr. Hilma Forsman*** [1], ***Prof. Lars Brännström*** [1]

1. *Stockholm University*

Background: Millions of children and adolescents worldwide are placed in out-of-home care due to severe psychosocial adversities, resulting in substantial national costs. These individuals face elevated risks of maltreatment, offending, and poverty, which, in turn, contribute to significant psychiatric disorders affecting long-term functioning into adulthood. To date, little is known about the life-course trajectories of psychiatric disorders among out-of-home placed individuals, particularly when accounting for shared familial factors. Understanding these trajectories is crucial for informing early interventions, improving mental health care strategies, and shaping child welfare policies that better support vulnerable youth throughout development and the transition into adulthood. Moreover, a robust examination that distinguishes placement effects from shared, time-invariant familial factors is essential for deeper insights into their long-term impact.

Objectives: This study adopted a life-course perspective with two main aims: (a) to advance scientific understanding of psychiatric disorder trajectories across the lifespan, and (b) to examine the association between out-of-home placement characteristics and psychiatric trajectory groups while accounting for time-invariant familial factors.

Methods: Swedish linked administrative register data were used from a national cohort of 1,476 siblings (52% men, 48% women) with and without out-of-home care experience. Sex-stratified latent class growth analyses were conducted to describe psychiatric trajectories from birth to age 40, using a sibling design. Multilevel multinomial regression analyses estimated the associations between out-of-home care and psychiatric trajectory groups, accounting for both observed and unobserved family-related confounding factors.

Results: The lifetime prevalence of any psychiatric disorder was 35% among men and 34% among women, compared with 18% and 15% among non-placed men and women, respectively. Two distinct trajectories were identified for both men and women: a large low-stable group (men: 84%, women: 91%) and a smaller increasing group (men: 14%, women: 9%). Out-of-home placement—particularly during adolescence—was associated with substantially higher odds of following the increasing trajectory, even after accounting for time-invariant familial factors and measured background characteristics. Familial effects were small in the low-stable group and moderate in the increasing group, similarly for men and women.

Implications and conclusions: Out-of-home placed individuals, particularly in adolescence, follow high-risk psychiatric trajectories from childhood to midlife, with substantial shared familial influences. These findings underscore the critical need for close collaboration between mental health and child welfare systems to mitigate the risk of psychiatric disorders among individuals exposed to severe childhood adversities. Ensuring continuity of mental health care and facilitating well-supported transitions into adulthood is highly important to ensure a healthy development for out-of-home placed children and adolescents.

Research evidence use (REU) and transfer of knowledge into practice - Seeing Optimal Black Parenting through Black and White Lenses

Thursday, 11th September - 17:15: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. Cynthia Okpokiri [1]

1. *University of East Anglia*

Professionals in White majority countries generally have poor understanding of Black parenting, often classifying effective Black parenting techniques as *authoritarian*. Perhaps the single most important individual in research on assessment of parenting quality and parenting styles, Diana Baumrind, made this clear in her initial studies in 1970s USA. However, since then, researchers and professionals have found ways to pigeonhole positive Black parenting practices into parenting styles developed specifically for and from White populations. The effect is that Black children's needs are under-served in professional practice and policy in these contexts, such as Britain, USA, and Australia. Add to this the impact of racism and poverty, and the educational, psychological, social, and legal outcomes for Black children are dire.

Findings from our qualitative research with Black parents, children and social care professionals in England reaffirm Baumrind's initial premise from 1971 – that good Black parenting is different and should not be viewed through a White Eurocentric lens. We sought to re-examine optimal Black parenting from *Black* perspectives. We grouped what our research participants shared as positive Black parenting practices into a model of six principles - *Selfless love, Pride, Adaptability, Resourcefulness, Courage*, and *Spirituality* (SPARCS), termed *requisite parenting*. Widely accepted research-informed parenting styles are based on two core dimensions – *responsiveness* and *demandingness*. *Requisite parenting* builds on both dimensions, but incorporates a third – *situatedness* – which centres Black experiences of society, deployed as being fundamental to Black parental behaviour.

The research methodology was underpinned by participatory research principles, where Black cultural practices, including *soul-food*, were used to allow participants engage at an authentic level. We sought to theoretically evaluate *requisite parenting* using 34 individual semi-structured interviews and two focus group discussions comprising 17 Black parents, 11 Black children, and six social workers and child practitioners who work with Black families within three regions in England. *Requisite parenting* received overwhelming endorsement from participants who collaborated with our researchers to improve the model. We present this new optimal Black parenting style to researchers, professionals, and policymakers, to urge deeper interest and compassion into Black children's poor outcomes in most child indices, to move towards reverting the historical and ongoing damage to Black children's welfare and family functioning.

The study received ethics approval from a UK higher education institution.

“I want to go back home”. Impact evaluation of the ‘Casa d’Infants’ project for child and youth deinstitutionalisation

Thursday, 11th September - 17:30: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Mx. Jose Lopera [1], ***Ms. MONICA GARCIA*** [1]

1. *Fundació Acció Social Infància (FASI)*

INTRODUCTION

The foundation **FASI** manages 13 CIs in Catalonia, Spain. A CI is a residential service for children and adolescents in which parents are actively and voluntarily present daily. An **interdisciplinary team of professionals**—including social workers, psychologists, and educators—**accompanies parents throughout the intervention**, helping them enhance their parenting skills, such as setting clear educational boundaries, expressing affection, and fostering a positive parent-child relationship. The intervention lasts between **12 and 18 months**, and the project has been running since 2009, with the latest phase of research conducted in 2024.
This poster describes an Impact Assessment of the **Cases d’Infants (CI) project**, which aims to reverse institutionalization experienced by children and adolescents in care in the Child Protection System, and to promote **deinstitutionalization through parental reintegration**.
METHODS

- **Phase 1:** Professionals and adult beneficiaries participated in the construction of the **Theory of Change** to ensure that all stakeholders’ perspectives were included.
- **Phase 2:** Historical data from nearly **1,000 cases** were examined to determine the extent to which children and adolescents leaving CIs return to their parental home and avoid subsequent institutionalization.
- **Phase 3: Multivariable statistical methods** were applied to identify potential relationships between key project variables, including log-linear analysis, multiple correspondence analysis, segmentation analysis, and multinomial regression.
- **Phase 4:** The public administration monitored a sample of **473 cases** to analyze how many children and adolescents who exited CI later re-entered the child protection system.

RESULTS
Phase 1:

- The **Theory of Change** and indicator system were developed in a participatory process, incorporating feedback from both professionals and families.

Phase 2:

- **Final goal:** 71.17% of the children and adolescents returned to their parental home at the end of the intervention.
- **Prevention of institutionalization:** 80.26% of children entering the project from their homes avoided institutionalization.
- **Deinstitutionalization:** 67.31% of children who came from a residential institution were successfully reintegrated.
- **Parental reunification:** 54.47% of those entering CI from a residential institution returned to their parents’ homes.

Phase 3:

- Evidence suggests that **certain variables are associated with worse outcomes**: older age at placement, non-nuclear family structures, and intervention occurring at an advanced stage of the risk situation.
- Other variables, such as gender or geographical area, **did not show any relation to project success**.

Phase 4:

- **Independent adolescents:** 11.21% of adolescents become independent from their parents by the intervention end.
- **Separated at intervention end:** 23.2% got separated at the end of the intervention.
- **Separated later (months or years after exit):** 14.6% suffered separation at some point (months or years after exiting CI).
- **Remained with parents:** 62.3% will remain with their parents as far as the system knows.

CONCLUSIONS

The CI project demonstrates **high effectiveness** in reversing situations of risk of family neglect, both by preventing family separations that lead to institutionalization and by assisting children in residential care to return to their families. Data provided by the public protection system indicate that some positive effects of the intervention are **sustained over time**. These findings could inform more tailored interventions to meet the needs of diverse user groups.

Factors affecting Flemish, Lithuanian and Latvian foster parents' perception of support needs

Thursday, 11th September - 16:30: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Mr. Matthias De Coster [1], ***Prof. Johan Vanderfaeillie*** [2], ***Dr. Delphine West*** [2], ***Mrs. Camille Verheyden*** [2], ***Ms. Tamara Pigozne*** [3], ***Prof. Jolanta Pivoriene*** [4], ***Prof. Frank Van Holen*** [2]

1. *Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Psychology,* ***2.*** *Vrije Universiteit Brussel,* ***3.*** *Rēzeknes Tehnoloģiju akadēmija,* ***4.*** *mykolo romerio universitates*

Background and objective

Emotional and behavioural problems are common in foster children. Foster parents are usually the first ones to assess support needs. They consider themselves experts for that matter. However, it is unknown what impacts the decisions they make to that regard.

In this study, we examined what factors affect foster parents' decision on the need of extra support in other foster parents. According to Baumann et al. (2011), case-, decision-maker-, external- and organizational factors are of influence.

Methods

A total of 443 foster parents (i.e., respondents) were presented eight different vignettes, describing the problem behaviour (internalizing or externalizing) of a ten-year-old foster child (boy or girl) and the foster parents' reaction to it (reflecting low or high parenting quality). Specifically, 44 Flemish foster care workers in Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium), responsible for screening and selecting foster families, were asked to what problem behaviours foster children have and how foster parents react to these. To each vignette, every respondent was asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale if s/he believed the foster parents to be in need of extra support.

Respondents' overall score served as outcome variable in a multilevel model that included case factors (i.e., the characteristics described in the vignettes), decision maker factors (i.e., socio-demographic characteristics collected from respondents) and external factors (i.e., respondents' nationality). Foster parents may (not) look for extra support. Because doing so is determined by the confidence in being able to do so; the overall evaluation of doing so; and the perceived social pressure of doing so (Ajzen, 1991), we probed for these decision-maker factors in respondents as well.

Findings

Seven characteristics made respondents decide more on the outcome variable:

- being a girl (case factor);
- externalizing problem behaviour (case factor);
- low parenting quality (case factor);
- high confidence in finding extra support (decision-maker factor);
- the thought of finding extra support to be useful (decision-maker factor);
- lower numbers of foster children (decision-maker factor);
- being of Belgian instead of Lithuanian/Latvian nationality (external factor).

Conclusion

Characteristics inherent to the case that were of influence in this study should raise alertness for intervention in specific placements. Foster children and/or foster parents could be offered a treatment additionally to the regular foster care monitoring if these are present. Such intervention being inherent to the Flemish foster care system, respondents of Belgian nationality might have wanted to acknowledge its importance. If foster parents can experience its positive effects, others could become more inclined to look for extra support.

Drug collectives: Children's voices as a basis for policymaking

Thursday, 11th September - 16:45: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Prof. Cecilie Neumann [1], ***Prof. Tonje Gundersen*** [1]

1. *Oslo Metropolitan University*

The paper discusses data from a study of young people's experiences of involuntary residential treatment for substance use in two residential drug collectives in Norway.

The empirical basis for this paper is field visits and interviews with 10 young residents who lived in the drug collectives during our study (2020-2023). We also conducted a group interview with three young people who had ended their stay at one of the drug collectives, as well as interviews with two former substance abusers, now habilitated and professional workers.

The reason for choosing these two drug collectives is that both collectives received harsh criticism for their pedagogical methods from the Parliamentary Ombudsman's National Prevention Mechanism (NPM) in two separate reports in 2017 and 2018. Specifically, the criticism addressed three regulatory methods that had been applied in the collectives up until 2019. Those were admission trips for newcomers, motivational trips for those who used and shared drugs and "sick leave" as a reaction to non-participation in communal activities. The NPM´s criticism was based on assessment of staffs formal documentation practices as well as conversations with the young people who were present at the day of the NPM´s visit. The NPM found that the documentation was inadequate and that the young people were largely negative in their assessments of the staff's use of rules, routines and coercion.

Our own interviews with young people, however, revealed a different story. It appeared that young people´s views of their lives in drug collectives seemed to change over time. This was most prominent for those who assessed their treatment retrospectively. They felt they initially had been in need of strict boundaries in order to stay away from drugs, as well as to form emotional bonds with designated members of staff.

Based on the two reports from the NPM, two of the regulatory methods, admission trips and motivational trips, were deemed illegal by the state in 2019, and the drug collectives were ordered to stop using them. This begs important questions for research on the meaning of time/space and change as process when assessing young people's experiential knowledge. How should we address fluidity, space and temporality when young peoples 'voices' are utilized for policymaking? Or rather, do young people's experiential knowledge in a fixed point in time form a valid ground for national policymaking?

Hence, we set out to analyse how the regulatory methods were experienced by the young people *in situ* and retrospectively. Adding to this, we ask how the regulatory measures intersects with time/space as process and may facilitate the ignition of external and internal motivational factors necessary for young persons to choose lives without drugs, given that the measures are administered in a safe and comprehensive environment.

Paying particular attention to the experiential knowledge of the three former drug collective residents and the two habilitated grownups, we will discuss under what circumstances ´coercion' and boundary-setting may be understood and even defended as a part of caring regimes aiming at facilitating young people to stop using drugs.

Family Reunification and Placement Stability of Young Children (0-2 Years): Associated Factors and a Comparison Between Residential Care and Foster Care.

Thursday, 11th September - 17:00: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Ms. Nienke Derkoningen [1], ***Prof. Frank Van Holen*** [1], ***Prof. Johan Vanderfaeillie*** [1]

1. *Vrije Universiteit Brussel*

Objectives

Although foster care is the preferred option for young children in Flanders, residential care remains a reality, even for infants and toddlers. This is raising questions in light of international standards discouraging institutional placement for this age group which needs to be examined. This study analyses placement objectives and criteria used to select a type of intervention (residential or foster care), as well as potential associations between these variables and reunification outcomes. Furthermore, it explores the stability of placements for young children (0–2 years) and examines whether children remain in the same type of care three years after placement, and if not, where and how quickly they transitioned. It also investigates how the frequency and duration of contact between children, caregivers and biological parents relate to placement outcomes.

Method

Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered during online interviews with professionals for 54 cases: 12 children in residential care, 26 in kinship foster care, and 16 in non-kinship foster care. The study takes into account contextual factors such as placement reasons, care goals, and parental circumstances to reflect the complexity of child trajectories.

Findings

Placements were primarily driven by parental factors, including inadequate parenting skills, unstable caregiving, and parent-child relationship difficulties, with differences observed between children in residential and foster care. The type of care did not significantly affect the speed of reunification; rather, key influencing factors were the nature of parental issues and the long-term care perspective formulated during placement. After three years, 8 foster children were reunified with their parents; the others remained in care. In residential care, 4 children were reunified; the remainder transitioned within or between care forms. This difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2.000$, $p = .157$). Variations in placement goals and parent-child-professional contact were also noted.

Conclusion

Children placed in residential care differ substantially from those in foster care in terms of background and care objectives. These underlying factors appear more predictive for reunification outcomes than the type of care itself. By shedding light on current practices, this study raises important questions about the persistence of residential care for very young children in a high-resource context and underscores the need for critically examining systemic decision-making and placement rationale.

Keywords: youth care, young children, reunification, foster care, residential care.

Preventing Future Professional Burnout in Socio-Educational Fields: Perspectives from Higher Education

Thursday, 11th September - 17:15: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Gemma Crous [1], ***Dr. Paulo Padilla-Petry*** [1]

1. *Universitat de Barcelona*

Background: Various authors emphasize the significant risk of burnout for professionals involved in socio-educational interventions, particularly when working with ipoulation in risk such as children in the child protection system and their families.
Objective: The objective of this study is to investigate how a university (as a higher education institution) can prevent future professional burnout in undergraduate students studying social education, social work, and pedagogy, based on the perspectives of teachers and students.
Methods: A mixed-methods approach was used, including individual interviews with department heads (N=4), three focus groups with students (N=12), and surveys for teachers (N=58).
Findings and conclusions: The results suggest that a key step in preventing future professional burnout in higher education would be acknowledging the risk, and teachers generally appear to be aware of this concern. However, how can students be prepared for a challenge that is unlikely to have occurred yet and may not be in the near future? The transition from academic studies to professional work is often idealized by students, making the risk of future professional burnout seem unimportant. Students voiced concerns about the lack of burnout prevention in higher education, especially due to insufficient contact with the realities of professional life and the lack of practical tools (with an excess of theoretical knowledge or information on burnout but no actionable solutions). Additionally, some findings draw attention to the issue of burnout within higher education itself, and when considering the prevention of future professional burnout, the issue of student burnout should also be addressed.

Forming positive pupil-staff relationships in school for children in out-of-home care: A scoping review

Thursday, 11th September - 17:30: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Mrs. Helen Trivedi [1]

1. *Rees Centre, University of Oxford*

Objectives: Children in out-of-home care form a vulnerable group that face substantial challenges, including disrupted education, emotional instability, social exclusion and difficulties forming attachments. However, research consistently demonstrates that the presence of positive pupil-staff relationships plays a crucial role in promoting well-being, academic success, and overall development (Berridge, 2017; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992; Pianta, 1992; Pianta et al., 2002). This scoping review explores extant literature that details how children with a history of maltreatment describe and conceptualise positive relationships with school staff.

Attachment theory emphasises the role of secure and trusting bonds in a child's emotional and cognitive development and is a useful lens through which to view relationship formation. Children in out-of-home care may experience disrupted attachment patterns due to early experiences of trauma, which could affect formation and maintenance of future relationships. Developing and maintaining positive, stable relationships is a key component of readjusting internal working models of relationships (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992). The establishment of such relationships within educational settings offers a sense of security, essential for academic and personal growth. Positive relationships with school-staff serve as additional sources of emotional support, stability and social inclusion (Bouchard & Smith, 2017; Roubinov et al., 2020), which can buffer adverse effects of trauma and foster a sense of belonging. However, little is known about how children living in out-of-home care characterise and conceptualise components of positive trusting school-based relationships.

Methods: This paper will present findings from a scoping review of extant literature being conducted as part of my doctoral research into how care experienced young people conceptualise positive pupil-staff relationships. Building on previous research (Pringle et al., 2019), factors in the literature associated with trusted adult support are explored, including: demographics, staff role and personal qualities (Nguyen & Le, 2023; Whitehead et al., 2022); school staff behaviour (Davis, 2024); school context and environment (Brunzell et al., 2016; Konold et al., 2017); nature of establishment; and reported impact upon the child.

The primary focus of the review is the self-reported description and conceptualisation of positive, trusting school-staff relationships from children with child welfare services involvement, out-of-home care experience, or indicators of maltreatment by primary care giver. Papers need not include a comparison in their research to be included in the review.

Findings: Analysis of the included studies includes a critical review of methods used to elicit young peoples' views, theoretical frames applied to interpret findings, and, crucially, the content of the young peoples' voice. Preliminary reading emphasises the critical role that positive pupil-staff relationships play in the success and resilience of children in out-of-home care. However, their direct voice about school-staff relationships is seldom reported.

Implications: This review informs future research on including the voice of young people in out-of-home care and how they describe positive pupil-staff relationships. Also emphasised is the centrality of the voice of the child in research that seeks to better inform how educators can foster environments where children in out-of-home care build meaningful relationships that substantially improve their well-being and life trajectories.

Introducing the Concept of Outward Facing Practice in Residential Care - The potential life course benefits of a re-orientation in care practices

Thursday, 11th September - 16:30: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Prof. Robbie Gilligan [1]

1. *School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin*

The hallmark of residential care has often been the laser focus on what happens in the care setting. Practices within the inner world of the setting are seen as pivotal in effecting desired change. This can often mean that thinking and practice in the setting become separated from the world outside.
In this presentation, a re-orientation of practice is proposed with greater emphasis being placed on practices that engage in a concerted way with the *world outside*, with family and community networks and resources. It will be argued that such engagement with the world outside through *outward facing practice* opens up special opportunities to promote transformative change across the life course for the young people concerned. It will be argued that such a shift requires considerable renewal in the mindsets, skill sets and policies underpinning care practices in residential centres.

Focusing in this instance on community resources, the presentation draws on insights from a recent study of the longer term transformative potential for children in residential care of supported engagement with recreational, part-time work and other activity in the world outside the care setting (Author, in press). The study highlights the cumulative importance of supportive actions by adult carers in the setting, the agency of the young person in the face of such opportunities, and the valuable and sustaining contribution of relevant external actors.
The study on which the presentation is based comprises three well worked case examples. These are based on published accounts by three adult alumni of residential care settings - reflecting on their time in care, and afterwards. These accounts offer a rare, detailed and person-centred 'window' onto developments over time that have proven formative in the lives of these three care alumni. The opportunities they found while in residential care opened up pathways that proved transformative in the trajectory of their work career and personal identity. These opportunities lay in the worlds of sport, music and creative arts.
The presentation will be careful in its claim. The presentation will not argue that outward facing practice will be successful in every case. Rather it will propose that the evidence presented illustrates its potential in the right circumstances to inspire renewed practices, more ambitious visions and enhanced longer term outcomes for young people in residential care settings. It will explore some of the essential features of the proposed model of outward facing practice in residential care.
Grounded in the detailed personal accounts, the presentation will offer theoretical and practical insights with relevance for the development of care practice (and practice theory) in residential settings for children and young people. The focus of this presentation and its origins in lived experience data seem timely given the many debates and challenges currently swirling around the field of residential care for children and young people. The presenter will argue for how outward facing practices that engage with family and community resources can prove transformative for children and strengthen the relevance, value and sustainability of residential care for the future.

Australian Temporary Family Care: response to child emergency via relational care, stability, and active family reunification

Thursday, 11th September - 16:45: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Ms. Deirdre Cheers [1], ***Dr. Melissa Kaltner*** [2], ***Dr. Rosa Flaherty*** [3]

1. *Chief Executive Officer, Barnardos Australia,* ***2.*** *Partner, Lumenia,* ***3.*** *Executive Leader Children & Families, Barnardos Australia*

Background: Programs providing emergency/crisis care for children removed from family when risk of significant harm is reported play a crucial role in future child outcomes. Ensuring child stability, with strong focus on enabling families to return to residing safely together, provides challenges alternative care systems and planning processes worldwide.

Objectives: This presentation provides independent analysis of the outcomes of Barnardos Australia's Temporary Family Care (TFC) program, which employs an evidence-informed, strategic approach to support families and enable child wellbeing. The program provides stability, specialized alternative care, and comprehensive wrap-around services to enable children, young people and their families to thrive.

Methods: The TFC program prioritizes a child and family focus, guided by evidence-informed practice, strong relationships, cultural sensitivity, capacity building through partnership, and trauma-informed support. The program integrates rigorous staff and carer training, supportive work with families, and strong relationships with support teams. TFC's key objectives include enhancing family restoration efforts, prioritizing stability and continuity for children, achieving child permanency outcomes, expanding comprehensive support services, and fostering collaborative approaches to care and holistic supports.

A targeted analysis of the outcomes of the program was undertaken by child and family focused consulting practice Lumenia to explore the impact of the program on key outcomes for children needing emergency/crisis care, and their families. Integrated administrative data analysis, engagement and workshops with TFC practitioners, with direct program feedback and case studies also used to explore perspectives of those with lived experience of the service.

Findings: Independent analysis indicated that TFC program demonstrated strong outcomes for families and children, including:

- **Higher Rates of Restoration:** Children in Barnardos TFC exited to restoration at a rate of 8%, 2.9 times higher than NSW OOHC restoration exits (2.8%).
- **Specialized Carer Focus with Higher Carer Retention Rates:** TFC carers average five and a half years of caring experience with TFC, demonstrating higher retention relative to the general NSW carer pool.
- **Ensuring Child Stability:** 83% of children and young people in the TFC program experienced a single placement only, compared to 62% of children with care entry durations of less than 1 year in NSW OOHC.
- **Comprehensive Support Services Enabling Rapid and Sustained Care Exits:** On average, children in TFC exited care after 16.5 months, compared to 66% of total NSW OOHC exits occurring after greater than 2 years in care, highlighting timely service provision and stability achievement.

Conclusion: TFC program demonstrates a unique and effective approach to supporting children. The program's enablers will be explored in this presentation, including unique approach and specialized carers, emphasis on concurrent planning, and evidence-based approach to child outcomes. Demonstrating that a targeted and trauma-informed approach to working with children in crisis can significantly improve restoration, carer retention and stability for children in OOHC. These findings highlight the importance of specialized, intensive, and collaborative approaches to emergency care.

Mothers, Fathers – Boys and Girls: How Sex Influences Child Welfare Tribunal Decisions

Thursday, 11th September - 17:00: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Ms. Helle Karina Johansen [1], ***Prof. Karl Harald Søvig*** [1], ***Prof. Ragnhild Bjørknes*** [2], ***Prof. Stine Lehmann*** [1]

1. *University of Bergen,* ***2.*** *The Norwegian center for child behavioral development*

Background

When the child protection tribunal decides on a care order, numerous discretionary assessments are involved. And as in all legal decision, sex is not supposed to make any difference on the outcome. Yet, we know that sex can influence outcomes within the child protection system, such as the frequency of contact, the increased scrutiny mothers face in child abuse cases, and the reduced guidance fathers receive from child protection workers. However, we know very little about sex as a factor in decisions regarding contact.

Understanding these sex dynamics is crucial for developing policies that ensure all children, regardless of sex, have their best interests prioritised.

Objectives

The objective of this study is to examine if and how parental sex and child sex can influence the child welfare tribunal decisions on contact frequency between the child and the biological parents with daily custody. We will also examine whether there are sex differences in how children's opinions are weighted in child welfare tribunal decisions.

Method

The data comprised a national sample of care order decisions from child welfare tribunals (N =1,124). The decisions were quantified by manual coding, using Nvivo. We conducted regression and interaction analysis.

Preliminary main findings

General Contact Frequency

Mothers generally had more contact with their children than fathers in all the years studied (2008, 2018, and 2021). From 2018 to 2021, there was an increase in the number of contacts per year for both mothers and fathers. For mothers, contacts increased from 6.99 to 12.95, and for fathers from 5.29 to 11.03.

Child's Sex

There was an association between the child's sex and contact frequency with the father. Girls had fewer contacts with fathers compared to boys (regression coefficient -2.985, CI [-5.447 to -0.524], p = 0.014). In 2021, there was a lower frequency of contacts between girls and their fathers compared to boys (regression coefficient -5.085, CI [-9.998 to -0.172], p = 0.041).

Parents' Sex

Mothers with mental health problems had more contact with their children than mothers without mental health problems. Fathers with mental health problems had more contact in 2021 than in 2018 (regression coefficient 10.964, CI [3.698 to 18.230], p = 0.003). Fathers with aggressive behaviour had a greater decline in contact frequency compared to mothers with aggressive behaviour (regression coefficient -5.235, CI [-9.093 to -1.377], p = 0.008). Older children had more contact with mothers, but not necessarily with fathers.

Weight of Children's Opinions

Girls were associated with a higher weight on the child's opinion compared to boys (unadjusted regression coefficient 0.388, CI [0.086 to 0.670], p = 0.012; adjusted regression coefficient 0.259, CI [0.039 to 0.480], p = 0.021).

Implications

These findings underscore the need to consider sex when evaluating contact frequency and the weighting of children's opinions in child protection proceedings. By critically examining how sex influences child protection

decisions, we can work towards more inclusive and equitable practices that better serve the needs of all children and parents involved in care order proceedings.

School policies and teachers' roles: what contribution to alternative care for intra-family sexual violence?

Thursday, 11th September - 17:15: (ZICER Room 1) - Oral

Mrs. Delphine PELISSIER [1]

1. *Paris Cergy University*

Sexual violence against minors is recognized as a social issue that is developing into a public problem (Gilbert & Henry, 2012). Sociological analyses of sexual violence-SV and moreover, intra-family sexual violence-IFSV (Cromer, 2017; Debauche, 2019; Hervouet, 2023) reveal the complexity of the issue and the statistical underestimation of its prevalence (Finkelhor, 2010; Debauche, 2015). At the international level, one in five girls and one in seven boys have experienced sexual violence during childhood (Unicef, 2024). In France, one in six women and nearly one in ten men report having experienced SV before the age of eighteen (Virage, 2015). Policies aimed at protecting child victims align with international, european and national requirements while also adapting to territorial constraints (Capelier, 2015). The Ministry of Education plays a key role in child protection policies. As the primary place of socialization for children due to compulsory education, school is a privileged space for detecting and reporting the domestic violence to the socio-judicial authorities (King, 2011). What school policies govern the reporting of IFSV? Teachers due to their direct, constant and prolonged interactions with children, hold a crucial position in reporting (Mathews & Walsh, 2004), which can lead to interventions by child protection services. How do teachers impact and contribute to the decision-making process for alternative care?

The oral presentation aims to explore these questions by examining IFSV as a new educational issue (Moignard, 2018) and drawing on data from an ongoing thesis in education and training sciences, conducted in the territory of Reunion Island. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from a questionnaire distributed to teachers from kindergarten to high school (n=640) and qualitative data from ongoing interviews (n=39) on the identification and reporting of domestic and intra-family sexual violence. This presentation is part of the topic *Processes and policies in alternative care for children* and is structured in two parts.

First, school policies addressing IFSV will be analyzed through the original intersection of an institutional literature review on school-based reporting and a sociological analysis of intra-family sexual violence.

Second, the initial findings of the doctoral research will be presented to examine how teachers perceive and apply IFSV reporting and how their formal or informal experiences may contribute to the institutional framework and the components of the decision for alternative care.

Lessons Learned Regarding Implementing Mentoring Interventions with Young People with Foster Care Experience

Thursday, 11th September - 16:30: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Dr. Amy Salazar [1], ***Ms. Sara Spiers*** [1], ***Ms. Deborah Fabiyi*** [2], ***Ms. Jenna Thompson*** [1]

1. *Washington State University Vancouver,* ***2.*** *Washington State University*

Objectives: Mentoring programs are popular intervention models used with many vulnerable populations, including youth with foster care experience. However, they can be quite complicated to implement, and the time and effort needed to implement them well is often underestimated. This presentation shares lessons learned from implementation of the Fostering Higher Education (FHE) postsecondary support program for youth with foster care experience, which includes a mentoring component. The research question that will be answered is "What are lessons learned regarding how to most successfully engage in (a) mentor recruitment, (b) mentor training, (c) mentor-mentee matching, (d) pair oversight, (e) group activities, and (f) closing relationships, for organizations implementing FHE?"

Methods: Four sources of qualitative data were collected and analyzed from educational advocates, mentor coordinators, and supervisors implementing FHE in three different states in the United States between 2019 and 2024: a lessons learned survey (example questions: *What do you think has worked really well in implementing the mentoring component? What recommendations do you have for doing this differently?*), a two-year follow-up lessons learned interview (example questions: *What worked really well for [each mentoring phase] in the project? What lessons learned or recommendations do you have for doing [each mentoring phase] better or differently?*), quarterly technical assistance evaluation surveys, and meeting notes. Data were analyzed using Dedoose online qualitative data analysis software. The analysis approach was thematic analysis following Creswell's (2013) six-step qualitative analysis process.

Findings: Two global themes emerged in response to the research question: (1) Procedures and Logistics, and (2) Relationships, Connections, and Engagement. These themes were applicable across all six phases of the mentoring process (training, matching, pair oversight, group activities, and closing relationships). For Global Theme #1 Procedures and Logistics, three subthemes emerged as important for consideration having to do with (a) clear procedures, logistics, and expectations, (b) content (most specifically for mentor trainings and mentor-mentee group activities), and (c) flexibility and adaptation. For Global Theme #2 Relationships, Connections, and Engagement, feedback from respondents discussed the importance of this in relation to (a) mentors, (b) mentees, and (c) community partners.

Conclusions/Implications: This study's findings regarding what it takes and how to prepare to successfully implement a postsecondary-focused mentoring program with youth with foster care experience provides many insights that could be helpful for non-profits aiming to implement mentoring programs with a variety of vulnerable populations, not only youth with foster care experience. Specific practice recommendations emerging from the study's findings will be shared that map onto the six phases of the mentoring process (training, matching, pair oversight, group activities, and closing relationships).

Using extreme family finding approaches to find permanent placements for children who are likely to wait longer for adoption

Thursday, 11th September - 16:45: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Prof. Sharon Vincent [1], ***Dr. Emma Geddes*** [1], ***Mrs. Rachel Stewart*** [1]

1. *Leeds Beckett University*

Objectives

Despite increases in the number of children entering care the number of adoptions in England has significantly declined in the last two decades due to decreasing numbers of potential adopters. This has meant older children, sibling groups, children from dual and diverse heritages and disabled children who may be considered 'harder to place', are having to wait longer for an adoptive family to be identified, with some having their care plans changed from adoption to long-term fostering. This not only deprives children of a permanent 'growing up family' it is also very expensive for local authorities due to the high costs of care over the lifetime of a child. Local authorities and adoption agencies have, therefore, been forced to consider more innovative, non-conventional methods of family finding, including social media campaigns to find families for children who wait longer to be adopted. While evidence suggests social media marketing campaigns are increasingly being used to widen the pool of prospective adopters in the United States and India (Metra et al 2023), they have not traditionally been used for family finding in the UK due to concerns that this may breach the child's right to privacy (Grant and Lury 2020).

We present findings from an evaluation of a pilot project that adopted more extreme methods of family finding involving bespoke publicity and a social media marketing campaign, to try to secure adoptive families for children who had been identified as likely to wait the longest using a new web-based tool based on measuring the probability of securing a permanent family within 14 months of a child entering care using traditional family finding approaches.

Methods

Based on a theory of change model the evaluation methods comprised:
1) An international literature review of family finding approaches for children who are harder to place.
2) Semi-structured interviews to ascertain 5 practitioners' views of using the web-based tool.
3) Comparison of placement outcomes for children for whom extreme and traditional family finding methods were used.
4) Two in-depth case studies where extreme family finding approaches were used based on analysis of data collected from observations and semi-structured interviews with adoptive parents, foster carers, social workers, family finders, schools and local authority and adoption agency managers.
Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Qualitative data were analysed thematically.

Findings

Early findings suggest non-conventional methods of family finding, including featuring children on social media, have the potential to reduce the length of time children wait and help secure permanent placements for those children who otherwise might not be given the chance of adoption. However, extreme family finding

approaches are costly and very few children were referred to the Project due to concerns around privacy.
Conclusion/implications
Further consideration should be given to protecting the privacy and rights of children, birth parents and other family members if extreme family finding approaches are to become more widely adopted in the future and longitudinal studies should be undertaken to measure outcomes over time to determine stability of placements and child well-being.

When quality control comes into tension with collaboration and support for foster parents: ethical issues and possible solutions

Thursday, 11th September - 17:00: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Dr. Marie-Pierre Joly [1]***, Prof. Marie-Andrée Poirier*** [2]***, Prof. Annie Pullen Sanfaçon*** [3]

1. *Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté,* ***2.*** *University of Montreal,* ***3.*** *Université de Montréal*

BACKGROUND: 15 years ago, foster parents in Quebec transitioned from a volunteer to a unionized worker status (Government of Quebec, 2009). Alongside this change, the professional support they previously received declined significantly, replaced by a contractual focused on controlling the quality of services (MSSS, 2016). Although these changes are relatively recent, studies indicate that this new framework has weakened collaboration between youth protection services and foster parents while fostering a climate of fear regarding potential reprisals (Boyer & Noël, 2018; Guénette, 2023). Similar observations have been reported in other jurisdictions with comparable approaches (Riggs, 2015; Nesmith, 2020).

OBJECTIVES: This presentation focuses on Quebec foster parents' experience of the new work environment in which they evolved. It presents data from a doctoral study that aimed to 1) identify the ethical challenges that foster parents encounter in the exercise of their role and 2) better understand the ethical reasoning they apply in the face of these challenges (Joly, 2024).

METHOD: 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted with foster parents, and the content was subjected to reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019) anchored in a critical ethics theoretical framework (Banks, 2021; Weinberg, 2009).

FINDINGS: The results confirm that many foster parents fear reprisals if a "quality gap" is detected in the services they provide. However, the study goes further, revealing that this fear of reprisals constitutes a significant ethical problem (Banks & Williams, 2005), as it pressures some foster parents to hide their vulnerabilities, avoid seeking support, or refrain from reporting deficiencies in professional practice. This, in turn, gives rise to difficult emotions such as helplessness, anger, and guilt, as they struggle with the fear that their silence may ultimately jeopardize the well-being of the child in their care. This presentation will demonstrate that the difficult emotions evoked by foster parents could be understood as moral distress (Weinberg, 2009), a form of distress felt when constraints (in this case, fear of reprisals) prevent a person from acting according to what they believe to be the right thing to do.

IMPLICATIONS: To address this ethical issue, mechanisms to ensure the quality of foster care services must in no way compromise a collaboration focused on the well-being of foster children, but also that of foster parents, who act as caregivers for these children (Miller, Green and Lambros, 2019). Trauma-focused approaches will be cited as an example on this point, as they enable both the child AND the adult acting as caregiver to be taken into account (Blaustein and Kinniburg, 2018).

Enhancing the quality of interventions in Residential Care Homes: how to reinforce the role of supervision process ?

Thursday, 11th September - 17:15: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Prof. Elisa Veiga [1]***, Prof. Mariana Negrão*** [1]***, Dr. Francisca Magalhães*** [1]

1. *Research Center for Human Development, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Porto, Portugal*

Despite international efforts to reduce child institutionalization, Portugal continues to report a disproportionately high rate of children placed in Residential Care Homes (RCH), exceeding 95% (ISS-IP, 2023). These children frequently experience significant trauma, which can hinder their emotional, psychological, and social development. Consequently, the quality of care within RCH is heavily dependent on the competencies of frontline staff, who are essential in addressing these complex needs. Extensive research underscores the value of trauma-sensitive practices in fostering safe, supportive environments for both children and care professionals.

In response to the urgent need for improved care in RCH, also recognized in recent legislative changes, our team recently carried out a study using the Trauma Sensitive Care Evaluation Questionnaire (TSCEQ, Veiga et al., 2020). This questionnaire is centred on the fundamental components of a trauma-sensitive approach within welfare contexts. The study evaluated staff perspectives on the quality of RCH in Portugal, and highlighted training and supervision as fragile areas within their policies and practices (Negrão, Veiga, Rocha & Clemente, 2024).

Supervision has a central role for ongoing support in addressing the challenging responsibilities of the care workers preventing burnout, compassion fatigue or other forms of psychological distress. A growing body of research in this topic point out the positive impact of supervision on staff well-being and performance and their potential role in organizational change.

This study aims to explore RCH supervisor's perspective about the 1) organizational readiness of RCH to incorporate a Trauma Sensitive Care approach, 2) their role and their contribution to prompt the quality of RCH contexts regarding this framework.

Three experienced RCH supervisors participated in interviews aimed at exploring key themes aligned with the study objectives. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using a semi-inductive, thematic approach. Data coding and management were collaboratively conducted by the research team, with analytical support provided through NVivo 15 software.

The findings indicate that participants perceive the relevance of Trauma Sensitive Care (TSC) primarily in terms of its benefits for children and youth residing in RCH.

Participants identified several barriers to the implementation of TSC within RCH settings, namely: 1) Lack of human resources and the insufficient competency profiles of staff constrain the capacity for individualized care; 2)Lack of leadership training among RCH directors and the instability of governance, regarding the definition operational guidelines, were mentioned. According to participants, current practices within RCH are predominantly remedial, which undermines the development of preventive strategies that foster predictability and emotional and physical safety.

Participants emphasized its role for professional development that supports the organizational policies and practices in alignment with trauma-sensitive principles. Nonetheless, the implementation of TSC remains limited, and supervisors themselves were seen as requiring structured professional development plans to ensure their competencies in accordance with organization demands.

The pivotal role of supervision must be both recognized and reinforced within organizational change initiatives, ensuring consistency with trauma-sensitive care principles. Such alignment is fundamental to enhancing the quality of interventions in RCH and safeguarding the rights of children.

Raising awareness about child sexual exploitation through the web

Thursday, 11th September - 17:30: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Ms. Vanessa Fournier [1]

1. *Centre de recherche universitaire sur les jeunes et les familles (CRUJeF)*

In 2018, the Government of Quebec commissioned a research team to identify all provincial initiatives addressing child sexual exploitation. This included awareness and prevention strategies, psychosocial services, professional training programs, clinical tools, and more. This extensive effort led to the publication of a research report, detailing 160 initiatives dedicated to combating child sexual exploitation.
In parallel, the *Commission spéciale sur l'exploitation sexuelle des mineurs* submitted a report in late 2020, which included several key recommendations. One of the most significant was the creation of a dedicated web platform to fight child sexual exploitation. The commission envisioned this platform as an accessible resource offering information and an interactive registry consolidating all available support services across Quebec.
Building on these recommendations, the *Centre de recherche universitaire sur les jeunes et les familles* initiated the development of a specialized website entirely dedicated to this cause. In 2025, *ensemblequebec.ca* was officially launched. This platform is designed for anyone seeking to learn more about child sexual exploitation or find nearby support resources. It serves three main objectives:

1. Centralizing information on all Quebec-based initiatives related to child sexual exploitation prevention, intervention, and training.
2. Raising awareness and help users to recognize and respond to suspected or confirmed cases of exploitation.
3. Serving as a reference tool for professionals supporting young victims and their families.

This presentation introduces Ensemble Québec—a model of successful collaboration between the research community and over 100 organizations offering specialized services to youth, families, and professionals. It also aims to inspire the development of similar initiatives on a broader scale.

The pathways of young people who leave approved out-of-home care placements to stay elsewhere: An exploration to guide innovations in transition support

Thursday, 11th September - 16:30: (ZICER Room 3) - Accepted with changes

Dr. Jemma Venables [1], ***Dr. Laura Simpson Reeves*** [1], ***Dr. Kathy Ellem*** [1], ***Prof. Karen Healy*** [1]

1. *The University of Queensland*

Objectives: Children and young people are typically placed in out-of-home care (OOHC) when it is assessed that their care and protection needs are not being met within the family home. However, there is a cohort of young people who leave their approved OOHC placements (e.g., foster, kinship, residential placements) without permission to stay in other, unapproved locations (e.g., family/kin, friends, strangers or on the street). There is no agreed terminology for the phenomenon – though individualised and deficit-based language such as 'absconding', 'runaway', 'AWOL', and 'self-placing' are commonly used. Such terms fail to adequately recognise the role of the OOHC system in young people's constrained choice to leave approved placements. In this paper we join the call for more nuanced understandings that centre the voices of young people. Specifically, we aim to better understand young people's placement pathways both prior to and following their first episode of leaving approved OOHC placements to stay elsewhere. In doing so, we seek to examine the dynamics that shape transitions within their living arrangements over time and to identify the needs of this cohort to inform more responsive policies and practices.

Methods: We conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews with 11 young people (13-18 years) in Queensland (Australia). Interviews explored their motivations for and experiences of leaving approved OOHC placements to stay in other, often multiple, locations. Young people shared diverse experiences and journeys. We utilised a pathways approach to examine the temporal dimensions and the dynamics that shaped transitions in their living arrangements. This involved mapping each young person's self-reported journey into a matrix that chronologically listed living arrangements and key events they highlighted within various life domains (e.g., relationships, health, education, legal involvement etc). This helped us to locate the life events and circumstances that young people saw as significant against their living arrangements over time. We then looked across the maps to identify patterns, including factors associated with periods of stability and of disruption.

Findings: The young people reported varied patterns of movement between living arrangements and locations over the period they were staying in unapproved locations. A pathways approach allowed our analysis to highlight the complexity of their journeys as well as the strategies young people used to source living arrangements. Three broad pathways into, through and, sometimes, out of unapproved living arrangements emerged from this analysis: (a) longing to live with loved ones; (b) seeking a place to belong; and (c) perpetual turbulence. Our findings highlight the varied support needs of young people as well as the role of informal (friends and family) and formal supports in helping to sustain or jeopardise their safety, connection and wellbeing while away from approved placements.

Implications: Acknowledging the varied motivations for and pathways of young people while living away from approved placements provides an opportunity to implement more nuanced practices that are responsive to the shifting needs of young people and their living arrangements over time. Thus, helping to create safety, wellbeing and connection for this often-overlooked cohort of young people in OOHC.

Resilience among youth with severe behavior problems and factors related to it

Thursday, 11th September - 16:45: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Mrs. Kitta Ripatti [1], ***Dr. Marko Manninen*** [2], ***Prof. Kati Heinonen-Tuomaala*** [3]

1. *The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) and Tampere Universities (TAU),* ***2.*** *Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare,* ***3.*** *Tampere Universities (TAU)*

OBJECTIVES

In this research on psychology, we study the resilience of youth with severe behavior problems, its associations with other factors, and the potential for strengthening resilience.

BACKGROUND

Youth with severe behavior problems often experience a cumulative burden of challenges. Although the prognosis at the group level is poor, some individuals cope well. It is plausible that resilience plays a significant role in this positive trajectory. Yet, to the best of our knowledge, there is no previous research focusing specifically on adolescents with severe behavioral problems. Prior general population studies suggest that resilience protects against the risks caused by a difficult background and broadly promotes development.

METHODS

In Finland, minors with the most severe behavioral problems are placed in reform schools (RS). The resilience of RS youths (N=88, age 13-17) was assessed using the CD-RISC10 instrument. The results were compared to results from a general population sample (N=1725, age 15-29) and to those from young prisoners (N=156, age 18-29). Among RS subjects only, resilience was analyzed together with mental well-being assessed with BDI-21, GAD-7, LOT-R and SWEMWBS instruments and selected qualitative questions. Regarding prisoners, diagnostic interview and imprisonment-related variables were also available.

FINDINGS

CD-RISC scores among RS youth (mean 23.9, SD 7.9) are significantly lower compared to both general population (mean 30.1, SD 6.4, p<.001) and young prisoners (mean 26.6, SD 7.5, p<.05). From a categorical perspective, 58% of RS youth and 43% of young prisoners have low resilience, both rates differing significantly (p< .001) from that of the general population. Among RS youth, low resilience is associated with low positive mental health (p<.001) and anxiety (p<.05). Anxiety can also co-exist with high resilience, as it is a normal reaction to adverse or dysfunctional circumstances. High resilience (9%) is linked to positive mental health (p<.001). Among young prisoners, low resilience is associated with alexithymia (p<.001), depression (p=.001), PTSD (p<.006), and suicidality (p=.001). Prisoners convicted of less severe crimes have lower resilience scores than those with longer sentences (p=.046), suggesting that their offenses often act as survival mechanisms in a chaotic lifestyle. Among young prisoners, high resilience (16%) is related to lack of both alexithymia (p<.006) and PTSD (p=.020).

CONCLUSIONS

Low resilience is common among youth with severe behavior problems. Good resilience is related to psychological well-being and better coping. Achieving robust resilience should be a key objective in rehabilitation. Since youth cannot be expected to independently evolve into more resilient versions of themselves, key strategies for fostering resilience include increasing adults' awareness of resilience and to strengthening adults' capacity for mentalization. Beyond reducing individual suffering, strengthening the resilience of youth with severe behavioral problems also promotes community well-being and serves as a cost-effective public health and socio-economic intervention.

Integrating social and spatial factors: A model for understanding subjective wellbeing in residential care

Thursday, 11th September - 17:00: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Mr. Tobias Kindler [1], ***Mr. Thomas Schmid*** [1], ***Prof. Stefan Köngeter*** [1], ***Dr. Lukas Fellmann*** [2], ***Ms. Jana Osswald*** [2], ***Prof. Dorothee Schaffner*** [2], ***Ms. Carole Zellner*** [1]

1. *Eastern Switzerland University of Applied Sciences,* ***2.*** *University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland*

Introduction and Research Interest:

The subjective wellbeing of young people in residential care has been increasingly studied in the last years (Costa et al., 2020; Montserrat et al., 2022). Existing research has predominantly concentrated on the association between their relationships and social networks on the one hand (e.g., Garcia et al., 2020; Webster et al., 2020) and subjective wellbeing on the other. However, another crucial factor, namely the perception and actual status of young people's socio-spatial situation, particularly their housing situation (see Meuth, 2017), has thus far received limited attention. To address this research gap, this study tested a theoretical model that integrates spatial factors, specifically housing, with social factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of young people's subjective wellbeing. Furthermore, the research seeks to contribute to the underexplored area of subjective wellbeing among children and youth in residential care.

Methodology:

Utilizing a quantitative cross-sectional research design, the study invited young people in residential care in the German-speaking part of Switzerland to participate in an online survey. The questionnaire included measures of social support (Fydrich et al. 2007) and social connectedness (Lee & Robbins, 1995) as independent variables, while the housing situation was assessed through self-developed scales on three dimensions of housing (Meuth, 2017): agentic, physical, and emotional. The dependent variable, subjective wellbeing, was evaluated using the Personal Well-Being Index for School Children (Diener, 1984; Cummins & Lau, 2010). The sample comprised 559 young people from 90 distinct organizations across 15 Swiss cantons. Confirmatory Factor Analysis and path analysis were employed to test the theoretical model.

Results:

Path analysis revealed direct and indirect effects of study variables on young people's subjective wellbeing. The variables explained 53% of the variance in wellbeing. The model had an acceptable fit to the data: NFI = .98, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .03. Respondents who reported higher social support expressed a higher level of social connectedness ($\beta = .56$, $p < .001$), which contributed to a stronger sense of well-being ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$). Moreover, participants with a higher score on the agentic ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$) and physical housing scales ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$) reached a higher score on the emotional housing scale, which strongly contributed to a higher level of well-being ($\beta = .25$, $p < .001$).

Conclusion:

This study is one of the pioneering efforts to assess and elucidate the subjective wellbeing of young people in residential care. The findings underscore the importance of spatial factors, particularly housing, in efforts to improve the subjective wellbeing of this vulnerable population. Professionals in the field, including social workers, are advised to broaden their focus beyond psychological and social aspects to include the socio-spatial situations of young people in their professional practice. This is particularly important in the context of residential care, where residents often lack choice in their living arrangements. The presentation concludes with brief reflections on implications for policy, practice, and future research in the field of child and youth services.

Applying the Dimensional Model of Adversity and Psychopathology to the study of ACEs in children and adolescent in residential care

Thursday, 11th September - 17:15: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Ms. Sabina Daniela Gaitán Chiappino [1], ***Dr. Laura García Durán*** [1], ***Ms. Sonia Romero Códez*** [1], ***Prof. Francisco Javier Fernández-Baena*** [1], ***Prof. Maria D. Salas*** [1]

1. *Universidad de Málaga*

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is one of the most significant environmental factors influencing the development of cognitive, social and mental health problems throughout life. The Dimensional Model of Adversity and Psychopathology (DMAP) aims to specify the mechanisms by which early adversity affects development. This model differentiates between two dimensions of adversity: threat, characterised by exposure to atypical situations that pose a perceived risk (such as physical abuse); and deprivation, which is the absence of expected experiences that facilitate a healthy child's development (such as neglect). This study describes the application of the DMAP in a project developed by the University of Malaga with young people in residential care. Children and adolescents aged between 9 and 16 years old living in 22 residential homes in Malaga province were assessed. An extensive evaluation of the files of each young person was carried out and, based on the indicators included in the classification system of maltreatment of the Government of Andalusia (SIMIA), an exhaustive codification was made. Each type of adversity, the developmental stage and the chronicity of the exposure was recorded. Among the most relevant and descriptive results, it was found that over 70% of the young people had suffered more than one ACE before entering the protection system and that 98% of them had suffered neglect in their first reported adversity. In addition, it was also found that those children and adolescents who had suffered early ACEs (before age 3) showed greater problems in emotional regulation. The results also show that longer time in the residential home is related to less internalizing and attentional problems. Finally, the theoretical and methodological contributions of this model to understanding the effects of ACEs on human development will be discussed.

Mapping autonomy : For the appropriation of secure care and custody units by adolescents in residential care

Friday, 12th September - 09:00: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Ms. Sabrina Bourget [1]

1. *Université Laval*

Space is not just a receptacle for human activity: it is intrinsically linked to our lives and social interactions. Lefebvre (1974) and other researchers, such as Harvey (1989, 2006), Massey (2005) and Löw (2016), have emphasized the dialectical relationship between space and the social, where human activity produces space, which in turn influences this activity. In the particular context of carceral spaces, this relationship becomes more complex, as the rights and freedoms of individuals are severely restricted. Ironically, the social actors most present in these spaces, those who live there permanently, are often deprived of the opportunity to participate in their social production.

A striking example of this dynamic can be observed in the secure care and custody units for young people in need of protection or sentenced to custody in residential care for minors in Quebec. Results comes from twenty periods of participant observation into 2 secure care (one with only youth under the protection law and one with youth under protection law and youth accused or convicted for criminal offenses) and 2 custody units (only for youth accused or convicted for criminal offenses) on two readaptation center and twenty semi-structured interviews with young people living in the units where the observations took place. With the interviews the technic of sensible mapping was used, for which youth were invited to draw how they see their secure units in their imagination. This article then used two cycle of thematic analysis to reveal how these spaces, which are living environments for adolescents, albeit temporarily, are rather conceived as transitional spaces where young people do not feel welcome.

The article first explores the spatial representations of young people and staff, emphasizing the role of the restrictive material dimension of space and of control and surveillance practices in the formation of these representations. It then highlights the way in which young people express their agency despite the constraints imposed by the security unit and the practices of educators. By appropriating fragments of a space-time designed to deprive them of it, these adolescents demonstrate their autonomy and their ability to redefine their relationship to this space.

Finally, the discussion proposes a transformative approach by using the spatial dimension of secure units as a lever to encourage the autonomy and agency of young people. By enabling adolescents to reclaim these spaces and turn them into safe and less oppressive living environments, it is possible to promote their development and emancipation, thus facilitating their return to an open environment or society.

Participation and Leaving Care

Friday, 12th September - 09:15: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Dr. Samantha Tedesco [1]***, Prof. Elisabetta Biffi*** [2]

1. *University Milano Bicocca,* ***2.*** *"Riccardo Massa" Department of Human Sciences for Education, University of Milano-Bicocca*

CONTEXT:
Participation plays a fundamental role in promoting child rights and resilience in contexts of vulnerability such as alternative care (Cossar et al., 2016; McPherson et al., 2021; van Bijleveld et al., 2014). Despite this relevance, Participation is not such a widespread practice (Biffi et al, 2018, Cashmore, 2002), care leavers' voice is not listened enough (Arbeiter et al. 2017; Mauri et al. 2024) and little is known about the meanings that care leavers and professionals give to participation with respect to effectiveness in leaving care (Slaatto et al. 2024).
OBJECTIVES
We will present the results of a research conducted in Italy with the aim of knowing the meanings of Participation given by care leavers and professionals and exploring whether Participation can be seen as a key factor for the effectiveness of leaving care pathways.
METHOD
Exploratory qualitative study based on a hermeneutic-phenomenological method (Van Manen, 2023) to scout beliefs and experiences of professionals and care leavers. In-depth 20 interviews were conducted with a sample of 10 professionals and 10 care leavers (19 to 25 years old), gender balanced. The study was approved by our Institution's Ethics Committee.
RESULTS
The analyse of the interviews brings out some conditions that enable good support in leaving care and a good transition to adulthood: e.g. the key role in the implementation of participatory pathways that plays having a stable relationship with the referring educator and the importance of giving care leavers the "right to make mistakes", accompanying them without taking over.
CONCLUSIONS
These data provide access to how participation is understood by professionals and care leavers and underline the importance of considering participation as a fundamental factor in effectively process of leaving care.
Recommendations or takeaway points for the audience:

1. The importance of training practitioners to integrate participatory practices into their daily practices;
2. In order to better understand complex issues where personal meanings and professional practices are intertwined (such as the topic of this presentation), it is argued that it is necessary to use qualitative methodologies capable of patiently reaching the participants' point of view, going beyond the pure description of phenomena;
3. The importance of considering the care leaver's perspective throughout the educational project and not just at the end of their stay in residential care.
4. The importance of participation as a fundamental factor in effectively process of leaving care and transition to adulthood.

KEY WORDS: Leaving Care, Participation, Transition to adulthood

PEER VISITING ADVOCACY IN CHILD AND YOUTH RESIDENTIAL CARE

Friday, 12th September - 09:30: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Prof. Silvio Premoli [1]***, Prof. Elisabetta Biffi*** [2]***, Dr. Chiara Carla Montà*** [3]***, Dr. Lucia Carriera*** [4]

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Objectives

In reference to «the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child» and to be heard in any proceedings affecting the child, enshrined in the UNCRC (1989, art.12), independent advocacy for children's rights in the context of alternative care allows for children «to voice their experiences individually and collectively» (Cantwell et al., 2012, p.125).

Despite international and national regulations, and the indications emerging from research, children continue to be under-considered, excluded from decision-making processes, not listened to, not represented (Boylan, Dalrymple, 2009); this is especially penalising for children who, due to adverse life experiences, have difficulty expressing themselves (Biffi, Montà, 2020), as children in residential settings. Therefore the role of children's ombudsman has been introduced around the world, to protect and realise their rights (Flekkoy, 1991).

This study investigates the research project 'Visiting Advocacy in Residential Care Facilities,' funded under Italian Law 285/97 by the Children's Rights Ombudsman of the City of Milan—an initiative aimed at promoting participatory processes to support the rights and well-being of young people in residential care settings.

Method

This presentation will focus on the deep understanding of the participatory project implemented in Milan, using the case study as investigation method (Mabry, 2008).

The main characteristics of the project are: the paradigmatic perspective adopted (the child rights-based approach - Premoli, 2012); a structured system of monitoring, documentation and evaluation; constant and innovative training support for the advocates; scientific supervision; collaboration with the City management of child protection social services.

The project is based on the introduction of advocacy practices within children's residential care homes (Raineri, Calcaterra, 2017), implemented by a duo of advocates consisting of a professional and a care leaver.

Findings

The innovative aspect of the project is the creation of a 'space' (Lundy, 2007) other than every day, where children and young people can learn about their rights and are empowered to express their perspectives, with the support of 2 independent experts, a specially trained (Bateman, 2000) care leaver (peer advocate) and a professional educator (advocate), to empower them and uphold their human rights (Hoefer, 2019), on the behalf of the City Ombudsman.

Through these practices, young people can develop agency, resilience and a sense of ownership over their life trajectories while addressing the systemic barriers they encounter.

The project also produced interesting outputs: a peer support tool (a booklet designed for every out-of-home child at the beginning of his or her journey in a residential context, developed by the project team with the contribution of care leavers and young people envolved in the project); a training path for visiting advocates.

Conclusions

This study has shown the power and generativity of special spaces of listening and empowerment created in unusual contexts. In fact, not only did the great involvement and appreciation of young people emerge, but also the social pedagogues who were most reluctant to accept the project within their residential work context have

openly admitted to evaluating very positively the processes activated by the visiting advocacy intervention.

Participation, partnership, and sharing: Young women's suggestions for social work practices with adolescent girls in care

Friday, 12th September - 09:45: (SEECEL B2) - Oral

Dr. Nour Shimei [1]

1. *The Faculty of Social Work, Ashkelon Academic College*

Background: Despite widespread recognition of the importance of involving children and youth in shaping practices that affect their lives, translating participation from principle to practice remains challenging. This study focuses on the perspectives of young women who experienced the welfare system as adolescents, highlighting professional practices that promote participation, partnership, and sharing in addressing challenges faced by adolescent girls in care.

Objective: The study explored how social work practices can better support adolescent girls by incorporating their voices into the care process. It sought to conceptualise practices that promote meaningful participation, empowering girls as active agents in their care and decision-making processes.

Methods: This research employed a participatory action research (PAR) approach, engaging 25 Israeli women aged 18 to 29 who had encountered the welfare system during adolescence. These women had faced adversity, including poverty, social exclusion, and violence. Data collection involved in-depth interviews and group discussions, where some participants transitioned into co-researchers. They collaborated in analysing findings, presenting at seminars, and suggesting actionable recommendations for social work practice.

Findings: The analysis revealed that adolescent girls' ability to participate meaningfully in their care hinges on social workers' proactive engagement, expressed through three interconnected practices:

- Participation: Girls emphasised the need for social workers to adopt a "standpoint of hope," demonstrating unwavering commitment, persistence, and belief in their potential. The absence of such support often led to feelings of abandonment and despair.
- Partnership: Collaborative decision-making was crucial. Participants highlighted the importance of being involved in writing social reports, ensuring their perspectives were accurately reflected. Transparent documentation practices were essential for fostering trust and promoting shared responsibility.
- Sharing: The young women valued social workers' selective self-disclosure, mainly involving relatable experiences. This practice humanised the professional relationship, dismantled power hierarchies, and reinforced trust and empathy.

Conclusions: The study underscores the importance of shifting social work practices from traditional, top-down approaches to collaborative, participatory models. By embracing participation, partnership, and sharing, social workers can foster more equitable relationships with adolescent girls in care, enhancing their agency and well-being. These findings have implications for youth care policies and training, advocating for systemic changes and prioritising young people's voices in decision-making processes.

Implications: This research contributes to the evolving discourse on child and youth participation in social work, offering practical recommendations for social workers, policymakers, and educators. It highlights the need for ongoing dialogue, reflective practice, and structural adjustments within welfare systems to ensure young people can meaningfully participate in shaping their care experiences.

Challenging the narrative: Parenting experiences of care-experienced people across borders.

Friday, 12th September - 09:00: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Mrs. Shilla Shomai [1]

1. *University of Worcester*

Compared to their peers, care-experienced young people (CEYP) are likely to become parents at a young age (Shpiegel *et al.,* 2021). Parenthood tends to be unplanned (Datta *et al. 2017*), resulting in significant social disadvantages, including poorer mental health and low self-esteem (Cummings & Shelton, 2024; Parsons, Schoon and Fitzsimons, 2024). Help-seeking is challenging for care-experienced parents (CEPs) who perceive professionals as constantly seeking evidence of child maltreatment (Roberts *et al.,* 2017), judgemental, unsupportive, expecting CEPs to prove themselves and thus fear possible removal of their children from their care (Guinchard, 2024).

This study, situated within an interpretivism paradigm and employing thematic analysis techniques, utilised semi-structured interviews to examine the parenting experiences of CEPs in Scotland compared to England. The study found multifaceted challenges faced by parents, including struggles with mental health, substance use, domestic abuse and poverty, which parents associated with their childhood trauma. A larger proportion of English parents felt underprepared and rushed out of care with little to no support which negatively impacted their parenting prospects. Some parents from England also had their children removed from their care because of a lack of support. In contrast, the majority of parents in Scotland reported positive parenting experiences, linked to a smoother and more supported transitional period and the availability of supportive relationships.

These positive experiences challenge the negative narrative that normally stigmatises the life outcomes of care-experienced people and diversifies this. The comparison between the two nations reveals the difference in policy approaches and the shared struggles in the state's attempt to achieve positive life outcomes for CEYP. The ongoing challenges, particularly those faced by CEPs provide a significant research and policy gap. This context set a foundation for exploring parenting journeys, focusing on how policy and practice intersect in shaping their experiences.

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Experiences of sibling relationships for young adults who grew up in kinship foster care

Friday, 12th September - 09:15: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Ms. Julie Cahill [1], ***Dr. Eavan Brady*** [2], ***Prof. Robbie Gilligan*** [2]

1. *School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin,* ***2.*** *Trinity College Dublin*

The aim of this presentation is to outline preliminary data regarding relationships with birth siblings for young adults who grew up in formal kinship (relative) foster care. Based on data from an ongoing PhD study, case examples will be used to illustrate the meaning of sibling relationships as a source of support and connection but also the challenges that sibling relationships can present as the young adults navigate early adult life.

Context

Sibling relationships in early adult life can hold important meaning in terms of connection, giving or receiving help (White, 2004 and sibling relationships of children in out of home care have become an important focus in research. (Hovland &Hean, 2021; Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009). The literature on kinship foster care has highlighted the particular benefits of kinship care in this regard, including a greater likelihood of placement with siblings (Scannapieco,1997) and an enhanced opportunity for children to maintain their family roots and supporting their sense of belonging and identity. (Montserrat, 2014). To date there has been limited qualitative research which focuses explicitly on former foster children in the kinship care literature (Skoglund, 2018), such qualitative research is vital if "the positive power of kinship care is to be unlocked for the benefit of children" (Gilligan, 2024:3).

Method: Findings presented are drawn from data collected as part of an ongoing PhD study of the lived experience, in early adult life, of young adults who grew up in relative (kinship) foster care in Ireland. The qualitative study, based on semi structured interviews, has explored adult life in a broad way for participants, and the aspects of life discussed have been largely participant led. Data is being analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The overall study aims to recruit approximately 15 to 20 participants. This presentation will draw on preliminary findings identified following analysis of interviews completed to date. With relevant data extracted from the overall study to specifically consider the meaning of sibling relationships.

Findings

Drawing on the insight provided by this qualitative study of lived experience, and considered through the lens of life course theory, the presentation will consider the meaning of sibling relationships over time. Based on three key case examples, purposefully selected to illustrate key tendencies in the data, the presentation will provide insight into (i) how the sibling relationships are important to the young care leavers in terms of their identity (ii)the provision of support from siblings but also (iii) the conflict that can present where worry or obligation for siblings directly affected the choices that participants made about their own early adult lives.

Conclusions / Implications

The author suggests that while insight into the meaning of sibling relationships in early adult life is important for all young adults, the data presented will give particular insight for young adults with care experience, and in particular the further nuance for young adults who grew up in kinship / family foster care and the relevance of this for further research and practice consideration.

Young Mothers Transitioning from Out-of-Home Care: mothers' experiences and intergenerational risk of out-of-home care

Friday, 12th September - 09:30: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Prof. Melissa O'Donnell [1], ***Ms. Renée Usher*** [1], ***Ms. Chloe Bryant*** [2], ***Dr. Lauren Parsons*** [3], ***Prof. Donna Chung*** [3], ***Dr. Miriam Maclean*** [1]

1. *Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia,* ***2.*** *University of Western Australia,* ***3.*** *Curtin University*

Background: Young people with a history of out of home care experience have been shown to experience poorer outcomes in comparison to their non-care experienced peers, including areas of health, educational attainment, employment, and housing. Outcomes are also gendered, as young women with care experience are more likely to give birth at a younger age and a greater likelihood of child protection involvement with their own children.
Objectives: This study quantitatively examined the prevalence of births and the risk of child removal in young females transitioning from out of home care. We also examined the experiences qualitatively of mothers with care experience as they transition from out-of-home care to independent living.
Methods: This study utilises mixed methods with a retrospective, population-based analysis of deidentified, linked administrative data and a qualitative analysis of eleven interviews with young mothers. All were aged between 18-25 years at the time of the interviews, and one mother had children removed by the child protection system.
Findings and Implications: The prevalence of births was significantly higher for those with out-of-home care experience (18.2%) than in the general population (4.2%) although similar for those with child protection contact who did not enter care (19.4%). The proportion of child removal was higher for children of those with out-of-home care experience (21.1%) than for children of those with child protection contact only (5.8%). The odds of removal were 2.5 times greater for children born to those with out-of-home care experience compared to children born to those with child protection contact only [OR:2.54 (95%CI: 1.98-3.24)]. These results indicate young mothers with out-of-home care experience have a higher prevalence of births than the general population without child protection contact and increased risk of child removal, highlighting the need for tailored support for young parents transitioning from care and their children.
The qualitative analysis of young parent care leavers interviews found overall that leaving care planning and post-care support did not meet the needs of participants, particularly around parenthood. Participants felt under-supported and unprepared to leave care and be independent as mothers. Participants also expressed a strong desire to break or avoid an intergenerational cycle of out-of-home care in their families. Areas of improvement for leaving care planning and care leaver service provision have been offered by care leavers to support their role as parents and young people transitioning to independence.

The scope of experiences and outcomes of young people transitioning from out-of-home care in Indonesia: Preliminary findings

Friday, 12th September - 09:45: (SEECEL C1) - Oral

Mr. Rangga Radityaputra [1], ***Prof. Philip Mendes*** [1], ***Dr. Susan Baidawi*** [1]

1. *Monash University*

Introduction

Young people transitioning from out-of-home care (OOHC), also known as care leavers, are globally recognised as a vulnerable group with potential disadvantage compared to young people from parental care. To date, there is a dearth of practice and scholarly attention concerning the experiences of this cohort in Indonesia. This study, lead authored by an Indonesian researcher, explores and investigates the scope of experiences and outcomes of care leavers in Indonesia, the underlying factors that determine their outcomes, potential facilitators & barriers to receiving post-care support, and the need for formal policies and practices to support these young people.

Objective

This study aims to explore the scope of experiences and outcomes of young people transitioning from OOHC in Indonesia.

Methods

This study is applying qualitative methods of investigation to collect data using maximum diversity sampling and semi-structured interviews to collect data from key informants and lived experience persons who understands and have gone through a “first-hand” experience of the phenomenon.

The study collected data from 88 participants from three different groups of stakeholders, which are young people in and transitioning from OOHC aged 16 to 25 (57 participants, 23 female & 34 male); (2) their care and support providers (24 participants); and (3) child welfare actors that indirectly support them (7 participants). The study gathered data from participants from four different provinces in Indonesia, which have distinct social, cultural, and religious diversity: Aceh, West Java, Bali, and East Nusa Tenggara. Research fieldwork was conducted from June 23, 2025, to August 21, 2025, in these locations, with an additional participant from Jakarta. Future analysis will be conducted primarily through thematic analysis of semi-structured interview data, supplemented by additional notes from field observations and other relevant documents, to answer the research objectives.

Preliminary findings

Preliminary findings from the research fieldwork have shown that young people transitioning from OOHC in Indonesia have a mixture of favorable and unfavorable experiences in their transition into adulthood (i.e., in-care positive & negative experiences), diverse and contextual factors that determines their outcomes (i.e., low employment availability in the area), barriers and facilitators in receiving post-care support (i.e., care providers capacity), and the strong need to build holistic social ecology of support due to their potential poor life outcomes (i.e., mental health and wellbeing challenges, housing instability, inadequate employment, unemployment, social exclusion).

Discussion & Conclusions

Most young people transitioning from OOHC in Indonesia experience an abrupt transition into adulthood after 18 years or upon completing high school, which significantly impacts their potential life outcomes. Findings from the fieldwork indicate that extended care policies and practices are almost non-existent, while only a few organisations have formal leaving care and aftercare practices in place. Their pre-care, in-care, and post-care experiences vary depending on their contextual factors, which also determine their potential for successful outcomes.

There are future potential unexplored areas for research, such as care-experienced young people from large institutional settings, those who transitioned from faith-based and government child welfare institutions, and further longitudinal research to evaluate their outcomes.

How carer involvement in a mentalization-based fostering intervention can promote secure carer-child relationships.

Friday, 12th September - 09:00: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. Caroline Cresswell [1]

1. *University of Hertfordshire*

This paper presents findings from the *Relationship Stories Study*, a qualitative component of a randomised control trial evaluating the *Reflective Fostering Programme* - a mentalization-based intervention aiming to enhance foster carers' reflective capacity and support the development of secure carer-child relationships. The Programme delivers psychoeducation and practical tools across ten weekly sessions. It aims to strengthen carers' ability to mentalize both self and child, manage stress, and enhance relational outcomes, ultimately supporting placement stability and child wellbeing.

Relationship Stories explored how the Programme's proposed mechanisms of change played out in everyday carer-child interactions. Drawing on qualitative mixed methods - including parental development interviews, photo elicitation, observed play, and a child-led story-based activity - the study explored how carers translated learning from the Programme during and after their participation.

Analyses from three in-depth case studies will illustrate how carers' curiosity about the child's inner world, expressed through playful and reflective interactions, helped nurture reparative relationships with children who had experienced relational trauma. Findings show that carers' own relational histories shaped their reflective functioning, and that contextual stressors could challenge their ability to maintain a reflective stance. However, when carers were able to attend to their own emotional states, they were better equipped to respond sensitively to the child's needs, suggesting increased self-efficacy. Children also demonstrated significant agency in shaping positive relational dynamics, highlighting the reciprocal nature of these developing relationships.

Substance Use Competence Among Staff in residential child care institutions

Friday, 12th September - 09:15: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Mrs. Kristin Matre [1], ***Dr. Ingunn Barmen Tysnes*** [1], ***Dr. Monika Alvestad Reime*** [1], ***Dr. Hulda Mjöll Gunnarsdottir*** [2]

1. *Western Norway University of Applied Sciences,* ***2.*** *University of Stavanger*

Background/objectives: In Norway, approximately 900 adolescents live in child care institutions each year, two-thirds of whom are in residential child care institutions. These institutions aim to provide care and developmental support for adolescents who lack sufficient care at home and require more help than foster care can provide. The adolescents often experience complex problems and face a higher risk of substance use issues compared to their peers Ideally, those who reside in these institutions should not have substance use- related issues. However, like many of their peers, they may explore substance use.

Public evaluation reports have revealed a lack of competence among staff, a need for development of institutional offerings and the need for more research. However, there appears to be limited knowledge about residential staff's competence when working with adolescents with substance use. This study aims to explore residential staff's competence working with substance use issues and how it is applies in practice. Molander's theoretical concepts of "knowledge-in-action" and "theory-in-use" are the theoretical framework of this study. Knowledge regarding competence and the need for competence in residential child care institutions can contribute to more targeted efforts in preventing problematic substance use among children and adolescents in residential child care institutions.

Method: This qualitative study, based on interviews with 16 residential staff members including 11 women and 5 fem, aged 25- 65 years, across four different care institutions. The semi- structured interviews approximately 1 ½- 2 hours length, examines how staff in residential childcare institutions manage substance use-related challenges among adolescents. Data from the interviews was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Findings: Through analysis, two main themes have been identified: 1) identification and application of signs of substance use – knowledge in action, and 2) applying knowledge about youth and substance use – theory in use. The study concludes that residential staff draw upon both theoretical and experience- based knowledge in their work with youth who use substances, and that staff utilize their theoretical competence more explicitly than previously assumed. They feel more equipped to address and identify substance use issues than earlier. The staff emphasize the importance of sharing knowledge and experiences with colleagues, as well as being visibly present with the youth to better identify substance use among them. Additionally, they highlight the significance of having knowledge about substances, trauma informed care, and understanding the function of substance use[IT1] . The findings in light of Molander's theoretical concepts of "knowledge-in-action" and "theory-in-use," and implications for practice will be presented.[IT2]

Implications: The study emphasises the importance of competence in residential child care institutions, and addresses the implications for staff competence and the prevention of substance use among adolescents placed in residential childcare institutions. Staff competence in substance use can enable them to identify and prevent substance use issues, and in this way, enhanced substance use competence can help strengthen the institutions and ensure that the objectives of the residential child care institutions are met.

Dilemmas Concerning Restrictive Measures and Interventions in Residential Youth Care in the Netherlands

Friday, 12th September - 09:30: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Ms. Anne Addink [1]

1. *Netherlands Youth Institute*

Objectives:
The Netherlands has committed to closing all closed institutions for young people in youth care by 2030, with small-scale alternative residential care to be developed by 2025 for those unable to grow up at home and in need of a secure environment. While restrictive measures are prohibited under Dutch Youth Law in open residential youth care, these measures are still applied in practice. This research aims to explore the dilemmas faced by professionals in daily practice and what is helping them to prevent the use of restricting measures.
Methods:
This study combines a literature review with practical research. The literature review covers topics such as the definition of repression and restriction of freedom, their consequences for children and young people, methods to prevent such measures, and the laws and regulations that govern their use. The practical research consists of focus groups and interviews with young people in residential care, their parents, professionals working in residential institutions, family house parents, and experts in the field. These dialogs explore the challenges, bottlenecks, and potential solutions regarding the use of freedom-restricting measures.
Findings:
The research identifies six key dilemmas professionals face in daily practice:

1. **Balancing Support and Restriction**:
   Young people have the right to develop and make their own choices, yet they also require boundaries, such as agreements on screen time and bedtimes. The dilemma is finding the balance between providing autonomy and setting necessary limits.
2. **House Rules**:
   Creating house rules that are conducive to a positive living environment is challenging. Too many or overly strict rules can lead to a negative spiral of more rules and punishment, worsening the situation.
3. **Protecting a Young Person from Themselves**:
   At times, professionals must intervene to protect a young person from self-harm. However, the law prohibits general measures such as restraint, isolation, or surveillance. The dilemma is finding alternative approaches in dangerous situations and areas or crises.
4. **Protecting Safety for All**:
   In a residential setting all should feel safe, children and the staff. The dilemma arises when a child creates unsafe situations for others, requiring intervention while maintaining a safe environment for both residents and staff.
5. **Responding to Emergency Situations**:
   In emergency situations professionals need to act. An emergency is a crisis that cannot be predicted. Organizations must anticipate scenarios and always evaluate incidents to learn.
6. **Dealing with Uncertainty and Complexity**:
   Some situations are so complex or ambiguous that everyone feels stuck. It's a challenge to acknowledge that no one has an answer and take time to explore the situation and options together.

Conclusions/Implications
In response to these dilemmas, the Netherlands Youth Institute has developed a guide to support professionals.

This guide does not provide one-size-fits-all solutions but offers examples, methods, and techniques to help professionals address these challenges and reduce reliance on restrictive measures. By navigating these dilemmas, professionals can contribute to creating a more supportive residential care environment for young people.

Perspectives of Professionals on Children's Participation in Decision-Making and Services Within the Social Welfare System

Friday, 12th September - 09:45: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. Anita Barišić [1], ***Dr. Mateja Marić*** [1], ***Ms. Lara Rašić*** [1]

1. *Faculty of Law in Osijek*

This study explores the perspectives of social welfare professionals regarding the involvement of children in the realization of their rights, access to services, and treatment implementation within the Croatian social welfare system. The research is grounded in the empowerment theory, the concept of children's rights, and Shier's model of participation, providing a comprehensive framework for analyzing child involvement in decision-making processes. Through qualitative research conducted via two focus groups with ten professionals from social welfare offices and institutions, the study examines the extent of child participation, identifies challenges, and suggests improvements for practice.

The findings indicate that, despite formal recognition of children's rights to participation, they are often marginalized in practice. Experts highlight systemic deficiencies, including slow procedures, resource constraints, and inconsistent communication, which hinder children's ability to be adequately informed and involved in decision-making processes. Furthermore, the results emphasize the need for a better understanding of children's emotional needs and the empowerment of their role in decision-making processes. The study also reveals that children frequently lack awareness of their rights and the services available to them, leading to their passive role in welfare proceedings.

Professionals emphasize the need for child-friendly communication, tailored to age and cognitive development, as well as for institutional changes that foster meaningful child participation. Recommendations include the continuous improvement of structured guidelines for engaging children in social welfare procedures, better training for professionals, and improved intersectoral cooperation to ensure that children's voices are heard and respected.

These findings contribute to a broader understanding of child participation in the welfare system and offer insights for enhancing policies and practices to better align with children's rights and well-being.

Keywords: child participation, social welfare, rights realization, professional perspectives, child protection

A Balancing Act: A Qualitative Examination of Foster Parent Rights and Well-being in the United States

Friday, 12th September - 10:00: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Ms. Amanda Cruce [1], ***Dr. Mary Rauktis*** [1], ***Dr. Elizabeth Farmer*** [1], ***Ms. Kimmie Breeden*** [2], ***Dr. Morgan Cooley*** [3], ***Mx. Scout Hartley*** [4]

1. *University of Pittsburgh,* ***2.*** *Oklahoma State University,* ***3.*** *Florida Atlantic University,* ***4.*** *Rutgers University*

Minimizing residential care placements and creating greater permanency are goals of the American Child Welfare System, and foster parents are critical to achieving these goals. Although there is a considerable body of research on birth parent rights and child/youth rights, there is little systematic inquiry using a rights-based framework about foster parent perspectives and experiences. This study utilized focus groups with parents (n=19) to explore their perspectives about their rights when functioning as foster parents. The focus groups were transcribed and analyzed by two coders, the first author who is a doctoral student, foster and adoptive parent, and the other analyst is a doctoral student who is a foster care alumnus. The qualitative analysis procedure incorporated the theoretical framework of Social Work Scholar David Androff's framework, (2017) and the transcripts were coded using the six constructs of social work human rights practice: human dignity, transparency, accountability, participation, non-discrimination, and well-being. The findings support a more robust human rights practice by the American child welfare system professionals not only to support foster parents but also the birth parents and children the system aims to help. This requires judges, advocates, social workers and other professionals engaging with foster parents in ways that convey respect, collaboration, and provision of adequate support for themselves and the children in their care. This might involve providing foster parents with high-quality and ongoing training, sufficient resources to care for foster children, and acknowledging their unique and key contributions within child welfare. Foster parents acknowledge the balancing act of rights between the groups and believe that child welfare systems can identify when foster parent, child and birth parent rights may be in conflict negotiate policies and practices that recognize all participants. Although foster parents believed that the system did not always work in the best interests of children and families, they rejected the notion proposed by some American Social Work scholars to abolish the child welfare system. They were hopeful that if the focus was truly on the child and family, and rights were balanced, that the child welfare system could achieve the goals of safety, permanence and well-being.

“We all grow up with our mob because it takes all of us”: First Nations collective kinship in Australia.

Friday, 12th September - 10:15: (SEECEL C2) - Oral

Dr. James Beaufils [1]

1. *University of Technology, Sydney. Jumbunna*

Being raised by and within ones’ First Nations community, among one’s mob and fully immersed in culture, is a fundamental part of First Nations being. This is an aspect of First Nations being that has been disrupted through colonial practices targeting First Nations families, such as the Stolen Generations where 10-30% of all First Nations children were forcibly removed from their families in the twentieth century. It also continues in the contemporary era through statutory child removals in Australia, where the continued overrepresentation of First Nations children in Australian child protection and out-of-home care (OOHC) systems, pushing community voice and concerns of continued generations of our children bring stolen. A fundamental redesigning of how OOHC services are delivered is critical, this would be by and for First Nations communities and children in Australia. The redesign would draw on First Nations leadership, knowledges, traditions and values, this article describes an innovative model of kinship care, the ‘Minintitja Care Model’, where one First Nations community designed and delivered in rural New South Wales, Australia. The Minintitja Care Model is an example of the power and promise that First Nations self-determination holds to deliver improved outcomes for First Nations children in OOHC in Australia. We argue that it evidences the importance of fundamentally redesigning how OOHC services are delivered to First Nations children in Australia by drawing on First Nations knowledges, traditions and values. Redesigning a system that was not built for the benefit of First Nations children and families requires more than reform: it requires the bravery to envision new possibilities by drawing on ancient wisdom.

Perspectives of LGBT+ adolescents who have been victims of sexual abuse on their psychotherapy: needs and challenges

Friday, 12th September - 09:00: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Mr. Nicolás González-Araneda [1], ***Dr. Mónica López López*** [1], ***Dr. Claudia Capella Sepúlveda*** [2], ***Mr. Alberto López-Vásquez*** [2]

1. *University of Groningen,* ***2.*** *Universidad de Chile*

A recent global meta-analysis pooling data from 165 national studies across 80 countries (Piolanti et al., 2025) estimated that 11.4% of children experienced lifetime sexual harassment, 8.7% suffered contact sexual violence, and 6.1% reported forced sexual intercourse before the age of 19. In the case of LGBT+ childhoods and adolescences, an association has been reported between belonging to a sexual and/or gender minority and experiencing a higher lifetime risk of victimization than heterosexual and cisgender individuals, including experiences of bullying, verbal, physical, and sexual abuse (Coulter et al., 2017; El Khoury et al., 2021; Goldbach & Gibbs, 2017). Regarding sexual violence in particular, empirical evidence indicates that LGBT+ youth are disproportionately affected relative to their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Friedman et al., 2011; Williams & Gutierrez, 2022). Supporting this, a recent meta-analysis by Jonas et al. (2022) estimates that approximately 30% of LGBT+ adolescents and young adults report having experienced some form of sexual abuse during their lifetime. Therefore, from an intersectional perspective, these adolescents face a double violence, since in addition to the effects of discrimination and social exclusion they experience due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, there are the consequences of having been victims of sexual abuse. Objective: The aim of this study is to understand the processes of psychotherapy with LGBT+ adolescents who have been victims of sexual assault, from their own perspectives, to identify their needs and the challenges that persist in clinical practice with this population. Methodology: A qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews with adolescents who self-identify as LGBT+ and who have been victims of sexual abuse was used. The seven participating adolescents are cared for in centers specialized in the treatment of children and adolescents who have been victims of sexual abuse in Chile. The data were analyzed following grounded theory procedures, specifically open and axial coding. Results: Preliminary results show that adolescents need to feel accepted and validated in relation to their OSIEG, requiring that these issues can be addressed in therapy freely and without questioning. Likewise, they identify as positive to be able to talk about their concerns related to their identity and self-concept. They also highlight the importance of addressing myths about sexuality and its relationship to the experience of abuse, family support and validation of their experiences. However, some adolescents mentioned that they could not talk about these issues because their psychotherapists did not actively address them and they feared rejection, which led them to hide important aspects of their identity. Discussion: The clinical implications of these findings are discussed, especially how the concealment of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity may limit the approach to various therapeutic goals, representing a missed opportunity in the psychotherapeutic process. Also, some strategies that, from the adolescents' perspective, are effective in helping them to elaborate both the abuse experience and the challenges related to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity will be discussed.

Challenging childhoods: preventing and addressing sexual exploitation in youth with vulnerable backgrounds

Friday, 12th September - 09:15: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Gabriëlle Mercera [1], ***Dr. Sophie Leijdesdorff*** [2], ***Dr. Evelyn Heynen*** [3], ***Prof. Thérèse van Amelsvoort*** [2]

1. *Koraal Centre of Expertise / De Hondsberg and Maastricht University, department of Psychiatry and Neuropsychology,* ***2.*** *Department of Psychiatry and Neuropsychology, Maastricht University,* ***3.*** *Open University*

Introduction

Sexual exploitation of youth is a major but often hidden societal issue. It is characterized by complex dynamics of coercion and abuse and has profound consequences for the mental and physical health of youth. Youth growing up in challenging and unstable family environments are particularly at risk for sexual exploitation. Two highly vulnerable but underrepresented groups of youth require greater focus in research: 1) young women in residential care with intellectual disabilities; 2) young men who remain largely overlooked in both research and practice. Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing more inclusive and effective prevention and intervention strategies. This presentation highlights key findings from a completed PhD research on the risk and protective factors for sexual exploitation. It focuses specifically on the needs of sexually exploited and at-risk young women in residential care with intellectual disabilities and sexually exploited young men.

Methods

This research, conducted in the Netherlands, incorporated a multi-method perspective: 1) A systematic review was conducted to provide a comprehensive overview of risk and protective factors for youth sexual exploitation worldwide. 2) A retrospective case-file study analysed data from 55 sexually exploited and at-risk young women with intellectual disabilities (aged 10–29) in a residential treatment program. This study examined their mental health, family dynamics, social networks, and care needs. 3) In a qualitative study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 26 sexually exploited and at-risk young men to explore risk and protective factors throughout their life course and their care needs.

Results

A wide range of risk factors for sexual exploitation at the individual, familial, and environmental levels was identified. The systematic review revealed a scarcity of research on protective factors. This review synthesized findings from 65 studies, presenting a theoretical framework that links adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), mental health challenges, and maladaptive coping mechanisms to an increased risk of sexual exploitation. The results from the case-file study and interview study highlight the unique vulnerabilities of respectively youth with intellectual disabilities in residential care and young men. Both of whom often experience an accumulation of ACEs and family and residential instability, which make them particularly susceptible to grooming and exploitation. Findings on care needs highlight the urgent need for specialized support tailored to at-risk and sexually exploited youth, but also peer support, accessible mental health care and sex and relationship education.

Conclusions

This presentation will discuss the relevance of these findings for professionals in mental healthcare, child welfare and protection, family support, social services and residential care, with a focus on how they can inform early identification strategies and tailored interventions for at-risk and sexually exploited youth. This research underscores the critical role of ACEs in the pathways to sexual exploitation and emphasizes the need for early risk identification, trauma-informed care, and the creation of stable and safe environments for high-risk youth. Given the lack of research on protective factors, further studies are necessary to explore how resilience mechanisms can mitigate the impact of ACEs and foster positive development.

Exploring the Use of Simulation-Based Learning to Promote Trauma-Informed Care Approaches for Youth in Therapeutic Campus-Based Care

Friday, 12th September - 09:30: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Angelique Jenney [1], ***Ms. Krista West*** [2]

1. *University of Calgary,* ***2.*** *Wood's Homes*

Background: Therapeutic Campus-Based Care (TCBC) environments provide support and intervention for young people in care with complex needs and requires skilled providers. These skills are not taught in classroom settings, but often through on-the-job learning experiences. The onboarding time and resources for each staff is significant and the potential for distressing learning experiences occurring early in a new worker's trajectory can discourage them from remaining in the field long enough to develop competence and mastery for this difficult work. Simulation-based learning (SBL) opportunities offer a range of learning scenarios that can be experienced safely to build knowledge and insight.

Objectives: This project created a number of virtual and live simulations as a mechanism to improve access to trauma-informed care skills training and provide opportunities for the development of practice competencies in both student and professional practitioners in TCBC settings.

Methods: Three complex youth case scenarios (aggression, self-harm behaviours, sexual exploitation) were designed to understand the role of reflective and relational practice capacity when staff are responding to trauma in young clients. Multiple complex episodes, requiring different levels of competency and complexity (novice, advanced beginner, and competent) were piloted with a diverse group of child and youth care workers.Participants (N=92) engaged in a virtual gaming scenario (online) and a live in-person simulation (which was video recorded). Each activity was followed by a reflective practice process and the live simulation experience included a video elicitation interview.

Findings: Preliminary findings from the reflective practice components will be shared which indicate SBL is a promising avenue for developing reflective and relational practice capacity within trauma-informed care settings for youth.

Conclusion/Implications: This presentation will describe the study and preliminary findings indicating potential for SBL within TCBC settings to support trauma-informed care approaches with new staff. Participants will also have the opportunity to engage with one of the SBL scenarios, and discuss experiences and implications for future developments and practical applications in children's mental health settings.

Treatment Engagement and Emotion Recognition among Boys and Girls with Conduct Problems

Friday, 12th September - 09:45: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Ms. Emmely Delamillieure [1], ***Prof. Olivier Colins*** [1], ***Dr. Melina Nicole Kyranides*** [2]

1. *Ghent university,* ***2.*** *University of Cyprus*

Objectives: Facial emotion recognition is essential for social functioning, facilitating interpersonal communication, social interactions, and relationship building, while also promoting prosocial behavior. Misinterpreting facial emotional cues can lead to misunderstandings of others' internal states and behaviors, shaping an individual's attitudes and actions. These misjudgments may have clinical consequences, potentially affecting treatment success and increasing the risk of poor outcomes. Beyond treatment outcomes, it is equally important to examine underlying processes such as treatment engagement (TE), which plays a key role in promoting positive treatment outcomes and fostering therapeutic change. Although it can be hypothesized that TE and emotion recognition are associated, no research has explicitly examined this relation. Therefore, the present study investigates the relationship between emotion recognition, specifically accuracy and processing speed, and TE in a sample of 16- and 17-year-old adolescents who (allegedly) have committed crimes and/or exhibited conduct problems. Given prior findings linking conduct disorder (CD) and callous-unemotional (CU) traits to deficits in emotion recognition, it is important to scrutinize if the association between emotion recognition and TE holds after controlling for the number of CD symptoms and CU traits. Additionally, potential sex differences are explored.

Methods: Boys recruited from youth detention centers (YDCs) (n = 169) and girls recruited from YDCs and other facilities (n = 110) completed several questionnaires, including the Treatment Engagement Questionnaire and the Proposed Specifiers for Conduct Disorder. They also participated in a computerized emotion recognition task and were assessed for CD symptoms through a semi-structured diagnostic interview. Pearson's bivariate correlation coefficients were calculated and a series of multiple linear regressions were performed.

Findings: Results revealed sex differences in emotion recognition (e.g., recognition accuracy and processing speed for anger and disgust) and showed that only a few emotion recognition variables were significantly associated with TE indices (e.g., among boys, recognition accuracy for anger; and among girls, processing speed for happiness). Some associations remained significant after controlling for CD symptoms and CU traits. Additionally, sex differences were observed in the relationship between emotion recognition and TE.

Conclusion/implications: The findings suggest that emotion recognition may be linked to indices of TE, though its impact appears limited. The observed sex differences emphasize the need for further research on sex-specific patterns in emotion recognition and how emotional processing influences TE.

Parental Perspectives on Involvement and Contact with their Children in Residential Care for Youth from Underprivileged Backgrounds

Friday, 12th September - 10:00: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Accepted with changes

Prof. Shalhevet Attar-Schwartz [1], ***Dr. Efrat Lusky-Weisrose*** [1]

1. *the Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

Objectives: There is wide recognition that contact with parents while in residential care settings is beneficial for children. Yet, some barriers limit parental involvement. Research often overlooks parents' perspectives, focusing on administrative data and professionals' and young people's reports. This study explores the experiences of parents whose children reside in educational residential care settings for youth from underprivileged backgrounds, highlighting parent-child relations, parental involvement, and factors that hinder or promote parents' participation.

Methods: The study utilizes in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews with 33 parents of youth (aged 12-18) from 11 Israeli educational residential care settings serving youth from the country's geographical and social peripheries. A thematic analysis of the interviews was conducted to identify themes and sub-themes describing the parents' experiences and insights.

Findings: Two key themes emerged: (a) the state of the parent-child relationship during the child's stay in the residential care setting, including the transition to the facility; and (b) parental involvement at the residential care setting, including both proactive involvement initiated by the parents and involvement facilitated by staff, as well as the barriers to and facilitators of this involvement. The main barriers include staff's low availability, passivity, and alienation, as well as high turnover; the children's demanding schedule; and the family's socioeconomic challenges, geographic distance, and internal conflicts. Main facilitators include a collaborative staff approach, positive child-staff relationships, parental empowerment, and holistic staff partnerships.

Conclusions and Implications for Practice and Policy: The study holds implications for child welfare professionals and policymakers, highlighting that for children in residential care settings, parent-child relations are shaped not only by familial and personal factors but also by proactive parental involvement and the quality of parent-staff relationships. Hence, to promote parental involvement child welfare system should address both logistical barriers and the broader emotional and systemic stressors parents face. This includes providing tailored support services such as financial aid, mental health resources for both parents and child, and trauma-informed training for staff. The findings emphasizes the need for policies that actively involve parents in RCSs and recognize them as key sources of knowledge about their children; and the importance of staff training to improve parental engagement and the provision of resources to support quality parent-child connections.

Strengthening the parenting competencies of families at-risk through an intervention programme in social services

Friday, 12th September - 09:00: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Dr. Lucía González-Pasarín [1], ***Ms. Alícia Borrego-Tarragó*** [1], ***Dr. Nauzet Gutiérrez-Rodríguez*** [1], ***Dr. Sara Rodríguez-Pérez*** [2], ***Prof. Eduard Vaquero-Tió*** [1]

1. *Universitat de Lleida,* ***2.*** *Universidad de Oviedo*

One of the most significant social challenges currently faced by the EU is the search for new forms of social and educational innovation that contribute to the promotion of positive parenting, and the transition towards quality family- and community-based care services (Council of Europe, 2006; European Commission, 2024). Since the adoption of Recommendation Rec(2006)19 of the Council of Europe on policies supporting positive parenting, political, educational, and social measures and commitments have been made aligned with the challenge of strengthening families to ensure the rights of children, especially in families at risk and social exclusion, where exercising this type of parenting can be particularly difficult.

Recent literature supports the need to continue investigating innovative and scientific knowledge regarding ecological, inclusive, interdisciplinary and participatory approaches from the positive parenting approach in the child protection system, especially regarding the reality of interventions with families of origin in situations of risk and social vulnerability.

This communication presents the results on an evaluation of changes in the parenting competencies of families who have participated in the evidence-based positive parenting programme 'Comprehensive care programme for children, adolescents and their families at risk' (Balsells et al., 2024). The programme was implemented by 57 practitioners in primary care or community social services on family preservation, within the social services of the City Council of Lleida (Catalonia, Spain). A total of 77 families and 90 children and adolescents are involved in the programme using an individual/family-based methodology, of whom 23 completed the process. Data were collected through questionnaires on parental and family competencies and the risk level of the families, completed by professionals. Descriptive analysis and a paired-samples Student's t-test were conducted.

Preliminary results on the parental and family competencies of those mothers and fathers who completed the intervention showed improvements, for instance, in their capacity to provide basic care, emotional warmth, stimulation, and values and norms; as well as to identify resources for the care and upbringing of their children. In addition, a decrease in the level of risk was identified based on practitioners' decision-making after the end of the intervention with families, such as closure of the risk file. These findings demonstrate that this positive parenting programme is effective in strengthening parental and family competences in at-risk situations, enabling them to better respond to their children and adolescents' needs in their context. Using a participatory, ecological and inclusive methodology grounded in "The Cycle of the Positive Parenting Triangle (Triangle P+)" (Balsells et al. 2023), practitioners and families work together to strengthen the family unit and prevent the escalation of the risk level, along with the potential consequences this could entail, such as family separation and institutionalisation of children and adolescents.

Informal Social Support and the Educating Community in everyday contexts: more than ten years of pathways with families in situations of vulnerability

Friday, 12th September - 09:15: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Dr. Andrea Petrella [1], ***Prof. Paola Milani*** [1]

1. *University of Padova*

Family vulnerability is a social and educational condition characterised by high relational complexity, which can have severe consequences for children's developmental needs and family well-being. Informal social support, understood as a form of solidarity among families and individuals, is one of the key-resources that the Italian P.I.P.P.I. programme (Programme of Intervention for the Prevention of Institutionalisation) seeks to activate in everyday life contexts to address situations of vulnerability. Coordinated by the Laboratory of Research and Intervention in Family Education at the University of Padova and funded by the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, P.I.P.P.I. was launched in 2011 and recently recognised as an Essential Level of Social Performance (LEPS). It adopts a multiprofessional approach in order to support children and families, promote personalised interventions and family participation, with the aim of reducing educational poverty and social exclusion.

This research analyses data on informal social support collected between 2011 and 2023 through the RPMonline platform, used by professionals engaged in the programme to document all phases of care plans. The study explores the extent to which informal support networks are mobilised for families involved in P.I.P.P.I., as well as the resources through which the process of mutual help takes place (extended family, neighbourhood networks, volunteering), aware that the P.I.P.P.I. LEPS is, for the first time in Italy, advancing integrated interventions that can be activated across formal and informal contexts.

In particular, the research highlights:

i) how community, in its various forms, functions as a way of developing the human flourishing, activating networks for the benefit of most vulnerable families. Informal social support is considered not only as family-to-family assistance but also as a means of fostering informal contexts, which can serve as access points for the creation of new relationships. The analysis of data collected sheds light on the diverse range of actors involved as part of solidaristic proximity for vulnerable families, and material and immaterial support these resources provide.

ii) the role of multidisciplinary teams in facilitating connections among actors, emphasizing how enabling structures can empower individuals' capabilities to offer support and create generative informal networks.

We can assert that perhaps the most insightful analytical perspective, is the diachronic approach. It is important to note that initially the activation of informal support was almost exclusively linked to the involvement of extended family networks and, to some extent, friendships. Over time, the prevalence of these two types of support has declined in favour of solidarity-based proximity relationships, which find their distinctive features in associations and specific projects (local, parish-based, etc.).

If we accept the definition of community as a collective actor that not only educate their citizens but is also educated and transformed by them, what P.I.P.P.I. seems to have fostered is a gradual transition from more conventional forms of family-based solidarity (rooted in friendships or kinship ties) to more intentionally designed forms of solidarity. These latter forms are connected to local contexts and their resources and are open to the contributions of both institutional and non-institutional actors.

Effectiveness of a video-feedback intervention to promote positive parenting for foster children

Friday, 12th September - 09:30: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Dr. Delphine West [1], ***Dr. Lara Stas*** [1], ***Prof. Frank Van Holen*** [1], ***Dr. Laura Gypen*** [1], ***Prof. Johan Vanderfaeillie*** [1]

1. *Vrije Universiteit Brussel*

Foster children are at risk for developing disorganized attachment relationships (Van den Dries et al., 2009; Vasileva & Petermann, 2018) and behavioural problems (Goemans et al., 2015; Vanschoonlandt et al., 2012). Video-feedback Intervention to promote Positive Parenting and Sensitive Discipline– Foster Care/Adoption (VIPP-FC/A) is an intervention aimed at improving sensitive parenting in order to promote secure attachment relations and reduce behavioural problems. In this study, a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) was used in order to examine the effectiveness of VIPP-FC/A in a Flemish foster care sample (n = 100), using questionnaires at three measurement moments. The hypothesis was that VIPP-FC/A would increase foster mothers' sensitive parenting and decrease the externalizing behavioural problems and insecure attachment behaviour of the foster children and parenting stress of the foster mothers. The intervention effects on these four outcome variables were analysed by constructing four multilevel models. After controlling for the baseline measurement, there was no significant main effect of condition for sensitive parenting, externalizing problems, insecure attachment behaviour and parenting stress. There was however a significant effect of condition and age on insecure attachment behaviour: within the group of youngest foster children (under 30 months), children in the intervention group scored lower insecure attachment scores than children in the control group. Additionally, there was a significant effect of condition and type of foster care on externalizing behaviour problems. In the group of children placed in kinship foster care, children in the intervention group had lower external behavior scores than children in the control group.

Exploring Caregiver Experiences with Navigating and Securing Residential Care for Children with Intensive Needs.

Friday, 12th September - 09:45: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Dr. Shamra Boel-Studt [1], ***Dr. Darejan Dvalishvili*** [1]

1. *Institute for Quality Children's Services, Florida State University*

Objectives: Residential Care (RC) is a vital intervention for children with high acuity needs who cannot be safely cared for in the home. Issues with accessing RC in the United States and internationally are longstanding due to complicated service systems, costs, and policies aimed at minimizing utilization. Limiting utilization and access to RC has consequences for families and children who require higher-level interventions resulting in prolonged stress and instability, heightened risk for victimization and trauma, and delayed treatment. Families of children with high acuity needs are amongst the most vulnerable yet, little effort has been made to understand their experiences with accessing RC services and the impacts of these lived experiences. Drawing upon an adaptation of Hainstock's (2017) Caregiver Journey Framework, this study describes caregivers' experiences with accessing RC for their children with high-acuity needs.

Method: Using a multiple case-study design, 30 caregivers shared their experiences with accessing RC for their children. Additionally, 30 service providers were interviewed to explore their experiences with helping caregivers access RC. Breaking the process into four phases, participants described 1) precursors to seeking RC and their experiences with 2) navigating the system 3) their child's transition into RC, and 4) their preparation for their children's discharge and post-discharge experiences.

Results: Results show a complicated, emotionally charged process for caregivers navigating the RC system. Several themes emerged: 1) Challenging Behaviors & Safety Concerns: Caregivers considered RC placement only after dealing with behaviors beyond their ability to manage for years—such as aggression, self-harm, and sexual misbehavior. These behaviors affected the child, stressed family dynamics, and raised concerns about family member's safety and mental health. 2) Barriers to Accessing Services: Caregivers faced long waits and difficulty navigating systems with limited support. The scarcity of resources, lack of information, and stigma surrounding RC contributed to these challenges. 3) Eligibility and Systemic Limitations: Fixed eligibility criteria failed to account for the full spectrum of children's needs, preventing those with more complex needs from accessing appropriate services. This highlighted the rigidity of the system, which does not allow for the flexibility that families need. 4) High Turnover and "Compassion Fatigue": Caregivers expressed frustration with case manager and staff turnover leading to a lack of continuity in care. 5) Inadequate Aftercare: The lack of reliable support for post-discharge planning perplexed caregivers. While some appreciated the involvement of service providers in preparing for discharge, most were left without follow-up services.

Conclusion: Findings suggest that most caregivers faced significant barriers securing necessary care for their children. System inefficiency, limited resources, and lack of support need to be addressed to improve services for these families. A primary outcome of this study is to give caregivers a voice in a process of critical importance to their families' wellbeing and shed light on challenges and opportunities to support families seeking services.

Parental experiences of separation from the child when Child Welfare Services take custody

Friday, 12th September - 10:00: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Ms. Brenda Nyambe [1], ***Dr. Ellen Syrstad*** [1], ***Dr. Mari Herland*** [1], ***Dr. Memory Jayne Tembo-Pankuku*** [1]

1. *VID specialized Universty*

When child welfare services (CWS) take custody of the child, parents must parent at a distance an experience challenging to them and how they interact with child welfare services who are key actors in the reunification process. This phenomenology study explores the lived experiences of parents who have been separated from their children for various reasons. Literature reveals that parents moan the loss of custody of their children, they feel a sense of guilt and shame. Hence, they may experience profound grief, anxiety, a sense of disempowerment and exhibit anger due to their perceived inability as parents. Therefore, the paper aims to address the research question:

How do parents experience Separation when their child is placed in foster or institutional care?

The research design is a qualitative approach conducted phenomenologically to explore the lived experiences of the parents. In-depth interviews will explore the emotional and psychological experiences of 10 parents who have experienced the phenomenon of “Separation” from their children and how they navigate being a parent at a distance. The study highlights the interaction between the parents and CWS from their first encounter and during the separation period. This brings to light coping mechanisms and dynamics that parents encounter, and opportunities provided by CWS to foster communication between parents and the child.

The findings from this research reiterate the call to focus on the wellbeing of parents while protecting children, given that the biological principle of the Norwegian Child Welfare Act empowers them as primary carers unless otherwise. Thus, the findings suggest that policy makers must ensure there is a balance between the rights of the child and those of the parents. Parents must be provided with supportive measures that help them deal with the challenges of parenting at a distance when CWS takes custody of their children.

Key words: Child welfare services, parents’ experiences, custody, separation, lived experiences.

Family Strengthening in India: Preventive and Re-integrative Aspects of Family Separation in India

Friday, 12th September - 10:15: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Dr. Kiran Modi [1], ***Dr. Gurneet Kaur Kalra*** [1]

1. *Udayan Care*

In India, approximately 0.35 million children without parental care live in more than 9,000 Child Care Institutions (CCIs), as other family-based care mechanisms remain in a nascent stage (MOSPI, 2018). While India has strong juvenile justice laws and policies that emphasize family-based care—with institutional care as a last resort—multiple factors such as poverty, frequent migration, pandemics like COVID-19, and a lack of resources, mechanisms, and awareness regarding alternative Family-Based Care services continue to drive high institutional placements. As a result, family strengthening often takes a backseat. However, recent progress in laws, policies, and practices has marked a shift away from heavy reliance on institutional care, reinforcing the principle that families provide the best environment for vulnerable children to thrive.

The rehabilitation, restoration, and reintegration of children already separated from their families require a more systematic and concerted effort. Udayan Care, an NGO based in India, explored the situation of children restored from CCIs to their families during COVID-19 and initiated the Fit Families Together Project in Delhi, India. The project is guided by a 3R model—Reach, Reinforce, and Reintegrate—through the Circle of Care and Protection approach, which addresses 10 key domains: basic needs and safety, household finances, physical health, mental health, education and vocation, child self-awareness, community and social connections, legal entitlements, positive parenting, and hope and faith. These domains inform a comprehensive plan that can be integrated into government systems. This evolving practice of follow-up care for reintegration employs a child-centric, best-interest approach.

While the project initially focused on reintegrating children restored to their families, its broader scope includes prevention and gatekeeping efforts at the community level. Its goals are to foster strong communities that take ownership of children's well-being, well-functioning and resilient families that can care for and protect their children, and empowered individuals who can ensure children remain within families.

Drawing from a real-life family case study, we will highlight the impact of interventions across the project's domains on family cohesion and resilience. The case study will illustrate the complex challenges families face during crises—such as economic hardships, health issues, lack of education, and legal identity concerns—all of which heighten the risk of family separation. Through a combination of targeted interventions, structured case management tools, and holistic support mechanisms, we will demonstrate how families were empowered to navigate adversity, mitigate separation risks, and strengthen familial bonds. The presentation will also showcase findings from a third party impact evaluation data from over three years of the on-ground interventions, assessing its impact on reintegrating children and preventing family separation.

Family strengthening as the central approach, this presentation advocates for proactive approaches to addressing the root causes of family separation, emphasizing early intervention, collaborative support networks, and district-level service convergence. By sharing real-life success stories, this presentation aims to inspire stakeholders and policymakers to prioritize preventive and re-integrative measures, ultimately fostering healthier and more resilient families across India.

Like Walking on Eggshells: Children's Experiences of Transitioning into Foster Care

Friday, 12th September - 11:45: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Prof. Ingunn Tollisen Ellingsen [1], ***Dr. Hulda Mjöll Gunnarsdottir*** [2]

1. *The University of Stavanger,* ***2.*** *University of Stavanger*

Backround:
Every year, a considerable number of children come under the care of the Child Welfare Services (CWS) in Norway. In 2024, a total of 42,421 children received CWS support, and by the end of the year, approximately 9250 children were in living in some sort of foster care arrangement, either as a compulsory or voluntary placement. The transition into foster care can be emotionally challenging, often marked by feelings of grief, loss, and uncertainty that make it difficult for children to bond with new caregivers. To ensure stable placements, it's crucial to understand how children experience this transition and to identify key turning points that help them feel safe and settled in their new environments.

Objectives:
The study is part of a broader project exploring the perspectives of youth in care, particularly their views on follow-up with parents, foster carers, and children living in foster care. Our research question for this presentation is: How do children make sense of their experiences with child welfare services and the relational dynamics involved in moving into a foster family?

Methods:
We conducted a qualitative study involving interviews with ten youths aged 15-25 (four boys and six girls), who had experienced foster care. The participants entered foster care between the ages of 1 and 15. Interview questions explored themes such as moving into foster care, early interactions with foster parents, and contact with birth parents and CWS in the initial phase of the care placement. Participants were recruited from CWS agencies in five different municipalities in Norway. We apply thematic analysis to explore their experiences from the time they entered care, identifying key turning points in their adjustment and examining their experiences with follow-up from the CWS.

Findings:
Preliminary findings reveal that entering foster care is an emotionally charged experience. The participants describe specific moments that served as turning points in their adjustment to their new environment. These moments highlight both relational and practical aspects that are significant to their experience of moving into care. Furthermore, participants expressed mixed feelings about follow-up from the CWS, noting that the nature of the relationship between their social worker and caregiver could sometimes act as a barrier to open communication about challenges and concerns.

Implications:
In our presentation, we will expand on these findings and discuss their practical implications. The findings are particularly relevant for professionals involved in planning transitions and providing follow-up support for children in foster care. The study highlights the emotional strain children experience during these transitions and underscores the importance of relational support in helping them navigate this peiod. While the study is based on experiences from a Norwegian context, we believe the emotional challenges and relational dynamics described by participants have international relevance. These insights may inform efforts to strengthen emotional support and relational continuity during placement transitions across international contexts.

Transitions in and out of Crisis: Young People's and Caregivers' Perspectives on Child Protection During and After COVID-19

Friday, 12th September - 12:00: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Ms. Kaj Flurina Affolter [1], ***Dr. Tim Tausendfreund*** [1], ***Ms. Nicole Eicher*** [1]

1. *ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work*

Background: Societal crises and health emergencies can profoundly affect child protection (CP) systems, raising questions about preparedness and responses. The COVID-19 pandemic, as a prime example, highlighted concerns about family functioning and children's well-being as threats to health and economic challenges increased, combined with questions of ensuring adequate care and education during lockdowns. To understand the impact of COVID-19 and the adaptability of CP systems, it is essential to consider not only the resilience of established CP services but also perceptions and actions of young people and their caregivers. A German study by Witte and Kindler illustrated this by showing that existing CP services were primarily adapted to address pre-pandemic problems, without considering newly arising pandemic-related issues. Our qualitative study asked young people and caregivers using CP services how they perceived and managed problems and opportunities during COVID-19, and what it means for them in post-pandemic times.

Objective: Our study explores challenges and resources of young people and caregivers in CP during the COVID-19 pandemic, how they coped with these challenges, and the role attributed to CP services.

Methods: This qualitative study is based on semi-structured interviews with young people (aged 14–22) and caregivers involved in the Swiss CP system during the pandemic. In line with Grounded Theory Methodology, data collection and analysis are ongoing and follow an iterative, cyclical process. So far, seven interviews with young people and three with mothers have been conducted – findings presented are based on these interviews and further interviews are being conducted. Participants were recruited via child protection institutions, which facilitated contact in accordance with data protection requirements. Findings are contextualized by our meta-synthesis of qualitative studies on CP during and after COVID-19 (Affolter et al., 2025). This study is part of the 'Child Protection in times of Covid-19 and beyond' project, a segment of the 'Covid-19 in Society' National Research Programme funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

Findings: Our meta-synthesis indicates that remote schooling was predominantly perceived negatively, especially by young people. Interviews in our study highlighted specific reasons why this posed significant challenges for CP services. Remote schooling amplified pre-existing inequalities among other things due to limited space and technical equipment, caregivers' capacity to support learning, and the unique circumstances in residential care. Additional challenges linked to CP services include managing proximity and distance in residential care under 'social distancing' rules and the impact of mask-wearing in residential care settings. Furthermore, Caregivers expressed the need for additional support and emphasized the importance of informal networks during the pandemic.

Conclusions/implications: While not all emerging topics are directly linked to CP, there are many overlaps and consequences for CP services. These include schooling, care arrangements, household economics, influencing the living conditions and well-being of children and their families[KA1] . This study aims to amplify the voices of CP service users to strengthen CP services. Furthermore, our findings highlight the need for CP systems that are not only reactive but also proactively support families.

Affolter et al. (2025): https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2025.107558

“Foster carers can be the key to more contact with your children”: Exploring the Perspectives of Children and Mothers with Migration Backgrounds

Friday, 12th September - 12:15: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Ms. Eirinn Hesvik Ljones [1], ***Dr. Marte Knag Fylkesnes*** [2], ***Dr. Øivin Christiansen*** [1]

1. *Regional Centre for Child and Youth Mental Health and Child Welfare (RKBU West), NORCE Norwegian Research Centre AS, Bergen, Norway,* ***2.*** *University of Bergen*

Objectives

Family dynamics are complex, especially for children placed in foster care and their families of origin, who navigate family belonging at a physical distance. For children with migrant backgrounds, contact arrangements regulated by Child Welfare Services (CWS) may be crucial not only for maintaining family relationships but also for preserving religious, linguistic, and cultural ties. In our study on how CWS contact arrangements meet the needs of children with migrant backgrounds, we found that both children and parents emphasised the role of foster carers. In this article, we therefore explore how children and mothers talk about the role of foster carers in the context of “doing” family at a distance.

Methods

This study employs interviews and photo-elicitation with two samples: 1) seven children and young people with migration backgrounds, interviewed twice, resulting in 12 interviews; 2) eight birth mothers (unrelated to the children interviewed) with migration backgrounds sharing their experiences of contact with their children in foster care. A narrative-inspired thematic analysis was conducted. Our theoretical point of departure is an interest in how families are defined, practised, and displayed in contemporary Western societies.

Preliminary findings

From the mothers’ perspectives, foster carers were essential for enabling parenting from a distance. Foster carers, along with CWS, acted as gatekeepers to parent-child contact, influencing how and when contact between mothers and their children occurred. Building a collaborative relationship with foster carers was therefore an important task. The mothers highlighted foster carers’ supportive actions, such as recognising them as resources, speaking positively about them to their children, sharing information, and supporting linguistic, religious, and cultural practices. Conversely, feeling sidelined could strain relationships and raise concerns about their children. Some mothers found it difficult to voice their opinions due to the need to maintain good relations with foster carers to secure access to their children, revealing underlying power dynamics.

From children’s perspectives, foster carers played a vital role in organising contact between the children and their birth family as well as supporting their relationships. This involved spending time together across families, facilitating contact with siblings, and maintaining contact with extended family. Such interactions could foster positive contact experiences for the child, help develop and strengthen bonds, and provide valuable insights into cultural practices and the children’s backgrounds. However, some children also expressed discomfort with joint meetings involving parents and carers, indicating a need to establish boundaries around parental contact.

Conclusions

Preliminary findings demonstrate how foster carers contribute to the wider family project of children in care and their parents, maintaining connections and fostering a sense of family despite the challenges of alternative care arrangements. From these perspectives, foster carers are vital in bridging the child’s past and present while focusing on the future. This requires foster carers to be sensitive, adaptable, and culturally aware, ensuring that the child’s identity and heritage are recognised and preserved while fostering a sense of security and belonging within the foster home.

Motivations and Barriers to Becoming a Foster Family: Exploring Gender Differences

Friday, 12th September - 12:30: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Dr. Lorena Maneiro [1], ***Prof. Joana Baptista*** [2], ***Dr. Eunice Magalhães*** [3], ***Dr. Olalla Cutrín*** [1], ***Mrs. Carmen Dourado*** [4]

1. *Universidade de Santiago de Compostela,* ***2.*** *Iscte,* ***3.*** *iscte,* ***4.*** *Asociación galega de familias de acollida (Acougo)*

Child protection systems worldwide face challenges in engaging families to provide foster care for children and adolescents in out-of-home placements. Understanding the motivations and barriers perceived by society in fostering is crucial to increasing participation. The aim of this study was to identify the motivations and barriers associated with the interest in fostering from a gender perspective. An online survey was distributed among the adult population in Galicia (Spain). A total of 765 respondents (14.6% men, 84.1% women, 0.4% non-binary, 0.8% preferred not to respond), aged 18 or older, participated in the study. Gender differences were analyzed across motivations (child- and family-centered), barriers (temporary nature of foster care, financial and institutional support, child's needs and birth family relations), and parenting capacity (child- and family-centered capacities). Two structural equation models (SEM) were conducted: (1) examining motivations and barriers as predictors of interest in fostering and (2) adding perceived parenting capacity as an additional predictor. Gender differences in SEM were examined using multiple-group models. The results showed significant gender differences in all variables except for family-centered motivations, with women scoring higher than men. The SEM results indicated that only child-centered motivations were associated with interest in fostering, and only among women. When parenting capacity was added to the model, only the perception of child-centered capacities was related to interest in fostering, again only in women. Among men, none of these variables were associated with interest in fostering. These findings highlight the importance of considering gender differences in recruitment strategies, emphasizing child-centered motivations and perceived parenting capacities to enhance engagement in potential foster families.

Child-related knowledge production as part of social worker's professional expertise in assessment and decision-making in Finnish child welfare

Friday, 12th September - 12:45: (SEECEL Main venue) - Oral

Dr. Tuuli Lamponen [1], ***Dr. Anne-Mari Jaakola*** [2], ***Ms. Noora Aarnio*** [3], ***Dr. Eveliina Heino*** [3]

1. *Tampere University,* ***2.*** *University of Turku,* ***3.*** *University of Helsinki*

This study focuses on child welfare social workers' perceptions of knowledge production – when assessing the child's situation and making sound decisions – as part of their professional expertise in child welfare. Knowledge production has several functions regarding the expertise of child welfare, such as responding to various information interests, strengthening participation of the client and balancing power, ensuring ethical competence, enhancing the effectiveness of child welfare processes and services, and reducing errors in decision-making. The starting point for knowledge production is the legislative foundation of child welfare, particularly the understanding of children's rights, the principle of serving the best interests of the child, and adherence to ethical and moral professional codes. Previous research has identified gaps in knowledge production,
such as recognizing risk factors related to the child's situation, identifying abuse or violence, and possessing expertise in developmental psychology, trauma-informed practice, and crisis social work.

The research question was examined from the perspective of social workers, and the data consists of qualitative survey responses collected in 2023 and 2024 from 29 social workers working in child welfare services. The research questions were: How is knowledge production connected to child welfare expertise, and how does expertise develop during the specialization program? The social workers were contacted through the child welfare specialization program. The data wascollected at the beginning and again at the end of the program to capture the social workers' perceptions of how their expertise had
developed.
The results of the study were summarized using the respondents' perceptions of the integration of child welfare expertise and knowledge production, which appeared undeniably important. The social workers' skills and expertise affect how accurately they could identify risk factors or positive influences affecting the child's situation and how the knowledge production process in the situation was formed. The respondents emphasized that their expertise in the use of theoretical and research-based knowledge in the context of child protection had developed.
The analysis reinforces the previous understanding of identified competency gaps and the importance of training in providing a sufficient knowledge base for demanding expert work in child welfare. The study highlights various tasks of knowledge production concerning children, ranging from client relationships to structural work in child welfare and societal advocacy.

Ensuring competence in knowledge production as part of child welfare expertise should be emphasized both in degree programs leading to a social work qualification and in child welfare specialization programs. It is crucial to strengthen the foundation of theoretical and research-based knowledge production to enhance developmental knowledge expertise from the perspective of social work.

Looking backwards to find ways forwards: A study of serious case reports.

Friday, 12th September - 11:45: (SEECEL A1) - Accepted with changes

Mrs. Evelina Fridell Lif [1]

1. *Stockholm University*

Serious cases and serious case reviews has motivated changes in legislation and practice. For instance, the Munro reports inspired more structured child welfare investigations in several countries. More recently, Brandon and colleagues continuously reviewed British serious case reviews. In Sweden, revision of laws regarding child safety and foster care have been initiated after two tragic cases reported of in Sweden's media as Lilla Hjärtat and Tintin.

The need to address safe and high-quality services is relevant in child welfare in general. This pertains to children in foster care in particular, considering the gravity of separating a child from its family of origin and the need for social service to guarantee both safety and support for development and nurturing relationships. Historical and recent research by Sköld and others show that this is something that social services may struggle to provide.

In Sweden, social workers are mandated to reports serious incidents or risk of such incidents to the Social Care Inspectorate under the Lex Sarah Act. Part of the expressed intention with this law was to enable social services sharing of experiences and learning to prevent future incidents. Because of this law, reports have been collected for the last couple of decades. This mean that there are numerous Lex Sarah reports yearly, presenting a potential wealth of information about identified incidents, how they were identified and what is being done to prevent future incidents. Despite this possibility for addressing, understanding and learning from the past incidents, this has not been addressed in research. This indicates a need for continued learning from past mistakes in foster care.

To address the issue of recognising potential and actual incidents in foster care, this study proposes to request and analyse the lex Sarah-reports regarding foster care in 2020-2024. The study will primarily address the questions:

- What types of incidents are reported?
- How has the incidents come to the attention of the social services?
- In what ways have children been heard before or during the investigation?
- What solutions are proposed and reported in response to the identified incidents?

These questions will be addressed in two main steps. Firstly, to gain an overview of the material, the case reviews will be sorted by year and type of incident (i.e., violence towards child), where the issue was identified (i.e., social services, foster carers, family of origin) and how the incident came to the attention of the social services (i.e., child, foster carers, own observations, teachers etc.). This will enable a quantitative overview of the foster care related case reviews, addressing mainly the first two questions. Secondly, case reviews will be further analysed using a more thorough thematic approach addressing the subsequent questions, enabling a more in-depth understanding of the identification processes, children's voices in serious case reviews and what solutions are proposed in response to the incidents. Relevant theoretical frameworks concern risk management, self-monitoring, auditing, risk-management and sociology of childhood.

The presentation will focus on current research, research gap and lastly, a preliminary research strategy will be outlined.

“Secrecy not privacy is what the in camera actually achieves” A Study on the Operation of the In Camera Rule in Family Law Courts in Ireland

Friday, 12th September - 12:00: (SEECEL A1) - Oral

Dr. simone mccaughren [1]***, Dr. Aisling Parkes*** [2]***, Dr. Kenneth Burns*** [2]

1. *Trinity College Dublin,* ***2.*** *University College Cork*

The ‘in camera’ rule in the Irish family law context operates to protect the identity and privacy of the parties and any child(/ren) to whom the proceedings relate. It is in the context of private and public family law proceedings that significant decisions affecting the lives of children and families are made. The Irish family justice system is in the process of undergoing a period of reform. Thus, it is imperative that there is a robust evidence base to support this reform process. To this end, the Irish Department of Justice commissioned the researchers to examine the operation of the rule in practice. However, the actual nature and scope of the rule’s application is unclear. This study, the first of its kind to be conducted in the Republic of Ireland, sought to learn more about how the rule is understood by those impacted by it, as well as how it operates in practice. Two key research questions will be addressed: 1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the in camera (privacy) rule in the operation of the Irish family law proceedings (public and private)? 2. What are the recommendations for reform from those with experience of the operation of the in-camera rule in family law proceedings in Ireland (public and private)?

This was a mixed method study which involved comprehensive data collection including an anonymised online survey that was conducted with parents and guardians (age 18+, n=300), 18 focus groups with professionals and civil society actors (n=64), and interviews with 13 Judges (various court jurisdictions). Thematic analysis was undertaken on the qualitative data, and statistical analysis on the survey data.

Findings

Parents survey:

-The in camera rule was not explained in 55% of cases.

- Just over one third (37.3%) of participants strongly agreed /agreed that they had a clear understanding of what the in camera rule allowed.

- Rule was breached in close to half of all cases.

- Nearly two thirds of participants (65%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that ‘the in camera rule is fine, no need to change it’.

Qualitative focus groups: findings indicate that there is an argument to be made for clearer guidance around the parameters of the rule.

Judicial interviews: While many Judges were of the view that the in camera rule is itself clear, there was inconsistency between judges about its application in practice.

Courts are a central facet of effective democracies promoting social stability, protecting rights, and access to justice. Family law courts hear cases that are sensitive, for example, divorce, guardianship, and children at the edge of care. It is clear from this groundbreaking and original study that what is permitted by this constitutionally established rule is unclear. The operation of the rule in practice suggests that significant reform is required. This interdisciplinary study provides a comprehensive evidence base on how the in camera can be reformed leading to legislative, policy and practice changes to promote transparency and to protect the privacy and rights of individuals.

Brothers and sisters together: unrealised aspirations for children in Scotland

Friday, 12th September - 12:15: (SEECEL A1) - Accepted with changes

Dr. Paula Jacobs [1], ***Dr. Helen Whincup*** [1], ***Dr. Maggie Grant*** [1], ***Dr. Ariane Critchley*** [1], ***Dr. Jade Hooper*** [1], ***Dr. Linda Cusworth*** [2]

1. *University of Stirling,* ***2.*** *Lancaster University*

Background

In Scotland the report from the Independent Care Review 'The Promise' (2020), re-affirmed that, unless it is not in their interest, brothers and sisters should live together, and where they live separately the connections and contact between them should be nurtured. Subsequently, Section 13 of the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 placed a duty on Local Authorities to maintain connections between brothers and sisters who live apart. However, there is a lack of understanding how to best support care experienced children and their families to maintain or establish connections (AFKA, 2023).

Methods

Since 2014, the longitudinal mixed methods research study Permanently Progressing? has been gathering and analysing data on the 1,836 children and young people who became looked after in Scotland in 2012-13, when aged five or under. This paper focuses on specific findings about sibling connections and contact. Frequency and type of contact were analysed from caregiver and social worker surveys. The main part of the paper is a qualitative exploration based on our interview data, utilising network and thematic analysis to explore how sibling connections are experienced by children, adoptive parents, foster carers, kinship carers and birth parents.

Findings

Approximately half of the children where caregivers and social workers completed a questionnaire have no contact with any brothers or sisters they live apart from. Variation was associated with legal status, rather than children's needs, with adopted children having less contact.

Where there was contact with siblings our findings highlight the layers that make this challenging. These include differences in parenting and family cultures of two, and at times, three families, children's different levels of interest in each other, and adults balancing worries about sibling contact with an awareness of the importance of this connection to children's lives.

Caregivers and birth parents identified that additional sensitivity was needed when siblings had different early experiences or ways of relating to their birth families.

Birth parents expressed concerns about their children not having the contact with their siblings that had been agreed upon. This was particularly difficult when there was at least one child living at home with them.

The network maps clearly identified that sibling relationships cannot be considered in isolation and are intertwined with conceptualisations of who family is, and what happens when this differs across those involved.

Conclusion

Balancing the needs of each child and dynamics in different families is challenging, but that so many children currently have no connection with their brothers and sisters is stark.

Connections between brothers and sisters living apart and the way these are developed or maintained depend on views and decisions made by each of the caregivers involved, but young people can also shape these relationships with increasing agency.

Kinship carers, adoptive and birth parents did not feel sufficiently supported in developing or maintaining relationships between siblings.

While in current policy and practice in Scotland we can see a focus and concern about sibling contact, our study asks: What about those who have been separated for a long time?

Educational outcomes of care leavers and their matched peers: A gender perspective

Friday, 12th September - 12:30: (SEECEL A1) - Oral

Dr. Netta Achdut [1], ***Prof. Rami Benbenishty*** [2], ***Prof. Anat Zeira*** [2]

1. *Ben Gurion University of the Negev,* ***2.*** *the Hebrew University*

Background:
Numerous studies across Western countries have documented poorer educational attainments (EA) upon leaving care and much lower participation rates of care leavers in post-secondary education (PSE) compared to their same-age peers in the general population. Most studies on care leavers that analyze educational attainments by gender show that while in care and afterward, men are at particular risk of poorer outcomes. Enhancing educational outcomes of youth in care is a central task for out of home care agencies. Here, we focus on secondary-school EA and enrollment to PSE.
Objectives:
The study has two main objectives. The first objective is to compare secondary school educational attainment (EA at age 18) and enrollment in postsecondary education (PSE) between: (1) study groups (care leavers versus their same-age matched peers); (2) gender (men versus women); and (3) study groups by gender (to determine whether study group effects differ between the two genders). The second objective is to predict secondary school EA (at age 18) and PSE enrollment by study group, gender, and study group by gender interaction, controlling for a set of potential confounders.
Methods:
This quasi-experimental study is based on an integrated longitudinal administrative data file created by the researchers in collaboration with the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (ICBS). Drawing on this administrative longitudinal data we examined 16 consecutive birth cohorts (1982-1997) of alumni of therapeutic residential care facilities in Israel (n=3,765)
and same-age doubled-sized matched comparison group from the general population (n=7,530). Bivariate analyses were conducted to compare EA and PSE enrollment by study group and gender. Multi-variate analyses were performed to predict EA and PSE.
Results and Conclusions:
Large disparities between care leavers and their matched peers were evident. A gender gap in educational outcomes was found among care leavers and their matched peers, with females outperforming males. Yet, multi-variate analyses reveal a complex picture. While female care leavers are more successful than males, they show larger disparities from females not in care than those observed among males. That is, the contribution of residential care to care leavers' educational outcomes varies by gender.
Education is a basic and central component in the mission of the youth villages, and despite the academic deficits of young people arriving at these facilities, they should be guided toward attaining a quality matriculation certificate. This goal can be achieved by implementing targeted educational support programs that encourage care leavers to enhance their academic achievements. Ideally, these programs should begin as early as possible to facilitate the gradual development of both cognitive and noncognitive skills. By systematically addressing these areas over time, such programs can significantly improve care leavers' academic performance and long-term educational prospects. More guidance in accessing PSE and substantial financial aid is needed to help care leavers move forward in the educational system

Transitional Safeguarding in youth justice and probation services: supporting young people into adulthood

Friday, 12th September - 12:45: (SEECEL A1) - Accepted with changes

Prof. Christine Cocker [1], ***Dr. Birgit Larsson*** [1], ***Ms. Dez Holmes*** [2], ***Dr. Nathalie Huegler*** [2]

1. *University of East Anglia,* ***2.*** *Research in Practice/National Children's Bureau*

Introduction

The transition from youth justice to probation is a process of transferring between two systems at the age of 18. To date, there has been no research explicitly exploring how the concept of Transitional Safeguarding is applied to the youth justice and probation service context to support young people aged between mid-teens to mid-twenties through this transition.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- understand how safeguarding and transition work within the youth justice and probation services for young people
- capture developing Transitional Safeguarding practices in youth justice and probation
- provide an understanding of how service provider members work in supporting the six principles of Transitional Safeguarding
- document the experience of young people who move from youth justice to probation services
- produce recommendations to address how local youth justice and probation services identify and address safeguarding issues for young people within transitions planning

Methods

This research sought the views and experiences of professionals using a mixed methods approach to investigate how youth justice services and probation services work together (and separately) to provide services to young people including care-experienced young people. We used a literature review, survey (n=144 respondents), secondary analysis of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation data (n=908 'cases'), interviews (n=8) with managers, interviews (n=5) with practitioners about a particular young person they had supported, and focus groups with practitioners (n=8, involving 21 practitioners), plus one focus group with young people (n=4 young people) as methods in the research. The survey and secondary data analysis encompassed all of England, whilst the interviews and focus groups focused on five study sites.

Findings

There is impetus for a Transitional Safeguarding approach at practice and strategic levels. However, translation of this into direct practice has either not been evidenced currently or is not happening. Leaders and practitioners recognise the need for transitional arrangements to be different than they are now and for safeguarding practices to be considered within this. The social policy framework exists, but the practice and system realities impact on how transitional and safeguarding support is offered to young people. There are issues for practitioners in both services in being able to work in a personalised way with young people, their views of each other's work with young people, including the use of binarized language, an emphasis in probation on community protection and risk to others. There are a number of equality and diversity issues around understanding: with a system designed to predominantly work with men, how young women's needs are met and how ethnicity is considered in how services are developed for Black and global majority individuals, in particular how systemic adultification affects young people in the youth and criminal justice systems. Other diversity issues include how services meet the needs of young people with neurodiversity and speech and language difficulties, as well as

those with mental health difficulties, care experience, and who are LGBTQ+. Recommendations arising from the study are presented.

Longitudinal studies demonstrating extreme poor mental health in residential out of home care in Australia

Friday, 12th September - 11:45: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Mr. Douglas Faircloth [1]

1. *None*

The author has led 6 outcome and 1 place-based evaluations of therapeutic residential out of home care (TRC) services in Australia over 4 state jurisdictions from 2011 to 2022 using comparable methods and tools supporting longitudinal insight into poor and unmanaged mental health of young people in Australia's Out of Home Care system.

The evaluations have utilised the HoNOSCA and also used other complimentary psychometric or other data gathering tools to measure the outcomes at entry into the service and overtime. The evaluations have measured the outcomes as essential and consistent therapeutic practices have been applied. The quantitative measures have also been augmented by qualitative evidence. In addition, the evaluations have gathered demographic data relating to elements such as time spent in out of home care prior to entering the TRC, age at entry, gender identification, Indigenous status, and placement changes.

The use of the HoNOSCA, and in 4 of the evaluations, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) has enabled a comparison to be made between the severity of the mental health indicators of the children and young people (CYP) entering the TRCs and the populations of CYP entering specialist inpatient mental health services. The mental health services also use these tools.

Key findings are that:

- CYP entering TRCs consistently have significantly higher poor mental health indicators than the CYP entering specialist children and youth inpatient services (CYMHS)
- The most consistent differentiation in the HoNOSCA ratings between TRCs and CYMHS is that the TRC populations have higher aggression scores
- The severity of poor mental indicators has increased over the last 11 years in the TRCs
- The majority of CYP have been in Out of Home Care prior to entering the TRC and have not had the extreme poor outcomes addressed in prior care
- Unstable placements is a key factor in these young people's lives and experience
- The consistent application of therapeutic essential elements leads to a significant reduction in the indicators of poor mental health over time
- The reduction of poor mental indicators is consistently accompanied by improvements in relationships with others (healthy attachments)
- The essential elements of therapeutic care in place to achieve positive outcomes are: (1) The support of a therapeutic specialist (2) Organisational congruence (3) Trained, and consistent staff (4) The use of reflective practice including reflective practice meetings (5) Properly matched CYP in the TRC - no emergency or forced placements (6) Engagement and participation of the CYP – Participation is a process where someone influences decisions about their lives and this leads to change (prior to entry, who lives in your home etc) (7) The TRC is home like (8) Regular Care Team meetings (9) Planned and supported exit process (10) Governance and quality therapeutic practice
- Government practices are a major factor undermining positive outcomes in TRCs including mismatched CYP, lack of consultation with the CYP, incongruent practices in relation to therapeutic care and understanding of trauma, unplanned and forced placement changes, absence from care team meetings.

Evidence demonstrates that TRCs offer healing and hope

Promoting Children's and Parents' Mental Health and Quality of Relationship through Dance and Attachment with Dropi (DAD)

Friday, 12th September - 12:00: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Prof. Alexandra Carneiro [1], ***Prof. Mariana Negrão*** [1], ***Dr. Luisa Sousa*** [1], ***Dr. Sofia Mexia Alves*** [2], ***Dr. Filipa Pires*** [2], ***Dr. Mariana Cardoso*** [2], ***Dr. Mariana Craveiro*** [2], ***Prof. Filipa Sampaio*** [3]

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Introduction

The parent-child relationship is crucial for early development, as attachment theory emphasizes the caregiver's role as a secure base for exploration. However, high-risk environments, marked by economic hardship, social isolation, and limited access to supportive resources, face significant challenges in fostering positive parent-child interactions. These stressors can impair parenting abilities, increasing parental stress and negatively impacting child development, leading to danger situations. Evidence suggests that interventions promoting positive parenting improve relational quality, with art-based approaches fostering nonverbal communication, creativity, and emotional bonding. Evidence suggests that dance-based interventions enhance parental sensitivity and dyadic synchronization, yet further research is needed due to the scarcity and methodological limitations of existing studies.

Objectives

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the Dance and Attachment with Dropi (DAD) intervention in enhancing parent-child relationships and fostering socio-emotional development in at-risk children and their parents. By addressing relational challenges, this intervention aims to support families, mitigating factors contributing to institutionalization, and strengthening services designed for families at risk, promoting healthier developmental trajectories.

Methods

This study employed a single-group pre/post-test and follow-up design using a mixed-methods approach. Parent-child dyads, with children aged 3–10 years, were recruited from community institutions and social media to participate in the DAD intervention. The program integrates dance and positive physical interactions to strengthen parent-child relationships and promote child socio-emotional development. Data collection included standardized self- and hetero-report instruments, individual interviews, and focus groups.

Findings

Data is currently being collected hampering findings description. Now, the sample consists of 18 parent child dyads with an expectancy of achieving 20 dyads. Within this sample, this study proposes to (1) explore feasibility and acceptability of DAD considering participants' perceptions, (2) evaluate the impact of the DAD program regarding parenting variables (namely parenting competences, mental health, and stress), child functioning (namely emotional and behavioral well-being) as well as the quality of the parent-child dyadic relationship.

Conclusions/Implications

The study findings will contribute to understanding the impact of dance-based interventions on at-risk parent-child relationships. Results will inform future intervention programs and policies supporting parent-child bonding through nonverbal communication and movement-based approaches, particularly for families facing adversity. Implications will also be drawn on how to foster services for families at risk that can contribute to the well-being and resilience of families, granting every child can have and has the best possible context for development and acting against the need for placement measures.

Strengths and Limitations

This study addresses a gap in parent-child interventions by incorporating dance and affective touch to enhance

relational quality in at-risk families. It employs a robust mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data for a comprehensive evaluation. However, the small sample size limits generalizability, and the absence of observational measures restricts objective assessment of parent-child interactions.

Services for Vulnerable Families in Family and Community Settings: Insights from Four Case Studies

Friday, 12th September - 12:15: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

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1. *The Teaching and Clinical Centre of the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences,* ***2.*** *The Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences*

Families at risk of poverty and social exclusion often face complex and interrelated challenges that require comprehensive and coordinated support from various community-based and home-delivered services.
The aim of this study is to examine how such services are delivered, coordinated, and experienced in the everyday lives of vulnerable families. Specifically, the study explores the risk and protective factors, as well as availability, coordination, and continuity of services for four families living in the Peščenica-Žitnjak district of Zagreb, Croatia.
The selected families face multiple challenges, including health risks among parents and children, learning difficulties, behavioral problems, poverty, and difficulties in securing adequate housing conditions. These families have been provided with community services, and some also receive services in their homes. The services provided will be reviewed with a focus on their continuity, coordination, and impact tracking.
A qualitative case study approach is used. Study is conducted through analysis of documentation and service records of 4 families facing multiple challenges and the risk of social exclusion that are included in the services of The Teaching and Clinical Centre as a clinical unit within the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences and some other services in the community. The findings reveal differences in service accessibility, continuity, and coordination and emphasise the importance of coordinated and continuous support services for vulnerable families, underlining the need for effective service delivery to address complex social issues.
The results underline the importance of an integrated and well-coordinated approach to service provision for vulnerable families. Ensuring sustained and consistent support within the community and family environment is crucial for addressing complex social and economic challenges. The study also underscores the need for improved monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the long-term impact of these services.

Keywords: vulnerable families, service delivery, coordination, social exclusion, case study

Understanding Adolescents' Responses to Psychologically Abusive Parenting: A Mixed-Methods Study with Implications for Prevention and Practice

Friday, 12th September - 12:30: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Dr. Julia Quehenberger [1], ***Ms. Meret Sophie Wallimann*** [2], ***Ms. Kaj Flurina Affolter*** [1], ***Ms. Ida Ofelia Brink*** [1], ***Prof. Thomas Gabriel*** [1]

1. *ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work,* ***2.*** *School of Social Work, ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences*

Objectives:
The harmful effects of psychological abuse (PA) are well recognized. However, the disclosure of such experiences remains relatively under-researched. Previous studies have primarily focused on the disclosure of child sexual abuse. International research shows considerable variation in adolescents' disclosure rates of psychologically abusive parental behavior. Notably, existing studies suggest that peers are the most common recipients of such disclosures, whereas formal recipients such as social workers or police are less frequently addressed.
Despite international evidence, understanding of how adolescents assess disclosure strategies in response to PA and how quantitative findings relate to their subjective perspectives remains limited. As adolescents' expectations can shape disclosure decisions, insights into these processes are crucial for developing trustworthy support services and encouraging help-seeking.
Methods:
As part of a sequential mixed-methods design, data from *N*=1.402 adolescents aged 12–16 living in the canton of Zurich who completed an online questionnaire were analyzed. The survey measured participants' experiences of psychologically abusive parenting (CAMI; DiLillo et al., 2010; Nash et al., 2012) and the frequency with which they disclosed these experiences. Subsequently, a subsample of *n*=28 students participated in seven group discussions based on a vignette depicting psychological abuse through 'terrorizing' and 'threatening' behaviors. The discussions served to validate and deepen the quantitative findings. Transcripts of the group discussions were analyzed using qualitative content analysis.
Findings:
Descriptive analyses showed that 584 students (41.7%) reported having experienced psychologically abusive parental behavior. Among 424 (72.6%) students who indicated being affected by these experiences, 187 students (44.1%) disclosed them. Most disclosures were made to peers, and only 26 students (13.9%) disclosed to professionals outside school and 18 students (9.6%) to professionals in school.
The qualitative data revealed a more in-depth understanding of strategies for dealing with such experiences, including both disclosure and non-disclosure. Self-blame/apologizing, avoidance or denial, deliberate confrontation, and emotional withdrawal were identified as reasons for non-disclosure.
Students associated disclosure with various intentions (e.g., confiding, seeking solutions) and brought up potential benefits (e.g., understanding parental behavior, relief, support) and risks (e.g., not being taken seriously, escalation, negative consequences).
Implications:
The low disclosure rates for PA, particularly toward formal recipients, highlight the need for further prevention efforts and improvement of existing support services. The group discussions offer valuable insights in this regard.
Children and adolescents could benefit from awareness campaigns that counteract normalization or internalization of such experiences and strengthen their capacity to recognize these situations as potentially harmful. At the same time, a tension becomes visible between the needs of children and adolescents and the professional

responsibilities of child protection workers. From a professional perspective, any formal disclosure, even with the intention of simply confiding, may trigger mandatory interventions. However, this very fact can deter young people from opening up.

Child protection services should critically reflect on their perception among young people to better understand (non-)use, especially in cases of PA.

Findings suggest that aligning procedures with youths' expectations and increasing transparency by informing them about these procedures could help build early trust and prevent escalation into out-of-home placements.

What are common principles to enable children and youth in the Netherlands to grow up as at home as possible?

Friday, 12th September - 12:45: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Ms. Harmke Bergenhenegouwen [1]

1. *Netherlands Youth Institute*

Objectives:
Every child has the right to a safe place to grow up. Preferably that is at home, with parents or family. If that is not possible, the care children receive should fit in with the family and resemble a home situation as much as possible. In the Netherlands, such care is not yet sufficiently developed and offered in a joint and coordinated way. As a result, there are differences in quality of care and professionals need a shared framework. This research aims to formulate key principles based on scientific, practical and experiential knowledge and to provide practical tools for professionals across different phases of care to support children in growing up 'as at home as possible'.
Methods:
This study combines a literature review with practical research. The literature review covers topics such as attentive and contextual care, integrated care, and small-scale housing for children and young people from families with multiple, serious, and long-term problems. The empirical research consists of 10 focus groups of 12 professionals and researchers. In addition, we conducted 15 interviews with key stakeholders, including young people, their parents, professionals working in both outpatient care and foster care and residential settings, and experts in this field. These interviews discuss the challenges and obstacles faced by professionals, as well as effective practices that help children and young people grow up as close to home as possible. A total of 135 people are involved in this research.

Findings:
The study identifies three fundamental principles and three themes that provide a shared framework for enabling children and youth to grow up as at home as possible.
The fundamental principles for professionals:
1. Work contextually and systemically.
2. Collaborate with the family and treat everyone as equals.
3. Provide attentive care to the family.
The three themes, each with five practical recommendations:
1. Preferably at home
a. Gain a comprehensive understanding of the situation.
b. Engage with the family's network
c. Collaborate with the school
d. Develop a shared explanatory analysis
e. Provide integrated family support
2. Close to home
a. Organize care close to home.
b. Seek family-oriented living arrangements or a small-scale facility.
c. Keep siblings together.
d. Support shared parenting.
e. Ensure unconditional living and work toward a sustainable future.

3. Returning home
a. Maintain contact with home
b. Provide support for parents
c. Make timely and well-considered decisions regarding future perspectives.
d. Offer assistence before, during and after returning home
e. Sustain connections with previous place of residence after returning home

Conclusions/implications:

The Netherlands Youth Institute has developed a guide to support professionals in their daily work. Professionals from different organizations can use this guide as a shared framework to facilitate discussions and align their approaches. This guide also provides direction for policy makers and administrators, fostering integrated collaboration among all stakeholders to help children and youth grow up at home or as much at home as possible.

Shifting power: how children's voices are driving accountability and evidence-informed care reform policy and practice

Friday, 12th September - 13:00: (ZICER AKCELERATOR) - Oral

Mrs. Victoria Olarte [1], ***Ms. Lourenza Steytler Foghill*** [1], ***Prof. Paul Cooke*** [2], ***Ms. Kirsty Bastable*** [3]

1. *Hope and Homes for Children,* ***2.*** *University of Leeds,* ***3.*** *University of Pretoria*

What happens when children and young people - particularly those with lived experience of care and exclusion - are not merely consulted about their care but recognised as generators of evidence, architects of solutions, and actors in accountability? This question drives the Youth Accountability and Deaf Inclusion in South Africa (YADIS) project and new research on radical accountability to children. This work explores how lived experience can drive systemic reform when treated as a legitimate epistemological resource and embedded, through participatory praxis, into policy and programme design - transforming both care systems and the young people within them.

YADIS was implemented in four South African communities across Gauteng and the Western Cape between 2022–2023, engaging young people with lived experience of care or risk of separation, including deaf children and youth. It supported them to investigate, articulate, and act on their experiences of care and exclusion.

The methodology was grounded in arts-based and child-led epistemologies, structured around deliberate research-to-impact pathways. A scoping review of youth leadership, accountability and inclusion in child protection informed a participatory action research cycle that equipped 48 children with tools for self-advocacy. Participants identified barriers, proposed solutions, and documented them through participatory filmmaking, reflective journaling and other methods. Inclusive and accessible approaches such as sign language facilitation and visual tools enabled meaningful participation. An embedded evaluation framework using longitudinal Q methodology systematically tracked changes in young people's self-perceptions - particularly their sense of agency, leadership and influence.

Key impact pathways demonstrate how evidence generated through lived experience was transferred across multiple spheres of influence:

- **Family-level change:** Reflective child-caregiver dialogues translated children's experiential knowledge into improved trust, communication, and redistributed agency - enabling children to participate more meaningfully in everyday decision-making at home.
- **Community advocacy:** Youth-led public engagement disrupted dominant narratives of vulnerability - positioning young people, including those with disabilities, as sources of knowledge, inclusion and transformation.
- **Policy influence:** Direct engagement between YADIS participants and the Gauteng Department of Social Development allowed young people to present evidence-based proposals to provincial authorities. One participant was subsequently appointed as a Youth Commissioner in the Western Cape, embedding formal youth representation and lived experience in child protection structures. Lessons from YADIS informed the development of South Africa's emerging national care reform strategy, including approaches to disability inclusion and youth engagement.
- **Global impact and knowledge transfer:** Findings helped shape international discourse, including contributions to the UN Day of General Discussion on Alternative Care and informed practical tools for embedding youth accountability within care reform efforts globally and at organisational level, with a new phase of research on radical accountability now underway.

This research challenges tokenistic participation and affirms that when children's voices are positioned as evidence, not anecdote, they shift not only discourse but power and decision-making itself. Young people can create a world where their demands for inclusive, community-based care are acted upon. Child-led knowledge, when treated with rigour and ethical intentionality, can shape policy, shift practice, redistribute power – and begin holding care systems to account.

Professional Perspectives on Children's Participation in the Chilean Child Protection System

Friday, 12th September - 11:45: (ZICER Room 2) - Accepted with changes

Dr. Manuela Eleonora Garcia Quiroga [1], ***Mx. Alejandra Yanez-Cancino*** [2]

1. *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso,* ***2.*** *University of Groningen*

Objectives

Meaningful participation in child protection systems is a highly relevant issue, as it can enhance both the processes and experiences of children and adolescents, ultimately leading to positive impacts in their lives. Meaningful child participation is understood as a process built on three key pillars: (1) providing children with accessible and appropriate information; (2) actively listening to their perspectives; and (3) incorporating their views into decision-making processes on matters that directly affect them (Bouma et al., 2018). This study examines how professionals within the Chilean Child Protection System (CPS) perceive children's participation in decision-making concerning care arrangements, aiming to identify attitudinal and structural factors shaping participatory practices and contribute to debates on the realisation of children's rights in protective interventions.

Methods

The analysis was conducted in two stages. Data derived from the *1st Study on Participation and Decision-Making in Child Protection.* In Stage 1 (n=112), a total of 112 professionals (psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, curadores ad litem, and Family Court judges) completed questionnaires. The analysis drew on the scale *Attitudes towards Intervention with Children and Adolescents*, focusing on the subscales *Attitudes supportive of children's participation in decision-making* and *Attitudes supportive of parents' participation in decision-making*. In Stage 2 the analysis was conducted with a subsample of professional with work experience in residential settings (n=66). The analytical strategy combined the same instrument with two additional measures: *Attitudes towards Participation in Residential Care* and *Implementation of Participatory Practices*, enabling a closer examination of how general attitudes translate into practices in residential settings.

Findings

Results from Stage 1 indicate that professionals strongly endorse children's participation (mean = 3.75/5; 89% favourable), yet show lower support for parental involvement (mean = 2.98/5; 45% favourable). In Stage 2, professionals in residential care reported highly positive attitudes towards children's involvement (mean scores consistently above 4.6/5). However, the implementation of participatory practices revealed a discrepancy: listening to children, providing them with information, and representing their views in hearings were frequent practices, while enabling children to actively influence treatment or intervention plans was less common. These patterns suggest that although participation is valued in principle, its operationalisation remains largely consultative rather than decision-shaping.

Conclusions/Implications

The findings reveal a persistent gap between professionals' attitudinal support for participation and its depth in everyday practice. Participation is often limited to information-sharing and representation rather than substantive influence on decisions affecting children's lives. Strengthening participatory cultures in CPS requires: (1) institutional guidelines and training to operationalise meaningful participation; (2) resources to address structural barriers in residential care; and (3) recognition of children's right to participate as a central principle of protective interventions. By explicitly examining how professional attitudes, measured through validated scales, translate into practice, this study contributes to international debates on child welfare and highlights pathways to embed children's voices more firmly within decision-making processes.

The Effects of Home-Based Multisystemic Therapy for Adolescents with Severe Behavioural Problems from Families with ID

Friday, 12th September - 12:00: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Ms. Sophie van der Horst [1], ***Dr. Annemarieke Blankestein*** [2], ***Dr. Dineke Feenstra*** [3], ***Prof. Robert Didden*** [4]

1. *de Viersprong, Netherlands Institute for Personality Disorders / Behavioural Science Institute, Radboud University, the Netherlands,* ***2.*** *de Viersprong, Netherlands Institute for Personality Disorders / Behavioural Science Institute, Radboud University,* ***3.*** *de Viersprong, Netherlands Institute for Personality Disorders / Erasmus University Rotterdam,* ***4.*** *Radboud University, Behavioural Science Institute, The Netherlands*

A pilot study from 2012 showed that Multisystemic Therapy (MST) for adolescents with an intellectual disability (ID) was less effective than for adolescents without an ID (Lange & Van der Rijken, 2012). Based on this finding, practical experiences, and knowledge about what works in treatments for adolescents with ID, a specialisation of 'standard' MST (from here on MST) was developed: MST-ID.

A pilot study from 2019 suggested that MST-ID (when compared to MST for families of adolescents with an ID) is able to attain positive treatment outcomes (Blankestein et al., 2019), some of which are maintained until 1.5 years post-treatment (i.e., reductions in rule-breaking behaviour; Blankestein et al., 2020). In this oral presentation, we will present a multi-centre study which investigates the effectiveness of MST-ID, which is adapted for adolescents (aged 10-19y) with behavioural problems from families in which either the adolescent and/ or one or both parents have ID. Prior research shows that it is important to investigate long-term effects to see whether the results are maintained (Janssen et al., 2025), which is why in this study we measure up to 1.5 years after treatment. Assessments take place at start (T0) and end (T1) of MST(-ID) treatment, with follow-up measurements at 6 (T2), 12 (T3) and 18 months (T4) after treatment.

In order to assess the effects of MST-ID, its treatment outcomes will be compared to the treatment outcomes of families with ID receiving MST treatment. Due to limited regional availability of MST-ID, treatment referrals depend on the availability in the region and families cannot be randomised to the treatment groups. Therefore, a quasi-experimental, observational study design is used with families enrolling in either MST-ID or MST. Enrolment is based on regular referral procedures. Both MST and MST-ID are intensive, home-based treatments with an average of 3 treatment sessions per week, targeting the severe behavioural problems of adolescents and problems in family functioning. MST-ID is tailored to the needs and skill deficits of families with ID. Concretely, more attention is paid to how therapists create engagement, implement interventions, and realise support from informal supports, in a tailored, more structured way, when compared to MST.

It is hypothesised that MST-ID is more effective – in terms of less behavioural problems, more adolescents living at home, being in school/work, no new police contact, less parenting stress – than MST. The Propensity Score (PS) method is used to balance treatment groups and, combined with Multilevel Modelling (MLM), to estimate treatment effect over time.

Currently, 217 families are participating in the study, data collection is still running until 2026. This study has already given us new insights on collaborating with other mental health care institutions, on creating ID awareness and on barriers effecting inclusion numbers. In this presentation we will present our lessons learned.

Socio-ecological framework: Unveiling the layers of social interactions in teenage mothers' experiences in child protection residential settings

Friday, 12th September - 12:15: (ZICER Room 2) - Accepted with changes

Mx. Alejandra Yanez-Cancino [1], ***Dr. Manuela Eleonora Garcia Quiroga*** [2], ***Mr. Jaime Muñoz-Insunza*** [3]

1. *University of Groningen; Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Valparaiso,* ***2.*** *Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso,* ***3.*** *University of Groningen*

Objectives

Grounded in a socio-ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Tebb & Brindis, 2022) and informed by research on adolescent motherhood and youth in child protection systems (Merrick, 1995; Gal, 2017; Tebb & Brindis, 2022), this study explores the social interactions of teen mothers living in residential settings within the Chilean Child Protection System. It examines how these young mothers position themselves and their social networks in relation to diverse actors, including institutions, care workers, family members, partners, and children, and captures the emotional attributions they associate with these connections. The study also considers the impact of uprooting, social support, and participatory engagement on teen mothers' experiences.

Method

To enhance teen mothers' agency and autonomy, a participatory graphic method was developed, allowing participants to visually map their social interactions within a socio-ecological framework (SEF), resembling a network of connections. Analysis proceeded in two phases. First, it examined how teen mothers positioned themselves and their social circles across the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Second, it explored the emotional attributions assigned to these relationships, categorised as positive, negative, or ambiguous through content analysis (Franzosi, 2008; Flick, 2013). Graphic materials were systematised in tables to facilitate both individual and collective reading (person-group analysis). Participant quotes enriched the SEF interpretations, illuminating nuanced perspectives of each teen mother.

Findings

The participants expressed a range of emotional attributions, including positive, negative, and nuanced feelings toward different agents. A particular characteristic of this group was placing their children and themselves in the most intimate layer of their system with positive emotions, with an absence of adult figures in this space. They also regarded their partners, the technical team, and direct care educators at the residence as positive connections. In subsequent system layers, health workers and care workers were included, while the family court was viewed as more distant and associated with negative emotions. Contradictorily, one participant, recently turned 18, expressed feeling overwhelmed by family court decisions and positioned it in her innermost system. The limited presence of the family of origin in participants' social networks suggests potential gaps in familial support.

Conclusions and Implications

The study underscores the importance of fostering agency, individuality, and emotional recognition among teen mothers within child protection systems, where autonomy is often constrained. Participants valued environments encouraging decision-making and active involvement in raising their children. The study highlights the complexity of individual experiences within a homogenising context like the CPS, where children and youth are often overlooked. For participants, motherhood represents control over their lives; in the absence of spaces of individuality, motherhood and their children occupy that space.

Participatory, creative methods reveal complex social and emotional dynamics, centring teen mothers' voices in decision-making and interventions. Findings highlight the need for socio-ecologically informed policies and programs that support relational, emotional, and structural dimensions of teen mothers' networks, strengthen

parenting capacities, and inform professional training, including strategies to mitigate uprooting and enhance supportive practices.

Mistrust and avoidant attachment: A closer look at the relational adjustment of women after exiting residential care

Friday, 12th September - 12:30: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Prof. Katherine Pascuzzo [1], ***Prof. Nadine Lanctôt*** [1], ***Ms. Marika Limoges*** [1]

1. *Université de Sherbrooke*

Background. Placement in residential care is recognized as a means of last resort to provide vulnerable youth with specialized services to support their psychological and socio-emotional development, as well as to meet their complex personal and relational needs. Given their risk of childhood experiences of maltreatment, these young people are likely to have internalized an insecure attachment characterized by negative perceptions and expectations of self and others (Costa et al., 2020; Zegers et al., 2006). When existing care, these young people may still find themselves in difficult situations (e.g., social isolation; Courtney et al., 2020), contributing to a more challenging transition into adulthood. In recent years, research has extended our understanding of the risk and protective factors involved in the relational adjustment of young women who were placed in residential care in adolescence (Lanctôt, 2020; Leiting et al., 2024; Melkman, 2017). Important insights into their relational functioning with significant others such their parents and their professional carers have been gained. But what does their relational adjustment look like over time? Longitudinal studies providing answers to this question, beyond young adulthood, are currently scarce. Moreover, our understanding of the potential underlying mechanisms involved is limited. The following study seeks to address these limitations by drawing on attachment theory and longitudinal data provided by women having experienced out-of-home care in adolescence. Specifically, this study assesses the persistence of their mistrust towards others in adulthood. The role of insecure attachment as a mediator of mistrust persistence is also examined. **Methods**. The sample consists of 61 women placed in residential care centers in adolescence (Time 1). A version of the Young Schema Questionnaire-Short 3 (Young et al., 2005; Mihaescu et al., 1997) was used to assess participants' mistrust in young adulthood (Time 2; *M* age = 19.40, *SD* = 1.48) and again 8 years later (Time 3; *M* age = 27.28, *SD* = 1.93). The Attachment Style Questionnaire (Feeney et al., 1994) was used to assess participants' attachment at Time 3. **Results**. Mediation analysis with the Process macro in SPSS revealed a significant indirect path (95% CI = 0.013; 0.334). Specifically, greater mistrust across Time 2 and Time 3 was explained by greater avoidant attachment at Time 3. This mediation model controlled for participants' relationship quality with their mother at Time 1, cumulative experiences of childhood maltreatment assessed at Time 2, and relationship status at Time 3. **Conclusion**. Results are consistent with those of a meta-analysis showing a strong link between the mistrust schema and avoidant attachment (Karantzas et al., 2023). Yet, to our knowledge, the present study is the first to corroborate this link using longitudinal data and among a sample of vulnerable women with a history of out-of-home care in adolescence. These new findings suggest that the enduring nature of the mistrust schema in adulthood may be explained, in part, by the relational pattern specific to the insecure avoidant attachment style. Implications for clinical practice during and after care are discussed.

Virtual reality enhanced CFT intervention for severe conduct problems: CFT+VR study

Friday, 12th September - 12:45: (ZICER Room 2) - Oral

Dr. Marko Manninen [1]

1. *Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare*

Objectives

Adolescents with both severe conduct problems and psychopathic personality traits have poor prognosis and low adherence to traditional interventions. Our CFT+VR intervention combines compassion-focused therapy (CFT) with virtual reality (VR) exposure. CFT sessions are based on psychopathy.comp program developed in Coimbra University. It has shown promising results, but low motivation to participate and engage to any interventions is common among antisocial adolescents. Thus, VR extension has two aims: first, to enhance adolescents' motivation to participate and second, to provide a safe yet immersive environment for training aggression management skills. We are especially interested on the possible effects of CFT+VR for psychopathic traits, which have traditionally proven hard-to-treat.

Methods

The participants are 15 to 20-year-old males with conduct disorder or antisocial personality disorder residing in state reform schools (RS) and Finnish prisons due to severe disruptive behavior. CFT+VR program consists of 25 individual sessions, 20 CFT and 5 VR. The participants are assessed in the beginning, middle and end of the program. Psychopathic traits are measured with YPI-S questionnaire. Other validated measures (e.g. TAS-20, WAI-SR) are used, and qualitative data is also gathered. The final data will include 72 probands and 72 matched controls. This presentation is based on preliminary results (N=20), as CFT+VR data acquisition will continue till the end of 2026.

Findings

After the CFT+VR intervention, YPI-S scores show statistically a significant drop (RCI>1.96) in psychopatic traits. On the YPI-S psychopathic subscales, the change was most evident on Callous-Unemotional (CU) traits subscale. Alexithymic features measutred by TAS-20 scores have decreased clinically significantly, which implies better skills in identifying and processing emotions. In addition, the participants rated the alliance with the therapist strong (WAI-SR mean 4.26, SD 0.54), which is rare among this special population.

Conclusions and implications

CFT+VR appears to be a promising and effective rehabilitation method for adolescents with severe conduct problems and psychopathic traits. Combining evidence-based CFT therapy with immersive VR technology has proven to be both applicable and effective. Delinquent adolescents are often reluctant to engage in traditional psychotherapy process for numerous reasons. At the same time, most adolescents have positive attitude towards digital technology. Utilizing VR in rehabilitation is one tool for enhancing engagement and overall motivation. VR provides physically safe, immersive and also cost-effective environment for both psychoeducation and learning important skills like impulse control for aggression. Previously, perpetrators with psychopathic/CU traits have been considered hard or even impossible to treat. Based on our results, a more optimistic viewpoint is well justified.

Processes and policies in alternative care for children in Armenia: Recent Developments

Friday, 12th September - 11:45: (ZICER Room 3) - Accepted with changes

Mr. Spartak Sargsyan [1], ***Ms. Anahit Melkumyan*** [1], ***Ms. Liana Mkrtchyan*** [1]

1. *SOS Children's Villages Armenia*

Objective

Deinstitutionalization is the process of comprehensively transforming national structures for the protection of children. It is grounded in several theoretical frameworks, including the Children's Rights Approach, Attachment Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory.

. Empirical studies on deinstitutionalization show mixed results:

- **Positive outcomes**: Family-based care improves children's well-being, academic performance, and social integration.
- **Challenges**: Foster families often lack adequate support, placements can be unstable, and community-based services may be underdeveloped.

This research explores the Armenian context of deinstitutionalization, focusing on collaborative efforts among state institutions, non-governmental organizations, international actors, and multidisciplinary teams. The study highlights the transition model used in Armenia, which emphasizes moving from institutional to family-based care. In this context, SOS Children's Villages Armenia, a key partner of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs for over 35 years, played a central role in the closure of the "Gavar" orphanage, which housed 72 children from 1936. A five-year agreement was established to ensure the smooth transition of these children to family-based care at the SOS Children's Villages "Kotayk" branch, with a strong focus on family reunification, followed by placement into foster or family-like care, in alignment with UN guidelines on alternative care and SOS CV standards.

Methodology

The research employed a mixed qualitative methodology, applying the following methods to assess each child included in the study:

- **Document review**: Analysis of institutional files, case histories, and care records
- **In-depth interviews** with multidisciplinary team members, including social workers, social pedagogues, psychologists, nurses, educators, and caregivers
- **In-depth interviews** with children, focusing on their experiences, needs, and perceptions of care

These methods provided a comprehensive understanding of each child's background, needs, and the most appropriate form of care.

Main Results and Findings

The assessment revealed that many children had experienced significant abuse—physical, psychological, and emotional—within their biological families. Prolonged or repeated stays in institutional care further impaired their development. Consequently, institutional care was deemed inappropriate, and family-based alternatives became the priority. Individualized care and development plans were created for each child. Many children were also found to require specialized services, including psychiatric care, special education, speech therapy,

and ongoing psychological support. SOS Children's Villages Armenia emphasized the importance of tailored interventions to ensure children's rights, well-being, and long-term development.

Conclusion

Based on these findings, a strategic plan was proposed, including:

- Gradual and phased placement processes
- Core assessments for each child
- Development of individualized care plans
- Continuous training for professionals
- Regular supervision and monitoring to ensure quality care

A standardized assessment tool was applied to all 72 children, guiding decisions regarding reintegration and alternative placements. As of March 1st, 21 children had been successfully placed in family-like care: 2 in foster families, 12 in homes accommodating up to six children, and 7 with integrated SOS families. The transition process is ongoing, with additional placements expected through 2025. A governmental commission has recently been formed to oversee the formal closure of the "Gavar" orphanage and the transitional phase to SOS Children's Villages "**Kotayk" branch**.

Maximum placement periods to promote stability in foster care: the perspective of social workers and lawyers working in child welfare

Friday, 12th September - 12:00: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Mrs. Doris Chateauneuf [1], ***Mrs. Carmen Lavallée*** [2], ***Dr. Sonia Hélie*** [3], ***Mrs. Alexandra Rivest-Beauregard*** [2]

1. *Centre de recherche universitaire sur les jeunes et les familles (CRUJeF),* ***2.*** *Université de Sherbrooke,* ***3.*** *Institut universitaire Jeunes en difficulté*

ABSTRACT

Achieving stability and timely permanency for children in care is a priority in many child protection systems. In some countries, including Quebec (Canada), this concern has led to the introduction of maximum placement periods. These durations refer to predetermined time periods that indicate the maximum length of time a placement can take before the court decides on a permanent plan for the child. The maximum durations depend on the age of the child at the start of the placement, and indicate the time available to the parents to resolve the issues that led to the intervention of child protection services and demonstrate their ability to regain custody of their child.

Objectives: Even though these maximum placement periods are crucial for children and families in child protection, and for the professionals responsible for applying them, they remain largely unstudied scientifically. The main aim of this study was to examine the context in which maximum placement periods are used, and to identify the psychosocial and legal issues that arise in practice. One of the aims of the study was also to understand the differences between the perspectives and practices of social workers and lawyers on the subject of maximum placement periods in child welfare context.

Methods: As part of a study looking at the legal and social dimensions of maximum placement periods, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with social workers responsible for the psychosocial follow-up of children in one child protection agency (n=15) and lawyers practicing youth law in the corresponding legal district (n=15). The questions addressed to participants during the interviews were designed to: 1) identify the different practices associated with the use of maximum placement periods; 2) explore the views of social workers and lawyers regarding the interpretation of maximum placement periods and associated concepts; 3) and examine the challenges involved in applying and respecting these periods.

Findings: The results indicate that the participants share a common definition of the maximum placement periods and their objectives. However, differences between social workers and lawyers were observed in terms of practices and interpretation of the notions of stability and permanency. In addition, the analyses of the issues raised by the participants reveal sometimes convergent, but also divergent conceptions of the challenges that accompany the use of this measure in a care context.

Conclusions and Implications: Despite a consensus on the potential benefits associated with maximum placement periods in terms of stability and permanency for children in foster care, their use in practice poses a number of challenges. Lack of human and material resources, as well as difficulties in accessing social services and the courts, threaten the foundations of maximum placement periods and call for further reflection.

Predicting Reunification Failure: The Role of Placement Characteristics and Family Challenges

Friday, 12th September - 12:15: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Dr. Sonia Hélie [1], ***Prof. Marie-Andrée Poirier*** [2], ***Dr. Tonino Esposito*** [2]

1. *Research Institute for Youth in Difficulty,* ***2.*** *University of Montreal*

CONTEXT. Reunification is often considered a successful outcome in child protection when it ensures long-term stability for the child. However, failure rates range from 12% to 33%, depending on follow-up duration. While existing studies have primarily focused on the risk of a first reunification breakdown, many children experience multiple failures. This study aims to estimate the long-term risk of reunification failure, including children who have already experienced at least one breakdown, and to identify key predictors of reunification failure based on placement characteristics and family clinical profiles. Belsky's model on the etiology of maltreatment supports the hypothesis that these factors can impact the risk of maltreatment in the home at the time of reunification and thus the risk failure.

METHOD. A 10-year survival analysis was conducted on a cohort of 3,885 children reunified in Quebec in 2008. Cox regression models examined placement characteristics associated with reunification breakdown across different age groups. Additionally, for a subset of 146 children, clinical records were analyzed to document difficulties in child and parental functioning at the time of reunification, the frequency of pre-reunification contact, and the services provided during placement. These variables were then incorporated into Cox regression models to determine their association with reunification failure.

RESULTS. Findings indicate that 61% of reunified children experience a reunification breakdown within 10 years of entering child protection services. Several factors significantly increase the risk of reunification failure, including age at reunification, shorter placement duration, the presence of neglect, abandonment, or behavioral issues as intervention grounds, a history of previous reunification failure, number of placement moves, and placement in a residential care setting. In terms of clinical factors, the progression of contact between the child, parents, and social worker prior to reunification emerged as a significant predictor of failure. However, difficulties in child and parental functioning, as well as the services provided during reunification, were not associated with breakdown risk.

DISCUSSION. These findings underscore that reunification, when not supported by long-term stability planning, can become a revolving door rather than a permanent solution. Children with a history of instability and prior failed reunifications require targeted, intensive interventions that begin before reunification and continue well beyond the return home. A shift in practice is needed—one that prioritizes early identification of high-risk cases, continuous parental engagement, and structured, long-term support for families. Without such measures, reunification risks becoming a temporary solution rather than a true pathway to permanency.

Parental follow-up: Child welfare workers experiences of changes in practice following the ECtHR judgments against Norway

Friday, 12th September - 12:30: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Dr. Siv Skotheim [1], ***Prof. Karen Havnen*** [1], ***Prof. Hanne Cecilie Braarud*** [1]

1. *Regional Centre for Child and Youth Mental Health and Child Welfare (West), NORCE Norwegian Research Centre AS, Bergen, Norway*

Background

In the past decade, the Norwegian child welfare service (CWS) has come under international scrutiny, particularly due to the European Court of Human Right's (ECtHR) rulings against Norway. The criticism mainly revolves around the visitation practice and that Norway too early have considered long term out-of-home care (OOHC). The consequences are often restricted parent-child contact which might hinder reunification, as well as insufficient support for the parents from the CWS. The Norwegian Supreme Court has therefore emphasized that OOHC is intended to be temporary, and that parental reunification is the main permanency goal for most children in OOHC. This implies a demand on the CWS to assure that the visitation practice will enable and not hinder reunification. Recent reviews of care placement decisions in Norway show an increase in contact visits compared to the time before the ECtHR judgments (Alvik, 2021; Stang et al., 2023), and a slightly increase in numbers of reunifications (NOU 2023:7). There is a need to explore the impact of the new policy on the CWS's work with the parents. The aim of the present study was to explore how child welfare workers experience and describe changes in their work with parents after the ECHtR-judgments against Norway.

Method/design

Data were obtained by conducting two focus group interviews, with thirteen child welfare workers from nine different CWS in the western part of Norway. The study is part of a larger project aiming at studying the CWS's practices following the ECtHR Judgments against Norway. Reflective thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.

Findings

The preliminary analyses revealed three main themes. **First,** the child welfare workers emphasize that the ECtHR rulings against Norway have resulted in a *strengthened focus on the parents*. As part of this, many CWS have implemented better plans and routines for parental follow-up, reorganized supervision and intensified their work in the family before a placement. **Second,** they emphasized some *challenges and dilemmas meeting the enhanced demands*, such as the CWS dual role and the parents' acknowledgement of the situation and motivation for follow-up. **Third,** they emphasized an *increased focus on contact visits.* This involved better quality of contact visits, as well as better plans and routines for evaluation.

Conclusions/implications

Both our findings and findings from other studies indicate that the CWS in Norway have changed the visitation practice and strengthened their practice towards the parents in several ways following the ECtHR judgments against Norway.

A Comparison of Direct Care Staff Training and Support in Three Countries: Transforming Views on Staff Preparedness

Friday, 12th September - 12:45: (ZICER Room 3) - Oral

Dr. Patrick Tyler [1], ***Dr. Jaime Gomez-Blaya*** [2], ***Dr. Justyna Siemionow*** [3]

1. *Boys Town,* ***2.*** *CiudadEscuela Muchachos,* ***3.*** *University of Gdansk*

Objectives: Direct care staff play a critical role in the quality of therapeutic residential care. Unfortunately, retaining staff is a universal challenge, and agreement on qualifications, training, and support for staff varies globally. International collaboration is needed to gain a collective understanding of the benefits and challenges to recruiting, training, and retaining staff. This presentation will provide insights gained from comparing the training and support that direct care staff received in therapeutic residential care in three countries. **Method**: The study explored staffing qualifications, training, supervision, and evaluation requirements in programs in Poland, Spain, and the United States. Materials collected for the study included federal/regional regulations, staff job descriptions, program training and supervision manuals, and staff evaluation forms. The researchers also had prior experience as practitioners in the residential programs, so an autoethnographic method was used to provide insider knowledge that other researchers may not be able to know. **Findings**: Similarities and differences in staff qualifications, training, supervision, and evaluation requirements were compared between the three programs. In Poland, staff had the highest level of academic preparation and staff had the most autonomy once they were in their positions. The staff were treated as specialists who developed their skills through professional practice. Regulations were generally established at the federal level for ongoing training, supervision, and evaluation of staff; and specifics were determined by the residential agency director. In Spain, direct care staff required a bachelor's degree in education, psychology, or social work. An educational certificate could also be earned during high school to be an "assistant". Regulations for staffing were determined at the regional level (i.e., Autonomous Communities); and the residential agency provided a mentorship program to train, supervise, and evaluate new staff while they were on-the-job. The United States had the lowest educational qualifications and only required a high school diploma or equivalency. The regulations were determined at the state level and according to accreditation and agency standards. After staff were hired, this residential program had the most prescriptive training, supervision, and evaluation requirements that were based on the evidence-based model standards (i.e., Teaching-Family Model). Direct care staff were required to attend a two-week preservice training workshop prior to working with children. After completing initial training, staff received bi-weekly consultation from their supervisor twice a week for the first six months, in-service training on the program model monthly, monthly observations by their supervisor, and formal evaluations to monitor implementation (i.e., initial 6-month, 1-year, then annually). Similarities showed all three programs required staff to have practice-based training prior to working with youth; ongoing training to help them meet the evolving needs of youth; supervision and meetings for effective communication and teamwork; formal staff evaluations; and data systems to monitor compliance, youth safety, wellbeing, and program outcomes. **Conclusions/Implications**: The findings will be shared to further the international conversations about staff preparedness and sustainability. The goal of the presentation is to aid in transforming the training and support that direct care staff need to provide quality residential care services to children and youth.

Poster

Developmental Trajectories of Adolescents in Residential Care: Exploring Risk, Protective Factors, and Change

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Prof. Caterina Balenzano [1]

1. *Department of Political Science, University of Bari Aldo Moro, Italy.*

Children in out-of-home care, including those in residential settings, show significantly higher rates of mental health problems than their peers without care experience. This heightened vulnerability is primarily linked to adverse childhood experiences and family trauma (Jozefiak et al., 2016; Seker et al., 2021). These minors also face increased risks of poor well-being, insecure attachment, and social or behavioral maladjustment, especially when they lived in care environments characterized by low staff-to-child ratios and high turnover, which can compromise the quality of relationships (Cassibba et al., 2023; Johnson et al., 2006).

Despite growing attention to these issues, few studies have explored the developmental trajectories of emotional and behavioral problems during residential placement (e.g. Attar-Schwartz et al., 2017). While some findings suggest stability or deterioration over time, results remain inconsistent, and there is limited research on the factors shaping diverse developmental pathways (Lee & Holmes, 2021) or on the mechanisms that foster positive change (González-García et al., 2023).

The present study, part of the broader RESILAB project (Resilience Laboratory for the Integration and Well-being of Minors), addresses two main objectives: (a) to assess the psychosocial functioning of adolescents in residential care using multiple indicators, and (b) to examine the relationship between risk factors (e.g., trauma) and protective resources (e.g., attachment security and mentoring). The study involved 44 adolescents aged 11–17 (52.3% male) living in residential communities in Southern Italy and their designated care workers, who completed a standardized assessment protocol.

Regarding psychosocial functioning, professionals reported optimal peer integration in 54.5% of cases, while school and broader social integration were rated as optimal in only 34.1% and 31.8% of cases, respectively. SDQ data from care workers revealed that 43.2% of adolescents scored below the normative range for prosocial behavior, and 78.6% showed borderline or clinical levels of total difficulties. Clinical-level scores emerge consistently across several SDQ subscales, with particularly high rates observed for peer relationship problems (43.2%) and behavioral difficulties (38.6%).

Correlational analyses showed that trauma exposure was positively associated with adolescents' self-reported SDQ difficulties ($r = .34$, $p < .05$). Among protective factors, the quality of mentoring — measured through the Mentor Behavior Scale—was inversely associated with practitioners' SDQ total difficulties ($r = –.30$, $p < .05$). Furthermore, higher attachment security — measured through Relationship Questionnaire — was strongly linked to fewer self-reported SDQ difficulties ($r = –.50$, $p < .001$).

From a research perspective, these findings underscore the enduring impact of trauma and reveal that attachment security and supportive mentorship are associated with reduced maladjustment among adolescents in residential care. Future studies should incorporate larger samples and employ rigorous longitudinal monitoring protocols (Trubey et al., 2024), utilizing path analysis to elucidate the mediating and moderating roles of intervening variables in the relationship between risk factors and developmental outcomes. From a social work standpoint, the implementation of targeted and sustained interventions aimed at enhancing relational quality and promoting resilience is essential to facilitate more favorable developmental trajectories.

Embracing Risk: Resituating Safety, Wellbeing, and Permanency in a Dignity of Risk Framework to Transform Child Welfare

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Clark Peters [1], ***Ms. Caitlin Bartley*** [1]

1. *University of Missouri*

Child welfare reforms typically offer a new balance of family integrity, child safety, and wellbeing. Historically, however, reforms tend to whipsaw between focusing on child safety (e.g., “child savers”) and preservation of the family unit (e.g., “Homebuilders”, other family preservation programs, and reunification services). A focus on wellbeing is implicit in both extremes but also invites overreach of state intervention. The high level of jurisprudential oversight in the US makes the tension among priorities particularly acute. Innovation in the field emerging from each extreme can be understood as the toleration and avoidance of certain risks, which invites a new way to policy and practice objectives.

Taking lessons from critical disability studies, child welfare can avoid continually recycling historical eras and instead reconceptualize how we understand the challenge of designing and deploying out-of-home care by recognizing that risk—to children and to the family unit—is unavoidable regardless of current policy and practice priorities. Risk itself is of course unavoidable in child welfare, but too often contemporary debates devolve into overly simplistic dichotomies between risks posed by dysfunctional families and risks and harms arising from substitute care. Some topics—short versus long term safety and wellbeing, the value of community and cultural capital, youth voice—generally get inadequate attention.

In emphasizing limiting risk, the field has neglected to understand that risk itself can be channeled to enhance safety and family integrity. Disability scholarship provides the field with the important concept of a “dignity of risk”, which recognizes that each policy and practice decision point involves trading risks for benefits. By better formulating how decisions can account for risk (e.g., severity and immediacy) against benefits (e.g., type, immediate or deferred) the child welfare field can take a broader view of serving and involving young people and families who come to the attention of the state.

This presentation applies the dignity of risk framework to three key areas of child welfare, each featuring original research conducted by the lead author: enhancing financial capability of adolescents in care, heightening involvement of young people in their own case decision-making, and maintaining family integrity when young people engage in criminal behavior. Each example demonstrates the advantages of identifying, containing, and channeling “healthy” risk to enhance child and family outcomes.

Supporting the Transition in Croatia: Professionals' Perspectives on Youth's Readiness to Leave Alternative Care

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Prof. Anja Mirosavljević [1], ***Dr. Gabrijela Ratkajec Gašević*** [1], ***Dr. Ivana Maurović*** [2]

1. *Associate Professor,* ***2.*** *The Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences*

Research shows that young people in alternative care often have complex needs due to the reasons behind their entry into care and the challenges associated with growing up in care. They face a higher risk of an unsuccessful transition to adulthood and are more likely to experience adverse developmental and life outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial to provide targeted support during the leaving care process, with particular attention to the preparation and transition phases.

This study aims to explore readiness to leave care from the perspective of professionals working with children and young people in alternative care settings, including correctional institutions, children's homes, foster care, and NGOs. Focus groups were conducted with 41 professionals across Croatia, and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings suggest that young people are generally not adequately prepared to leave care, with various individual and contextual factors influencing their readiness. The paper concludes with recommendations for the further development of support systems for care leavers.

“ ‘Only If You Study’: Experiences of Young Care Leavers in Chile Transitioning Out of Residential Care”

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mr. Felipe Paredes [1]

1. *University of Sussex*

In Chile, young people leaving residential care face a transition influenced by strict institutional expectations. State support is primarily linked to educational enrollment, leaving those who struggle with mental health issues, employment, or alternative paths without necessary assistance. This study examines the experiences of 16 young care leavers participating in a transitional living pilot program, using a biographical approach and narrative analysis to understand how they perceive their journeys beyond care.

Although all participants are pursuing education, meeting the system’s criteria for success, their transitions remain complex and uncertain. The sudden loss of residential support alters their relationships with care staff, family, and peers, prompting new reflections on identity and belonging. Some young people face significant distress due to structural barriers and everyday relational challenges, while others find ways to move forward. Their narratives reveal that the transition is a diverse and evolving process, shaped by past support experiences and ongoing interactions rather than a fixed path.

This research, centering on young people’s lived experiences, emphasizes the need for a more flexible and inclusive transition framework that recognizes the diversity of care leavers’ journeys and provides sustained support beyond academic achievement.

Children's and parents' Participation and Involvement in Kinship Care: A Comparative Study of Denmark and Greenland

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Lene Mosegaard Søbjerg [1], ***Dr. Bonnie Jensen*** [2]

1. *VIA University College,* ***2.*** *Ilisimatusarfik*

This poster presents a comparative analysis of children's participation and involvement in kinship care arrangements in Denmark and Greenland. Drawing upon qualitative research consisting of interviews with care experienced people, the study explores the diverse experiences and perspectives shaping children's roles in these contexts. Kinship care is alternative to traditional foster care, offers distinctive opportunities for children to maintain familial connections and cultural identities. However, the extent to which children and their parents are actively involved in decision-making processes and supported in expressing their views varies significantly. In both Greenland and Denmark, the emphasis on children's rights and participation, as outlined in national legislation and social work practices, provides a framework for fostering children's agency. In Greenland, the distinct cultural and social Inuit context characterized by strong kinship ties and a history of colonial influence, presents other unique considerations. This presentation provides insight into the circumstances in the two settings and investigates how the legal and cultural framework of Denmark and Greenland, and the traditional Inuit values and contemporary social work practices in Greenland intersect to shape children's involvement in kinship care. It specifically addresses how cultural understandings of childhood, family, and decision-making in both country's influence children's experiences. By comparing these two contexts, this study aims to:

* Identify the key factors that facilitate or hinder children's participation in kinship care.
* Explore the cultural and legal differences that shape children's experiences.
* Analyze the role of social work professionals in promoting children's agency.
* Provide recommendations for improving practices and policies to better support children in kinship care across both regions.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding children's involvement in kinship care, highlighting the importance of culturally sensitive and child-centered approaches. It underscores the need for ongoing dialogue and collaboration to ensure that children's voices are heard and that their rights are upheld within these vital care arrangements.

A system of indicators to evaluate the results and impact of policies and programs to support the transition from care to adult life in Spain

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Joana Miguelena [1]***, Dr. Josep Lluis Oliver*** [2]***, Dr. Teresita Bernal*** [3]***, Dr. Diego Ardura*** [4]

1. *University of basque country,* ***2.*** *Universidad Islas Baleares,* ***3.*** *Universidad Camilo José Cela,* ***4.*** *Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia*

Public entities provide programs to prepare young people under protective measures—especially those in residential care—for independent living. These programs start two years before they reach the age of majority and continue as needed, ensuring active participation and benefits. They include socio-educational monitoring, housing support, social and labor integration, psychological support, and financial aid (Article 22 bis of Law 26/2015, July 28, amending the child and adolescent protection system). However, not all the Spanish Communities offer the same programs or have the same impact and results.

In this communication, we present a System of indicators to evaluate the results and impact of policies and programs to support the transition from care to adult life in Spain. This system is one of the result of the IMEX program (Itinerarios de Emancipación de Éxito) of the Federación de Entidades con Pisos y proyectos Asistidos (FEPA) which brings together a large number of entities responsible for providing transitional support services and programs for young people leaving care in Spain. The IMEX project is funded by the Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales (Ministry of Social Affairs).

This system is also the result of the collaboration of TABA (UNED) and IARS (UAB) research groups with FEPA and the collaboration of policy makers from the different autonomous communities and the central administration, entities and professionals who provide transitional support services, care experienced youth and national and international expert researchers.

The indicator system was developed on the basis of Rico's (2023) model for assessing public policies and was continuously refined through a series of consultations involving all stakeholders. After several consultations with the different stakeholders, the system is composed by 9 dimensions, 13 objectives, 9 planning indicators, 43 implementation indicators, and 37 results indicators.

The system and the results of the first application of the system will be presented in the communication.

Challenges and Perceptions of Nepal's Childcare Institutions: Care Practices and the Implementation of Government Policies

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Srijana Sapkota [1]

1. *University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign*

Introduction & Background: Approximately 150 million of the world's child population are orphaned (UNICEF, 2023). Because orphaned children in developing countries face particularly vulnerable conditions, a case study of Nepal is presented, where children represent an estimated 29% of the population, and a staggering 9% are identified as orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) (Shrestha, 2023). These children are largely cared for in childcare institutions. Factors such as conflict, poverty, natural disasters, orphan trafficking, and systemic vulnerability contribute to the higher rates of institutionalization. While existing literature explores these causes, less is known about the collaborative role of (a) the Government of Nepal (GoN), legislating and implementing policies, and (b) non-governmental organizations (NGOs) managing care for nearly one million institutionalized children under government policies. Drawing from interviews with administrators and staff of NGO-run institutions in the Kathmandu Valley, this study examines the following questions: (1) What care practices do participants identify as most effective in promoting children's development? (2) How do they perceive the GoN's policies and their implementation?

Methods: This study uses collected interview data from administrators and staff at 20 randomly sampled childcare institutions, including orphanages, children's homes, and residential care centers across the Kathmandu Valley. Institutions were identified through online searches and word-of-mouth recommendations. After initial contact and preliminary visits, most agreed to participate, often conducting interviews on the same day. The final participant sample consisted of 30 self-selected administrators and staff members who were either founders and/or active caretakers at the select institutions. Participants took part in semi-structured interviews, with each interview lasting between 15 and 30 minutes. Interview questions were aimed at examining participants' perceptions of OVC's development and related policies legislated by the GoN. Their demographic data was not collected to maintain confidentiality, as many requested to remain anonymous. To contextualize the study's findings and recommendations, the analysis also draws on archival, policy, and ethnographic research, where relevant.

Results: Results from interviews suggest a holistic recognition of care practices shaping OVC development, but a weak relational dynamic between state and NGO, marked by mistrust and harsh feelings. Participants reported that while policies are generally standardized, with incidents of government agencies rescuing trafficked children, conducting periodic policy monitoring, and providing workshops, their overall implementation, as perceived by participants, remains weak. Participants primarily attributed this to the lack of financial resources allocated to institutions to meet policy standards. Several participants also noted that the policies are overly complex, excessively demanding, and sometimes inconsistent with local needs. Further, they described an adversarial relationship with government bureaucrats, often experiencing negative attitudes from them during interactions.

Discussion & Implications: The findings suggest policies tailored to Nepal's socioeconomic context and implemented to facilitate friendlier partnerships between the GoN and NGOs managing childcare institutions. Our discussion presents recommendations for the GoN, guided by NGOs' perspective.

Transforming an Orphanage into appropriate placements for foster youth in crisis

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. David Crampton [1]

1. *Case Western Reserve University*

In 1992, the new director of the Cuyahoga County Division of Child and Family Services (CCDCFS) convened a meeting of non-profit agencies with which CCDCFS contracted for residential care services. These agencies provided secure care for older foster youth with severe behavioral needs. The Director told the agencies that too often, children remained in their residential care for many years and did not successfully transition back to their community. The director told them she was canceling the residential care contracts and directing her staff to place these children in family settings that might have better outcomes. Some of the agencies survived by developing the capacity to deliver other services, but they all lost their capacity to provide residential care since they no longer had these contacts.

Following the COVID-19 Pandemic, for reasons that are not yet well understood, the youth mental health crisis in Cuyahoga County and the United States became much worse (Hoots et al. 2021). CCDCFS experienced a rapid increase in older youth entering foster care with severe behavioral needs. CCDCFS struggled to find appropriate placements for these children. In some cases, they placed the children in residential care out of state which limited the chances of the children returning safely to their communities. CCDCFS asked local agencies to take in these children, but they did not have the capacity to meet their needs. One agency proposed renovating a former Orphanage into a “Wellness Campus” where foster youth would receive a comprehensive behavioral health assessment and be placed within units on the campus with an assortment of treatment options.

The development of the Wellness Campus was welcomed as a solution to the youth placement crisis, however previous concerns about residential care remained. David Crampton, a child welfare expert with extensive experience with CCDCFS, pulled together a research team to assist the Wellness Campus with building a database for capturing data on assessments and outcomes for the Wellness Campus clients. The goal is to help the agency track when and how they can help a child successfully leave the campus. This paper will report on the progress in establishing the Wellness Campus and collecting data on the youth they serve. Suggestions for other communities experiencing a youth foster care crisis will be offered.

Hoots BE, Li J, Hertz MF, et al. Alcohol and Other Substance Use Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic Among High School Students — Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2021. MMWR Suppl 2023;72(Suppl-1):84–92. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.su7201a10

Parental reflective functioning and psychological adjustment in adopted adolescents: a comparative study

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Esperanza León [1]***, Ms. Laura Belmonte Toro*** [1]***, Dr. Carmen Moreno*** [1]***, Ms. Andrea Fuentes-González*** [1]***, Dr. Maite Román*** [1]

1. *Universidad de Sevilla*

The central goal in this study is to explore, on the one hand, adoptive parents' capacity to reflect upon their own experience as parents, upon their adolescent's experience, and upon the relationships between them; on the other hand, psychological adjustment in adopted adolescents; and, the relationship between the two dimensions. Previous studies have shown the importance of parental reflective thinking in understanding their children's thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Although, in the field of adoption, the scientific literature on the psychological adjustment of children is quite extensive, it is less so for adolescents and is very scarce with respect to parental reflective function.

Two groups of 60 families and their children from Spain were compared: 30 adoptive parents and 30 non-adoptive parents. The adopted adolescents had been born in Russia and the non-adoptive' comparison group was recruited through schools in the same community where the adoptees live. One of the main topic of this study –parental reflective functioning–, was assessed through a semi-structured clinical interview (*Parent development interview, PDI*), inspired in part by the *Adult Attachment Interview* (*AAI*). It was adapted for use with adoptive parents by M. Steele and colleagues and translated into Spanish by our research team. The other main topic, psychological adjustment of adolescents, was assessed through the application of the standardized questionnaire *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)*. This study is part of the broader project *Longitudinal adoption & institutionalization study at the university of Seville (LAIS.US)*. Data were collected at three different times carried out from middle childhood to adolescence. This current work focuses on the analysis of the data referred to wale 3.

First, we describe the overall results found in the comparison between the adoptive and non-adoptive families in the three blocks differentiated in *PDI*: *parent affective experience codes* (e.g., joy/pleasure, competence); *child affective experience codes* (e.g., child aggression, child control); and global codes (e.g., coherence, richness of perceptions). Second, the comparison of the scores between the two groups studied showed that adoptive parents scored higher than non-adoptive mothers in important positive domains, specifically, exhibited greater warmth and affection in the relationship. Although there are fewer significant differences than in earlier times of study. Third, the total psychological adjustment score in adopted adolescents showed significant positive relationships with key contents of parental reflective functioning in non-adoptive families (degree of anger, disappointment, child's anger) and some more positive relationships were found in the group of adoptive families (degree of anger, angry expression, guilt, disappointment, child control).

This reflective functioning study shows the adoptive parents' strengths as a whole and the relationship between some weaknesses in these parenting capacities and the psychological adjustment of adolescents. The results help us better understand family dynamics while providing important keys to support and intervene with adoptive families and their adolescent children.

Growing up without roots: rethinking stability in residential care

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Andrea Fuentes-González [1], Dr. Maite Román [1], Dr. Carmen Moreno [1], Dr. Jesús Palacios [1]

1. *Universidad de Sevilla*

Placement instability is one of the main challenges currently facing the child protection system, particularly within residential care. To support healthy development and promote recovery from adverse childhood experiences, children in care require safe environments and stable, emotionally available, and nurturing caregivers. Scientific evidence has consistently highlighted the detrimental effects of placement instability on the developmental trajectories and overall well-being of children growing up in residential care. In order to explore this relevant issue in greater depth, this study aims to examine placement stability in a sample of children in residential care, focusing on the number of placement changes, the number of different care facilities in which they lived, and the breakdown of family-based care arrangements. In addition, it explores factors associated with placement instability and examines its relationship with children's psychosocial adjustment.

This research is part of the Longitudinal Adoption and Institutionalization Study conducted by the University of Seville (LAIS.US). The sample consisted of 50 participants who had lived in residential care in Andalusia (Spain). Information about their child protection trajectories was gathered through a retrospective review of case files, complemented by longitudinal assessments. Key findings indicate that participants experienced an average of three placement changes (*SD* = 2.52) and lived in approximately three different residential care settings (*SD* = 1.94). Factors linked to higher levels of placement instability included older age at entry into care and greater cumulative adversity. Among other findings, regarding psychosocial adjustment, youth with more unstable care trajectories showed increased emotional difficulties.

The results of this study have relevant practical implications for child welfare decision-making and the design of interventions aimed at promoting safe, stable, and emotionally reparative environments for children in residential care.

Possible selves and resilience as contributors to the wellbeing of care experienced young people in South Africa

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Mandisa Mbaza [1]

1. *University of Johannesburg*

The concept of wellbeing is broad, encompassing a variety of components of an individual, including mental health and self-esteem. The wellbeing of care-experienced people is affected by challenges that are not experienced by their non-cared for peers. Children placed in alternative care may come from abusive and/or neglectful backgrounds. These backgrounds often have traumatic or adverse effects on them which may have a lasting impact on their mental health and self-esteem.

Possible selves are future aspects of self-concept comprising of a hoped for self, a feared self and an expected self. These aspects of self motivate behaviour, either towards a hoped for self, away from a feared self or to balancing out hoped and feared selves to an expected self. Resilience involves having better-than-expected outcomes after experiencing adversities. These outcomes are achieved by navigating and negotiating towards resources. Resilience and possible selves may have a complimentary relationship. For example, resilience-enablers could assist towards an individuals hoped-for self and possible selves may contribute to resilience.

Eight care-experienced youth took part in this qualitative study. Data was collected using the possible me tree model visual methodology. This model consists of three steps, a life map, possible me tree drawing and planning. The life map step involves participants drawing a map of their life, highlighting significant events in the past, present and/or future. The possible me tree drawing requires participants think of three possible future selves, draw a tree with three branches and write each possible self in a branch on the drawing. Each future self is explored, using questions like “what do you hope for as …?”. Responses are recorded in each branch and explored in detail. The planning step involves the completion of the planning grid, with headings including: possible self, hoped for self, feared self, expected self, action, date. This step is aimed at actualizing the future ideas that were presented in previous steps. This study involved two interviews with each participant, using the life map activity and possible me tree drawing.

Participants were interviewed after the life map and possible me tree drawing activities using semi-structured interviews. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings demonstrated mental health challenges including depression and anger. Self-esteem issues included fear of failure and self-doubt. Resilience enablers were resources facilitated through the residential care centres and the participants’ motivation and self-determination were sources of assistance and support.

The recommendations from this research included further research of the relationship and interaction of resilience factors and possible selves, including how the theories can be utilized together to facilitate the development of care-experienced people. Care-experienced people need to be assisted to explore their future possible selves whilst in care and assisted to develop concrete plans towards their actualization. Therefore, the use of suitable models, including the possible me tree model, to facilitate in the process whilst in care was also recommended.

Ecomap: A Tool for Assessing the Impact on Community of Parenting Groups

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Sara Pérez-Hernando [1], ***Dr. Ainoa Mateos*** [1], ***Dr. Hector Alonso*** [1], ***Dr. Anna Mundet-Bolós*** [1], ***Ms. Elisa Colina Labrador*** [1], ***Ms. Almendra Espinoza-Rivera*** [1]

1. *Universitat de Barcelona*

This communication is part of the project *"Innovation and Quality in Group Methodology to Support Parenting with Families at Risk: An Intersectional and Community Perspective"* (PID2022-137305NB-C22), funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of the Government of Spain. One of the aims of the project is to evaluate from the community perspective the impact of group methodology on the parenting skills of families at varying levels of psychosocial risk.

To achieve this objective, a tool based on ecomap methodology is designed to facilitate the analysis of parenting support sources available to families after participating in the program, gain insights into effective professional practices for community engagement within the context of the positive parenting program, and explore the social support needs of participating families within the community.

The ecomap is a visual tool that allows for the observation and analysis of participants' relationships with the community, as well as with relevant services and individuals. In this case, the ecomap is collected at three different stages: before participation in the program, during the program, and after its completion, in order to assess changes in the perception of social support and determine whether participation in the group intervention has strengthened community ties. A total of 67 parents across 9 groups participated in this evaluation.

Preliminary results indicate that, prior to starting the intervention, participants primarily rely on support from their partner, close and extended family, and friends. However, they also identify schools as a significant community resource, with parks being considered an essential communal space. In some cases, work, neighbors, social services, or security forces are also mentioned as important sources of support. During the group program, in addition to the previously mentioned resources, professional facilitators become a notable source of support, with other participating families being highlighted as particularly valuable. Finally, when considering future support, other services such as psychologists, speech therapists, or babysitters emerge, alongside community resources such as cultural facilities and associations. In several cases, economic aid is also identified as an important resource. Lastly, some families recognize the ongoing social support provided by other families in the intervention group and express interest in future intervention groups for children and adolescents.

Far Away, but Still Important! Transnational Family Relations in the Daily Lives of Unaccompanied Minors in Germany

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mrs. Franziska Anna Seidel [1]

1. *University of Kassel*

Background: Germany is considered a major receiving country for displaced unaccompanied minors (UMs). Due to the physical absence of parents or legal guardians, UMs are taken into care by social services. However, the absence of parents does not mean that they are necessarily less important to UMs. Instead, transnational family relationships can have a crucial impact on the lives of UMs.

Aim: This presentation aims to present the findings of a qualitative study on the transnational family relationships of UMs in Germany, with a special focus on how the physical separation from parents influences the daily lives of UMs. Emphasis will be placed on the overall well-being of the UMs, their educational achievements, life in residential care institutions, relationships with peers, and their dreams for the future. Implications for child welfare will be discussed.

Method: The study is based on a qualitative research design following a constructivist grounded theory approach by Charmaz (2014). Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with (former) UMs (n=12), social work staff (n=20), and experts (n=3). For this presentation, a secondary analysis of selected categories identified in the heuristic model was conducted.

Findings: The results indicate the high relevance of the family for UMs, despite physical absence and sometimes despite the possibility of staying in contact. The family relationships of UMs are highly diverse. They can be connected to stressors and also serve as a highly valuable resource. Concern for the well-being of family members not only affects the overall well-being of the youth but is also related to school performance, perceptions of living in institutions instead of “at home”, and peer relationships. Perceptions of the future are also influenced by the perceived responsibility for family members abroad or the desire for reunification at home or abroad. In particular, global crises (e.g., Taliban takeover in Afghanistan or border closures due to COVID) and personal problems (e.g., illness, death, insecurity, or poverty of family members) influence how UMs perceive their daily lives. Social workers often consider the importance of the family, but concrete and systematized support regarding UMs’ family relationships is rare.

Conclusions and implications: Results point towards a strong need to acknowledge the importance of transnational family relationships in the daily lives of UMs. This could include transnational social work with family members abroad in interventions.

Social workers should acknowledge the fact that UMs’ family may always be present despite their physical absence and UMs’ lack of verbalization of their concern for the family. Family-centered support should consider how global (political) circumstances affect the daily lives of youth and their families abroad.

Assessing positive childhood experiences: translation, adaptation, and prevalence in Dutch residential care

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Gabriëlle Mercera [1], ***Mrs. Kiki Bruidegom*** [2], ***Ms. Jessica Vervoort-Schel*** [3]

1. *Koraal Centre of Expertise / De Hondsberg and Maastricht University, department of Psychiatry and Neuropsychology,* ***2.*** *Erasmus University Rotterdam,* ***3.*** *Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences*

Introduction

Research on resilience has highlighted the role of Protective childhood experiences (PCEs) in buffering against the negative effects of Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). A greater number of PCEs in childhood is associated with improved overall health outcomes throughout the lifespan. Evaluating and addressing PCEs can support individuals with a history of childhood adversity in restoring healthy developmental pathways, particularly for children with emotional, behavioural, and learning difficulties and their families. The development of resilience-based assessments has gained attention recently, however, in the Netherlands, no Dutch screening instruments for PCEs were available for children and their caregivers. This poster presentation outlines: 1) the process of translating 3 existing PCEs questionnaires from English into Dutch; 2) experiences of children with emotional, behavioural, and learning difficulties and their caregivers with completing these questionnaires; 3) prevalences of PCEs among children with emotional, behavioural, and learning difficulties in residential care and their caregivers.

Methods

This research was conducted in the Netherlands. First, three existing PCEs questionnaires were translated into Dutch, following the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for the translation and adaptation of instruments. This process included forward translation, review by a bilingual expert panel, back translation, and cognitive interviewing. Second, perspectives of children and parents on PCEs—and on ways to discuss these experiences—were gathered through a student learning collaborative at Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences. Third, a retrospective case-file study was carried out in a residential care centre for children with emotional, behavioural, and learning difficulties. Operationalisations of PCEs from the screening tools were used to explore the prevalence of PCEs among these children and their caregivers.

Results

This poster presentation provides an overview of the translation process of the PCEs screeners, the results of the learning collaborative and the assessment of PCEs in the case-file study. The translation process highlighted the importance of addressing cross-cultural and conceptual considerations rather than focusing solely on linguistic or literal equivalence. Examples of these challenges will be presented, alongside experiences of children and their caregivers derived from the cognitive interviews in completing the screeners and their perspectives on PCEs. The retrospective case-file study revealed that information on PCEs was significantly underrepresented in records compared to data on ACEs. An overview of the ACEs and PCEs prevalences will be presented.

Conclusions

To effectively foster resilience and well-being, a deeper understanding of PCEs is needed in both research and practice. PCEs are modifiable resiliency factors that promote thriving and positive developmental outcomes, independent of childhood adversity, while also playing a role in mitigating the effects of ACEs. Accordingly, culturally appropriate PCEs questionnaires should be made available, incorporating the voices of children and caregivers to ensure meaningful translation and adaptation. Tools to assess PCEs enable professionals, together with children and caregivers, to explore, identify, and build upon PCEs throughout care trajectories. By recognizing and reinforcing PCEs, professionals can better support caregivers and communities in fostering environments that nurture children's strengths and resilience.

The presence and absence of the birth family in adoptive family talk within the context of closed adoption: An Indian perspective.

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Sushri Sangita Puhan [1]

1. *Royal Holloway University of London*

Over the past thirty years, adoption policy and practice in India have significantly evolved, aiming to promote in-country adoption. Each year, more than 4,000 Indian children are adopted through a closed adoption model. When eligible prospective parents are successfully matched with a child, the privacy of the adoptive family is prioritised and protected, while no personal information about the biological parents is provided to the adoptive parents and adopted child and vice-versa. Due to the confidential nature of adoption, only 12% of adoptive families disclose the adoptive status to their children (Mohanty, 2014).

This paper is based on a qualitative study that explores communicative openness in adoptive family practices in closed adoption. It illuminates how a child's past and birth family are portrayed within adoptive family communication. It draws on in-depth accounts from five adoptees and eight adoptive parents of urban middle-class families in India. Following a narrative inquiry approach, the research illuminates the lived experiences of people who experience adoption. This method allows for the exploration of the complex, multi-layered, nuanced realities of adoptive family lives in an evolving socio-legal context (Clandinin, 2007; Riessman, 2008). Since adoption remains an under-researched area in the social and family landscape of India, this study employed an inductive exploratory research strategy. By applying an interpretive narrative approach, the analysis moves beyond simple descriptions of experiences to uncover the deeper meanings that participants associate with their adoptive family lives, as well as how these meanings shape their practices. This examination focuses on the content of each story while also paying close attention to its construction. This process offers valuable insights into the social function of these narratives, exploring the links between participants' lives and broader contexts and revealing the complexities and ethical dilemmas associated with adoption communication.

The findings indicate a diversity of openness in adoptive family communication about adoption. Communication tends to occur within a defined framework, often leaving little space for birth parents. Topics concerning the birth parents and the child's past are generally uncomfortable for adoptive parents to address. While adopted individuals often express a genuine curiosity about their origins and biological parents, this interest is frequently dismissed or perceived as imaginary by some adoptive parents. The findings suggest that openness about adoption in the early stages can foster a positive identity among adoptees; however, this openness does not always encompass the child's past. Connections to the child's history are viewed as threatening due to the cultural stigma surrounding birth parents, which some adoptive parents are hesitant to confront.

Although the country's Adoption Regulations 2017 include provisions for 'root search' concerning adoptees' rights to identity upon reaching 18 years of age, sociocultural influences on adoption communication point to a gap between policy and practice. This contradiction highlights the need for greater sensitivity toward a child's past experiences and emphasises the importance of providing information that can aid adoptees in developing a positive sense of identity within a closed adoption model.

Child Maltreatment Prevention: Implementation Successes and Challenges for a Voluntary Community-based Child Maltreatment Prevention Program

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Deborah Moon [1], ***Ms. Jeesoo Jeon*** [2], ***Ms. Jenn Lee*** [1], ***Ms. Amanda Cruce*** [1], ***Dr. Michelle Johnson-Motoyama*** [3], ***Dr. Nancy Rolock*** [4], ***Dr. David Crampton*** [4], ***Ms. Holly Larrabee*** [3], ***Ms. Ruijie Ma*** [1]

1. *University of Pittsburgh,* ***2.*** *Univeristy of Missouri Kansas City,* ***3.*** *Ohio State University,* ***4.*** *Case Western Reserve University*

Background and Purpose: Child maltreatment is a serious public health problem that causes a substantial burden on society. This study examines a voluntary family support program that aims to build protective factors against maltreatment for families through tailored services within an overarching family coaching model. The pilot project serves families in a few counties in one U. S. state that has high poverty and low population growth rates. This session will present the findings from the process evaluation focusing on the successes and challenges in participant reach, engagement, and outcomes as well as the implementation determinants based on the qualitative data collected at the end of the first year of full implementation.

Methods: One focus group was conducted each with project leadership (n=2) and family coaches (n=3). Three focus groups were conducted with the implementation teams representing each county (n=10). Interviews were conducted with the program manager (n=1), and one parent participant. Data collection instruments were developed based on the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research to examine implementation determinants in multiple dimensions. Data were collected via Zoom and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was conducted using Dedoose. Two trained doctoral students and a PI experienced in qualitative research independently coded initial transcripts while checking for inter-coder reliability. Disagreements were resolved through discussion. The constant comparative technique was used to examine patterns of themes within and across transcripts, and matrix analysis was used to compare and contrast themes that emerged in data from multiple informants.

Findings: Providers and implementation teams perceived that the program improved participants' concrete support, social support, and parent-child interactions while acknowledging the societal issues that limit the project's impact. Interviewees generally perceived that the project has successfully reached and engaged target families while highlighting specific challenges in reaching families in communities with limited resources and service infrastructure and lack of trust. Convergence was found among informants regarding reach and engagement facilitators; 1) coaches' lived experiences and expertise promoting family connections, 2) services aligned with family goals, 3) the project's evolution to meet complex family needs in changing environments, and 4) the project's family-centered approaches differing from traditional child welfare services. Regarding barriers, incompatibility of service approaches between the project staff and referring agencies, competing organizational priorities that limit leadership capacity, lack of sustainable funding and challenging provider retention as well as stigma toward maltreatment prevention services were highlighted by different informants. Participants recommended improvement in relationship building with communities, better collaboration with other services, reducing staff turnover, changing confidentiality rules, building sustainable implementation infrastructure, and maximizing the role of local champions including family participants for better program reach.

Conclusions and Implications: This voluntary program is a promising model of building family protective factors and promoting family well-being. The highlighted project implementation determinants can shed light on the effort to build a system of family support without stigmatizing and disempowering disadvantaged families.

“Trying to get grown adults with authority to listen to kids with behavioral issues”: A case study of a young woman’s journey through the US child welfare system

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Linda-Jeanne Mack [1], ***Dr. Corey Shdaimah*** [1]

1. *University of Maryland, School of Social Work.*

Background/Objectives

The EuSARF 2025 key topics include several areas for transformation, transition and innovation of child welfare services for young adults. Using case study analysis, we examined the perceptions and experiences of a young adult who navigated the dependency court process associated with her child welfare (CW) case and subsequently aged-out of care.

The dependency court in the US is where many significant CW decisions are made including removing a child from their family, reunifications, terminations of parental rights, and independent living case planning for young adults. It is critical to understand how young adults perceive and experience their involvement with both systems. Taken from a larger study of families and young adults participating in dependency court hearings, we use an interview with Kay (pseudonym), to examine the CW and dependency court process through the following aims:

(1) explore participation at decision-making points, (2) examine how young adults describe support and services, and (3) create recommendations for CW providers, dependency court staff and other professionals working with young adults.

Method:

We employed principles of case study research to provide an in-depth examination using what Creswell and Poth (2018) describe as an “instrumental case” that “focuses on an issue or concern and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue” (p. 98). In this case we use one young woman’s experience of her dependency case trajectory, ending in her eventual emancipation from CW as a young adult without legal permanency (e.g. guardianship, adoption, or reunification). We used a holistic approach, using the entire interview to identify themes for this instrumental case. Rigor was ensured through regular team meetings, memoing, and an audit trail.

Findings:

Kay was a white cis-gender woman who identified with her Lutheran faith. She was placed in a CW residential facility at age 13 and then spent time between family foster care and residential placements. After emancipating at age 18, at 19, she returned to CW to receive voluntary independent living services. Kay was also working full-time and parenting her two year old son. Under three broad themes of access, support and self advocacy findings include themes of participation, the importance of relationships with CWS providers and advocates, and building independence.

Conclusion:

Findings shed light on the need for comprehensive training for dependency court staff, and professionals working with CWS impacted-families. Kay described her interactions with a variety of adults at various decision-making points indicating the value of their support. Our findings also illuminate the need to create more opportunities for all youth and young adults to engage in CW and dependency court processes.

Implications:

1. Youth and young adults in out-of-home placement need access to, support and tools to navigate decision-making spaces in CW and dependency court processes.

2. Additional training is needed for professionals working with youth and young adults who will be emancipating without legal permanency.
3. Young adults need access to independent living skill training and efforts to ensure interdependence and relational permanence through enduring relationships while building such skills is key.

Intersectional Disparities in Placement Volatility Among Care Leavers with and without Emotional Disability in the U.S.

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Melissa Villodas [1], ***Dr. JoAnn Lee*** [2], ***Dr. Gilbert Gimm*** [1], ***Dr. Leah Cheatham*** [3]

1. *George Mason University,* ***2.*** *University at Buffalo,* ***3.*** *University of Alabama*

Objectives: This cross-sectional study examines whether care leavers aged 16-21 in the United States experienced disparities in placement volatility by emotional disability status and at the intersection of race/ethnicity and sex. Emotional disability is the largest category of disability among care leavers in the U.S. (Oswald et al., 2010). Prior studies have found greater volatility (i.e., frequent placement changes) among youth with emotional disabilities (Platt & Gephart, 2022; McCauley, 2021; Cheatham et al., 2020). Placement volatility may exacerbate transition challenges during the care leaving process by disrupting social support networks and continuity in education and access to health care services. Among U.S. youth in foster care, age (older), race (Black or American Indian), and sex (females) are known to be risk factors for placement volatility (Platt & Gephart, 2022); however, few studies have examined differences in placement volatility at the intersections of disability, race/ethnicity, and sex. Using an intersectional lens can help to identify disparities across multiple factors that are not captured by examining a single factor (e.g., ableism, racism, sexism) alone (Thomas et al., 2023).

Methods: Data were obtained from the 2021 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS, 2021). AFCARS includes data collected by all 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico on all children in foster care. Our analytic sample included care leavers (youth in the process of leaving foster care) ages 16-21 (N=91,586). We conducted a bivariate analysis of placement volatility (frequency of placement changes) by emotional disability status. The distribution of placement volatility was examined at the intersection of emotional disability (yes/no), race/ethnicity (Hispanic, Black, White), and sex (female/male).

Findings: Overall, we found a significant association between emotional disability status and placement volatility ($\chi^2(9) = 3500.00$, $p < .001$), in which the share of care leavers with an emotional disability increased with the number of placements. However, the slope of this association varied by race/ethnicity and sex. Specifically, Hispanic youth had the steepest slope in the proportion of care leavers with an emotional disability as placement volatility increased ($b = 3.1$, $p < 0.001$). Also, male youth had a slightly steeper slope in the proportion of care leavers with an emotional disability as placement volatility increased than females ($b = 2.8$, $p < 0.001$ and $b = 2.7$, $p < 0.001$ respectively).

Conclusions/Implications: Reducing placement volatility is critical for successful outcomes during the care leaving process. The study found evidence of intersectional differences in placement volatility among care leavers by emotional disability status, race/ethnicity, and sex, which suggests the need for targeted support for care leavers of differing identities (ability status, race/ethnicity, and sex) to mitigate the risk and challenges of placement volatility, which in turn, can lead to improved long-term outcomes for care leavers.

Implementation of the Home-Start program in Spain

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Federica Gullo [1]***, Dr. Laura García-Alba*** [1]***, Prof. Jorge Fernandez del Valle*** [1]

1. *University of Oviedo*

Background. The relationship with parents and the care children receive during their early years are crucial for their optimal development and future integration as adults. However, due to various circumstances, families may encounter challenges in the parenting process, often feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, and isolated, especially when lacking sufficient resources and support. Having someone they can trust and rely on, though, can make all the difference, helping prevent the situation from worsening. In this work, we aim to present a project we are implementing in Spain to support families during such a critical time. This is the case of the Home-Start program, which was founded in Leicester in 1973 to support families with young children up to the age of five who are experiencing parenting difficulties. Research shows that support provided to parents can have positive effects on their self-esteem, well-being, and parenting skills, as well as positively impact children's early experiences, thereby reducing the risk of future problems, crises, or family breakdowns. **Methods.** The program's methodology involves recruiting and training volunteers with parenting experience, who can provide practical and emotional support to vulnerable families through weekly visits in their homes and in the community. The support offered to families is informal, free of charge, confidential, and tailored to the needs of each family. Throughout the entire process, a coordinator supervises and supports both parties. Furthermore, a non-profit organization is responsible for the implementation and expansion of the program. In Spain, this role is held by the Nieru Association for the Study and Promotion of Child Welfare, which is recognized by Home-Start Worldwide as the National Association in the country. Although the Home-Start program originated in UK, its innovative approach, simple format, and flexibility have facilitated its expansion over the past 50 years. Today, it operates in 23 countries across five continents, with Spain being one of most recent countries to implement it, and the first Spanish-speaking one. This brought with it certain challenges, including the creation of various materials, translation and adaptation of others, the design of an evaluation plan for the program and its results, and the adjustment of certain procedures to meet the needs of local families. **Results.**Its development in the Spanish context is, therefore, recent, but initial experiences have been promising, and the program is increasingly recognized as a fundamental resource for families. The first results show that families report significant improvements in their well-being and quality of life, lower levels of stress, greater access to social resources, enhanced parenting skills, and better management of daily challenges, all thanks to the program's support. **Discussion.** This has helped demonstrate the need for the Home-Start program at the local level, sparked interest from public administrations, and served as the foundation for expanding the program to other provinces and regions.

Initial implementation of the MIAF Pre-Service Training and Foster Family Applicant Assessment: Enablers and barriers

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mrs. Kamila Araújo [1], Prof. Stephanie Alves [2], Dr. Leonor Rodrigues [1], Mrs. Sandra Ornelas [1], Prof. Isabel Soares [3], Prof. Helena Grangeia [4]

1. *ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion - Association,* ***2.*** *Lusófona University, HEI-Lab: Digital Human-Environment Interaction Labs,* ***3.*** *ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion - Association; School of Psychology, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal,* ***4.*** *ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion - Association; Research Centre for Justice and Governance (JusGov)*

Background: Family Foster Care (FFC) has increased in Europe as part of child protection deinstitutionalization policies. However, Portugal presents one of the lowest rates in Europe, with only 4.1% of foster children placed in a family-based alternative care. Given the current FFC challenges in Portugal, it was important to develop a comprehensive framework and evidence-based practice model, supported by policy, international and national best practices, and sensitive to the specific needs of Portuguese context. Therefore, a design-based research model – The Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF®) – was developed through a research-practice partnership to support FFC professionals during the pre-service training, assessment and selection of family foster care applicants, and the following support of foster families and children during placements.

Objective: This pilot study sought to understand the enablers and the areas for improvement of the MIAF® Pre-service Training and Foster Family Applicant Assessment, to optimize practices and to scaled it up to different contexts.

Method: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with dyads of 12 professionals who participated in the initial implementation. These interviews were video and audio-taped, following participants' consent. Sociodemographic information was also collected in an online questionnaire. Interviews were analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-step framework for thematic analysis coding process.

Findings: FFC professionals perceived the model as well-structured, flexible, and objective. The model designed tools and processes supported decision-making to select the most suitable families for a high-quality FFC response. Implementation challenges included professionals' initial lack of experience with the model and lack of support from the child protection system, both of which must be addressed for successful implementation. Specific barriers to improvement were identified, including issues with the structure of the assessment report form, questionnaire bias, difficulties in using the assessment instruments, and the need to increase and update foster families' testimonies in the Pre-Service Training phase.

Conclusion: Further efforts regarding ongoing professionals' training and supervision of their practices must be delivered to achieve successful implementation of the model.

Using recurrence risk to inform and adjust comprehensiveness of child protection investigations

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Prof. Svein Arild Vis [1], ***Dr. Kirsten Buck Rustad*** [1]

1. *UiT The Arctic University of Norway*

Introduction: Following a report to Child Welfare and Protection Services (CWPS) in Norway, an investigation will in most cases (85%) be initiated. This investigation must be carried out within a 90-day period. The family, the child, and other informants such as school, healthcare services or the police may then be contacted. Investigations should primarily focus on the problems identified in the report but may be extended to encompass a more comprehensive risk and needs assessment when needed. The guiding principle is that the investigation process should be adapted such that it is not more invasive than needed.

Problems: Recurrent involvement with CWPS may indicate that the initial investigation was not comprehensive enough to identify the problem. We used longitudinal administrative data on all children (n=236 536) with first time involvement with CWPS in the period 2013-2022 to track subsequent recurrence. Aims were to determine (i) the prevalence of recurrence within 180 and 360 days after the first investigations and (ii) to identify types of concerns that has higher or lower risk of recurrence and subsequent substantiation.

Results: We found that following the first investigation, 8.8% of the children were re-reported within 180 days. After 360 days were 14.6% of the children re-reported, and then the substantiation rate was 32.2% of the re-reported cases. We found increased chance of recurrence and subsequent substantiation if the initial report contained concerns of child mental health problems, child criminal and behavioural problems, and high level of conflict between parents - with and without alleged domestic violence. We found decreased chance of substantiation of the second referral, for cases with parental drug abuse and parental criminal activity. Cases with physical and/or psychological child abuse were more likely to be recurring but were not more likely to then receive services.

Discussion: The recurrence rates suggest that initial investigations may not always be comprehensive enough. This highlights the need for more thorough assessments in cases with certain risk factors, such as child mental health problems, behavioural issues, and high parental conflict. These issues may require more intensive and targeted interventions during the initial investigation to prevent future reports.

The finding that physical and psychological child abuse cases were more likely to recur, but not more likely to be substantiated, calls for an evaluation of the investigative processes and criteria used to substantiate such cases. Refining the methods used to assess and substantiate abuse allegations is necessary to ensure adequate protection for children at risk.

Conclusion: This study underscores the need for a nuanced approach to child protection investigations. By identifying concerns more likely to lead to recurrence and substantiation, CWPS can better tailor their investigative processes. Initial investigations should be more thorough when certain risk factors are present, involving detailed assessments, targeted interventions, and closer monitoring to prevent future reports. Adapting the comprehensiveness of investigations based on recurrence risk can lead to more effective interventions and better outcomes for children and families, ensuring that investigations are as non-invasive as possible while thoroughly addressing identified problems.

Counselling as a Form of Formal Support for Young People from Alternative Care in Higher Education

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Prof. Marina Milić [1], ***Prof. Maja Laklija*** [1]

1. *University of Zagreb - Faculty of Law Social Work Study Centre*

The population of young people from alternative care involved in higher education faces specific challenges, some of which include a lack of social and emotional support, difficulties related to leaving or preparing to leave the care system, and challenges in adapting to the academic environment. One of the key forms of formal support in higher education is counseling (academic, career, and psychological counseling). The Faculty of Law at the University of Zagreb provides counseling services to students, thereby offering support to this population of students as well. The aim of this paper is to highlight the challenges faced by young people from alternative care during their higher education, as well as the topics they bring to counseling from the perspective of the counselor at the Student Counseling Center at the Faculty of Law. This is important because research and practice show that systematic counseling and, when necessary, psychotherapeutic support can significantly increase the academic success and emotional stability of young people from alternative care. Additionally, it contributes to their integration into the academic community and the development of life skills, helping them successfully overcome challenges and achieve their educational and professional goals. In the process of ensuring and providing support, it is crucial to focus on the needs of the young person and the challenges they face, thus creating support programs and individualized counseling work, for which the support of higher education institutions is necessary.

Mentoring adolescents to peer support and networking

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Jana Rapuš Pavel [1], ***Dr. Špela Razpotnik*** [1]

1. *Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana*

In this paper, the use of mentoring in socio-pedagogical work with a group of adolescents is presented. The research reveals which issues regarding peer relationships adolescents highlight in the mentoring process and how the participants responded when mentored by students of social pedagogy. In the research, we were also interested in the characteristics of the mentoring role and relationship that the students highlight when working with adolescents. Twenty-two (female) students of social pedagogy were included in the research. In the academic year 2021/22, they carried out mentoring in pairs with groups of adolescents from different pupils' dormitory across Slovenia as part of the field work for the course Social Pedagogical Interventions. A qualitative approach was used, with a thematic analysis of the data obtained from the students' final reports after the mentoring process was completed. The results showed that adolescents highlighted three broad issues of peer networking: (1) overcoming discrimination, (2) establishing (safe) physical spaces for meeting, socializing and supportive discussions, (3) establishing physical spaces and expanding the options for free-time and leisure activities. In reference to the mentoring role and relationship, the students highlighted the importance of role models and the mentoring model; supportive communication in strengthening personal autonomy and participation for peer networking; support in accessing resources, relationships and experiences, and advocacy. We recognize mentoring as one of the socio-pedagogical approaches, with which we can encourage young people to be more self-initiative and proactive.

Key words: social pedagogy, mentorship, adolescents, peer networking, pupils' dormitory

School interventions in relation to the complex needs and psychosocial difficulties of students - the perspective of school pedagogues

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mrs. Nina Amon Podobnikar [1], ***Dr. Jana Rapuš Pavel*** [1]

1. *Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana*

Primary school is an important life space that can play a protective role in children's lives. However, it can also be a source of distress, especially for those who face more complex and vulnerable circumstances in their daily lives. For school pedagogues, dealing with vulnerable children and young people, particularly those with complex difficulties, is becoming more pressing every year. As this is an area that cuts across many different disciplines, research on this topic also represents a particular challenge. The article presents the findings gathered as part of the research project titled "Identification of children and youngsters with complex needs and development of guidelines for better forms of support" (Razpotnik et al, 2024). Ten school pedagogues from different primary schools were involved in qualitative research. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using a thematic analysis method. We were interested in how school pedagogues describe good practise and the inclusion of children with complex needs and what factors and circumstances prevent the implementation of good practise. The findings emphasise the importance of human orientation, expertise and working conditions in creating an appropriately supportive school environment that provides timely, relevant, diverse and flexible forms of support and intervention. Suggestions are made for systemic changes to strengthen prevention in schools and enable support that is more focussed on children and their daily lives to reduce risks in their life pathways.

Keywords: primary school, children with complex needs, school pedagogues, school-based interventions

Young Voices: Understanding the Subjective Well-Being of Children in Transnational Caribbean Families

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Janique Charles [1]

1. *Rees Centre, Department of Education, University of Oxford*

This paper adds to the growing body of sociological research on transnational families by examining the experiences of "left-behind" children in St. Lucia and other Caribbean Small Island Developing States. While much of the existing regional research relies on retrospective accounts from adults, this study shifts the focus to children's real-time perspectives, exploring how transnational family structures shape their subjective well-being. By centering on children's voices, this unique research fills a critical gap in child-centered studies, which remain largely absent in the Caribbean. It provides fresh insights into childhood well-being within transnational contexts and offers guidance on how best to safeguard and promote their welfare.

After engaging with 1,007 students - both with and without transnational family experiences - 112 children voluntarily participated, providing full consent from their guardians along with their own assent.

The study followed a three-phase sequential, qualitative design. An initial online "good life" survey, followed by two rounds of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 22 students purposively selected through the survey. To gain deeper insight into the lived realities of left-behind children in a developing country, innovative and interactive methods were employed, including the *My Life, My Hopes, My Dreams* book, adapted from kinship care work, and photo elicitation. In the final phase, participants shared their perspectives on how best key stakeholders could address unique challenges of growing up in transnational family structures.

The findings reveal the complexity of children's experiences, showing that being "left behind" extends far beyond physical separation from a parent. Through a combination of thematic and narrative analysis, several powerful themes emerged, including *longing, isolation, distrust, poverty, emotional resilience, escapism,* and *dreams and aspirations*. These thematic aspects indicate the interconnections between emotional and socio-economic factors that shape the lived experiences of left-behind children, influencing both their immediate well-being and their long-term developmental trajectories.

Keywords: Caribbean Children, Childhood, Left-behind, Subjective well-being, Transnational.

Insights from foster family' on the implementation of a positive parenting programme to improve the quality of visits

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Ana Yira Osorio Z. [1], ***Dr. Lucía González-Pasarín*** [2], ***Dr. Isabel M. Bernedo*** [1]

1. *Universidad de Málaga,* ***2.*** *Universitat de Lleida*

Non-kinship foster care is a child protection measure aimed at providing children with a stable and normalised family environment by integrating them into a foster family, where they can fully participate in family life. One of the most significant aspects of this measure is that the majority of foster children have visits with their birth family, with the aim of maintaining their relationship and emotional bond. However, a clear conclusion from scientific literature regarding the experience of foster families with these contacts is that they represent a source of stress and concern. Additionally, foster families require support, guidance, and training from professionals regarding these visits and contacts. In this regard, the scientific literature highlights the need to improve the quality of these contacts and the preparation of all those involved.

The objective of this poster is to present preliminary results regarding the satisfaction of foster families with their participation in implementing the group programme 'Visits: A Context for Family Development' (Bernedo et al., 2020, 2024), as well as their main learnings from the sessions. This is a psychoeducational programme designed to enhance the quality of contact and visits during foster care by strengthening the parental, educational, and emotional competencies of both foster and birth families.

The participants were seven women foster carers with eight children in permanent non-kinship foster care, aged between 5 and 12 years, who maintained face-to-face visits with their mother or father. The instruments used were: (a) a data collection sheet to collect sociodemographic information; (b) the session evaluation sheet, which includes six questions about technical and pedagogy aspects, and satisfaction with the session. Four are open questions, and two Likert answers (range from 1=not satisfied to 6=very satisfied). For quantitative data frequency and descriptive analyses were performed and, for qualitative data, content analysis was carried out.

The results show a high level of overall satisfaction with each of the seven sessions of the programme, as well as with the technical and pedagogical aspects of the sessions (activities carried out, duration, treatment received, among others). Responses to the open-ended questions indicate that they have absorbed content such: a) the importance of collaboration among all those involve in visits; b) emotional competencies, such as recognising and identifying both child's and their own emotions as caregivers, as well as managing child's emotion; c) considering the child's perspective in conflict resolution, and c) communication and problem-solving skills.

In summary, the participating foster families express a high level of satisfaction with the programme. Preliminary results from the implementation evaluation suggest that the programme enhances the parental, emotional, and educational competencies of foster families. These findings point to the potential of the programme as a valuable resource for child welfare professionals involved in managing visits and contacts during placements. However, further research with larger samples is needed to confirm these findings.

Transforming interprofessional collaboration in early screening and care for young children: Barriers and facilitators

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Elma Hilbrink [1], ***Mrs. Jorien Versantvoort*** [2], ***Dr. Marloes de Lange*** [2], ***Mrs. Jenneke Saat*** [2], ***Mrs. Thessa Suijkerbuijk*** [2], ***Mrs. Marieke op ten Noort-Lourens*** [1], ***Dr. Marion van Hattum*** [1]

1. *HAN University of Applied Sciences, Key factors in youth and family support,* ***2.*** *HAN University of Applied Sciences*

When young children experience developmental or healthcare issues or when there are concerns about the environment they grow up in, most often these (potential) problems play a role in multiple contexts with different professionals involved. Such as youth healthcare nurses, youth care workers or nursery teachers. Interprofessional collaboration is crucial to support these children and their families. However, interprofessional collaboration in early screening and intervention can be complex, due to a variety of factors, like communication barriers and limited resources (e.g. Ideishi et al. 2010, Douglas, et al. 2012).

The healthcare system in the Netherlands is fragmented (Hagenaars, L. L. et al. 2018; Vos et al. 2016), with physical health care often separated from mental health care and youth mental health care distinct from adult mental health care. Additionally, youth (health) care provision varies across municipalities, complicating the delivery of integrated care. In recent years, various initiatives have emerged to address the challenges of interprofessional collaboration regarding care for young children, aiming to transform to a more integrated care model. For example, the national program Kansrijke Start (a Solid Start) focuses on care provision in the first 1000 days, emphasizing on interprofessional collaboration. Nevertheless, professionals still face challenges in transforming to interprofessional collaboration, particularly between medical care, maternal and infant healthcare, and community care providers. There is also still limited knowledge about factors that facilitate or hinder effective interprofessional collaboration in providing care for young children and their families. What are the necessary prerequisites for high-quality integrated care for young children?

This paper provides insights into the barriers and facilitators of multiprofessional collaboration in early screening and intervention for children from conception to six years of age. We employed two methods to study these barriers and facilitators: 1. a scoping review of international literature 2. interviews with 30 professionals from various disciplines working with young children and their families to understand their experiences and needs in realizing interprofessional collaboration.

After a rigorous review process, 21 articles (out of 1551 initially screened) were included in the final literature review. The identified facilitators and barriers were categorized into 5 clusters, which will be discussed in detail in the session:

1. Communication (e.g. the ability to contact each other, speaking the same ‘language’),
2. Personal interaction (e.g. lack of trust in other disciplines, hierarchical positioning),
3. Organizational and policy level (e.g. reflective practice, role clarity, collaborative infrastructure),
4. Goals/views/priorities, (e.g. different views of what transdisciplinary care means)
5. Knowledge (of for example the expertise of other disciplines) and training.

Additionally, we will discuss the interview findings. Initial results underline the literature findings and indicate a high need for professionals to meet each other in person to facilitate understanding, gain knowledge of each other’s expertise, and arrange regular contact.

Case reports unlocked: Leveraging retrieval-augmented generation with large language models to advance research on child psychological maltreatment

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mr. Dragan Stoll [1], ***Prof. Andreas Jud*** [2], ***Dr. Samuel Wehrli*** [3], ***Ms. Selina Steinmann*** [2], ***Ms. Meret Sophie Wallimann*** [2], ***Dr. Julia Quehenberger*** [4]

1. *Institute of Psychology and Education, Ulm University, Germany / ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work,* ***2.*** *School of Social Work, ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences,* ***3.*** *School of Life Sciences and Facility Management, ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences,* ***4.*** *ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work*

Background: Research on child psychological maltreatment is impeded by a lack of high-quality structured data. Crucial information is often documented in child protective services (CPS) case files, but only in narrative form. Recent research on the utilization of retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) methods with large language models (LLMs) for extracting structured data from narratives has demonstrated significant potential. RAG methods can facilitate automated classification, thereby eliminating the need for laborious annotation.

Objective: We aimed to extract structured data from narrative casework reports by utilizing RAG and local open-source LLMs to classify mentions of 24 CPS case factors. These factors encompass child maltreatment indicators, such as psychological abuse, risk factors associated with parental, family, and child characteristics, CPS interventions, and their outcomes.

Methods: We developed a four-stage workflow comprising of (1) case reports collection, (2) RAG based assessment of case factor mentions, (3) automated extraction of case factors, and (4) case labelling. All CPS reports (N = 29,770) between 2008 and 2022 from Switzerland's largest CPS provider were collected. Model performance was compared against human-coded validation data on assessments of psychological abuse of a child, lack of parental cooperation and parental alcohol abuse. Two expert human reviewers independently classified weighted random samples of reports to validate the findings.

Results: The model classified psychological abuse, lack of parental cooperation and parental alcohol abuse, with an accuracy of 82%, 83%, and 95%, respectively, surpassing the agreement rates between the two human reviewers (79%, 80%, and 93%).

Conclusions: RAG methods and LLMs can replicate human judgment on complex CPS case factors without the need for laborious annotation of case reports. High accuracy and complete inter-rater agreement level was achieved for straightforward factors, such as parental alcohol abuse. Improving RAG methods to assess both supporting and refuting case factor evidence could improve accuracy. Careful consideration of potential biases and limitations in machine learning methods is advised. These methods can serve as early warning systems, by identifying critical factors from extensive case notes that might otherwise be overlooked, supporting professionals in making informed decisions and improving outcomes for at-risk children.

Our research was recently published and can be accessed here:

Stoll, D., Jud, A., Wehrli, S., Lätsch, D., Steinmann, S., Wallimann, M. S., & Quehenberger, J. (2025). Case reports unlocked: Leveraging retrieval-augmented generation with large language models to advance research on psychological child maltreatment. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *169*, 107653. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2025.107653

Exploring Dialogue-Based Practices in Norwegian Child Welfare: Perceptions of Families´ User Involvement and Children´s Best Interest

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Ingrid Djuvik Overskeid [1]

1. *University of Stavanger, Norway*

Norwegian Child Welfare Services (CWS) have faced criticism for several years for inadequately protecting families and insufficiently including them in cases regarding alternative care. Despite the statutory right of children to participate in decisions affecting them, studies reveal that their voices are often neglected, and their perspectives insufficiently incorporated in decision-making leading to alternative care. Parents also report challenges in understanding child welfare assessments and may feel disrespected in the processes. Furthermore, child welfare workers report that handling such demanding cases leaves them constrained in adequately supporting families. To address some of these challenges, a method called the Dialogue Process (DP) has been introduced. DP is offered by the Child Welfare Tribunal and aims to enhance dialogue and facilitate collaborative solutions for families through participation and mutual understanding. Participation is voluntary and both families and CWS representatives are represented by lawyers. The Tribunal is a mediating impartial third party with responsibility of developing solutions that prioritize the best interests of the child.

This presentation will outline preliminary findings from a qualitative study, including six focus group interviews with Norwegian child welfare workers (N=25) who have participated in DP. The study aims to examine child welfare workers´ experiences of participating in DP and their perceptions of DP´s potential. The study is part of a PhD project that investigates how dialogue-based processes may contribute to increased user involvement for families in complex child welfare cases. There is limited research available on dialogue-based decision-making processes in the CWS. This study seeks to provide new and evidence-based insights into the extent to which DP can foster active user involvement and families‘ well-being in alternative care cases.

Reducing seclusion and restraint in youth care: how increased staff knowledge about trauma-informed care leads to a change in attitude about coercive measures (and why this is not enough)

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mr. Roel Kooijmans [1]***, Dr. Rianne Pellemans*** [2]

1. *Koraal Centre of Expertise / De Hondsberg (the Netherlands) University of Amsterdam, Research Institute of Child Development and Education, P.O. Box 19268, Nieuwe Achtergracht 127, 1018, WS, Amsterdam, the Netherlands,* ***2.*** *Department of Psychiatry and Neuropsychology, Maastricht University*

Objectives

In The Netherlands, juveniles admitted to a youth care facility may have their physical freedom restricted in order to avert serious harm to themselves or others under the Care and Compulsion Act. The use of coercion can cause physical and emotional harm, especially when it affects physical integrity, for example through physical restraint and seclusion. Most youths receiving support at residential youth care facilities have had relational traumatic experiences in childhood, and physical interventions can add new traumatic experiences. In addition, applying repressive and coercive measures harms the youth-caregiver relationship. Youth care organizations should strive to minimize the use of coercive measures.

As part of the implementation of trauma-informed care (TIC) at Koraal, a multi-centre youth care organization in The Netherlands, professional caregivers receive extensive training. The curriculum focuses on recognizing the impact of adverse experiences and a lack of protective factors on development, well-being, and health. Professionals are taught how to respond appropriately and prevent additional stress or traumatization. In the current study we investigated whether this training leads to different attitudes and practices regarding the application of coercion.

Method

Whenever coercive measures are applied at Koraal, professionals are required to describe what occurred in detailed incident reports. These reports were analysed qualitatively using a Framework Analysis approach. In a preconceived framework for analysis, six 'cognitive shifts' were postulated, that represent a shift from 'TIC-unfavorable' to 'TIC-favorable'. We identified language that is indicative of attitudes at either end of the spectrum. An example would be a shift from 'clients should follow my rules and restrictions' (TIC-unfavorable) to 'we set boundaries together' (TIC-informed). These shifts were derived from the theory on trauma-informed attitudes underlying the Attitudes Related to Trauma Informed Care scale (ARTIC) and SAMHSA's six principles of TIC.

We compared incident reports that predated TIC training with reports from incidents after teams were trained. Both narrative syntheses and quantitative analyses were conducted. For the quantitative analyses, we compared the proportion of trauma-unaware versus trauma-informed descriptions per theme.

Results

Both narrative and quantitative analyses demonstrated a general but modest positive shift towards more trauma-sensitivity. Changes were marked for some themes and small (and statistically insignificant) for others. For all themes, much room for improvement remained even after training.

At Koraal, this (modest) change in attitudes has at this point not yet translated into a significant reduction in the numbers of coercive measures. Discussions with professionals seem to indicate that training is a necessary first step but not enough. We suggest that a translation from a change in mindset to a change in actions requires guided peer-to-peer reflection, coaching on the job and ongoing supervision.

Poster

In our research poster, we present the main outcomes according to our six-theme framework. We will highlight challenges that emerge from the data and discussions with professional care workers and propose next steps for the reduction of seclusion and restraint in alternative care for children and youths.

The CARE Model in Spain: implementation and early results

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Ana Pulgar García [1], ***Ms. Raquel Ordiales Alegre*** [1], ***Mr. Jaime Burón*** [1], ***Dr. Carla González-García*** [1], ***Prof. Amaia Bravo Arteaga*** [1]

1. *Universidad de Oviedo*

Background: Children in residential care have lived through experiences of great emotional impact, which makes the implementation of trauma-sensitive programs and interventions essential. In this context, the CARE program (Children And Residential Experiences)is presented as an effective strategy to improve the quality of care in these environments.

This model was developed in 2005 by the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research at Cornell University (New York). It is an evidence-based program that is supported by a theory of change, whose objective is to transform interactions between professionals and children, promoting trauma-sensitive approaches. Its effectiveness has been recognized by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, where it has a "promising" level of evidence.

The theoretical framework of the program is based on six key principles: developmentally focused, family involved, relationship based, competence centered, trauma-informed, ecologically oriented. The application of these principles seeks to improve the well-being and adaptation of children in residential care, promoting a safer and more comprehensive environment for their development.

Objective: This work aims to describe the first implementation process of the CARE model in a non-English-speaking country (Spain) and analyze the early results in 6 children's homes after 18 months.

Methodology: The implementation process is currently at its third year of a 4-year collaboration project in the region of Cantabria (Spain). Baseline data have been collected from the staff, children and young people in 6 residential care homes and again after 18 months of implementation..

To this end, the Youth Perception Survey (YPS) questionnaire was used to assess children's perceptions, and the Staff Survey, to assess the educational beliefs and practices of professionals. Both were created and validated by Cornell University for the development of the CARE program and its implementation.

Results: The results show a statistically significant improvement, both in the educational beliefs and practices developed by the staff, and in the children's perception of how they are being cared.

Conclusions and implications: CARE Model seeks to maximize the potential of adults to meet the emotional and psychological needs of children. Its implementation in Spain is showing significant progress in the transformation of practices in residential care.

Experiences and responses to Intimate Partner Violence experienced by girls and young women in Independent Living placements

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Yvonne Hughes [1]

1. *University of Sydney*

In Australia, girls and young women experience intimate partner violence (IPV) more than other women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022), with girls and young women in Out of Home Care (OOHC) experiencing this violence at even higher rates (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017a). While there is anecdotal evidence that girls and young women in Independent Living (IL) OOHC placements are subjected to IPV, their experiences and needs are under researched. This poster provides an introduction to the research currently being undertaken by the presenter as part of a PhD.

The lack of robust data collection by Australian child protection systems prevents an effective public health approach to child protection. Gaps include understanding the prevalence and identification of abuse and neglect, evaluation of interventions and dissemination of information. This research aims to generate new knowledge by being the first Australian study to examine the unique perspectives and needs of CYP living independently within the OOHC system with experiences of IPV.

The research is being undertaken using *mixed methods,* which will include desktop research, surveys, interviews and agency file reviews. This methodology was chosen due to the need for both quantitative and qualitative data to address key gaps including: a) the limited data on the IL (OOHC) population – which impacts research into this population – and b) the need for a nuanced understanding of the experiences of girls and young women. It will follow the *explanatory sequential design* sequence (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), wherein qualitative research will be informed by quantitative data, culminating in integrated analysis.

First and foremost, this research will ensure that the voices of young people and their lived experience are incorporated meaningfully and respectfully. Research will include the voices of girls and young women in IL placements with experience of IPV via semi-structured interviews. Professional participants will be sought from agencies and NGOs who support young people in IL placements or provide programs that serve this population. Professional participants will also be sought from domestic and family violence organisations to seek views on whether their services are fit-for-purpose for CYP as intimate partners, rather than as children 'exposed to' DFV. This mixed methods approach aims to yield rich data to enable an analysis of both the prevalence of IPV in IL population and the needs of the girls and young women with lived experience of both IPV and IL in OOHC. It will provide new insights into the IL (OOHC) population through data that, to date, has never been collected. Understanding this population's exposure to and experience of IPV will shift our knowledge from anecdotal to evidence-based data.

Processes and Policies in alternative care for children - “I want to go back home”. Impact evaluation of the ‘Casa d’Infants’ project for child and youth deinstitutionalisation

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mx. Jose Lopera [1], ***Ms. MONICA GARCIA*** [1]

1. *Fundació Acció Social Infància (FASI)*

INTRODUCTION

This document describes an Impact Assessment of the *Cases d’Infants* (CI) project, which aims to reverse the institutionalization experienced by children and adolescents in care within the Child Protection System and promote deinstitutionalization through parental reintegration.

The foundation FASI manages 13 CI in Catalonia (Spain). A CI is a residential service for children and adolescents where parents are actively and voluntarily present daily. An interdisciplinary team of professionals works with the children and parents to improve parental skills (setting educational boundaries, showing affection, etc.) and the parent-child relationship during an intervention period between 12 and 18 months. The project started in 2009, and the final phase of the research was conducted in 2024.

METHODOLOGY

Phase 1. Professionals and adult beneficiaries participate in the construction of the Theory of Change.

Phase 2. The study examines the historical database of almost **1,000 cases** to determine the extent to which children and adolescents leaving CI return to their parents and avoid institutionalization.

Phase 3. Multivariable methods are applied to identify potential underlying relationships between key project variables (log lineal analysis, multiple correspondence’s analysis, segmentation analysis, multinomial regression).

Phase 4. Public administration monitored a sample of 473 cases to analyse how many children and adolescents who have exited CI re-enter the child protection system.

RESULTS

Phase 1. The Theory of Change and the indicator system were developed in a participatory process.

Phase 2.

- 79.2% of the beneficiary children and adolescents receive a non-institutionalization measure, and 72.07% return to their parental home at the end of the intervention.
- 69.66% of the children and adolescents who came from a residential institution leave the institution (64.14% come back with their parents and 5.52% with their extended family).

Phase 3. Evidence suggests that certain variables are associated with worse outcomes: age (the older the child, the worse the prognosis), non-nuclear family structures, and intervention at an advanced stage of the risk situation.

Phase 4.

- 85% of the children and adolescents have not had any new neglect or guardianship case that would lead to institutionalization.

- 51.2% of the children and adolescents did not have any further case files in the child protection system after leaving the project, meaning that the system did not detect any new risk situations.

CONCLUSIONS

The CI project demonstrates high effectiveness in reversing situations of risk of family neglect, both by preventing family separations that lead to institutionalization and by helping children residing in protection institutions return to their families. Data provided by the public protection system confirm that some of the positive effects of the intervention are sustained over time.

Community Level Resilience Factors in Kinship Care Families

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Aiga Romane-Meiere [1]

1. *University of Latvia*

Every year a lot of children around the world are removed from their families because they are neglected, abused or otherwise maltreated or their parents have serious problems – addictions, mental illnesses, imprisonment. If children are taken out of their biological family, one of alternative possibilities is care in kinship families. There is a contradiction between the potential un risks in kinship families In theoretical literature these families are described as a contradictory phenomenon - on the one hand it is emphasized that kinship care is the most suitable form of care for the child's interests, because it is easier to maintain a connection with the biological family and return to biological parents, on the other hand, the close connection with the biological parents often rises a risks of safety for the child in care.

The aim of the research was to identify the main resilience factors in kinship care families in different subgroups and to describe interaction of factors at different levels, including community level. Usually resilience factors are analyzed in family system level, however, these factors have interaction at the community and broader societal levels as well.

For data collections multiple case study methodology was used Subcases were strategically selected according to already existing division in Latvia and that is based on relationship with a child in care: there are grandparents, other relatives, non-relatives and non-formal caregivers. Used methods were 1) participant observation in 6 support groups and 4 summer camps; 2) 21 semi-structured interviews with kinship family members (mostly caregivers and children in care); 3) 12 semi- structured interviews with experts The methodological contribution of the research is the use of actor-network theory in data analysis. Theory allows identify those nodal points that have ability to change and transform the network structure, if they are located in strategically significant positions.

Findings reveals that most influential resilience factors in community level are access to information, attitude from neighbours, community and society, communication with professionals, social services. Impact of a factors may vary depending on the context and each of them can protective factor or risk factor. In summary, it can be concluded that in grandparent families, more than in other family models, the interaction of resilience factors in community level is subordinated to the reasons why the child was placed in care. Results of the study demonstrate, that aunts and uncles usually have their own nuclear families already, but pressure from society causes the decision to become an official caregiver even it has negative consequences to their family functionality.

Care-Leavers for Care-Leavers Movement in the Global South: Examining the Role of the Care-Leaving Alumni Association in Legal Reform in Ethiopia

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mr. Anduamlak Takele [1]

1. *Department of Sociology, University of Alberta,Canada*

Young people transitioning from out-of-home care into emerging adulthood have been identified as the most vulnerable group within the liberal model of the child welfare system. Their specific vulnerability to homelessness, school dropout, early parenthood, and mental illness results primarily from abrupt transitions from care to independence and a lack of aftercare support to help them adjust to independent living. Research documenting the negative outcomes of leaving care in the Global North is proliferating, highlighting the need for legal reform to support these young people's attempts to successfully transition from care to independent living upon aging out of care. However, research on care-leaving in the Global South is still in its infancy, and specifically, how care-leavers themselves are advocating for care reform remains unknown. The study employs Brysk (2013)'s speaking to power model of human rights advocacy to examine how the SOS Children's Villages International in Ethiopia Care-Leaving Alumni Association initiative advocates for legal reform in Ethiopia, garnering national attention and global solidarity. Drawing on critical discourse analysis of the Association's initiative to advocate for legal reform in Ethiopia, this study argues that the association's efforts to mobilize former care-leavers for change and to reframe its agenda as a human rights issue have encouraged Ethiopian policymakers to revisit the current child welfare regime and initiate policy dialogue for care reform in Ethiopia. The study also highlighted the influence of care leavers' agency in transforming oppressive child welfare systems in the country. It calls for urgent international solidarity among care-leaver alumni to address the marginalization of children in care, particularly in accessing aftercare support for a successful transition from care into emerging adulthood in Ethiopia.

Keywords

Care leaving, Care-Leaving Alumni in Ethiopia, Social Movement, Care reform, Leaving care in Africa

When “good enough” isn’t good enough: Child welfare workers’ experiences with assessing neglect and quality of care in norwegian foster homes

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mrs. Heidi Linnerud [1]

1. *University of Inland Norway*

Abstract:

Background:

Children in foster care are assumed to be safe and better cared for than in their biological homes. However, concerns about neglect and substandard care in foster homes are increasingly raised by frontline professionals in child welfare services.

Objective:

This study explores how Norwegian child welfare workers experience and assess concerns related to neglect in foster homes. It examines the ethical and professional dilemmas they face when evaluating the quality of care and what constitutes “proper” or “sufficient” care under systemic constraints.

Methods:

The study is based on eight qualitative, semi-structured interviews with child welfare workers responsible for the follow-up of children in foster care. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify key challenges in how neglect is perceived, tolerated, or acted upon in the context of limited placement resources.

Findings:

Findings reveal that children in foster care are not immune to neglect. Participants describe situations where concerns are minimized or deprioritized due to a lack of foster homes, leading to a lowered standard of acceptable care. This often results in ethical tension between ensuring stability and safeguarding children’s well-being. Participants also report emotional strain, inadequate supervisory support, and moral distress related to decision-making under uncertainty.

Implications:

The study highlights the need to critically assess quality standards in foster care, especially under resource limitations. It calls for improved routines for follow-up and intervention in neglect cases, clearer criteria for what constitutes proper care, and more consistent trauma-informed support for both children and professionals.

Relevance to conference theme:

This paper directly contributes to the theme *“Quality of alternative care for children”*, by questioning how quality is defined and maintained in foster homes under structural constraints. It also connects to *trauma-informed care* and *mental health in alternative care*, by showing how neglect affects children’s psychological well-being and how professionals’ emotional exposure impacts decision quality.

The Cost of Caring: An International Study into the Professional Quality of Life of Foster Carers

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mrs. Camille Verheyden [1], ***Prof. Frank Van Holen*** [2], ***Dr. Séverine Euillet*** [3], ***Ms. Ayumi Okawa*** [4], ***Dr. Stéphanie Chartier*** [5], ***Dr. Delphine West*** [2], ***Prof. Johan Vanderfaeillie*** [2]

1. *Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Department of Psychology,* ***2.*** *Vrije Universiteit Brussel,* ***3.*** *Université Paris Nanterre,* ***4.*** *La Sauvegarde Familiale,* ***5.*** *ULiege*

Objectives: This study examined the professional quality of life – specifically secondary traumatic stress (STS), burnout, and compassion satisfaction (CS) – among voluntary foster parents in Flanders and Wallonia (Dutch- and French-speaking regions of Belgium) and professional foster carers in France. It also compared the levels of professional quality of life across these groups and identified risk and protective factors related to carers' personal, foster care, and foster child environments. By comparing different types of foster carers across countries with differing foster care systems, we aimed to gain insight into how systemic and structural contexts may shape professional quality of life outcomes.

Methods: An online questionnaire was completed by 945 foster parents from all five Flemish foster care agencies (response rate ±15.7%), 316 foster parents from 14 (out of 17) Walloon foster care agencies (response rate ±24.6%), and 136 professional foster carers in one French Department (response rate ±38%). The 5th edition of the Professional Quality of Life scale (ProQOL-5; Stamm, 2010) was used to measure STS (α=.77), burnout (α=.76), and CS (α=.90). Several factors within the personal (e.g., personality traits), foster carer (e.g., workload regarding tasks and responsibilities as a foster carer), and foster child environment (e.g., trauma history) were measured in accordance with Stamm's theoretical model.

Findings: Results showed predominantly low levels of STS (Flanders: 59.2%, Wallonia: 53.8%) and burnout (Flanders: 69.3%, Wallonia: 71.8%) among Belgian volunteer foster parents, using cut-off values primarily derived from American data on professional helpers. High levels of CS were reported by the majority of Belgian volunteer foster parents (Flanders: 58.2%, Wallonia: 68%). French professional foster carers, in contrast, reported higher STS and burnout and lower CS, with most scores falling within the moderate range (STS: 69.1%, burnout: 60.3%, CS: 65.4%). When considering other factors that are associated with the professional quality of life, French professional foster parents scored significantly higher on burnout and significantly lower on CS, compared to the Walloon volunteer foster parents.

Multiple linear regression analyses identified key risk and protective factors influencing all three aspects of the foster carers' professional quality of life. Higher overinvolvement with the foster child, a heavier perceived workload regarding the tasks and responsibilities as a foster carer and family demands interfering more with foster carer tasks and responsibilities were linked to poorer professional quality of life (higher STS and burnout, lower CS). Experiencing more social support in private life and feeling more emotionally stable were associated with an increased professional quality of life (lower STS and burnout, higher CS).

Conclusions: These results underline the importance of balancing foster carer tasks and responsibilities with family/private life. Structural support, attention to carers' subjective experiences of their tasks and responsibilities, and efforts to promote emotional resilience and social support are crucial for safeguarding the well-being of foster carers in diverse care settings.

Early Start, Bright Future: Expanding Access to Early Years Support for Children

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Deborah Tsorbaris [1]

1. *Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare*

Early Start, Bright Future aims to improve long-term learning and development outcomes by increasing participation in early years services for children and families experiencing vulnerability, including children in out of home care. These services, such as early childhood education and care, and kindergarten, play a crucial role in fostering children's cognitive, social, and emotional development.

The Australian Early Development Census found that one in five Australian children is vulnerable in at least one area of their development at school entry. First Nations children, children in out-of-home care, those from non-English-speaking backgrounds, children with disability, and those from low socio-economic backgrounds stand to benefit the most from early learning but face the greatest barriers to participation.

The initiative was developed by Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare after extensive consultation with practitioners supporting children and families who shared they struggled to find clear, centralised information about programs, services, and subsidies that could help improve early childhood outcomes for children in Victoria.
To address this, Early Start, Bright Future provides:

- The Early Years Hub, an online platform housing a range of resources to equip practitioners with the knowledge and tools needed to support children's access to early childhood education and care.
- The Early Years Finder, which connects professionals with detailed information on programs, services, subsidies, and supports that enable early years participation.
- The Resource Library, offering research and fact sheets for professionals, parents, and carers to guide children's early learning journeys.

Led by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, in partnership with community organisations and with support from the Victorian Department of Education, the initiative focuses on improving access to two years of kindergarten as a foundation for school success.
This presentation will examine the success of Early Start, Bright Future in promoting early childhood development through evidence-based practices, cross-sector collaboration, and advocacy. By addressing barriers to participation in early learning, the initiative fosters improved educational, social, and emotional outcomes for children. The presentation will highlight the importance of integrating health, education, and family support services to build a strong foundation for lifelong wellbeing and demonstrate how targeted early intervention leads to lasting positive change for children, families, and communities.

Improving Collaboration and Knowledge-Sharing to Address Adolescent Violence in the Home in Australia

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Deborah Tsorbaris [1]

1. *Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare*

Adolescent Violence in the Home (AVITH) is a complex and distinct form of violence that remains underreported and poorly understood. It requires a specialised, multidisciplinary response, yet existing service systems in Australia—spanning child protection, trauma services, police, courts, and counselling—often lack the training, resources, and coordinated frameworks needed to respond effectively. While service responses are growing, families experiencing AVITH need more specialist service support, including therapeutic, whole-of-family, and dyadic interventions to address trauma and rebuild relationships. Addressing AVITH requires greater collaboration between and across sectors to ensure a unified, informed, and effective response.

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare plays a leading role in bringing together diverse sectors to strengthen responses to AVITH. Since 2019, with the support of Family Safety Victoria, the Centre has worked to improve awareness, build best practices, and provide tailored support to organisations working with children and families experiencing AVITH. Through trauma-informed approaches, early intervention strategies, and system-wide collaboration, we are working to break the cycle of violence and improve outcomes for young people and their families.

- The Centre facilitates and supports three AVITH networks, fostering cross-sector collaboration and knowledge-sharing.
- We deliver tailored training programs and support interstate and national initiatives to enhance sector-wide capability.
- Our Outcomes Practice Evidence Network hosts an AVITH knowledge hub, providing practitioners with research, good practice examples, webinars, training, and networking opportunities.
- The hub also raises practitioner awareness of system reforms and supports professionals engaging with young people who use, or are at risk of using, violence.

This presentation will examine the key drivers of AVITH in Australia and the cross-sectoral collaborations emerging to address it. It will also pose questions on a global scale, including:

- How can we further strengthen collaboration between child protection, justice, and family support services to create a more unified and effective response?
- What policy and practice innovations are needed to embed AVITH responses into service systems at a national and international level?

By fostering greater coordination, shared knowledge, and systemic reform, the Centre's AVITH initiative is building more responsive and effective services for adolescents using violence in the home.

Holistic Health of Orphaned Youth in Canada: The role of support resources in coping with parental loss

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Prof. Jacques Cherblanc [1], ***Prof. Christiane Bergeron-Leclerc*** [1]

1. *Université du Québec à Chicoutimi*

The loss of a parent in childhood or adolescence is a major life event that can significantly impact a young person's holistic health, encompassing physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions. Despite growing international research on alternative care and vulnerable youth, orphans remain an overlooked population in Canada, with limited empirical data on their health status and support needs. This study, part of the *Making Orphans Visible in Canada* project funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), seeks to address this knowledge gap by examining the associations between orphaned youth's holistic health and the support resources they accessed following parental loss.

Using a cross-sectional survey methodology, data were collected in winter 2025 from 750 young people aged 14-25, including 250 orphans, 250 youth with separated parents, and 250 with non-separated parents. The study applies an ecosystemic developmental model, integrating the life-course perspective to assess individual, social, and structural determinants of well-being. Health outcomes were measured using validated scales for physical health (Somatic Symptom Scale-8), mental health (GAD-7, PHQ-9, SIDAS-5), social support (Social Provisions Scale), and spiritual well-being (WHOQoL-SRPB Brief).

At the conference, we will present an analysis of the holistic health dimensions of orphaned youth in Canada, focusing on significant differences between orphans and non-orphans. We will then investigate the mechanisms underlying these disparities using regression models to identify key predictors—such as age at parental loss, cause of death, and access to protective resources—that may shape these relationships.

We hypothesize that orphans will report lower holistic health scores compared to non-orphans.

By providing a nuanced understanding of the determinants of orphaned youth's well-being, this study offers valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and healthcare professionals. The findings will inform the development of targeted interventions to mitigate the negative health consequences of orphanhood and enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of support systems in alternative care settings.

Successful Futures Check-In Survey: Proactive assessment, data-driven aftercare

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Jonathan Huefner [1], ***Dr. Patrick Tyler*** [1]

1. *Boys Town*

The transition from residential and foster care to adult living creates various challenges for young people leaving care. Many are at risk of poor academic outcomes, potential involvement in the criminal justice system, substance abuse, and other problematic issues. Youth transitioning from care who don't have family support are particularly vulnerable. Many need additional appropriate support and safety nets to successfully transition to young adulthood. Successful Futures is an after-care system created to provide formalized support for young people who are aging out of residential and foster care at Boys Town.

An important Successful Futures program element for identifying and supporting youth needs is the Check-In Survey. The systematically administered Check-In Survey allows Successful Futures to provide proactive, data-driven aftercare. This approach is proactive by actively identifying issues as they arise and taking steps to provide support and prevent crises. It involves regular communication, monitoring, and proactive interventions to support a smooth transition and integration into adult life. The systematic collection, analysis, and reporting of status and needs empowers Support Specialist to provide data-driven aftercare through providing specific and timely support and services based on individual circumstances and needs.

So far, three high school graduation cohorts have been involved in the Check-In process, and we have complete data for the 12-month mark. Check-In data is administered as an online survey coordinated by the Translational Research Center. Check-In data is collected post-graduation at 3-, 6-, 12, and 18-months and at the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th year. Information from the Check-Ins is reported back to the Success Future program. Red Flags, when responses indicate an immediate concerning need, are highlighted for immediate follow-up by program specialists. Examples of Red Flag issues include feeling unsafe in their living environment, being unable to pay bills, and reporting substantial problems with mental health issues.

The total number of graduates in the three graduate cohorts is 199. Overall, 64% of graduates have responded to a given Check-In. For the first three cohorts, 80% of graduates have responded at least once. The following program specific results will be presented: number of youth - who have someone to count on for emotional support, with mental health concerns, pursuing post-secondary education, number working, who have experience homelessness within the last 6 months, who have been arrested, etc. We will also present the percentage of youth who reported one or more Red Flag item.

Results support the value of the Success Futures Check-In process in supporting youth. By identifying Red Flag issues, the Check-Ins have empowered Successful Futures specialist to provide specific, timely support to alumni. This process is in its early stages, but proactive support to youth leaving residential care is likely to result in substantial benefits to these youth as they transition to adulthood.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Self-Control Skills Programme for Children With Externalising Behaviour Problems

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Oral

Dr. Gabrijela Ratkajec Gašević [1], ***Dr. Ivana Maurović*** [2]

1. *University of Zagreb, Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences,* ***2.*** *The Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences*

Self-control is a protective socio-emotional skill that becomes especially relevant in preadolescence, when children face intensified behavioural, emotional, and neurodevelopmental changes. This paper presents the development, implementation, and evaluation of a psychoeducational group programme titled *Master Self-Control Skills Like a DRAGON* (*Savladaj vještine samokontrole kao ZMAJ*), aimed at improving self-regulation in children aged 8–11 with externalising behaviour problems. The programme was developed within the ISKORAK project (Croatia), which seeks to improve assessment and intervention practices for children and youth with behavioural difficulties in out-of-home care. To date, five programme cycles have been implemented: four in institutional care settings and one in a community-based setting involving children from various welfare services. A mixed-methods design is used to evaluate programme outcomes. Quantitative data are collected at two measurement points (pre- and post-programme) using the Short Self-Regulation Questionnaire (Novak & Clayton, 2001), the Social and Emotional Skills Questionnaire (Zych et al., 2018; Croatian adaptation: Marušić et al., 2022), and the Child and Adolescent Behaviour Questionnaire (Mirosavljević et al., 2023). Programme facilitators monitored implementation fidelity and group cohesion throughout the process. Preliminary findings from previous programme cycles indicate improvements in emotional regulation, impulse control, and a reduction in externalising behaviours. This presentation will compare experiences of implementation across different settings and contexts, drawing on participants' perceptions and observed changes in self-control skills. The study aims to explore how structured group-based psychoeducational interventions contribute to the development of self-control among children with behavioural challenges. It further highlights the programme's potential as a scalable model within child welfare services and emphasises the importance of targeted, context-sensitive and cross-sectoral approaches in supporting at-risk youth.

Early lifespan trauma in Finnish young adults with an out-of-home care background – an ecological systems perspective

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Leena Leinonen [1]

1. *University of Eastern Finland*

In this study we analyze the experiences of Finnish young adults with a history of out-of-home care (OOHC) and mental health challenges, in regard to their experienced trauma and interpretations of the traumatizing factors during their early lifespan. The ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner is used as a tool in the analysis. We answer two research questions: 1) *How the experiences of trauma of Finnish young adults with an OOHC background and mental health challenges are structured in the light of the levels of the ecological systems theory?* and 2) *What kind of social factors can contribute to the experience of trauma?*

The data was gathered as a part of the LANUPS research project, funded by the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health for 2021–2022. The aim of the project was to identify realized services and the service needs of young people who have been clients of both OOHC and adolescent psychiatric outpatient or inpatient care. The data consists of interviews of nineteen young people aged 18–27, who have been in OOHC and who have also used or in their own opinion would have needed the services of adolescent psychiatry. By ´would have needed in their own opinion´, we refer to situations where a young person has experienced psychological challenges and anxiety, but for reasons such as a lack of knowledge on how to access appropriate assistance, had no access to timely and appropriate mental health services. The data was analyzed using a content analysis approach, utilizing both data-driven and theory guided analysis. The theory guided part of the analysis is based on the key idea in Bronfenbrenner's theory: an individual's development is influenced by a series of interconnected environmental systems, including the *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, *macrosystem* and *chronosystem*, each representing different environmental influences on an individual's growth and behavior – and possible traumatization.

Factors contributing traumatization in the data in the light of the levels of ecological systems theory were:

Microsystem: 1) *experiences of non-existing communication in the family* 2) *inadequate emotional skills and the denial of the expression of emotions* 3) *experiences of authoritarian parenting* 4) *traumatization in the context of OOHC* 5) *disregardful processes in a school context* and 6) *the role of religion in the process of traumatization*

Mesosystem: 1) *the life of the child is affected by the tensions between the professionals and the parents*

Exosystem: 1) *the life of the child is affected by his/her parent's experiences*

Macrosystem: 1) *rigid service structures* and 2) *general attitude climate regarding child welfare clients*

Chronosystem: 1) *conscious re-traumatization* and 2) *unconscious re-traumatization*

Understanding the traumatic experiences of adolescents with an OOHC background requires a thorough consideration of all the levels of the ecological systems theory. Traumatization is often a fusion of acute, chronic and complex traumas which should be better acknowledged in child welfare work.

A new clinical tool for the screening and assessment of child sexual exploitation cases

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Vanessa Fournier [1], ***Ms. Andrée-Anne Houle*** [2]

1. *Centre de recherche universitaire sur les jeunes et les familles (CRUJeF),* ***2.*** *Université de Sherbrooke*

Sexual exploitation is a complex issue. It can affect both females and males, minors and adults, occur in various settings and contexts, and be linked to criminal activities such as human trafficking. This complexity presents a significant challenge for professionals who interact with victims or individuals at high risk of sexual exploitation. To date, a few screening and assessment tools have been developed and evaluated (see Romero et al., 2021). In Quebec, more specifically, no standardized tools are currently available to professionals for screening and assessment in cases of child sexual exploitation.

To address this concern, a team from the *Centre de recherche universitaire sur les jeunes et les familles* has undertaken the development of a concept map—a graphical representation of the current body of scientific knowledge on child sexual exploitation. This map illustrates the main risk and protective factors associated with the issue, as well as the relationships between these factors. The goal of this tool is to guide professionals in considering these risk and protective factors during assessment and intervention while supporting the integration of evidence-based data into clinical practice.

To achieve this, two literature reviews were conducted: the first identified studies published between 1977 and 2019, while the second focused on studies published between 2019 and 2024. The main objectives were to:

1. Identify the risk and protective factors associated with child sexual exploitation.
2. Identify the possible indicators of victimization (physical, psychological, behavioral, and social).
3. Identify the consequences or challenges associated with victimization.
4. Identify key clinical recommendations and best practices for intervening with youth at risk of or victim of sexual exploitation.

The literature searches were conducted using the following databases: Medline, PsycInfo, Social Work Abstracts, CINAHL, Social Sciences Full Text, Criminal Justice Abstracts, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, Sociological Abstracts, National Criminal Justice Reference Service Abstracts, Science Citation Index Expanded, Social Sciences Citation Index and Emerging Sources Citation Index. In total, 163 studies were included in the analysis.

All study results were extracted and qualitatively synthesized. A convergent qualitative synthesis design was used to transform findings from quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies into qualitative data, ensuring that all available and relevant evidence was presented concurrently and equitably.

This poster aims to highlight key findings from the literature reviews, using the concept map. The focus will be on individual and family risk factors, protective factors, and factors contributing to the persistence of child sexual exploitation over time.

Sexually exploited girls in residential care: Exploring the associated maladaptive core beliefs in early adulthood

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Roxane Perrin-Plouffe [1], ***Prof. Nadine Lanctôt*** [1], ***Prof. Katherine Pascuzzo*** [1]

1. *Université de Sherbrooke*

Context: Sexual exploitation has severe and long-lasting consequences, often resulting in post-traumatic symptoms and a wide range of psychosocial difficulties (Cole et al., 2016). Adolescent girls in residential care are particularly vulnerable to this form of victimization (O'Brien et al., 2017; Reid, 2018). Despite the growing body of evidence documenting their post-traumatic symptoms, there is still limited understanding of the relational and identity-related consequences of sexual exploitation in this population.

Theoretical framework: The complex trauma model posits that repeated and prolonged victimization – especially in relationships with significant others (e.g., a romantic partner who turns out to be a pimp) and during critical development periods like adolescence – has serious detrimental effects on an individual's adaptive functioning (Cook et al., 2005; Herman, 1992). Complex trauma disrupts multiple areas of development, notably a person's belief system, which can lead to persistent and exaggerated negative perceptions about oneself, others, and the world (Côté & Leblanc, 2016). Young's cognitive schemas theory (1990) offers a valuable and innovative framework for understanding these beliefs and perceptions. Early maladaptive schemas are deep-seated, negative mental structures that shape our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, typically formed in childhood or adolescence in response to traumatic experiences.

Objective: The goal of this study is to explore the associations between experiences of sexual exploitation during adolescence and early maladaptive schemas in early adulthood.

Methods: This study draws on a secondary analysis of longitudinal data and includes six waves of measurement, from time of admission in residential care (*M* age = 15.1) to early adulthood (*M* age = 19.4). The sample consists of 125 adolescent girls placed in residential care facilities in Quebec through Youth Protection services. Sexual exploitation was self-reported during adolescence (from T1 to T5) using six specific items. Early maladaptive schemas were assessed in early adulthood (T6) using the short form of the Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ-SF; Young, 1998).

Findings: Mean comparison tests reveal that young women who reported experiences of sexual exploitation scored significantly higher on several maladaptive schemas, particularly mistrust/abuse, abandonment, vulnerability to harm and shame/defectiveness. These findings suggest that child sexual exploitation may contribute to the development and/or persistence of negative core beliefs and perceptions about oneself and others in early adulthood.

Implications: By applying Young's cognitive schema theory to the issue of sexual exploitation, this study offers a more comprehensive perspective on the long-term traumatic impacts of sexual exploitation, moving beyond symptom-based approaches to highlight the persistent and pervasive nature of cognitive mechanisms underlying the behaviors and perceptions of young women with a history of residential care and sexual exploitation. This research highlights the importance of addressing maladaptive cognitive schemas as part of intervention strategies for this particular population. Further analyses are underway to explore these associations while controlling for childhood maltreatment, to better understand the distinct and combined effects of multiple forms of adversity across the life course.

Giving a voice to children and parents about their experiences in child welfare services

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Prof. Eve Pouliot [1], ***Mrs. Catherine Lacelle*** [1], ***Dr. Marie-Claude Simard*** [2], ***Mrs. Sarah Ferrer*** [3], ***Mrs. Tanya Ryan*** [3]

1. *Université du Québec à Chicoutimi,* ***2.*** *Centre de recherche universitaire sur les jeunes et les familles (CRUJeF),* ***3.*** *Boscoville*

Objectives

Some studies suggest that increasing the knowledge and skills of child protection workers can improve services for children and their parents (Cooley & Petren, 2011; Glisson & Green, 2011). Developed by Boscoville, the Versant program is in line with this perspective, aiming to improve and structure rehabilitation services in the community in the context of child protection services. It is intended for educators in outpatient rehabilitation services working with children and adolescents aged 6 to 18 and their families, who receive youth protection services for two reasons: neglect or serious behavioral problems. This poster is part of a research project to evaluate the Versant program in three regions of Quebec (Canada). It focuses on the point of view of children aged 12 and over and their parents who have participated in the program.

Methods

Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 10 parent-youth dyads. This type of interview makes it possible to adapt to the diversity of youth and families, as well as their experience (Drapeau & Saint-Jacques, 2020). The data were transcribed and analyzed thematically using NVivo.

Results

Preliminary results show that children and their parents appreciate the structure and support offered by the program. They identify factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of the program and highlight several positive impacts on their family functioning.

Conclusions

This research highlights the importance of giving families a voice in the evaluation of youth protection programs. The results will contribute to the improvement of the Versant program by providing recommendations to better meet families' needs.

New Family Dynamics: When Grandmom becomes Mom

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Lise Jönsson Koumaditis [1], ***Ms. Charlotte Ørnskov*** [2], ***Dr. Lene Mosegaard Søbjerg*** [1], ***Ms. Sabina Jensen Jæger*** [2], ***Dr. Bo Morthorst Rasmussen*** [2], ***Dr. Anthon Sand Jørgensen*** [3], ***Mrs. stinne Tornøe Frederiksen*** [1]

1. *VIA University College,* ***2.*** *UC SYD,* ***3.*** *UCN*

Background, Theoretical framework and Research questions

When children are placed in kinship care, it is often grandmom who steps into the parental role. This study focuses on the new roles and dynamics that emerge in families when grandmom or other close family members become the primary caregiver. By employing a reflexive relational approach inspired by Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) and Morgan (2011), the study aims to understand how placement is experienced by different family members. It focuses on their interpretations and sense-making of new roles and tasks.

Research questions are:

How do new primary caregivers, biological parents and children experience and understand the new family relations? What happens when grandmom becomes mom? How do new family relations influence the individual family member and their relationships?

Methods

The study primarily relies on qualitative data from 15 semi-structured interviews with new primary caregivers, biological parents, and adults formerly in kinship care.

In addition to these interviews, the study incorporates participant observations and semi-structured interviews with social workers from six municipalities in Denmark. These interviews are not directly related to our key informants, providing a broader perspective on the challenges and practices associated with kinship care and of the new family dynamics when family members take on the role of primary caregivers.

Findings

Our preliminary findings indicate that a change in parental roles present both challenges and opportunities. On one hand, these roles can create significant emotional and practical challenges as family members navigate the complexities of balancing their traditional role with the responsibilities of being a primary caregiver. This dual role often requires them to adapt to new parenting practices when managing the expectations of children, biological parents and the social services that placed the children in kinship care.

On the other hand, the transition can also strengthen family cohesion. As the broader family comes together, it may provide a secure, stable, and nurturing environment for children. The involvement of family members in caregiving can foster a sense of family, which is crucial for the child's identity and sense of belonging.

Conclusions/implications

Previous research indicates that social work practice lacks knowledge and tools to support the family during kinship care (e.g. Svalastog et al., 2023; Skoglund et al. 2022; Linderot, 2020; Holtan et al. 2020; Knudsen, 2009). This study enhances our understanding of how family dynamics evolve and adapt to new social realities. The findings will potentially provide social workers, public administrators, policy makers and other professionals with valuable insights to better support families throughout the various stages of kinship care.

The protective role of individual, familiar, and residential factors in adolescents with distinct adversity profiles

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Nerea Llerena [1], ***Dr. Lorena Maneiro*** [1], ***Ms. María Álvarez-Voces*** [1], ***Dr. Laura López-Romero*** [1]

1. *Universidade de Santiago de Compostela*

Research suggests that the exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have a negative impact on psychological adjustment in adolescents in out-of-home placements. Consequently, one of the challenges faced by research refers to the identification of individual, familiar, and contextual factors that could help buffer this potential effect and protect the mental health of adolescents at risk. Thus, the aim of this study was to examine the effect of third variables in the relationship between three adversity profiles (i.e., Low ACEs, High neglect and High ACEs) and psychological maladjustment (i.e., trauma-related symptoms, externalizing and internalizing problems). Specifically, the mediation effect of family (i.e., security in the attachment figures and resentment toward parents) and adolescent variables (i.e., socioemotional skills and school engagement) were analyzed, as well as the moderation effect of residential environment (i.e., open and closed group climate). The sample was composed of 161 adolescents (46.6% males, 49.7% females, 3.7% non-binary), aged 12–18 (M = 15.22, SD = 1.59) involved in the first (T1) and second wave (T2) of the VRINEP project (Risk and Needs assessment in the child protection system). A total of 75 participants were followed up eight months later. All the study variables were assessed through reports provided by either group care workers or adolescents. Nine mediation models and three moderation models were tested. Regarding the mediation models, we examined the indirect effect of family variables, adolescents' socioemotional skills, and school engagement, all measured at T1, on the association between the adversity profiles (T1) and psychological maladjustment (T2). For moderation analyses, we tested the moderating effect of group climate (T1) on the relation between the adversity profiles (T1) and psychological maladjustment (T2). Results showed that adolescents in the Low ACEs profile scored lower in externalizing problems through higher levels of socioemotional skills. On the contrary, adolescents grouped into the High ACEs profile were associated with externalizing problems through lower levels of socioemotional skills. Concerning to moderation analysis, a significant moderation effect of open and closed group climate on the relationship between both Low ACEs and High ACEs and externalizing problems was found. Specifically, adolescents in the Low ACEs group showed higher levels of externalizing problems at higher levels of closed group climate. These results highlight the importance of identifying individual and contextual variables that could buffer the effect of ACEs on the psychological adjustment of adolescents in residential environments. Considering their specific profiles of needs contributes to the development of prevention and intervention strategies that include the aforementioned protective variables.

Professionals and carers' Insights on Money Issues in Portuguese Foster Care

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Elisete Diogo [1], ***Dr. Paulo Delgado*** [2]

1. *CARE-Research Center on Health and Social Sciences, Portalegre Polytechnic University,* ***2.*** *Polytechnic Institute of Porto*

The Portuguese foster care system is characterised by its solidarity and a shortage of candidates capable of meeting the increasing demand for these placements. Consequently, foster families merely receive compensation for their service, and professionalisation is not a consideration. The paucity of evidence on the impact of these issues on children's wellbeing calls for further research. The aim of this study is to provide novel insights from practitioners and foster families' perceptions regarding financial matters in foster care. The study will explore the impact of remuneration on motivation to foster, the evaluation of experiences in relation to expenses and the support received by foster families. Thirteen foster families and practitioners participated in this exploratory study in 2016. Narrative interviews and a thematic analysis were conducted, using MAXQDA. The findings indicated that participants perceived financial considerations to potentially influence the motivation of a specific applicant group, namely those who were unemployed during periods of economic downturn. The financial strain associated with the direct and indirect costs of foster care was found to be outweighed by the benefits of providing a stable family environment for foster children. Given the economic constraints, adequate compensation could be seen as a form of recognition for the service. To improve and ensure recruitment and retention of foster families, it was advocated that healthcare costs be reimbursed. Finally, we discuss implications of the data collected for the current policy and practice and how the legal framework has evolved to give foster families a dignified and fair remuneration, tax and employment status.

Preparing to be a parent for adopting a child with 'hard-to-place characteristics' in Romania

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mr. Mihai Bogdan Iovu [1], ***Ms. Anca Bejenaru*** [2], ***Mr. Sergiu Lucian Raiu*** [3]

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Context: Child adoption, whether domestic or international, continues to be a widely debated topic. In Romania, the process of domestic adoption is strictly regulated and since 2004 when the Adoption Act passed, there have been significant amendments supporting the parents and, in the end, shortening the duration of the process in the interest of the chid. One of these changes refer to adoption of children with 'hard-to-place' characteristics: those for whom in a 6-month period since they were declared adoptable there were no adequate family identified or, even if such a family was identified the adoption could not be completed due to multiple siblings, health issues, older age, a history of abuse, belonging to an ethnic minority (e.g., Roma), and/or with developmental delay. Objective: exploring the experiences of Romanian adoptive parents seeking to adopt children with "hard-to-place" characteristics, focusing specifically on the pre-adoption phase. Methods: Data were collected through 30 interviews with adoptive parents and analyzed across five key themes: the administrative process, certification process, training for adopting children with "hard-to-place" characteristics, visualization of public profiles of adoptable children, and the first meeting with the child. Findings: The results indicate that adoptive parents experience conflicting emotional and institutional challenges, particularly concerning expectations, bureaucratic procedures, the certification process, accessing public profiles of adoptable children, and initial interactions with the child. Conclusions/Implications: These findings contribute to the existing literature on adoption by providing insights into the perspectives of adoptive parents in Romania, a country with a high number of adoptable children and an ongoing effort to increase the number of completed adoptions. In line with previous research, our study highlights the necessity for specialized and targeted support measures for families who choose to adopt children with "hard-to-place" characteristics as these adoption decisions are frequently motivated by deep personal significance.

Together to Build a High-Quality Training Pathway for Foster Parents in Quebec (Canada)

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Marie-Pierre Joly [1], ***Prof. Marie-Andrée Poirier*** [2], ***Mrs. Martine Guénette*** [3], ***Mrs. Patricia Ringuette*** [3], ***Prof. Delphine Collin-Vézina*** [4]

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CONTEXT: To fulfill their complex and unique mandate, foster parents must receive adequate training throughout their fostering journey (Kaasbøll et al., 2019). However, recent studies in Québec (Canada) have identified several gaps, including the lack of training before initial fostering experiences, significant regional disparities in available training, the absence of a scientific and theoretical foundation for training programs, and a lack of adaptations to meet the specific needs of different types of foster families (e.g., kinship care, foster-to-adopt families) (CSDEPJ, 2021; Joly et al., 2022).

DESCRIPTION OF THE INITIATIVE: In response to these challenges, a working group on training foster parents in youth protection was established in 2023. This unparalleled collaborative forum convenes a diverse array of stakeholders, including foster parents from prominent trade union associations, youth protection professionals, researchers, and students. In its inaugural year, the working group's primary objective was to devise a training curriculum grounded in trauma-informed approaches, a methodology that has been demonstrated to be effective in fostering care (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2018; Collin-Vézina, 2018). Over the course of a year, working sessions were held to facilitate dialogue between scientific, clinical, and experiential knowledge. The objective of these sessions was to create rigorous training guidelines tailored to the needs of foster parents.

RESULTS: The poster presentation will showcase the group's work to date. First, it will introduce the Foster Parent Competency Framework, an essential tool for establishing a coherent training vision among stakeholders (Poumay, Tardif, & Georges, 2017). The framework encompasses four fundamental competencies: 1) Maintaining an engaged attitude; 2) Providing a secure family environment for the child; 3) Maintaining personal and family balance; and 4) Collaborating with the child's support network. The essential principles of quality training for foster parents, as identified by the working group, will also be presented. These principles integrate best practices in training methods and are based on recent knowledge in andragogy, while meeting the specific needs of different types of foster families, including regular foster families, kinship care, and foster-to-adopt families.

IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS: This initiative has provided practitioners with clear, rigorous, and consensus-based guidelines for developing high-quality training programs for foster families in Québec. More broadly, the establishment of this collaborative space, guided by scientific stakeholders, has had positive impacts, including the convergence of key actors, the cultivation of a shared vision for foster parent training and role, and the stimulation of the development of new initiatives to enhance training programs.

Reflective practice as a training strategy based on evidence for professionals in community social services

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Ms. Alícia Borrego-Tarragó [1], Dr. Lucía González-Pasarín [1], Ms. Laura Segarra-Ayllón [1], Prof. M. Àngels Balsells Bailón [1]

1. *Universitat de Lleida*

Training of professionals from social service is a key component in incorporating and consolidating best and evidence-based practices in family and parental support services. However, the research work done by the European Family Support Network (EurofamNet) continues to highlight the professionals training as an aspect to be improved within the quality of family support services in Europe. The objective of this communication is to present the validity and usefulness of the reflective practice methodology as: 1) a training strategy for professionals from social services, and 2) an appropriate research methodology to identify and make scientifically rigorous adaptations to a positive parenting programme.

This communication is under the framework of a research aimed at the implementation and evaluation of the 'Comprehensive Care Programme for Children, Adolescents and Families at Risk' (Balsells et al., 2024) by the social services of the City Council of Lleida, Spain. A qualitative, participatory and improvement-orientated methodology based on reflective practice was employed. The research participants were a total of 60 professionals from social services of the City Council of Lleida (Catalonia, Spain). Two instruments were used to collect data: a) a field journal of the support sessions from research team to professionals implementing the positive parenting programme; and b) a follow-up diary for each programme implementation session completed by direct-service professionals. Field notes were analysed using content analysis.

The results showed that reflective practice was a valid strategy for training professionals implementing the evidence-based programme, helping them acquire the competencies needed to carry out the Programme's methodology. It also facilitated an iterative dialogue between researchers, institutional leaders and practitioners, enabling both the adaptation of the Programme to the specific local context and to the organisation of the Services, fostering organisational changes within the service. This communication present. The findings of this communication demonstrate how scientific knowledge can be transferred to the professional practice of family support services by generating evidence-based practices. Reflective practice is an effective and suitable methodology for the acquisition of professional competencies and for promoting engagement in evidence-based practices that are better aligned with the needs and characteristics of families, thereby facilitating the integration of a positive parenting approach.

Leaving Care in Canada: What is the State of the Research and Where Should We Go from Here?

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mrs. Laurence Magnan-Tremblay [1], ***Prof. Varda Mann-Feder*** [2], ***Mr. Tristan Légaré*** [3], ***Mrs. Ariane Montminy*** [1]

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BACKGROUND: Over the years, the process of leaving care has become an issue of international relevance. While this interest has translated into a growing number of scientific publications across the world, it is still difficult to estimate the Canadian contribution to this research field. To this day, reviews published by Canadian researchers have mostly included research conducted in other countries, even though government funding is available to conduct leaving care research in Canada. Moreover, despite that Quebec is the second largest province of Canada with a high placement rate, most reviews have included English publications only, leaving French publications from this specific province aside. While Canada includes ten provinces and three territories, reviews have included publications from a handle of provinces only. Mapping Canadian research on leaving care in a more holistic fashion is important to move the research agenda to better serve the unique needs of care leavers across Canada.

OBJECTIVE: A scoping review was undertaken to provide a comprehensive overview of the scientific literature on leaving care in Canada.

METHODS: This review followed the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework, including enhancements proposed by Levac et al. (2010). A search was conducted in 18 electronic databases and *Google Scholar*, using specific terms related to the concepts of leaving care and the Canadian territory. Included studies were peer-reviewed, published in English or French language between 2013-2023, described original research conducted in Canada. Studies had to focus on leaving care preparation, leaving care process, transition to adulthood or outcomes among care leavers. The data extraction template focused on the study's characteristics, design, key findings, limitations and conclusion. Each step of the review was conducted independently by two team members. Of the 2073 eligible references, 64 were included in the final review.

FINDINGS: First, findings will focus on the characteristics of the studies included in this review (e.g.: year of publication, authors' province of affiliation, language of publication, study design, study method, type of data, data provenance). Second, the characteristics of the studies' samples will be presented (e.g.: respondent type, provinces of recruitment, specific sub-samples of youth). Third, an overview of the studies' main themes will be presented, including services, practices, interventions and programs. The main research gaps on leaving care in Canada will be identified as well as future avenues to uncover areas where more research is needed.

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS: The conclusion will highlight how the absence of national standards for child welfare policies, combined with the absence of systematic data collection among care leavers, contribute to a fragmented research agenda. To make progress, the relevance of integrating previous research findings into new research activity and recommendations to build a knowledge base in a more cohesive fashion will be discussed. In addition, the authors will highlight how the absence of research with a strength-based focus contributes to the stigmatizing of care leavers in Canada and limits the implications of research in developing policies and programs.

Improving outcomes for young people transitioning from care – Youth Perspective on Transition “THROWN IN THE DEEP END”

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Prof. Philip Mendes [1], Dr. Danielle Newton [1], Prof. Helen Skouteris [1], Ms. Hayley Wainwright [1], Ms. Sofia Grage-Moore [1], Ms. Melissa Savaglio [1], Ms. Sarah Morris [1]

1. *Monash University*

Young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) often experience health, educational, and social disadvantage due to early childhood adversity. These disadvantages do not end upon leaving care—rather, they are frequently compounded during the transition to independence. While governments and community service organisations aim to support care leavers through transition planning, this shift typically occurs at age 18—significantly earlier than for the general population and with markedly less support. Although previous research has highlighted the reasons behind poor post-care outcomes, there remains a critical knowledge gap regarding how transition planning can be improved to better meet young people’s needs.

This poster specifically draws on the narratives of 28 care-experienced young people, which highlights systemic failures in current transition processes—characterised by rushed planning, limited inclusion, housing precarity, and insufficient emotional and practical support. Despite these challenges, participants offered clear, youth-informed recommendations for reform—calling for developmentally appropriate, trauma-responsive, and relational approaches to transition.

Design and implementation of a questionnaire to assess the quality of care provided to young people in residential care

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mrs. Joanna Fernández Sánchez [1], ***Prof. Maria D. Salas*** [1], ***Mr. Miguel Ángel García-Martín*** [1]

1. *Universidad de Málaga*

Residential Foster Care continues to be an essential resource for the protection of children and adolescents. Over 50,000 children in Spain are under the guardianship of the protection system and around 17,000 young people live in protection centres therefore it is a priority to ensure the proper functioning and to guarantee the well-being of these boys and girls. The main objective of this study was to design a set of instruments to analyse the quality of care and attention provided to children and adolescents living in residential care homes. In addition, this tool was intended to detect, in a preventive and at an early stage, the shortcomings and opportunities for improvement of the residential facilities and of the daily professional practice in the residential care homes. The instruments created and/or adapted that form part of the questionnaire were: a) the Technical Inventory of Organisation and Functioning, which collects information on the planning and workflow of the professionals; b) the Technical Inventory of Equipment and the Physical and Architectural Structure of the Residential Care Homes, which collects data on the physical characteristics and the equipment available in the care homes; c) the ad Hoc instruments EQUAR-Andalusia which assesses compliance with the quality standards in foster care homes listed in the Quality Standards in Residential Care [EQUAR] and updated according to the latest Spanish and Andalusian legislation; d) an adaptation of the Affect Scale that assesses young people's perception of the affective relationships they have with their caregivers; e) the Rules and Demands Scale that assesses young people's perceptions of the educational style of their caregivers; and f) the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory ('exhaustion factor') which assess work fatigue, the need for rest and physical exhaustion of the professionals who care for the children in care. The questionnaire was administered in all the centres of basic care programme in the province of Malaga (a total of 22) with a total of 343 participants (146 children, 127 social educators, 22 directors of the homes, 24 social workers and 24 psychologists). Among the main results, the following should be highlighted: a) Quality standards were satisfactorily met according to the participants' assessments; b) Most of the residential care homes had adequate infrastructures to provide a good quality service to the children; c) children perceived more warmth and communication than criticism/rejection in most of the residential homes; d) children mostly perceived that caregivers used an inductive educational style; and e) burnout amongst professionals was at moderate to high levels. This questionnaire provides valuable and useful information to evaluate and identify goals to improve the operation of the residential facilities.

Foster Care quality standards: Promoting evidence-based practices and improving care

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Jonathan Huefner [1], ***Dr. Shamra Boel-Studt*** [2], ***Dr. Darejan Dvalishvili*** [2]

1. *Boys Town,* ***2.*** *Institute for Quality Children's Services, Florida State University*

Verifying quality of care is a key issue for children's foster care agencies. Periodically, news stories highlight heartbreaking instances of abuse and neglect of foster children while in care. The best solution for these issues is establishing and promoting quality standards for foster care, which include adequate oversight and improved practices. Additionally, quality standards for foster care are important because they are based on practices that research has shown are related to better outcomes for foster children and adolescents. Foster care services meeting the quality standards produce superior outcomes by using the best available practice knowledge within a continuous quality improvement framework. This presentation describes the development of quality standards for foster care, the creation of a measure, and a pilot-test of the measure in four foster care programs in Texas, USA.

A literature review focused on factors related to better outcomes for children and adolescents in Foster Care was conducted. A review of the published standards and empirical literature revealed 20 sources identifying elements of quality foster care. From these sources a list of quality standards for Foster Care was created. These standards were vetted by foster care agencies and former foster carers. Each standard was operationalized in terms of daily practice and a measure was created, the Quality Standards Assessment-Foster Care (QSA-FC). The QSA-FC was designed to be used in continuous quality improvement efforts.

Eighty-two quality standards were identified, falling within nine domains. The domains are Agency Policies and Procedures (11 standards), Foster Care Provider Supervision, Training, and Supports (8 standards), Placement and Service/Care Planning Processes (9 standards), Safe, Stable, and Nurturing Living Environment (12 standards), Positive Wellbeing and Healthy Development (10 standards), Education and Skill Development (11 standards), Family Engagement and Social Connections (7 standards), Monitoring, Accountability, and Quality Assurance (6 standards), and Transition and Discharge Planning (8 standards). The QSA-FC has been successfully pilot-tested in child placing agencies in the state of Texas, USA.

Quality foster care encompasses a diverse set of criteria with no one dimension defining quality. By bringing focus to that which is vital, quality standards simplify service provision without sacrificing critical outcomes. Meeting all or most of the 82 identified quality standards will require consistent, persistent effort and dedicated resources, but can produce good long-term outcomes for foster care youth. A continued focus on improving program quality will result in increased effectiveness in transforming the lives of the children and families we serve. Additionally, quality standards for foster care lay the foundation for funders and regulators to effectively monitor foster care programs for quality.

“At least I could say I’m home” Experiences of young people returning to their families from residential care

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

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Keywords: *Young People’s Experiences*, *Return to the Family, Reunification, Residential care*

Background and purpose: Returning to the family from care is as much a critical life event as entering care (Lambers, 1996). In addition to the task of reintegrating into everyday family life, young people must cope with being distanced from, or even losing, important relationships they developed in care (Balsells et al., 2016). Reunification research has developed a large body of research on risk and protective factors related to reunification stability. However, there are only a few qualitative studies examining young people’s return experiences (e.g. Bullock et al., 1998; James et al., 2017; Mateos et al., 2017). In German-speaking countries, research on family reunification has only recently gained more attention. This study is the first in Switzerland to examine young people’s experiences of returning to their families from residential care.

Methods: The study is based on biographical-narrative interviews with 18 young people who have returned to their families from residential care in German-speaking Switzerland. Between November 2023 and March 2024, nine female and nine male returners aged 14 to 18 were interviewed. At the time of the interview, the young people had returned between 9 months and 1.5 years earlier. The analysis combined methods of narrative inquiry and Grounded Theory (Somm & Hajart, 2019).

Findings: A narrative-based typology of return experiences will be presented that reflects the diversity of young people’s return experiences, as well as the various challenges and coping demands. While some young people experience a smooth - sometimes not even noticeable - transition, others face severe challenges or even another crisis in an already crisis-ridden trajectory.

Conclusions and implications: Return experiences are diverse and shaped by residential care history, perceptions of the family environment, and personal agency in the return decision. The main challenges involve social reintegration and transitioning to a less structured routine. Specific support needs for addressing the demands of each type will be presented.

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A participatory Life Story Work intervention with Care-Experienced Youth: Destigmatising, Connecting and Empowering through Co-Creation

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

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Objectives and Background

Life Story Work (LSW) has a longstanding tradition in child welfare but remains underdeveloped for care-experienced young people (CEYP) transitioning out of residential care. Existing approaches often focus on retrospective storytelling, offering limited support for future-oriented identity work during this pivotal life phase. In response, the RE:ROOTS intervention was co-developed and piloted in 11 youth care organisations in Flanders. This study presents a critical evaluation of RE:ROOTS, examining its perceived impacts, underlying mechanisms, and emerging tensions across stakeholder groups, including CEYP, process facilitators (PFs), artists, and outsider witnesses.

Methods

RE:ROOTS is grounded in narrative and participatory principles, supporting CEYP in co-constructing multi-layered personal narratives through collaboration with PFs, significant others, local artists, and outsider witnesses. The process culminated in a collectively designed artistic product. The evaluation followed a qualitative, practice-near approach, combining 14 semi-structured interviews with materials gathered during the participatory action research process (video/audio recordings, observations, and creative outputs). Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019) was applied to identify recurring patterns and points of friction. Reflexive attention was paid to researcher positionality and the challenges of conducting embedded research within a co-creative framework

Findings

Three key themes emerged across stakeholders.

(1) **Narrative ownership and destigmatisation**: Many CEYP experienced the intervention as a space to articulate counter-narratives that challenged stereotypical representations of care-experienced identities. However, not all participants felt comfortable sharing their stories publicly, and some questioned the long-term effects of such exposure. The ownership of the story that is captured in the final end products, requires explicit attention.

(2) **Relational complexity**: While the intervention fostered renewed connections with significant others and built new relationships (e.g., with artists), it also surfaced unresolved relational tensions. The co-creative process sometimes revealed emotional vulnerabilities that PFs found difficult to contain within the intervention's scope.

(3) **Transforming pain into purpose**: Several CEYP expressed a desire to use their experience to support other young people in care, seeing the intervention as a step toward future peer-support or professional roles. Yet, this transformation was uneven, and some participants felt pressure to present "growth" narratives before they were ready.

Across groups, PFs and artists reflected on how the process challenged traditional power dynamics and professional roles, creating opportunities for mutual learning but also exposing the limits of "not-knowing" stances when deeper therapeutic needs arose.

Conclusions and Implications

RE:ROOTS demonstrates the potential of participatory LSW to support identity reconstruction and social participation among CEYP. However, the findings also highlight important tensions around emotional safety, narrative exposure, and the boundaries of participatory co-creation. This study invites critical reflection on how arts-based, narrative interventions can be implemented ethically and sustainably within youth care settings. Rather than advocating for straightforward replication, we argue for further research into the long-term effects, contextual adaptations, and structural supports required for this type of work to be both empowering and protective.

Prevention of Institutionalization and Services for Families at Risk: A case study of India

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Prof. Riju Sharma [1], ***Ms. Alinisha Boro*** [1], ***Dr. Bibharani Swargiary*** [1]

1. *Assam Don Bosco University*

Institutional care has long been a practice in countries as a measure of promoting and protecting the rights of children who are vulnerable and in the margins of society. As children and childhood studies are gaining ground, there has been a number of research studies which not just validates institutional care as not a good practice, but also establishes that institutionalization should be the last resort in the system of child care and development. This has led to discussions, deliberations and dialogue towards setting alternative care systems, policies and programmes for a holistic growth and development of children.

India has the largest adolescent population in the world, 253 million, and every fifth person is between 10 to 19 years (https://www.unicef.org/india/children-in-india) August,15. This demography has led to the launch and implementation of various child protection programmes to promote and protect the rights of children, gradually shifting from a needs-based approach to a rights-based approach of protection, development and wellbeing.

Working within the framework of these programmes often leads to overlooking and disregarding the context, realities and the rich traditional practices of the communities in child protection and development. In the trajectory of child rights in India, a significant development is moving away from viewing the child from a fragmented lens to moving towards convergence and integration of policies and programmes and developing alternative care system which opens space for integration with diverse traditional and ethnic practices of ensuring care and protection which are local, sustaining and embedded in the eco system.

This article attempts to study the evolution of child rights in India within the framework of its legislations, policies and programmes introduced and implemented as a nation not only committed to promoting child rights, but also mandated, being a signatory of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. The introduction of the Juvenile Justice Act, followed by the Integrated Child Protection Scheme speaks volumes of the Government's efforts to prioritize child protection from an institutional level to gradually moving towards it being blended and integrated with community-based models of support and care, thereby making communities an integral part of the child protection eco system. India being such a vast and diverse country it is important and relevant to note how the structures and systems of child protection are being adopted to suit the needs and requirements of different communities and ethnic groups in promoting child care practices.

From Institutionalization to Inclusion: Professional Supervision in the Transition to Independent Living for Disabled Youth

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Oral

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1. University of Bucharest - Faculty of Sociology and Social Work

The transition of youth with disabilities from child protection systems to independent living is a critical phase for fostering social inclusion and upholding their fundamental rights. Successful transition requires **integrated community services**, **personalized transition plans**, and **sustained support from multidisciplinary teams**.

This paper highlights the pivotal role of **professional supervision** in facilitating this process, emphasizing its impact on:

- **Intervention quality**
- **Coherence between policies and practice**
- **Ethical and professional standards** (acting as both a safeguard and a catalyst for service improvement).

The framework aligns with:

- The **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (guaranteeing the right to independent living and community inclusion).
- Romania's **National Strategy *"A Fair Romania"* (2022–2027)**, which prioritizes deinstitutionalization and community-based support.

The study identifies **systemic gaps** and proposes **actionable solutions** (policy recommendations and practical tools) to ensure a **dignified and sustainable transition** for this vulnerable group.

Core message: Autonomy is not the absence of support but the **right to self-determination**—choosing the form and scope of assistance within an inclusive, participatory framework.

Keywords: transition, disability, independent living, professional supervision, supervision, multidisciplinary teams, child protection, social inclusion.

The cognitive and language development of young Flemish foster children

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Accepted with changes

Dr. Delphine West [1], ***Dr. Laura Gypen*** [1], ***Dr. Lara Stas*** [1], ***Prof. Frank Van Holen*** [1], ***Prof. Johan Vanderfaeillie*** [1]

1. *Vrije Universiteit Brussel*

Foster children are at increased risk for developmental difficulties due to early adversities (Dozier & Rutter, 2016). However, little is known about the cognitive and language development of young foster children in Flanders. This longitudinal study investigated the development of 53 foster children (aged 12–20 months at Time 1) over a one-year period, focusing on their performance on cognitive and language tasks. We hypothesized that the children would score lower than the normative mean for cognitive and expressive language development. Children were assessed at two time points using the Bayley-III-NL. Scaled scores on cognitive functioning, receptive language, and expressive language were compared to normative means. Most scores did not differ significantly from the norms, except for receptive language at Time 2, where foster children scored lower. Next, variables associated with the children's functioning on the cognitive and language scales were explored using multilevel modelling. Lower scores were found among children in kinship care across multiple developmental domains, and negative associations were found between both language subscales and insecure attachment behavior. It is recommended to monitor the development of foster children, with specific attention to those in kinship care. Supporting strong attachment relationships between foster parents and children, and implementing interventions that promote developmental support within foster families, is essential.

Alternative forms of care in crisis situations for child victims of human trafficking

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Prof. Marina Milić [1], ***Ms. Ivana Bertol*** [2]

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Crisis situations are an integral part of life and occur among individuals, families, groups, organizations and nations. In the event of a crisis, children and the systems in which they have lived until then are faced with threatening, sudden and unplanned circumstances. During these periods in the life of a child or young person, numerous risk factors appear as a consequence of the crisis. The causes of the crisis can be different - loss of family, separation from family, human trafficking, illness or death of parents, wars, as well as natural disasters such as floods, fires, earthquakes, pandemics and others. This paper will examine how the system responds to crisis situations in which children - victims of human trafficking - are the primary focus. The authors provide an overview of the legal and strategic frameworks for temporary placement of children in crisis situations as well as an overview of the theoretical framework of emergencies and crises (description of the crisis situation - human trafficking and descriptions of crisis intervention models) as well as a systematic overview of formal support for child victims of human trafficking. In addition, the paper includes a schematic representation of the formal support system using a crisis situation relevant to the study as an example. In addition, the paper will present data on the number of identified child victims of trafficking who were included in the formal victim support program and the number of child victims placed in alternative care (organized housing and foster family). Based on the existing theoretical and empirical findings, conclusions and recommendations for improving this area in practice are presented, with the aim of creating a more effective support system for child victims of trafficking. Authors will present temporary accommodation in crisis situations and legal and strategic frameworks and describe the types of exploitation for the purpose of human trafficking as well as crisis intervention models that can be applied when it comes to child victims of human trafficking, the importance of individual care planning and assessing the needs of the child victim in order to select a service provider in accordance with the child's best interests. Examples of providing support to child victims of human trafficking in crisis situations around the world are also presented. Also system of formal support for child victims of human trafficking with a schematic presentation and an example of the system's actions when a child is identified as a victim of human trafficking. This chapter will present data on the number of child victims of human trafficking who were included in the program of providing formal support and recognized as social services for temporary accommodation in crisis situations, also number of children who were placed in alternative accommodation (organized housing and foster families).

Presentation ends with the conclusions and recommendations for creating a more effective system of support for child victims of human trafficking are presented.

Pets as a therapeutic element of treatment foster care

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Mary Rauktis [1], ***Dr. Camie Tomlinson*** [2]

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Introduction: There is growing evidence that companion animals foster a range of positive social, emotional, educational, and physical health outcomes in both therapeutic and non-therapeutic settings for children and youth (Groenewoud, 2023). Importantly, for children in foster care, canine-assisted therapy reduced primary symptoms of trauma and internalizing symptoms and improved engagement and socialization as well as reduced disruptive behaviors in treatment sessions (Jones, 2019). In their study, Carr & Rockett (2014) found that youth in foster care perceived pets in the home as a haven and a source of support. Could the presence of companion animals (pets) owned by treatment foster parents associate with therapeutic benefits for youth with emotional and behavioral problems who are in foster care? Are there challenges to having pets in foster homes? To explore these questions, a pilot study was conducted with treatment foster parents trained in Together facing the Challenge (TFTC), an evidence-based treatment foster care model (https://preventionservices.acf.hhs.gov). TFTC is a skills-based program for therapeutic foster parents caring for children with emotional or behavioral problems.

Methods: Omni, a foster care trainer and provider of TFTC in the USA assisted in recruiting treatment parents to participate in a pilot study. Due to a loss of funding subsequent to changes in the Federal Government funding, the study was scaled back to a pilot study using a convenience sample and 50 parents. The study used cross-sectional design and will use correlational methods to analyze the information collected via a self-administered survey and 5 in-depth interviews which will be analyzed for themes. The survey included questions about the child/youth's behavior, behavior towards pets, the parent's relationship with the pet, and their working alliance with the child. Interview questions focused on the roles that pets play in the family and observations of the human-animal bond. Data is in the process of being collected, but early results suggest that pets occupy an important role in family life and with foster children as sources of emotional support in the home. The data will also be used to improve the survey for a larger study when funding is restored.

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Together Facing the Challenge
(https://preventionservices.acf.hhs.gov).

Practical research into vital elements on group climate in small-scale facilities in the Netherlands

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mrs. Mirka Hirsch [1], ***Dr. Marianne Pannekeet-Helsen*** [1], ***Mrs. Gerdien Kalma*** [1], ***Mrs. Esther Slagboom*** [1]

1. *Levvel*

Levvel, a youth care organization in the Netherlands, provides amongst others open and secure residential care for adolescents. Research suggests (Nijhof et al., 2020) that small scale facilities of up to six adolescents can have a positive impact on well-being in terms of living and working environment compared to larger groups of 8-12 children. In the past decade Levvel has been transforming its open and secure residential care from groups of 8 children and adolescents to homely, small-scale facilities embedded in residential areas with a size of 3- 6 children and adolescents.

Each year, we examine the perceived group climate among adolescents in residential care groups using questionnaires. We expected the group climate to be experienced more positive (i.e., safe, open, and supportive) in smaller-sized groups. However, in recent years, we have found the opposite: in several facilities with 4–6 children/adolescents, the results showed a decline compared to earlier group climate studies in (partly the same) groups of 8 children/adolescents. In a smaller qualitative study, one secure residential group with a close-knit team scored significantly better in terms of group climate—both compared to previous studies and to small-scale groups with 4 children. Based on these findings, we formulated the following hypothesis: “Cohesion between team members, as well as a shared vision of quality residential care, are crucial elements for a positive group climate for children with complex needs.”

In the spring of 2025, we examined both the perceived group climate (N = 41) as reported by adolescents in small-scale groups, and aspects of team functioning and work climate among the group workers in those teams (N = 48). Overall, an improvement in reported group climate was observed compared to 2023 and 2024.

The results provide partial support for the hypothesis. A shared vision, team cohesion, and a willingness to reflect and evaluate as a team were associated with greater perceived safety by the adolescents. Several aspects of the work climate, as experienced by group workers, were also correlated with a higher score on perceived safety and on experienced connection with residential youth workers. However, we also found some less expected results, like negative correlations between some aspects of team-functioning and work climate on the one hand and experienced autonomy by the adolescents on the other hand. Interviews with some of the teams suggest that additional factors could be of importance in establishing a positive living environment for adolescents.

The results of these studies will be used in further enhancing the pedagogical quality of our facilities. This is an example of how practical research can bring qualitative change in our daily youth care practice.

Emotion recognition and early adversity in adoption: the LAIS.US Study

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Carmen Paniagua [1], Dr. Maite Román [1], Dr. Pablo Carrera [1], Dr. Isabel Cáceres [1], Dr. Esperanza León [1]

1. *Universidad de Sevilla*

Previous research has shown that emotion recognition may be influenced by early experiences of adversity, specifically situations of neglect, maltreatment, or abuse. However, if children are adopted, they may catch-up in this area. The aim of this study was to explore emotion recognition in two groups: internationally adopted adolescents and community adolescents. Furthermore, this study analyzes possible differences in emotion recognition based on the valence of the emotions.

This work is part of the Longitudinal Adoption & Institutionalization Study (LAIS.US) of the University of Seville. Specifically, the sample is composed by 29 children adopted in Spain from Russia and 30 non-adopted children. Participants had a mean age of 16.12 years old. The instrument used was the Eyes Task (Baron-Cohen et al., 2001), composed of 28 photos of eyes expressing emotions about which adolescents have to guess the correct expressed emotion between four given options. These emotions can be classified into different categories, analyzed here based on whether they represented positive, negative, or neutral emotions. The analyses were conducted while controlling for gender and age.

The results show significant differences in overall emotion recognition between the adoption and non-adoption groups. Regarding the valence of emotions, no significant differences were found; however, a considerable effect size was observed between the two groups, particularly for positive and negative emotions. This research suggests that internationally adopted adolescents still experience difficulties in the emotional domain, likely due to early adversity before adoption.

The findings of this study have practical implications for adoption-related interventions. Given that difficulties in recognizing emotions may persist in internationally adopted adolescents long after they join their adoptive families, it is essential to provide post-adoption support. This support should focus on fostering emotional and social competencies in children who show challenges in these areas, through early and sustained intervention.It is also important to help adoptive families recognize and respond more effectively to the emotional needs of these young people.To ensure the long-term well-being of adopted persons, such resources and interventions should be integrated into adoption intervention frameworks.

Transitioning to Family Foster Care: Foster parents' psychological well-being in the first month of placement

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Cláudia Camilo [1], ***Prof. Stephanie Alves*** [2], ***Mrs. Kamila Araújo*** [3], ***Ms. Mariana Justo*** [4], ***Mrs. Sandra Ornelas*** [5], ***Prof. Helena Grangeia*** [3], ***Prof. Mariana Negrão*** [6], ***Prof. Isabel Soares*** [7], ***Prof. Joana Baptista*** [1]

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Background: The transition to family foster care (FFC) is a challenging process for both children and foster families. During the early transition period, foster parents must not only exhibit responsive, sensitive parenting but also navigate the complex challenges associated with foster care and the unique needs of the children in their care (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012; Lanigan & Burleson, 2017). These challenges prompt important questions regarding how foster caregivers adapt during the initial months of placement. Some research has suggested that this transition period can result in significant psychological distress among foster carers (Canzi et al., 2019), and they may exhibit diminished responsiveness during the early months post-placement (Gabler et al., 2018), but few studies have focused on foster families.

Objectives: The present research aims to preliminary explore parental stress, self-efficacy, well-being and satisfaction in foster parenting of Portuguese foster parents receiving MIAF (Integrated Model of Family Foster Care) in the first month of placement, and its association with fostered children demographics and development, and foster families' demographics.

Methods: Participated in the study 24 foster families and their fostered children aged between 0 and 84 months (M = 14.18 months; 58.3% girls) receiving MIAF in four different FFC services in Portugal. After one month of placement, foster families completed online questionnaires reporting sociodemographic data, parental stress and self-efficacy. Data regarding children's development were collected face-to-face.

Findings: Preliminary results indicated that foster parents, at the first month of placement, showed relatively high self-efficacy (M = 4.63, SD = 0.58, *range* 1-5), low parental stress (M = 1.31, SD = 0.28, *range* 1-5), high well-being (M = 19.04, SD = 3.83, *range 0*-25) and high satisfaction in foster parenting (M = 6.32, SD = 1.28, *range* 1-7). Higher foster parents' stress was associated with lower levels of well-being ($rs(22) = -.477, p = .018$) and satisfaction ($rs(22) = -.408, p = .048$), and with lower child's development quotient in the learning domain ($rs(10) = -.587, p = .045$). Foster parents' satisfaction was significantly associated with higher levels of self-efficacy ($rs(22) = .566, p = .004$) and well-being ($rs(22) = .486, p = .016$), and with children's younger ages ($rs(22) = -.422, p = .040$). Further, foster parents reported higher satisfaction in foster parenting when the child's transition to FFC was planned (vs. emergency; U = 92.50, p = .034). Data collection is still on-going.

Conclusions: Research on the well-being of foster families during transitions to FFC is needed, namely longitudinal evidence on child-family adaptation during the initial months of placement, particularly regarding the unique developmental needs of infants and toddlers. Given the complex interplay of factors at different levels of the system, further research is essential to identify the key variables that contribute to successful placements and promote positive developmental trajectories for children and families.

Growing up with absence: the lasting Impact of parental loss on young adult mental health

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Prof. Christiane Bergeron-Leclerc [1], ***Prof. Jacques Cherblanc*** [1], ***Prof. Benjamin Gallais*** [1], ***Prof. Julie Lane*** [2], ***Prof. Eve Pouliot*** [1], ***Prof. Felix Alexandre Proulx*** [1], ***Mrs. Isabelle Côté*** [1]

1. *Université du Québec à Chicoutimi,* ***2.*** *Université de Sherbrooke*

Background. The transition to adulthood is a critical period in psychosocial development, marked by intense identity formation and emotional adjustment. Adverse childhood experiences—such as the loss of a parent—can have lasting effects on the mental health of emerging adults.
Methodology. In November 2024, a large-scale online survey was conducted across 77 post-secondary institutions in Quebec (Canada) to explore the determinants of student complete mental health. A total of 32,790 students completed the questionnaire, among whom 507 had experienced maternal loss and 858 had experienced paternal loss.
Objectives and hypothesis. This presentation has three key objectives:

1. To provide a comprehensive overview of the complete mental health status of these young adults;
2. To compare mental health outcomes between students who experienced parental loss and those who did not;
3. To assess how individual factors—such as self-esteem and identity—relate to psychological indicators like anxiety, depression, and life satisfaction, and to determine whether these associations differ based on orphan status.

We hypothesize that these individual determinants may have a greater impact on the complete mental health of young adults who experienced early parental bereavement.
Results and discussion. This cross-sectional quantitative study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the mental health of young adults who experienced early parental loss. The findings aim to guide the development of targeted prevention and intervention strategies for students affected by adverse childhood experiences. By shedding light on the long-term impact of parental bereavement, the study supports the implementation of timely, tailored responses within both educational environments and family systems at the time of loss. Aligned with the conference themes, our presentation will explore: the mental health and well-being of children and young adults in alternative care as trauma-informed practices in caregiving settings.

Transforming Child Care Systems: Disability Inclusion and Participatory Pathways to Reform

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mrs. Victoria Olarte [1], ***Ms. Lourenza Steytler Foghill*** [1]

1. *Hope and Homes for Children*

Children with disabilities remain disproportionately placed in institutional care due to stigma, discrimination, and systemic exclusion. Drawing on two research initiatives - a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) study in Rwanda, and Youth Accountability and Deaf Inclusion in South Africa (YADIS) - we examine the intersection of disability, inclusion, and child care reform.

The KAP study surveyed 807 caregivers and professionals across Rwanda, supplemented by focus groups with 17 parents and interviews with 10 child care and protection professionals, to explore perceptions and practices regarding disability and family-based care. While 82.6% of survey respondents supported deinstitutionalisation in principle, 76.3% still believed institutions were safer than families for children with disabilities due to accessible healthcare, education, and support services. Discrimination against children with disabilities was reported by 81.2% of caregivers, and more than half of children with disabilities were not attending school.

In South Africa, YADIS amplified the voices of 48 deaf and care-experienced youth through an arts-based leadership programme and participatory research. Evaluation using Q-method design found significant increases in participants' perceptions of self-confidence, leadership capacity, and their ability to advocate for their needs and influence their communities. They demonstrated strengthened agency and challenged assumptions of dependency. When children and young people with disabilities are positioned as decision-makers rather than only beneficiaries of care, their perspectives broaden, their leadership potential grows, and they begin to shift societal attitudes from within.

Together this evidence highlights systemic barriers including persistent stigma, inaccessible services, and inadequate support for families of children with disabilities. However, it also points to powerful solutions, revealing the transformative potential of platforms that enable young people with disabilities to build agency and challenge exclusionary narratives, foster inclusive community engagement, and galvanise cross-sectoral commitment to dismantling discrimination.

Exclusion of children with disabilities from family life is not inevitable but a product of structural inequities and systemic failures. This evidence can inform rights-based, participatory frameworks for disability-inclusive care reform that equip communities, support families, dismantle stigma, and elevate the leadership of young people with disabilities in building inclusive, family-based care systems.

Development of the model of child participation in alternative care in Croatia- from invisibility to empowerment

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Dr. Ivana Borić [1], ***Dr. Andrea Ćosić*** [2], ***Ms. Andreja Šprem*** [2]

1. *University of Zagreb,* ***2.*** *University of Zagreb Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences*

Safeguarding the participation rights of children in alternative care is crucial to ensuring the quality of care and achieving positive developmental outcomes. Children's participation in decisions affecting their individual care, institutional interventions and systemic processes empowers them and promotes their well-being. Previous research on the Croatian alternative care system has shown that there are significant challenges in practice, such as limited opportunities for participation, low visibility and constant stigmatization of children in care. In response, the ISKORAK program, led by the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences at the University of Zagreb, was established to enhance children's participation and raise public and institutional awareness. This paper presents various initiatives and forms of child participation within the ISKORAK program. Key initiatives have included a series of workshops for children and professionals on participation rights, active participation in the Youth Advisory Board, participation in international conferences and participation in the UPSHIFT program, which enables young people to develop project proposals and secure funding for implementation. These initiatives aim to create a comprehensive model for the participation of children in alternative care in Croatia at individual, institutional and system levels. The paper critically examines these efforts using a theoretical framework of participation and provides evidence-based insights into models for strengthening the voices of children in alternative care. By presenting the Croatian model of child participation, this paper contributes to academic discourse, informs policy development, and supports the implementation of child-centered approaches within social systems.

Relationships between hostile attribution biases of children in Residential Care and the perceived acceptance/rejection of their caregivers

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Poster

Mr. Carlos Barrera [1], ***Ms. Sonia Romero Códez*** [1], ***Dr. Carmen Barajas*** [1], ***Prof. Maria D. Salas*** [1]

1. *Universidad de Málaga*

The majority of children and adolescents in Residential Care (RC) have suffered adverse experiences in their childhood and, in most cases, in a continuous and/or repetitive way (e.g. neglect, physical, etc.). According to Young's cognitive schema theory, such situations lead children to develop Early Maladaptive Schemas (EMS) that cause distortions and biases, which can modify the perceptions of the self and the interpersonal relationships. Among the EMS related to experiences of abuse and neglect are: mistrust, which leads to the development of hostile attribution biases; and emotional deprivation, which is the perception of not receiving enough affection or support from others. This study explores the relationship between mistrust (i.e., hostile attribution biases) and emotional deprivation (i.e., perceived affection from caregivers) in children and adolescents in residential care. It was expected that the greater the hostile attribution bias (mistrust), the less affection from caregivers would be perceived because of the difficulty that this population has in establishing trusting relationships. A total of 147 children and adolescents aged between 9 and 16 years (84 girls and 63 boys) from 22 RC facilities in Malaga (Spain), participated in the study. An adaptation of the Ambiguous Intentions Hostility Questionnaire (AIHQ; Combs et al., 2007) was used to assess hostility attribution biases. The instrument consisted of 7 different stories that varied in the degree of intention with which the offensive action could have been done, such that in five of them the action was ambiguous and in two of them it was accidental. After each story, five questions were asked to assess: Reason (degree of hostility attributed), Intention (degree of intentionality attributed), Anger (degree of anger the person would have felt), Blame (degree of blame attributed to the person who caused the action), Response (degree of aggressiveness the person would respond with). Affect Scale (Bersabé et al., 2001) was used to explore the young person's perception of the affective relationship with caregivers. It comprises 20 items distributed across two factors: Warmth/Communication, that evaluates the perceived warmth and interest expressed by care workers towards the young person, and Criticism/Rejection, that explores the perceived degree of criticism they show. The results showed that, when considering all seven stories, the children who showed greater anger and aggressive response also perceived greater affection from their educators. Furthermore, when the stories were analysed separately (ambiguous and accidental) it was found that in the ambiguous stories, the children who showed greater anger, blame and aggressive response also perceived more affection. Likewise, in the accidental stories, the greater aggressive response was related to a greater perception of affection. These results were unexpected and could be an indication that the professionals are carrying out appropriate educational interventions to ensure that children perceive support and affection, despite having cognitive schemas of mistrust.For practice, children's perception of affection, even in the presence of cognitive distrust biases, suggests that social educators play a key role in repairing impaired affective attachments. Specialized training programs in addressing early maladaptive schemas need to be implemented to improve their adaptation.

PREVENTING INSTITUTIONALIZATION IN RESIDENTIAL CARE: WHAT MAKES CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS FEEL AT HOME?

Thursday, 11th September: Poster presentations - Oral

Prof. LAURA VALLEJO-SLOCKER [1], ***Ms. Celia García de León*** [2]

1. *SOS Children's Villages Spain and Complutense University of Madrid,* ***2.*** *SOS Children's Villages Spain*

Introduction: Despite research on the factors that contribute to creating a sense of home, no studies have examined the psychological impact of these factors on children and adolescents who are deprived of parental care.

Objective: Residential care in Spain serves 16,365 children and adolescents under guardianship with a legal declaration of helplessness. This research explores the meaning of feeling like a family for children and adolescents in residential care In addition, it examines whether quality of life is affected by the perception of feeling like part of a family.

Method: Two studies were conducted. A qualitative study of 318 children and adolescents (aged 3 to 17 years) identified what makes them feel like they are part of a family. A quantitative study of 254 children and adolescents (aged 5 to 19 years) involved structured interviews and the KidScreen instrument. Chi-square test was employed to examine the association between categorical variables, and ordinal logistic regressions were used for the quantitative variables.

Results: shared activities, an affectionate and supportive environment, privacy, participation in the creation of rules, fair consequences, social relationships (with educators, family and friends), the physical environment, acceptance of their situation, satisfaction with the institution and age are fundamental aspects of feeling like part of a family.

Conclusions: this feeling is associated with higher quality of life. These aspects are key to the definition of models that aim to reduce the institutionalization of children, according to which increasing the number of educators and technicians per home, increasing their rotation, standardizing and protocolizing services (such as cleaning or cooking) or creating strict roles would eliminate those unique aspects that make children feel at home.

KEY WORDS: feel like family; sense of home; quality of life; children and adolescents; residential care.