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CHILDREN'S RESEARCH DIGEST

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*Capturing the
voice of the child*

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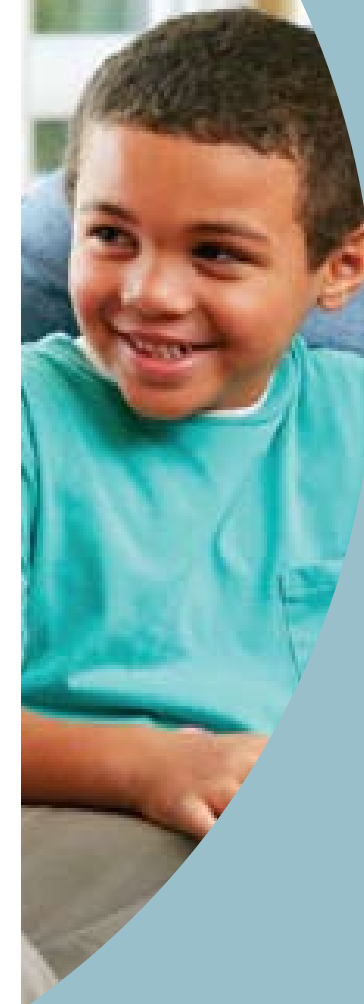
Foreword

Welcome to the first issue of the Children's Research Digest! The Digest evolved from our membership who spoke of their desire for a forum where they could showcase and disseminate their research in an accessible and succinct format. The idea of the Children's Research Digest was then further developed by members who agreed to participate in an editorial committee. The main objective of the Digest is to provide opportunities for all members of the Network who are conducting research on children's issues in Ireland and Northern Ireland to share their research findings with the wider community. It also allows members and non-members to find out about on-going research that members are engaged in so as to promote greater linkages, collaborations, and discussion on relevant topics.

In particular, the Digest provides an outlet for members who do not publish in traditional academic journals and we welcome submissions from practitioners, policy makers and academics. The Digest has an open access policy to ensure the widest possible reach and is an entirely on-line publication which is freely available to both members and non-members. Each issue has a thematic focus, and we welcome suggestions about possible themes for future editions. I would like to thank the editorial committee and in particular Louise Kinlen and Jackie Bourke, the co-editors of this first issue, for all their work and dedication in bringing the first issue of the Digest to life.

Orla Doyle

Dr. Orla Doyle,
Chairperson of the Children's Research Network of Ireland
and Northern Ireland



“In what ways can we possibly begin to make sense of children?” asks the sociologist Chris Jenks in *Childhood*, his seminal discussion on childhood and children. The theme of this first issue of the *Children’s Research Digest*, ‘Capturing the Voice of the Child’, suggests one way, which is by including the voice of the child in our research endeavours.

This issue comprises seven short articles and five research summaries, which draw on the work of the Children’s Research Network members. Together they contribute new knowledge on engaging children in the research process and authentically representing their views within a diverse range of research and policy contexts.

The *Digest* begins with two articles on the voice of the child in a legal context. The first article, by Roisin Graham, provides an overview of Article 12 of the UNCRC on children’s right to be heard and addresses barriers to realising this right within the *Guardian ad Litem* system in Irish courts. This is followed by Ann O’Kelly and Bernadine Brady’s article, which describes how a number of Articles of the UNCRC afford guidance on appropriate methodologies when conducting research with children. It discusses their application within the context of a case study on parental separation and divorce.

The next articles focus more specifically at research methodologies. The article by Christine O’Farrelly, Ailbhe Booth, Claire O’Rourke and Orla Doyle looks at the challenges of developing methodologies appropriate for engaging young children in research with refer-

ence to an experimental intervention study on children’s views of their experience of early school. Fiona Daly and Michelle Martyn’s article outlines a study undertaken by EPIC (Empowering People in Care) and describes a collaborative methodology involving young adults with care experience in research on young people’s experience of participating in *Child in Care* reviews. Angela O’Connell and Shirley Martin’s piece describes the peer-research methodology employed by an innovative project which focussed on issues affecting young people and their body image. The article by Rachel Shannon & Teresa Geraghty outlines research conducted from the perspective of children into childminding practice and quality and grouping children of different ages together in childminding settings. Finally, the article by Carmel Smith rounds off the main pieces with a synopsis of the benefits and challenges of capturing the voice of the child in research. Describing the findings of a study on some of the most influential research into children’s lives conducted over the course of the last 25 years, this article concludes that there is a need to ‘move beyond listening to children’s voices’, towards ensuring that the research we conduct has a positive impact on their lives.

The research summaries provide us with a flavour of research taking place in Ireland and Northern Ireland that aims to capture the voice of the child. These include capturing the voice of the child in residential care, the healthcare system, health behaviour and also on body image. We are immensely grateful to all who have contributed to this issue of the *Digest* and hope that it will contribute to the debate

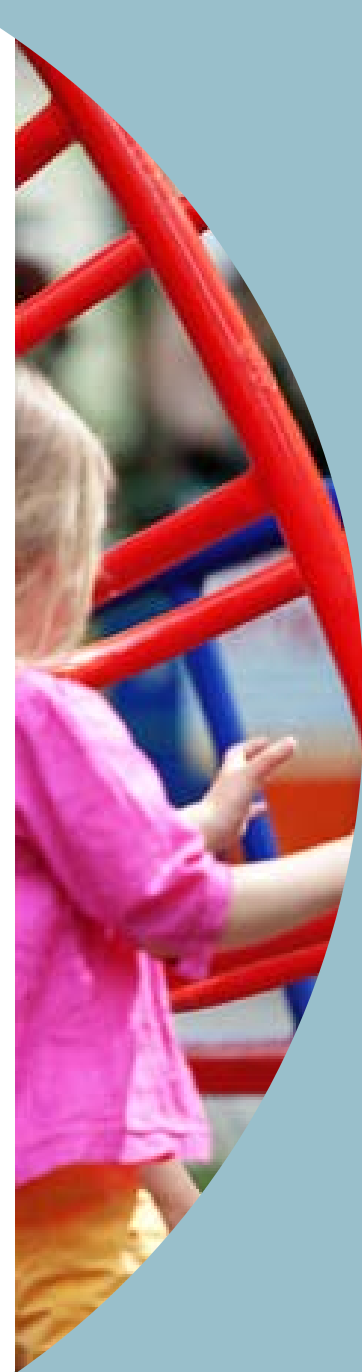
on how researchers can capture the voice of the child in a way that is meaningful and ultimately leads to improving children’s lives.



Dr. Jackie Bourke & Dr. Louise Kinlen
Co-editors

Acknowledgements

The publication of the first of the *Children’s Research Digest* would not have been possible without the assistance of all those who contributed. The editors would like to thank all members of the editorial committee and the reviewers, with particular thanks to Ailbhe Booth, Wendy Cousins, Sarah Jane Flaherty, Nóirín Hayes, Helen Mc Avoy, Tess Noonan, Emer Ring and Orla Tuohy. We would also like to thank the members of the Executive Committee of the Children’s Research Network for supporting and encouraging the *Digest* and Marian O’Dea for her on-going assistance. We are very grateful to our graphic designer Leanne Willars who brought the *Digest* to life. Finally, we would like to thank the members of the Children’s Research Network for their support and participation in this new venture.



The Child's Right to be Heard in Irish Family Court Proceedings: Rhetoric or Reality?

Roisín Graham

Introduction

The dawn of the 21st century has seen the 'voice of the child' emerge as a live issue and one that demands our utmost attention (Buchanan, 2006). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989 was the pinnacle of the children's rights movement and it is widely known as the "touchstone for children's rights throughout the world" (Fortin, 2003, p.49). It has since become the most widely ratified international instrument of all time highlighting a general consensus of the importance of children's rights at an international level (Kilkelly, 2007). A child's right to participate is viewed as "the keystone of the arch that is the UNCRC. Without the active participation of children and young people in the promotion of the child's rights to a good childhood, none will be achieved effectively". (Badham, 2002 in Lyon, 2007, p.102). A child's participatory rights are best encapsulated by Article 12 of the Convention. Article 12 goes much further than merely listening to the child and requires:

... taking account of the views of the child, which means that the child and his or her expectations and interests, have to be included in the decisions affecting the child, or, to say it more generally, in shared efforts to shape the daily life with its minor and major issues. Participation

is a very good term for that what results from expressing views, listening and giving due weight to the views, interests and goals of the child (Krappmann, 2010, p.501-502).

Article 12 plays a crucial role in giving a voice to the child in court proceedings, which can be done directly or indirectly. In particular cases, a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) can be appointed by the court to represent the child's welfare, interests and wishes (governed in Ireland under Section 26(1) of the Child Care Act 1991). The GAL is effectively an independent representative in proceedings (Shannon, 2011) and provides an extra-layer of representation (Bilson and White, 2005) for the child within the often combative nature of family court proceedings; thus providing many advantages in terms of representing the views of the child. The system as it currently operates in Ireland however carries many challenges, which are discussed below.

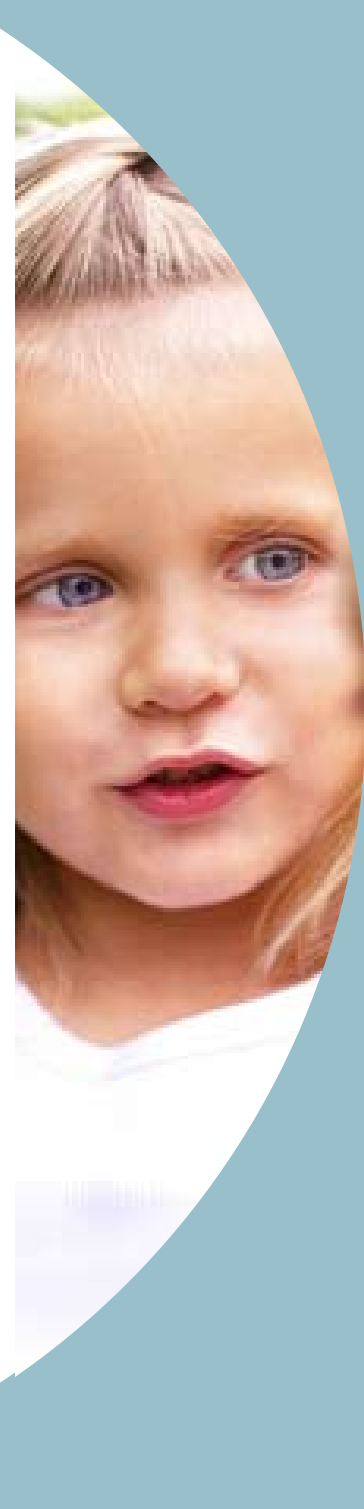
A Critical Analysis of the Role of the Guardian ad Litem under the Child Care Act 1991

One of the primary challenges associated with the role of the GAL is the lack of a clear definition of their role, functions and powers either through legislation or guidelines. Guidelines were issued in 2009 by the Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB, 2009), however the board has since been dismantled under part 6 of the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2011 and the guidelines never had legal force. Furthermore, the GAL has a dual role in that s/he must represent both the child's views and what is in their best interests, which are not always mutually exclusive. It seems clear

that the conflict between the child's beneficence and autonomy could be alleviated if the child could have both separate legal representation and a GAL, in other words, the solicitor would safeguard the child's right to be heard and the GAL would safeguard the child's best interests, similar to the model in the US (Schoffer, 2005). Unfortunately, under the 1991 Child Care Act (Ireland, 1991), the child is not entitled to such dual representation and at times the GAL may be the only person representing the child, despite not requiring legal expertise and the lack of awareness by the judiciary surrounding the scope of their role or function (Kilkelly, 2012).

Another challenge surrounding the role of the GAL arises under Section 25 of the Child Care Act 1991, whereby a child may join as a party in proceedings and also be legally represented. Where this occurs, S.26(4) precludes the appointment of a GAL, and indeed states that if a GAL is already appointed, that the appointment will cease (Carr, 2009). In practice, it has been reported that, in a number of cases where a solicitor has been appointed and wishes to have the involvement of a GAL, the judge dismisses the solicitor and appoints a GAL who then appoints the solicitor to represent them. This is just as expensive as 'dual representation', yet leaves the child unrepresented and not able to be a party. This means that the GAL interacts with the court as if s/he were a party rather than as an officer of the court (McQuillan, Bilson and White, 2004). In fact, given the stringent criteria of S.25(1) of the Act, which states that "...the court may, where it is satisfied having regard to the age, understanding and wishes of the child...", the appointment of a GAL will only apply to older children who are capable of expressing their views adequately to the court or a solicitor. Therefore, it is conceivable that a child may not be entitled to a GAL, legal representation or to become a party to the proceedings owing to the limitations set down as to the age and maturity of the child in question (Shannon, 2000). A further disadvantage of the GAL within the Irish context is that there are no set qualifications for the role,

One of the primary challenges associated with the role of the GAL is the lack of a clear definition of their role



apart from those recommended in the guidelines issued by CAAB which have no legal effect. Essentially, this allows for freelance GALs to operate independently, possibly without garda vetting. Furthermore, the appointment of a GAL depends largely on the judge hearing the case. This suggests that children are receiving different levels of service provision in accordance with the assigned judge as opposed to necessity (Daly, 2010).

Conclusion

The UNCRC has offered us the fullest legal statement of children's rights to be found anywhere (Freeman, 2000). In particular, Article 12 has copper-fastened the child's right to be heard at an international level. There is no doubt that the recognition of the child as a human being, who has the human right to be heard, fundamentally changed the position of children in the legal systems of the world (Ibid, p.505). However, it must be noted that the child's right to be heard within Irish family court proceedings cannot be fully realised due to the weaknesses of the mechanisms available to facilitate the voice of the child, most notably via a GAL, which for brevity's sake was solely examined within this article. Whilst there is great potential within the GAL system, the vagueness surrounding the scope of their role, functions, powers and qualifications, together with the restrictive nature of the 1991 Act (Ireland 1991), impedes the voice of the child being fully heard within the family courts. As a result, children involved in such proceedings are frequently unrepresented and may not, in fact, be involved at all (O'Callaghan, 2010, p.96). This is unacceptable as the outcome of a Family Law dispute may have a profound effect upon their future,

possibly more profound than the impact the outcome will have on the adults (Baroness Hale of Richmond, 2012).

The Committee on the Rights of the Child correctly asserts that achieving meaningful participation under Article 12 will necessitate dismantling the legal, political, economic, social and cultural barriers that currently impede children's opportunity to be heard and their access to participation in all matters affecting them (United Nations, 2009). Therefore, it is clear that a more concrete and robust promulgation of the role of the GAL in Ireland is needed to allow for a higher level of accountability and transparency and pave the way in transcending the right of the child to be heard in Irish family court proceedings from rhetoric into reality.

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Capturing Children's Voices in Research in Accordance with the UNCRC: A Case Study of Parental Separation and Divorce

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'It is not only a matter of asking the child; we must question ourselves'
(Paulo Freire, 1987).

Introduction

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which "addresses the legal and social status of children, who, on the one hand lack full autonomy with adults, but, on the other are subjects of rights" (UN, 2009) provides valuable guidance regarding best practice principles in conducting ethical research with children (Hill, 2009; Bell, 2008; Beasley, Bessell, Ennew and Waterson, 2011). Researchers have largely concentrated on the obligations inherent in Article 12 – the right for children to have their views heard (Hogan, Halpenney and Greene, 2002; Warming, 2006; Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010). This article aims to highlight how other relevant articles of the UNCRC (Articles 3, 5, 13 and 36) have been used to provide a framework, for current doctoral research into children's experiences of parental separation and divorce in Ireland incorporating participatory methods.

In the event that a participant would become distressed during the research process, a detailed protocol was put in place to ensure that he or she was responded to sensitively.

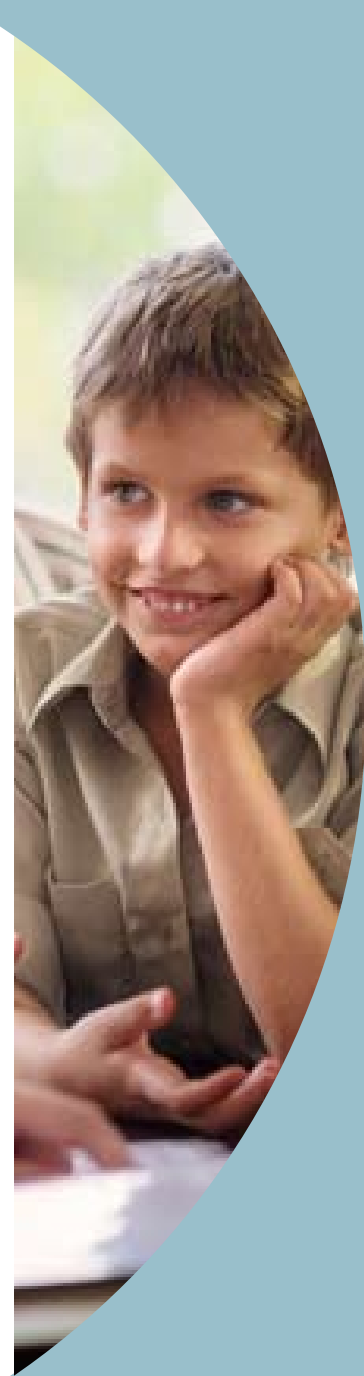
Applying the UNCRC

Article 3 of the UNCRC requires that research be undertaken only if it is in the best interests of the child in particular and in the best interests of children in general, while Article 36 requires that research be conducted in an open, non-exploitative manner. Dealing with an emotional subject such as parental separation had the potential to cause distress for research participants, which meant that the implications of Article 3 had to be carefully considered. The aim of the research was to give recognition to children's and young people's experiences of parental separation and divorce as despite the increased prevalence of divorce and separation in Ireland over the past decade, there has been little published research on the experiences of children in this context since 2002 (Hogan et al. 2002). Undertaking the research was therefore felt to be justified under both Articles 3 and 12. Participants were made aware of potential risk factors associated with the research, in particular the possibility of emotional distress and that any benefits arising from the research would, most likely, be reaped by other children and young people rather than themselves. Fully informed consent was obtained from a parent for all participants under 18 years of age and from the participants themselves for all stages of the research process. Additionally, confidentiality and anonymity were assured and the young people were made aware that they could refuse to participate or stop their participation at any time without consequences, including for a period of time following data gathering. In the event that a participant would become distressed during the research process, a

detailed protocol was put in place to ensure that he or she was responded to sensitively, including follow up, where necessary.

Article 13 of the Convention states that children have the right to express their views in any way they wish to do so. This implies that merely 'giving a voice' to children is not enough, and puts an onus on researchers to employ methodologies which enable children to express themselves in ways that suit their age and development. Participatory research methodologies, which may include drawings, storytelling, play and traditional methods such as interviews and focus groups presented in a child focused format, have the potential to reduce power imbalances between children and the adult researcher by giving children a choice in the methodology used. The commitment to avoiding exploitation in Article 36 also places an obligation on the researcher not just to engage with the participants in order to gather data – referred to by Beasley et al (2011) as 'mining for data' (p.163) - which further strengthens the case in favour of participatory research methods with children.

The participatory approach adopted in this study was multi-faceted and committed to the pursuit of engaged scholarship through working with children and young people towards the co-creation of knowledge. It included the establishment of a consultative group of two young people who acted as advisors for the duration of the research. 'Getting To Know Each Other' exercises (Moore and Layton, 2007) to build rapport with all participants and reduce power imbalances were undertaken at the start of all interviews. A range of age appropriate methods were used, including the St Luke's Bear Cards to elicit feelings and Family Sculptures to elicit closeness to family members, friends and pets in relation to coping strategies employed by the young people. Participants were informed of the progress of the research by letter at each phase and were invited to come together to review the research findings and give feedback on the themes emerging. Their input regarding dissemination of the findings will also be sought. Article 5 of the UNCRC requires that research be conducted to the highest professional standards of engagement with children – this was ensured through on-going contact with the consultative group of young



people, regular reflection and supervision, as well as the use of rigorous methods and analysis.

Under Articles 3 and 36, gatekeepers (who may include service providers as well as parents) must be fully informed of the research aims and process and agree to the participation of children to ensure that children would not be hurt or exploited in any way. While gatekeepers play an important role, concern has been expressed regarding their ability to allow or refuse access to young people by researchers (Thomas and O’Kane 1998; Fitzgerald, 2009; Infanti, 2008), which can contravene their rights under Article 12. This research was vigilant in ensuring that expressions of interest from children and young people regarding participating were respected. This was achieved through engaging in open dialogue with parents and gatekeepers and listening to their views and opinions, thus leading to their co-operation and enhancement of the research process. Despite this, however, there was one situation where a child may have been prevented from participating as his parent did not wish it, with the comment ‘oh gosh, no, I don’t think any of us want to go back on all that (parental separation) now’ (personal communication, April 2014). This could be seen as an example of how one child’s agency had ‘been handed over to parents’ (Beasley, et al 2011, p. 164). Article 36 of the UNCRC points to possibilities for researchers to revise the ways in which ‘key ethical principles, voluntary participation and confidentiality, have been ignored in research with children.....’ (ibid: 164). Such dilemmas in research with children challenge us as researchers to examine our own beliefs and views of children and the beliefs and theories of others, as advocated by Freire (1987).

Conclusion

To conclude, the methodology for this study was designed in accordance with the guidelines of the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), while the inclusion of participatory methods helped to ensure informed participation by means that are child-centred and respectful of children’s rights. It is argued that the UNCRC provides a valuable framework for research with children, including those who could be considered vulnerable due to their life experiences, offering the potential to ensure an ethical yet rigorous approach (Beasley, et al, 2011).

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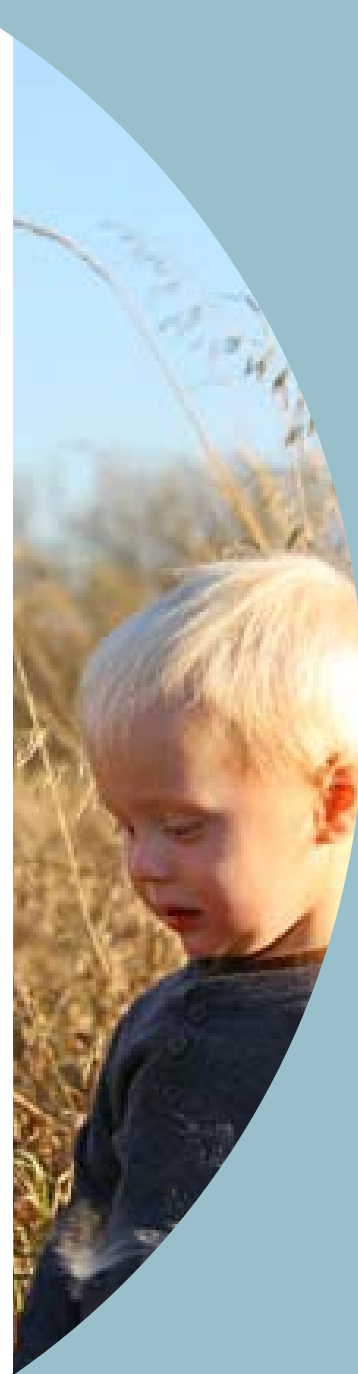
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Key ethical principles, voluntary participation and confidentiality, have been ignored in research with children.....



Rethinking Rhetoric on Listening: Seeking Young Children's Perspectives in the Context of an Experimental Early Intervention

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Introduction

The idea of children as experts on their own lives and as service evaluators is not new, yet it does engender unique issues when the participants are young children (Hennessy, 1999). This may explain why young children (0-6 years) have typically remained on the fringes of studies seeking children's perspectives (Lansdown, 2005) and have been considered "voiceless and invisible within society" (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005, p.7). One area in which there has been little exploration of children's perspectives is early intervention, which is increasingly utilised to mitigate socioeconomic inequalities in children's health and development. This oversight runs counter to gold standard approaches to evaluations of complex community interventions which endorse the value of participants' perspectives as a means of validating quantitative findings (Campbell et al., 2000). This article reflects on the Children's Thoughts about School Study to help stimulate discussion on the issues associated with investigating young children's perspectives as part of the evaluation of a complex community intervention.

Preparing for Life Evaluation

The Preparing for Life (PFL) programme aims to improve the school readiness of children living in a disadvantaged community in Dublin by working with families from pregnancy until children start school. The programme was developed in response to evidence that children from the catchment area lagged behind their peers at school entry in several areas of their development (Doyle, McEntee, and McNamara, 2012). Families participating in the programme were randomised into an intervention group receiving high level supports including home visiting covering topics on pregnancy, parenting and children's development, or a control group receiving low level supports common to both groups. The programme is evaluated through an impact evaluation involving periodic interviews in the home, direct assessments of children's cognitive abilities, and annual school readiness surveys, in combination with a process evaluation including interviews/focus groups with mentors, mothers, and fathers/father figures (see Doyle, 2013 for further information).

Children's Thoughts about School Study

The Children's Thoughts about School Study aimed to complement the existing PFL evaluation by investigating the PFL children's perspectives on their early school experiences. Children are uniquely positioned to offer information about whether they like school, look forward to attending school, and have positive views of teachers, peers, the school environment, and curriculum - key indicators of a successful school transition (Ramey and Ramey, 1994). For this study, forty one junior infants children from two local primary schools participated in one-to-one interviews

involving: (1) structured questions about children's school liking and avoidance, (2) open-ended questions about Riley Rabbit, a fictional character, starting school, (3) structured questions based on pictorial depictions about everyday school events, and (4) a draw and talk activity.

Reflections

A stark gap can exist between our aspirations to consult with young children and our ability to do so under real world conditions - and the devil is in the detail (Darbyshire, Schiller and MacDougall, 2005). Exercising due diligence in relation to children's profiles (e.g., language skills, cultural and community background) and optimal interviewing conditions can help to reduce the gap before studies commence (see Clark, 2005). Accordingly, we implemented two preparatory strategies, consultation and piloting, to help minimise data collection difficulties. Firstly, we sought feedback on our protocol from PFL implementation staff, local principals and teachers, and two domestic childhood researchers. This led us to seek information from parents on children's speech and language abilities in consent forms and to tailor depictions of school events to reflect the local school environments. In addition, interview times and locations were negotiated with teachers to avoid parts of the day and spaces where children may feel uncomfortable or distracted.

Secondly, piloting was used to ensure the suitability of the length and language of the protocol (Shaw, Brady, and Davey, 2011). This was essential given that our combination of methods were time consuming and had not frequently been used with young children facing socioeconomic risk. We found that revising the sequence of our methods allowed us to improve engagement without having to sacrifice the number of methods used. Importantly, piloting also provided us with an opportunity to build research capacity amongst team members who had not previously consulted directly with young children in this way.

Interview times and locations were negotiated with teachers to avoid parts of the day and spaces where children may feel uncomfortable or distracted.



However, the trade-off for piloting was time - a precious commodity within a large scale evaluation. Central to the planning and implementation of the study was the principle that effective ethics and methodology go hand in hand in research with children (Thomas and O’Kane, 1998). Within the demands of our evaluation, however, we needed creative solutions that would balance best practice with practicality. For example, it was not possible to cultivate relationships between researchers and children over time (Dockett, Einarsdottir, and Perry, 2009). Instead we asked parents to provide information on children’s interests to help foster conversation at the beginning of research encounters, a strategy we adopted having previously found it effective in conducting direct assessments. Similarly, we revised information booklets used in similar studies (O’Farrelly and Hennessy, 2013; Tatlow-Golden, Hennessy, Dean, and Hollywood, 2013) to introduce children to the study team, as well as the aims and activities. Booklets were introduced to children in a preparatory visit, provided to parents, and used to explore children’s assent during interviews. Such protocols are frequently encouraged in research with older children (e.g., Ford, Sankey, and Crisp, 2007), yet are seldom included in research with young children.

Finally, to maximise the breadth of data collected a mixed and multi method design was employed. Multiple methods were chosen to maintain and stimulate children’s interest whilst simultaneously reducing biases resulting from an over reliance on a single approach (Morrow and Richards, 1996; Thomas and O’Kane, 1998). Structured methods were chosen in part for their ease in comparing

children’s contributions across groups and comparability with international studies, while less structured methods allowed children relatively greater freedom to influence the content of the data. Overall our protocol was prescriptive; however we also sought to provide opportunities for agency within the parameters of the research agenda. For example, while we fashioned a more directive drawing prompt to yield greater school-specific content, we positioned children’s descriptions of their drawings as the first stage in interpreting this data (Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith, and Campbell, 2011). We also noted that structured measures, which may seem inherently restrictive in their ability to afford voice, often worked better with quieter children who chose to share less information when asked open-ended questions.

Multiple methods were chosen to maintain and stimulate children’s interest

Concluding Remarks

Our study does not claim to have captured children’s voices, but rather to have created space for children’s perspectives to be heard where they are often overlooked. We acknowledge that “giving someone a seat at the table does not automatically provide them with the power or resources to speak or to be listened to” (Thomson, 2007, p.208). Further discussion is needed to identify how this can be achieved within evaluations that demand equally ambitious and efficient solutions to conceptual, ethical, and methodological issues. While the literature has previously been restrictive in its conceptualisations of listening, emerging debate is reframing this research as a process of “experimentation, innovation and making do” (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008, p. 513; see also e.g., Spyrou, 2011; Tisdall and Punch, 2012). Our central

argument is that there is merit in applying these discussions to early intervention programmes. Doing so will afford children a place in evaluations which inform the policy and practice landscape that shapes their lives.

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A Participatory Approach involving Young Adults with Care Experience as Peer Researchers

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¹Empowering People in Care (EPIC)

Introduction

Empowering People in Care (EPIC) provides advocacy support to children and young people in State Care as well as young adults with care experience. EPIC also strives to encourage young people to participate in other aspects of its work, including research. This article discusses the participatory research method adopted for an EPIC study which involved young adults with care experience as peer researchers. It discusses how this was achieved and identifies some of the advantages and challenges in adopting this methodological approach. The research focused on the experiences of young people aged fifteen to seventeen participating in their Child in Care reviews in the Dublin North East region (Daly, 2014).

It was deemed easier for young people in care to talk about their experiences rather than write about them.

Participatory Research Methods

Participatory research methods involve doing "research with young people rather than on them" (Kirby, 1999, p.4). Involving young people in the process as peer researchers, such as identifying key questions and interpreting the findings, recognises that they are the experts on their own lives (Cahill, 2007). McLeod (2007) argues that the views of children and young people from disadvantaged groups, including those in State care, are less likely to be heard in research and practice compared to other groups of young people. McLeod (2007) also states that effective listening requires organisations to develop creative ways of finding out what is really important to young people and responding to what they have to say.



Nature of Peer Researchers' Involvement in the EPIC Study

A number of factors had an impact on the extent of peer researchers' involvement in the study including available resources for training and on-going support, as well as young people's own abilities and interests. Meaningful involvement requires much consideration to ensure that it is not tokenistic, and that peer researchers will be able to contribute to the research process as well as benefit from participating. The nature of peer researchers' involvement took the form of a collaborative approach between the EPIC Research Officer and the young researchers, which is defined as an "active, on-going partnership" (Kirby, 2004, p.10). Peer researchers were involved in three stages: preliminary planning phase; data collection; and data analysis.

Preliminary Planning Phase

The preliminary planning phase involved developing the research questions, choosing a research method and agreeing the extent of peer researchers' involvement in the study. These issues were discussed at two focus groups with young adults in June 2010: six young adults attended the first and five came to the second (four of whom participated in the first). Ages ranged from twenty to twenty eight. The young adults were known to EPIC and invited to participate by the Research Officer.

The focus groups were facilitated by the EPIC Research Officer and an external independent researcher. The key issues that emerged were recorded using a flip-chart and reflected back to the group for their views. The facilitators invited questions from young people before

moving onto the next topic for discussion. Decisions were based on the majority opinion of the group, for example, the advantages and disadvantages of different research methods were discussed, in particular questionnaires and interviews. The general consensus of the group favoured interviews as they would provide more in-depth information and it was deemed easier for young people in care to talk about their experiences rather than write about them.

Data Collection

In order to prepare the peer researchers to conduct interviews with young people in care, three training sessions took place in August/September 2010. These sessions were developed and facilitated by the Research Officer and the external independent researcher. Six young adults attended the first session, while four remained at the final session. All of these (except for one) had been involved in the preliminary planning phase. The topics covered at the training sessions included:

- What is research and the steps involved
- An introduction to research methods (advantages and disadvantages)
- The role of the researcher (including role play scenarios for interviews)
- Ethical issues including confidentiality and guidance in the event of a disclosure made by a young person
- The process of Garda clearance
- A Researcher Safety Protocol for peer researchers
- Feedback from young adults on the training sessions.

Following the training, two peer researchers were invited to conduct interviews for the study, both of whom were deemed to have

the appropriate social skills as well as having stability in their own personal circumstances at the time. In total, ten interviews were carried out with young people in care aged fifteen to seventeen between January 2011 and April 2012. Four of the interviews were conducted by one of the peer researchers (the other peer researcher was not available when data collection commenced). All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder.

Data Analysis

The Research Officer carried out preliminary data analysis of the interview transcripts and identified key themes. These issues were then discussed at a focus group with three peer researchers (two of whom had been involved in earlier stages). The aim of this was to gain a better understanding of the issues that arose for young people who had been interviewed.

Advantages and Challenges of Adopting the Participatory Research Method Approach

The involvement of peer researchers had several benefits for the study. The focus groups held at the preliminary planning phase helped identify interview questions that were relevant to the study population, as well as using language that was clear and easy to understand for young people. One of the main advantages of using the participatory research method is its potential to enhance the validity of research findings. A young person being interviewed by one of their peers is more likely to put them at ease and encourage them to be open and honest about their experiences (Kirby, 2004; Stein and Verweijen-Slamnescu, 2012). Finally, being involved in the research process gave peer researchers some practical experience of doing research and the opportunity to learn new skills.

While the method has benefits, there are several challenges in its implementation. The participatory research method moves the agenda from issues that the adult researcher sees as important to prioritise those that are identified by the peer researchers. This shift in power relations is one of the most significant challenges for adult researchers (O'Kane, 2008).



Training is one way of equalising power between adult researchers and young researchers (Cahill, 2007). It is also important to provide appropriate support to young researchers, especially those who are involved in data collection as sensitive issues may arise. The Research Officer spoke to the peer researcher after each interview to see how he/she felt and to establish if any follow up support might be necessary, which did not happen in this research.

Conclusions

The involvement of peer researchers in primary research requires more thought, planning and resources, especially time, compared to research that is solely carried out by adult researchers. Given the potential benefits for the research and for the young adults themselves, adopting the participatory research method is worth considering at the research design stage. This is one of the recommendations made in the EPIC report. It is hoped that future research will develop the use of participatory research methods to gain a valuable insight into the experiences of children and young people in care.

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Young People's Body Image - A Peer-Led Research Project

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Introduction

This article presents a brief overview of the methodology used in a peer research project carried out in 2011-12 with a group of young people exploring the topic of body image. The *Dáil na nÓg* How we see it: Survey on Young People's Body Image was an innovative, peer-led youth research project that set out to gather information about the issues that affect young people's body image in Ireland today. The research was conceived and designed, and the questionnaire administered by young people from the *Dáil na nÓg* Council (the national youth parliament comprising a representative from each of the 34 local authorities in Ireland). The Citizen Participation Unit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) funded the project and commissioned a research team, Dr Angela O'Connell and Dr Shirley Martin, from University College Cork. Staff from the DCYA also provided invaluable support to the project (including organisation of meetings, catering, co-facilitation of warm-ups, and departmental liaison). This short piece describes the peer-research methodology we used with the group, and the key learnings from that process.

Body Image and Peer-led Research

Article 12 of the UN CRC explicitly states that children should have a right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and that these views should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. This research project, originating from the work of the DCYA's Citizen Participation Unit, arises directly from the Government's commitment in the National Children's Strategy (2000 – 2010) to listen to children and young people, and to include their views in the policy-making process.



International research shows that young people are very concerned with their body image, and what little research there is relating to Ireland supports these international findings (see, for example, Doyle and the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) Team, 2010). Studies repeatedly highlight the serious social and health issues associated with negative body image, such as eating disorders, use of artificial supplements, inter-

By becoming centrally involved in researching their own lives, young people can improve the chances of their views being considered useful to policy makers and politicians who make decisions concerning their lives.

personal relationship problems, excessive exercise, withdrawal from participation and being subjected to teasing and bullying. As suggested by Mc Sharry (2009) and as evidenced by international research (Mission Australia, 2010), negative body image among young people can be significantly reduced where a national strategy to improve body image is implemented, particularly where it is adopted on a large scale.

In addition, it is increasingly recognised that by becoming centrally involved in researching their own lives, young people can improve the chances of their views being considered useful to policy makers and politicians who make decisions concerning their lives (Graham and Fitzgerald, 2010, p.137; Kellett, 2009, p.52). Participation in such research also brings personal benefits, and improves the research itself as young people have better access to their peers, have first-hand knowledge of youth cultures, and can often formulate more youth-appropriate questions in language that young people can relate to (Kirby and Bryson, 2002, p. 20).

Examining the importance of body image in influencing mental health among teenagers emerged as one of the key recommendations from the young people attending Dáil na nÓg 2010. When the Dáil na nÓg Council began to work on this recommendation, they first examined the State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2010 report and discovered that there is no publicly reported national data on

teenagers' body image. As a result, they decided to undertake research on body image using a survey of their peers, and started to put together a list of questions that they wanted to address. As researchers from UCC with extensive experience in participative research with children and young people, we were commissioned by the DCYA to facilitate and support the young researchers in their research process.

Method

Following a review of the literature on body image and participatory methodologies, we designed and delivered a tailored training package in peer-led research methods and ethics. This training focused on sensitive topics in research, question design, administering questionnaires, and ethical issues such as consent, support, confidentiality, data analysis, and feedback.

A series of workshops and communications between the Participation Unit, the young researchers, and us over a four-month period progressed and refined the survey questionnaire. The training addressed age-appropriate phrasing of questions, avoiding emotionally

charged or ambiguous words or leading questions that might influence answers, and we introduced the young researchers to the Likert Scale. The final version of the questionnaire was approved by a sub-group of young researchers, and a further meeting resulted in a three-page questionnaire, designed, with the help of professional designers.

After further training, the young researchers took the survey to each of the 34 Comhairle na nÓg Annual General Meetings in Autumn 2011. These AGMs draw young people together from diverse backgrounds and, as a result, the findings represent a comprehensive account of the body image concerns of young people in contemporary Ireland. In total, 2,156 young people aged ten to twenty-one years completed questionnaires.

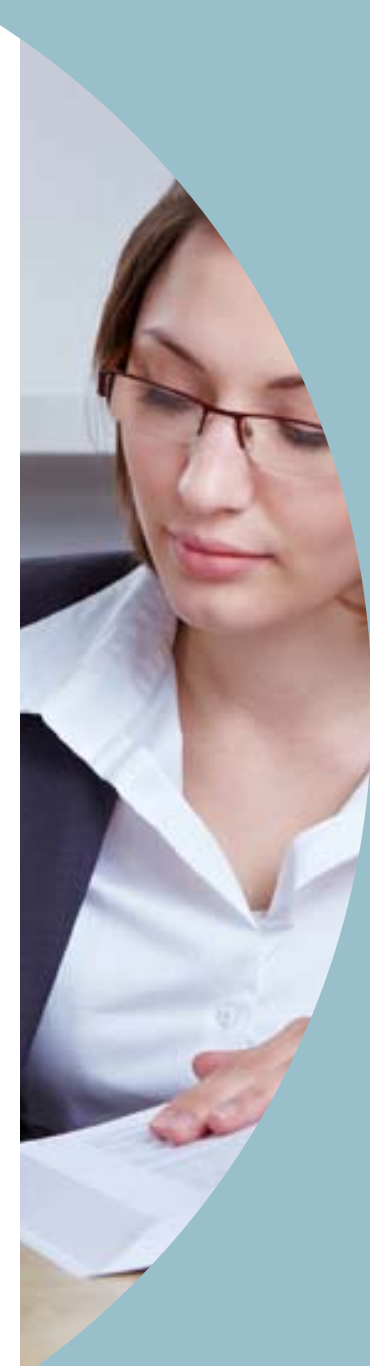
Methodology to Analyse Data with Young Researchers

We used a computer statistics package (SPSS) for preliminary analysis, and brought this data to a workshop. At this workshop, adapting a Consensus Workshop² method, the young researchers, individually by writing their ideas on post-it notes, then comparing them in pairs and finally arranging all of these ideas in groups, looked for trends and correlations, and suggested cross-references. We took the results of the workshop and refined the analysis to reflect the themes and suggestions that had emerged, incorporating these findings into a draft report.

Outputs

For maximum impact, the young researchers decided to develop an output in an attractive, informative, yet concise format for young people, and a fuller report for policy-makers. The reports were launched in October 2012 by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs at Dublin Castle, and attracted national media attention. The final report produced recommendations on how to support positive body image for young people in Ireland, including policy recommendations, and is available for download here: <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/childyouthparticipation/bodyimage/dcyabodyimagereport.pdf>

² Technology of Participation® Group Facilitation Methods, Institute of Cultural Affairs UK.



Key Learning from the Project

This project provided some key learning in supporting and enabling youth researchers to conduct peer research.

- Initial feedback from the young people who undertook the research was highly positive. Two years on, one of the researchers reports that her experience of doing the research influenced her decision to study sociology and politics in university. She also reflected that her experience

...altered my way of thinking...I was 16 at the time and my values and how I consider society were not as they are now, but the fact that we spoke of the survey offering ‘trans’ in the gender section made me think outside the box in comparison to many of my school friends at the time because transgender awareness was not a thing in secondary school.

- There were clear benefits in working with an established group of young people who were receiving support, including team-building and skills development. The young researchers had established positive group dynamics in place before the research process began, yet this sometimes made it difficult to tease out issues as there were few heated discussions or disagreements between them during the process.
- One of the limitations of the process was there was some inconsistency in attendance

There were clear benefits in working with an established group of young people who were receiving support, including team-building and skills development

at the meetings by some of the young researchers, which meant that there was some repetition at the start of each meeting. It may have been beneficial to have more ongoing updates on, for example, an online platform to keep everyone up-to-date on the process.

- Although the consultancy budget was small the overall financial and staffing supports available for the project enabled high levels of participation from the young people, many of whom had to travel long distances to attend meetings. The financial support was particularly important in relation to design and printing costs as the young researchers had expectations of a high quality, attractive and impactful final report which can be very costly. As this project was well funded and supported, we acknowledge that we, as researchers, were able to engage with the group of young researchers in an ongoing and resource-intensive process that may not always be feasible in other contexts.

- For researchers working with more limited means, it may not be possible to afford the costs and coordination required for participants to travel. Therefore, local groups might be more feasible.

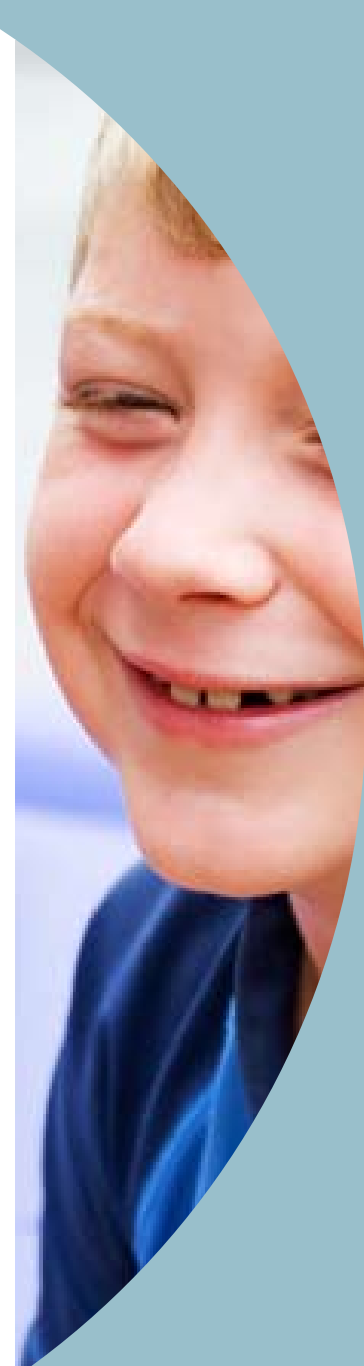
- Design and printing costs may be prohibitive for smaller budgets, thus alternatives such as online publication, using freely available templates from the web, might be explored. Young people themselves may have greater familiarity with more contemporary and effective options for dissemination.



Photograph: Monday 15th October 2012. At the launch of *How We See It: Report of a Survey on Young People's Body Image*, <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/press/151012PressRelease.htm>

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Children's Perspectives on Childminding in Northern Ireland

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Introduction

The National Children's Bureau Northern Ireland (NCB NI) and the Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA) have completed research which explored quality in childminding practice and the benefits and challenges of vertical grouping (i.e. children of different ages being cared for together). Based on statistics released from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS, 2013), registered childminding is the largest provider of full-time childcare in Northern Ireland. However, there is little specific mention of childminding in recent policy developments. Furthermore, research on childcare in Northern Ireland has tended to focus on issues such as availability, cost and economics (Gray and Bruegel, 2003). As noted by the Department of Education (DE, 2004), studies that explored quality and practice have been limited to group care settings, and this trend also applies further afield (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 1999; Smith and Joshi, 2002). This research aimed to explore practice, quality and the impact of vertical grouping in childminding settings from the perspectives of childminders, parents and children. The methodology used to acquire the perspectives of children and the findings from these data are presented below.

Methodology

Fourteen children aged between four and eleven years participated in either individual or joint interviews (with siblings). The purpose of these interviews was to find out what activities children participated in at their childminders, how they felt about being cared for in a mixed aged setting and what they liked best and least about being cared for in a childminder's setting. Projective and enabling techniques were used to elicit their views. These included asking the children to draw pictures of themselves at their childminders and the use of feelings cards which depicted a range of emotions. Before participating in the research, each child received an information and consent form which they were asked to sign along with their parents. Issues such as confidentiality and anonymity were explained in a language appropriate to the age and ability of the children. Each child received a thank you gift for participating in the research.

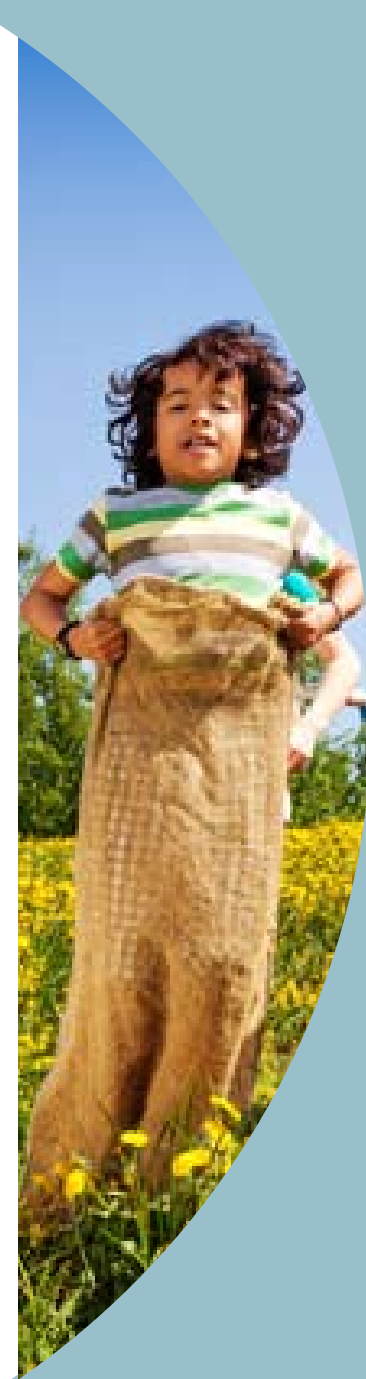
The views of children were also acquired through the Kids Life and Times (KLT) survey. This is an annual online survey with children in their last year of primary education (i.e. those aged between 10–11 years) which they access in school. It is conducted by Access, Research and Knowledge (ARK). This year's survey included questions on care arrangements for children after school hours. After the research was completed, each participant received a poster which presented the findings of the children's interviews and survey in a child friendly manner.

Findings

Why Children Like Going to Their Childminders

The majority of children reported feeling happy at their childminders. Many talked about the homely feel and the loving family environment at their childminders and how they liked being cared for in the same setting as their siblings:

Issues such as confidentiality and anonymity were explained in a language appropriate to the age and ability of the children



When we go to (childminder's name) it feels like going home. (Boy, 6, Interview)

(I am happy at my childminders because) my little brother goes there. (Boy, KLT respondent)

The children also highlighted the close personal bond they shared with their childminder and how they felt secure in their childminder's care:

(I am happy at my childminder's)... because my childminder treats me like I am her own. (Girl, KLT respondent)

I feel happy because my childminder treats me well and makes me feel safe (Girl, KLT respondent)

What Children Do At Their Childminders *The children also highlighted the close personal bond they shared with their childminder*

The children were involved in a wide variety of activities at their childminders. These activities included baking, playing sport and playing outside with garden toys, i.e. trampolines and swings (figure 1).

...she lets us bake fifteens sometimes (Girl, 11, Interview)

I play on the trampoline; have my snacks, playing football, playing with Bruce (childminder's dog). (Boy, 6, Interview)



Figure 1. Drawing completed by a participant (aged 8) from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust which depicts play with friends in their childminder's garden.

The older children reported completing homework at their childminders and many were assisted by their childminder:

...I can get my homework done so I will have more free time. (Boy, KLT respondent)

...my childminder is really nice and if I need help with homework she will always help me. (Girl, KLT respondent)

The children also interacted with children of mixed ages at their childminders. Many talked of how they enjoyed participating in activities and making friends with children of different ages. Some of the older children reported helping the younger children:

I get to play with my childminder's children and other children she looks after. (Girl, KLT respondent)

(I like doing)... the things Thomas (older brother) is doing. (Boy, 4, Interview)

I would help put on their coat and get a few things for (the childminder) sometimes. Or help them put their seat belt on and just hold their hand and stuff (Girl, 11, Interview)

Challenges Of Being Cared For By A Childminder

Some children identified challenges of being cared for in a mixed aged setting. One of these challenges related to the behaviour of younger children. For example, a number of the older children noted that the younger children sometimes disrupted their games and activities, and this was a cause of frustration:

When you are doing your homework, they (younger children) are running around screaming. (Girl, 10, Interview)

They (younger children) just answer you back ... they run around screaming after each other. And one time they were playing with a ball and I went out and they kicked it at me and I picked it up and they were like, no, no, no! We are playing football, you can't play. (Girl, 11, Interview)

Other children noted how they sometimes felt bored at their childminders due to a lack of appropriate toys or activities or because there are no children of a similar age to play with (figure 2):

I feel ok (about) the way I'm looked after when school finishes but we are the oldest ones there and sometimes you can get bored. (Girl, KLT respondent)

All the toys are babyish (Girl, KLT respondent)



Figure 2. One child depicts feeling bored at their childminder's (Girl, 10, Interview)



Conclusions

Findings from the interview and survey data show that there are many benefits for children of being cared for in a mixed age setting. These include the homely environment offered, which means children can be cared for alongside their siblings, and the promotion of mixed aged friendships which provides opportunities for learning. The children also identified challenges of being cared for in a mixed age setting which include feeling frustrated with the behaviour of younger children and feeling bored because of a lack of appropriate activities and similar aged friends.

In terms of childminding practice and quality, the data shows that children are involved in a wide range of activities at their childminders that target different developmental areas, for example, their gross motor abilities. The children also emphasised the close relationship they have with their childminder which demonstrates the development of secure attachments.

Further Reading

To access the full and summary reports of this research and a child friendly poster which presents the children's interview and survey findings please see <http://www.ncb.org.uk/who-we-are/northern-ireland/publications>.

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Teresa Geraghty has worked at NCB NI since 2006. She is a professionally qualified Community Youth Worker and has numerous years' experience of working in research and policy in the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland. Teresa has carried out research with a wide variety of children and young people including children with a disability; children in the care system; young women and rural young people. She also has a particular interest in children's rights work in terms of policy development. Teresa has been involved in the Equality Coalition, the Human Rights Consortium and Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) Policy group.

Giving Voice to Children's Perspectives: Do Actions Speak Louder than Words?

Carmel Smith¹

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Introduction

The right of children to be involved in all matters affecting their lives and to freely express their views was established as a fundamental human right under Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989). The views of children are seen to be separate and to potentially conflict with the rights of parents, professionals and others in positions of power in children's lives. To deny a child a voice is therefore seen as a denial of a child's right as a citizen. In this respect the UNCRC was a watershed in approaches to the development of national and international policies in relation to children and the 'voice of the child' became a powerful mantra amongst politicians, policy makers, practitioners and children's rights activists (James, 2007).

There was a shift of emphasis from research 'on' children to research 'with' children

In terms of research, a significant body of literature emerged in the decades following the UNCRC, most notably across the social sciences and humanities, which urged a radical rethinking of children's research (James and Prout, 1997; Greene and Hogan, 2005; Christensen and James, 2008). Consistent with the UNCRC, children were no longer to be viewed as objects of study but instead as dynamic social actors, influencing as well as being influenced by their everyday worlds. There was a shift of emphasis from research 'on' children to research 'with' children and in some cases, to research 'by' children (Kellest, 2010). There has been a marked trend towards qualitative approaches to research and creative and participatory methods, as researchers grapple with issues of empowerment and trying to make research environments more reciprocal and democratic (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010).



This study

Against the backdrop of the considerable changes that have taken place in children's research since the UNCRC, Smith and Green (2014) undertook a study with 22 high-profile children's researchers who had been responsible for some of the most influential published work in relation to children and childhood over the course of the last 25 years. The aim of the study was to capture important knowledge about this period and provide an informed base for discussions about the history, current status and future of the field. This article discusses some of the issues that arose from that study in relation to the voice of the child.

Method

A primary criterion for the selection of participants was that they had made a 'significant contribution' to theory and research in relation to children and childhood. The final sample represented a mix of participants in terms of disciplinary backgrounds and geographical locations. One person declined the invitation to be interviewed. In terms of limitations, although several participants had lived and worked in majority world countries, only one participant had been born and raised in the majority world.

In-depth, one-to-one semi-structured 'elite' interviews were recorded and transcribed by the interviewer. In keeping with ethical considerations when researching researchers (Wiles, Crow and Heath, 2006), interviewees were offered the opportunity to edit their transcript before publication. Interviews were thematically analysed and reported under key headings.

Results

Many of the interviewees expressed concern about the concept of the 'voice of the child' and were sceptical about the idea that simply presenting what children say equates with giving children a 'voice'. Researchers such as Corsaro, Ennew, Frønes and Rogers (Smith and Greene, 2014, p.248) pointed to how children (like adults) say different things depending on the context and emphasised that what children do not or cannot say is sometimes more significant than verbal interactions.

Giving 'voice' to children's accounts is not merely about listening to children and reporting what they say, it is about whether and how adults demonstrate that we hear what children are telling us.

Rizzini, whose work has highlighted the conditions for street children in Brazil, is clear that the issue is 'not about giving someone a voice', it is related to why people do not listen and do not want to be disturbed by the way children question things (Smith and Greene, 2014, p.194). The concern for Ennew, an international human rights activist based in Malaysia, involved in various programmes to strengthen capacity in rights-based research with children, is that 'children have "voices" but only adults have opinions.' She is adamant that until there is recognition that children 'are not just decorative additions to political life, their human rights will continue to be violated, often by the very people who think they are helping' (Smith and Greene, 2014, p.249).

A clear message from this study is that giving 'voice' to children's accounts is not merely about listening to children and reporting what they say, it is about whether and how adults demonstrate that we hear what children are telling us. Kellett, for example, argues that even if children have their say, the voice of the child 'can be meaningless' if adults do not follow through with action. 'If something isn't going to happen as a result of expression of voice then there is no agency.' (Smith and Greene, 2014, p.142). Therefore, if children participate in research and speak about their experiences and opinions in relation to their everyday lives, is that sufficient or does there need to be an effect or an impact if claims are to be made about giving children a voice?

In terms of the future, several of the interviewees were past or present editors of high profile journals. They commented on the repetitive nature of many of the small-scale studies presenting children as social actors currently being submitted to their journals. There was a consensus, across the spectrum of quantitative and qualitative research, that such studies have now reached 'saturation point' in terms of their contribution to the field (Smith and Greene, 2014, p.248). Cook, from his standpoint as a current editor of the journal *Childhood*, argued the need to move to a deeper level of critical analysis so as to inform and progress theoretical and methodological issues underpinning children's research:

Look, if we are going to see children as socially embedded beings, we are also going to have to see that they also have faces to lose and keep, selves to present, and that they have views that come out of their selective and biased experiences. Yes, it's a child's voice but it is not a golden road to truth. It is fraught like anything else, just fraught differently.' (Smith and Greene, 2014, pp.67-68).

Conclusion

Giving voice to children's accounts is a complex process. It is not simply about methods, tools and techniques that can be used to facilitate children to speak about their knowledge, opinions and ideas which can then be reproduced as 'the voice of the



child' for adult consumption. It is fundamentally about the skills of the researcher and the ways in which children are positioned by the researcher in the research relationship that enables or constrains the use of particular research methods (Smith, 2011). This, of course, has implications for researchers who must think deeply about the ways in which they conceptualise, theorize and position children in research so as to be open to hearing and accepting children's accounts as distinct and separate from their own personal, professional and disciplinary influences and ways of seeing the world (Smith, 2011). The research reported in this paper suggests that we need to move beyond just listening to children's voices and to focus on how adults can demonstrate that children's voices have been heard and acted upon, if the ultimate aim of research is to make a difference to children's lives.

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We need to move beyond just listening to children's voices and to focus on how adults can demonstrate that children's voices have been heard and acted upon



Their voice: Involving Adolescents in Developing Questions to Capture Factors Influencing Body Image Perceptions in Ireland

Ursula Kenny¹, Lorraine Burke¹, Kathy Ann Fox¹ and Colette Kelly¹

¹ NUI Galway

Introduction

In Ireland, young people have highlighted body image as an issue of concern (O’Connell and Martin 2012). Consequently, the Department of Health requested that the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study (HBSC) collect data on the factors that influence adolescent body image in the HBSC Ireland survey. The aim of this study was to develop and test a question for use in the HBSC Ireland 2013/14 study.

Methods

The HBSC study is a cross-sectional study that collects data on children’s health and well-being. To date the HBSC study has examined body image through a measure of body dissatisfaction, with no question(s) on factors influencing body image. To begin the question development process a literature review was conducted to investigate whether other cross-national surveys had included a question exploring body image influences.

International experts on body image were also contacted to assist in identification of a question. A single item was not identified thus two open ended questions were developed by the Irish HBSC team which include the following: “What influences how you feel about your body image?” and “What influences how you feel about your body shape?”. Adolescent views and opinions of these questions were collected from 75 young people, aged 13-17 years from two post-primary schools.

A workshop, which consisted of group discussions with young people was conducted in each school. During the workshops young people were asked to explain how they would

answer both questions, their opinions on each question and which question they preferred. Data were transcribed verbatim and a thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes from the research.

Young people showed a preference for the use of the term “body image” as opposed to “body shape”

Results

Key themes identified from the discussions are illustrated with quotes in Figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1. Perception of factors influencing adolescent body image in Ireland.

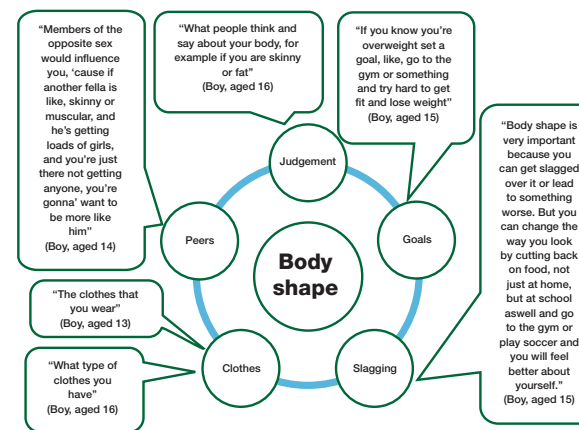


Figure 2. Perception of factors influencing adolescent body shape in Ireland.

Conclusion

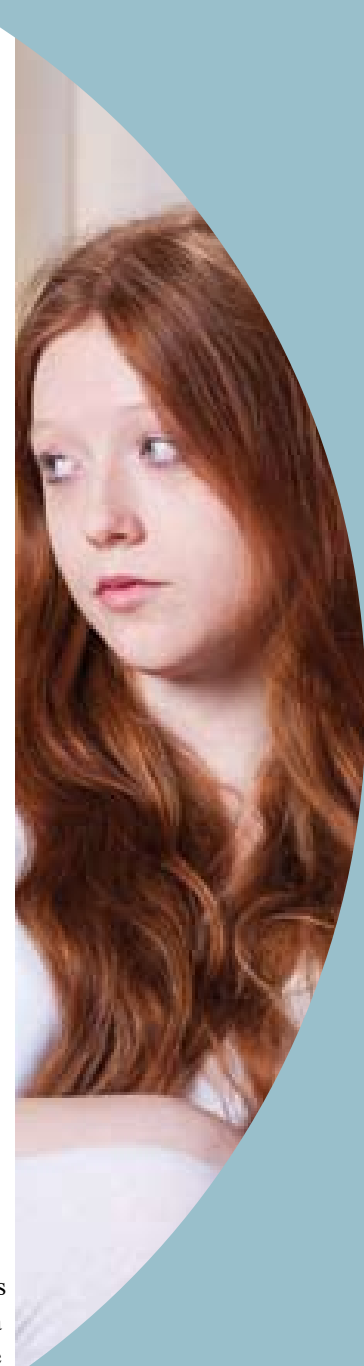
Overall, young people showed a preference for the use of the term “body image” as opposed to “body shape”, thus a question on factors influencing body image was included in the HBSC 2013/14 survey cycle. It is anticipated that the input gathered from young people during the question development process will serve to provide a greater insight into the factors influencing adolescent body image in Ireland.

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Developing an eHealth intervention to prepare and support young people (with long-term illnesses) for transition to adult healthcare services.

Imelda Coyne¹, Geraldine Prizeman¹, Aisling Sheehan¹, Aisling While²

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Introduction

This project emerged from a research study called TRYCIS (Transition from child to adult care for young people with chronic illness) and funded by the Health Research Board Ireland. Among the study objectives is to investigate how young people with long-term conditions experience the process of transition to adult healthcare services. We found that the transition from child to adult services can be very difficult. Young people want advice, information, support and signposting in relation to transition, but they encounter obstacles to having these needs met. Many young people receive inadequate information and preparation and the move from child to adult services was generally experienced as an abrupt transfer rather than a gradual and smooth transition. Hence, we co-developed this intervention with young people, as an innovative way of providing relevant information and better preparation for the transition process.

Young people want advice, information, support and signposting in relation to transition

Methods

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant ethics committees. The research was conducted in two phases. During the first phase we needed to identify young peoples' preferences for e-Health technologies and information provision. Using a mixed methods design, we conducted a survey (n= 207) and focus group interviews to elicit young people's preferences. The young people were aged 14 to 25 years and were from three disease groups: diabetes, cystic fibrosis and congenital heart disease. The survey data revealed that almost six in ten young people (57.1%) believed that a website would be quite or very useful for receiving information about their illness. Mobile phones/apps were deemed most useful (76.9%), while technologies such as Skype (15.7%), social networks (50.8%) and chat rooms (25.2%) were viewed as not very useful. Email (34.5%) and web pages (33%) were the preferred options for the exchange of information about the disease and for receiving advice/support and information on healthcare facilities. The interview data indicated that young people would value a website that contained information about key hospital personnel, differences between child and adult services, location and configuration of services, transition stories, FAQs and illness management.

During the second phase, the aim was to develop an appropriate e-health intervention using a participatory approach underpinned by four key principles: consultation and cooperation with relevant stakeholders, experimentation with alternative designs, contextualisation (testing with users and providers), and iterative development (modification in response to evaluation) (Waller, Franklin, Pagliari and Greene, 2006). Using this approach we set up a co-design group comprising young people with long-term conditions from the three disease groups. We also set up two additional advisory groups comprising stakeholders from voluntary organisations, disease support groups, healthcare professionals, parents, young people, in addition to the web designer and developer, and a digital technology expert. Prior to the development of the site a name was chosen. To choose a name for the website, a survey was distributed to young people and participants (n=74) and they were given ten possible names



derived from workshops/interviews/meetings. They were asked to choose their 'top 3'. 'SteppingUP.ie' was the chosen favourite. Using the data from phase one, we worked with young people to co-design and co-develop website and information material. This was an iterative process as we (researchers, young people, web designer) experimented with different designs via participatory workshops. The website design and materials were tested and modified in response to evaluations by young people primarily, and latterly by all other stakeholders. In this way, young peoples' voices and preferences and stakeholders' views were incorporated into the design of the intervention that is called www.SteppingUp.ie.

Conclusion

SteppingUP.ie is the first of its kind in Ireland. It is an innovative online resource that offers the following; video testimonials, downloadable stories, tips and information on managing the transition, becoming more independent, knowing about medications and the differences between child and adult services. During transition, some patients disengage from healthcare services and may experience deterioration in their medical condition. This intervention is one means of providing young people with resources to prepare them for transition to adult healthcare services. Within current resource constrained healthcare systems, we need to develop interventions which promote patient empowerment and enhance information sharing.

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Author Information

Prof. Imelda Coyne has over 20 years experience of researching, teaching and administration in higher education. She is a Professor in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin. Her programme of research focuses on two key strands: the extent to which children and young people's voices are heard and their participation in communication and decision-making; and inclusion in managing longterm conditions.

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An Exploration of Dissemination tools and Mechanisms among Young People

Lorraine Burke¹, Maureen D'Eath¹, Honor Young¹, Saoirse Nic Gabhainn¹

¹ NUI Galway

Introduction

The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Ireland (HBSC) study collects data on children and adolescent's health and well-being, social environments and health behaviours. An important part of the HBSC research process is ensuring that data and findings are used to improve the lives of children as well as to inform the broader research area. This is of particular significance when data is collected from young people, as it is important to honour their contribution to the knowledge generation process.

The main aim of this study was to identify alternative and suitable methods of disseminating to young people and to collate feedback on existing resources. Traditionally, research findings tend to take the form of academic documents and papers targeting a professional or scientific audience.

Methods and Findings

Focus groups were carried out with young people aged fifteen years and older in a range of settings (schools, youth groups). Feedback was collected on the young people's interest in the HBSC research findings, reactions

to existing materials and recommendations for more appropriate materials and modes of dissemination to young people. The findings demonstrate that young people were interested in having information about the health behaviours of young people their own age in Ireland. They saw the value of knowing the facts in the case of behaviours such as engaging in sexual intercourse. Most agreed that this sort of knowledge would lessen peer pressure in the lives of many adolescents. While young people were interested in receiving health behaviour information, they were very clear that it should be short, concise, have little text and

The majority of young people also suggested that social media such as Facebook and YouTube were the best modes of distributing information to them.

have a focus on visual aspects such as colour and images. The majority of young people also suggested that social media such as Facebook and YouTube were the best modes of distributing information to them. Many were interested in the use of short video clips made by young people themselves as a method of disseminating research findings.

Conclusion

These data provided valuable and constructive insights into suitable approaches to the distribution of research findings to a youth audience. Young people had clear priorities for the type of materials that are useful and the best modes of communicating these materials among their peers. These findings have provided valuable guidelines which will benefit the dissemination of both existing and future research in the area of children and adolescent health behaviours. Further information is available from www.nuigalway.ie/hbcs or hbcs@nuigalway.ie

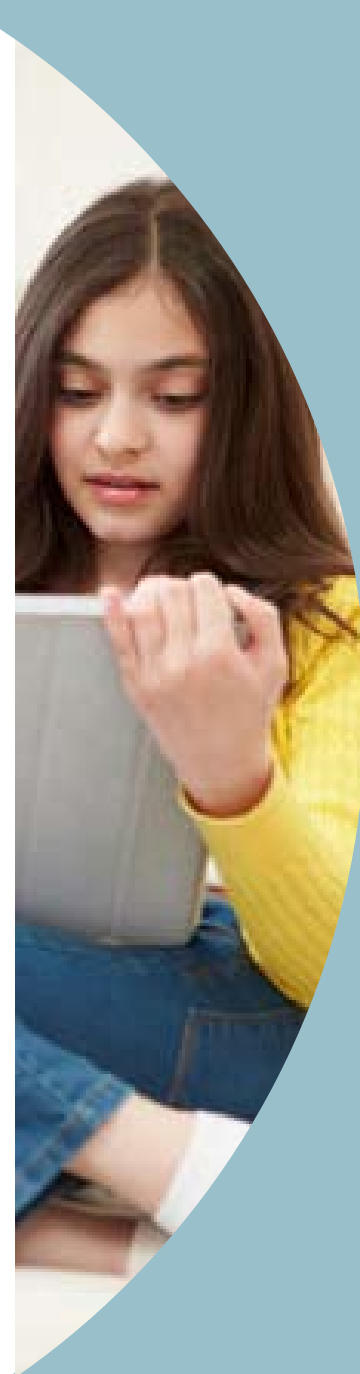
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Young People in Residential Care, their Participation and the Influencing Factors

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¹Tusla, The Child and Family Agency

Introduction

Young people living in residential child care settings frequently present with complex needs that may manifest as challenging behaviour (Gallagher and Green, 2012). For this reason, the opportunities afforded them to participate in decision-making about their lives may be limited (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011). In view of this, a small study was conducted in February/ March 2012 in a regional residential child care service to establish the extent to which young people in the care of the State living in such accommodation participate in decision-making about their lives and the factors which influence their participation (McCarthy, 2012).

Method and Findings

Interviews were undertaken with six young people living in three of the centres and with ten social care workers from four centres. The main findings are in keeping with previous studies on the subject including those undertaken by Bell, (2011), Bessell, (2011); Lansdown (2010), Leeson (2007) and Munro (2001). They show that with the exception of opportunities to meet with friends, young people were relatively satisfied with their involvement in decision-making about everyday

matters such as food, clothing and activities such as TV viewing. However, information from social care workers suggests that such decision-making can be fraught with difficulties, with many young people subjected to control battles initiated by some social care workers. In relation to decision-making about ‘bigger issues’ such as admission to residential care and the process of admission, family access, education/training and their future plans, young people had limited involvement. These young people were found to be unfamiliar with their right to participate as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the majority of the social care workers who participated in the study had not

Training was identified as an urgent need for professionals working with this vulnerable client group

received training on participation and had little or no information on the subject.

Factors were identified as enabling participation or creating obstacles to it. They include the culture of the service studied, the capacity of the young

people to participate, the skills, values and personalities of the relevant professionals involved in their lives, the nature of the available participatory spaces, access to effective advocates and the nature of their relationships with key professionals such as social care workers and social workers.

Conclusion

The varying levels of participation identified suggest a lack of shared understanding of the meaning of participation and a child’s right to participate. Among the recommendations made, training was identified as an urgent need for professionals working with this vulnerable client group.

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Edel Mc Carthy is a Training and Development Officer with Workforce Development in TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency. Previously and at the time of the study she was employed as a Guidance Worker in residential child care services. She has an interest in workplace training and the provision of quality services that meet real need and make a positive difference in the lives of children and families.



Capturing and Understanding Parents' Experiences of Concern about their Child's Growth or Development

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Introduction

The aim of preventative child health services is optimum health and development outcomes for children and families. Ten to twenty per cent of children have some form of developmental delay or disorder (WHO and UNICEF, 2012) and less than a third are identified before primary school entry (Glascoe, 2006, Sand et al., 2005). This exposes unassessed and undiagnosed children to health, educational and social disadvantages (Sices, 2007). Effective services require close working relationships between parents and primary Health Care Professionals (HCPs), such as General Practitioners (GPs) and Public Health Nurses (PHNs).

Pre-school children are reliant on their parents to voice concerns about their growth

or development outside of and apart from scheduled developmental checks. Literature reviewed indicated many efforts to effectively measure parental concern (Deakin-Bell et al., 2013, Glascoe, 2002, Hess and Landa, 2012), yet there has been a dearth of evidence on the experiences of parents in formulating and expressing concern.

Typically parents noted concerns when the child was aged between one and two years old

Methodology

The aim of a qualitative study (Mulcahy, 2014b), underpinned by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009), was to understand the experiences of a purposive sample of parents of fifteen pre-school children, in relation to growth or development concerns. Data were collected by semi-structured interview, managed using NVivo 10 and analysed using IPA.



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Findings

The sample of mainly mothers had concerns ranging from speech and language delay, musculo-skeletal problems through to autism spectrum disorder. Typically parents noted concerns when the child was aged between one and two years old. Concern was rarely expressed immediately as parents delayed while they tried to assess if their child was developing normally.

Four superordinate themes incorporating features of uncertainty were identified which captured the process parents go through in making sense of their experiences. IPA was particularly useful in identifying new insights about parental

concern. For example, the concern that parents described was not always about the child being studied. These main findings are currently being prepared for a peer-reviewed publication.



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Conclusion

Making sense of child growth and development concerns is challenging for parents and contributes to delayed verbal expression. Although perfectly appropriate for HCPs to adopt 'a wait and see' approach, it should be structured and in collaboration with parents. Otherwise stating parents are the experts in their own children is simply rhetoric.

The factors which encourage parents to voice their concerns are multifaceted (Mulcahy, 2014 in press). Strong nurse/client relationships foster trust which facilitates expressing concerns (Mulcahy and Savage, 2013). Recommendations in relation to how GPs can effectively elicit and attend to parental concern were also recently presented (Mulcahy, 2014a). In conclusion, studying the factors which help or hinder parents to express concerns about children who are too young to voice them, will help policy makers, educationalists and practitioners in planning, preparing and delivering effective preventative child health services.

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