Adolescent Substance Abuse. Whose Problem is it anyway?
Adolescent substance misuse continues to dominate the global discourse on adolescent problematic behaviour and this is gaining momentum and intensity in Ireland. Research in this area has increased in the past two decades, (Waldron & Turner, 2008); most of this research has focused on treatment outcomes. At present the research on adolescent substance misuse in an Irish context is sparse, additionally research focusing on adolescent service user perspectives internationally is limited (Baker, 2007). Although research in other countries has increased, questions relating to the aetiology of substance misuse in this age group and successful treatment approaches remain unanswered. There is a trend to treat mental health and substance misuse as two separate problems when the research shows that they mutually contribute to each other and a better understanding of this would improve outcomes for children involved in these services. The research conducted using client files of 93 young people in the Cork-Kerry region identifies that best practice when working with young people should at a minimum involve working in the context of the family, collaborative inter agency and shared care planning. The intention of the study is to gain a greater insight into the life experience of adolescents misusing substances and the implication of this for professionals working in relevant areas of mental health, social work and justice. The importance of understanding the issue from the perspective of service users and their right to shape their care plans and the significance that this has on service design and delivery.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 5
Student Submission: 0
Format: Oral paper (15 mins)
Accepted Format:
Topic: Practice innovations in child welfare and protection
Exploring the policy to practice gap: Social workers’ experience of embedding child protection policy into their practice

Irish government policy and professional practice has made numerous attempts to bridge the policy to practice gap in child protection social work by developing various implementation strategies. To date, these strategies have been reviewed predominately using a top-down assessment approach. In contrast, this qualitative research study critically examined the policy to practice gap through a bottom-up approach by exploring the implementation of child protection policy from a frontline service providers’ perspectives. Specifically, this research study: 1) identified social workers’ experiences towards implementing Children First 2011 into their daily practice; 2) explored how social workers negotiate the process of applying CF 2011 and ancillary policies/procedures in their practice; 3) analysed the collected data through the lens of implementation science.

Four themes emerged from the data analysis. The first theme, Professional role identity, discusses the participants’ perception of their role and responsibilities as child protection social workers. The theme Spheres of influence captures their perspective regarding the influence and impact that external stakeholders, service users and external professionals have on the ability of social workers to implement child protection policy. These external influence factors both support and hinder the policy implementation process. Negotiating the change process was a theme common to all participants as child protection social work in Ireland has undergone many changes in recent years; such as the establishment of the new TUSLA Child and Family Agency. The final theme, Exercising frontline discretion, explores how practitioners exercise professional judgement in making practice decisions within legal and policy frameworks. The findings suggest a tension between adhering to a high level of policy fidelity and practitioners’ need to exercise professional judgement when dealing with specific cases.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 6
Student Submission: 0
Format: Symposium (90 mins)
Accepted Format: Oral (15 Minutes)
Topic: Policy perspectives on child welfare and protection in Ireland
The Signs of Safety: The Importance of Safety Organised Practice

The Signs of Safety approach to child protection casework is widely recognised internationally as the leading available progressive approach to child protection casework (Turnell & Murphy, 2014). Increasingly practice in the area of child protection and welfare has become dominated by procedures and led to systems that have become both high in cost and defensive in nature. It is therefore, not surprising that data and research shows us an increase in the numbers of child care applications, increased number of children in care and increased number of children on a child protection notification systems. On a qualitative side research, has also indicting poor retention of social workers within this field of practice and poor experiences on the part of service users who come into contact with our services. The birth of the Child and Family Agency and gives for the first time an opportunity to reclaim and redefine the practice of our work and to actively support and develop practitioners to be risk sophisticated and focused, in a collaborative way, towards safety organised practice.

This symposium will highlight the key elements in the Signs of Safety Approach using a case example to explore the use of the approach in respect of safety planning for children. The case example will be used to show of risk and safety are “mapped” with the Signs of Safety Framework, participants will be facilitated in the development of danger and safety statements including exploring questions that will assist in identifying future safety. In addition to presentation will highlight the engagement of children in both the process of assessment and in the development of effective safety plans

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 10 Student Submission: 0
Format: Symposium (90 mins) Accepted Format:
Topic: Practice innovations in child welfare and protection
The School Completion Programme and the Development of Human Rights in Education in Ireland

This study explores the effectiveness of the School Completion Programme (SCP) to achieve the three goals of the National Children’s Strategy (2000-2010) which are that children:

- Will have a voice in matters which affect them
- Their lives will be better understood
- They will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development

The research involved interviewing children who attend the schools involved in the Programme and have participated in the supports at some stage in their educational lives. The findings provided a valuable insight into how these children experience their lives and how they perceive the SCP supports on offer to them. It was found that the children's experience of the SCP supports was a positive one which helps them overcome the difficulties they encounter during their educational lives and supports them to ensure their lives do not fall into crises. In conclusion, it is argued such a support should be developed rather than curtailed particularly in the current context of globalization and growing diversity.

The researcher argues that the SCP is a postmodern service and for that reason, the research draws on a postmodernist and social constructionist framework using an ethnographic methodology. The conclusions are (a) that the SCP is a unique, school based service which helps children achieve the goals of the National Children’s Strategy (2000-2010), (b) a real commitment to the development of such supports is needed by Government, and (c) the SCP is an effective service which helps reduce inequality, enhances retention and achievement and provides new ideas about how to achieve a positive climate in schools today.

Full text of this thesis is at: http://arrow.dit.ie/aaschssldis/44

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 11 Student Submission: 0
Format: Oral paper (15 mins) Accepted Format:
Topic: Policy perspectives on child welfare and protection in Ireland
The Babble Group - Using parent-infant groups to promote parental reflective functioning.

In cherishing babies, the most voiceless members of the child population of Ireland, this presentation will explore an intervention aimed at listening to and supporting this vulnerable group.

A baby cannot survive emotionally without being thought about by another reasonably sensitive human being who cares passionately enough about him or her to make the daily efforts and sacrifices good enough parenting requires. Many parents struggle to offer this to their children often through not having lived through the experience themselves as children. With the help of a grant (see below) we created an intervention by setting up a Parent and Baby group called ‘The Babble Group’ in Bessborough. The aim of the group is to support and enhance parents’ capacity to build relationships with their babies.

In this setting we work with parents who require professional support to care for their babies and whose parental capability and capacity to change is under review.

This presentation will look at the role of a facilitated group in providing a secure base for parents and infants together to strengthen and build their relationships. It will also look at the importance of a predictable, safe and regular space in promoting the social and emotional development of infants by supporting primary relationships.

It examines the challenges facing vulnerable, often traumatized or poorly resourced parents to 'be with' their infants and be curious about their shared experiences together.

This project has been aided by a grant from the Parenting Support Initiative (PSI) developed by The Katherine Howard Foundation (KHF) in collaboration with The Community Foundation for Ireland (CFI). It is currently in the second phase of the initiative which involves completing an evaluation of the project.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 15  Student Submission: 0
Format: Oral paper (15 mins)  Accepted Format:
Topic: Prevention and family support
Voluntary care (S.4 of the Child Care Act 1991): A caring, non-adversarial way to deal with the removal of a child or an opaque system where the rights of parents and children are not protected?

This symposium examines the system and operation of voluntary care removals of children in Irish state care. In 2012, 62% of all admission of children into state care were through this method (Tusla, Child and Family Agency, 2014), yet we know very little about its operation (Burns et al., Forthcoming). Due to a lack of empirical research in this area, it is not possible to say why such a high proportion of the children received into care in Ireland are placed there via the voluntary care route. There is some anecdotal evidence in certain CFA areas of a planned diminution of the use of voluntary care in favour of more admissions to care through the District Court (O’Leary and Christie, 2014). The seminar will address the following questions: Does voluntary care work, and for whom does it work? Should voluntary care be modernised, and if so, in what ways? Are there sufficient transparency and accountability mechanisms in place to protect the rights of parents and children? How ‘voluntary’ is voluntary care when a parent(s) signs a child into voluntary care?

This interactive workshop has three main aims: Firstly, to facilitate a debate on the strengths and weaknesses of this child removal model. Secondly, to compare the Irish voluntary care systems to other European countries. Thirdly, to extend the debate beyond the conference, the symposium will double as a research data-collection event and it is the facilitators’ intention to write up the key themes and data from the symposium for a journal article to disseminate the arguments expressed at the symposium. Fourthly, we also plan to use the #swconf15 Twitter hastag to garner additional perspectives on voluntary care from social media commentators.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 17 Student Submission: 0
Format: Symposium (90 mins) Accepted Format:
Topic: Legal perspectives on child welfare and protection in Ireland
Keeping Children's Minds in Mind: The Mental Health Needs of Children in Care

Children who grow up in court-ordered alternate care are the most socially and developmentally disadvantaged group of children in the developed world (Tarren-Sweeney and Vetere, 2013). Whilst it has been understood for many years that early experience has a significant impact upon the development of a child, it is only relatively recently that research has demonstrated the extent to which developing brains are affected at a neurobiological level, and the subsequent behavioural and emotional difficulties that children are likely to present with in later life.

The psychological and emotional needs of children and young people in care, combined with the complexities and inherent instability associated with court-ordered care typically present difficulties accessing generic health services. As a result, these particularly vulnerable children and young people often miss the opportunity for appropriate mental health treatment.

Children and young people who have suffered significant abuse and/or neglect during their formative years are often misunderstood and/or misrepresented within the current diagnostic classification system. Such children tend to either receive no diagnosis, or multiple, unrelated diagnoses. There is often a focus upon behavioural control and management, without appropriate recognition of interpersonal trauma. Ongoing challenges with interagency working compound these difficulties. The authors will argue for a departure from traditional ways of working and call for more innovative collaboration.

The authors will argue that in order to bring about change we must use the current evidence base to think about how we can best respond to the unmet needs of children in care. In doing so, it is important to ensure that children and young people in care with mental health difficulties receive an equitable, and not necessarily equal, service.

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Meta Information

Submission ID: 22  Student Submission: 0
Format: Oral paper (15 mins)  Accepted Format:
Topic: Practice innovations in child welfare and protection
The Traveller Child’s experience of Early Childhood Care and Education since the introduction of the free pre-school year

The aim of this research is to explore the Traveller child’s experience of pre-school since the introduction of the free pre-school year.

The literature shows that Travellers’ educational outcomes are not on a par with non-Travellers and that early education has a vital role in promoting inclusion from the outset.

A mixed methods research approach was adopted to facilitate the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data from early years’ educational services and Traveller parents. A survey, interviews and a focus group were the tools used.

The results found that Traveller children are in the main not accessing pre-school outside the community sector. Familiarity with pre-schools and relationships were found to be important factors for Traveller families when choosing a pre-school.

Analysis of the results pointed to recommendations in the areas of on-going data collection, partnership with parents in line with Siolta, standard 3, and supports a well-resourced Equality & Diversity training plan combined with on-going mentoring of Childcare practitioners.

Keywords: Travellers; Early years education; inclusion; free pre-school year; universalism; Partnership; Equality & Diversity; Siolta and Aistear.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 23 Student Submission: 0
Format: Lightening paper (7 mins) Accepted Format: Oral (15 Minutes)
Topic: Education and training of professionals
Cherishing all of the parents of the Nation equally? - Engaging with fathers in practice

This paper has arisen out of the experience of practice, and evidence in research, of the particular challenges relating to engaging with men in social work practice. ‘Just for Dad’s is a pioneering initiative developed by practitioners in Springboard, Knocknaheeny in Cork, in conjunction with the school of Applied Social Studies, UCC, aimed at engaging with fathers around developing relationships with their children. It has consisted of a twelve week group work programme which highlights how important dads are to their children’s development and during which fathers have explored topics such as ‘Building relationships with children’, ‘What about discipline?’, ‘Positive well-being’ and ‘The benefits of having a positive relationship with the children’s mother’. Over the course of a year, the initiative has been developed, implemented and independently evaluated.

This paper will outline the course of this journey, highlighting the lessons learnt, practice insights gained, and research findings from the evaluation process. In particular it will bring to the fore the voices and experiences of men in engaging with ‘Just for Dads’.

From the outset, the developers of ‘Just for Dads’ have intended that, the programme itself, their experiences and learning gained would be available to other practitioners interested in developing/furthering practice in this area.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 26 Student Submission: 0
Format: Oral paper (15 mins) Accepted Format:
Topic: Practice innovations in child welfare and protection
What Happened to Me? A Trauma Informed Practice in Fostering

Exposure to traumatic events is almost universal for children in the child protection and welfare system especially for children received into the care system. Traumatic stress is a normal reaction to a very bad experience and most children exposed to trauma have a least some symptoms, including:

- Intrusive memories,
- Avoidance reactions.
- Numbing reactions.
- Hyperarousal.

Children’s perception of threat to them or their loved ones both during and following an event and the nature of the foster parents responses following the event, are among the strongest predictors of children’s adjustment following a traumatic event. Children’s perceptions of their experiences as well as the ways which their symptoms manifest vary due to their age and developmental stage. Understanding how a potentially traumatized child experienced a traumatic event is the first step in finding out how best to meet that child’s needs in the immediate and long term.

Providing trauma informed education to foster families enhances their protective abilities, increases resilience, helps with a sense of safety, reduces placement breakdowns and enhances the well being of the child.

We propose to present a Theoretical Framework on Trauma Informed Care, this will be done by presenting information on the impact of trauma on brain development taken from the latest research. Our aim is to share this information with our Social Work colleagues and other Professionals with the view to developing a Trauma Informed approach to our practice.

We propose to present how this training is delivered to Foster Carers and how Foster Carers have utilised it. This will be done using an experiential and interactive approach with delegates. This training is at pilot project stage, we are currently delivering it to Foster Carers and evaluating same. The outcome of this pilot project will be spoken about in our presentation.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 29  Student Submission: 0
Format: Symposium (90 mins)  Accepted Format: Oral (15 Minutes)
Topic: Practice innovations in child welfare and protection
How Adults Tell: Using Biographical Narrative Interviewing Methodology (BNIM) to gather the experiences of Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Objectives: "Investigation of disclosures by adult victims of past abuse frequently uncovers current incidences of abuse and is therefore an effective means of stopping the cycle of abuse" (Department of Health and Children, 1999). In Ireland it is the duty of child protection social workers to accept and investigate adult disclosures of childhood sexual abuse. This research explores the experiences of adults who make such disclosures to social work services.

Method: This paper presents the results of using the BNIM method to explore the experiences of such adults who have disclosed to social work services. The sample was sought via two gate-keeping organisations who work with survivors of sexual abuse and violence in Ireland. This paper demonstrates how BNIM can be used to gather such voices in order to inform the policy and practice debate in this complex area.

Results: Combining international literature in the field (Finkelhor; Collin-Vézina; McElvaney; Alaggia etc) and analysis of the voices of adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse this paper presents the facilitators and barriers to disclosing such experiences to social work services; specific messages for social work practice in the area; recommendations for reform of both policy and practice; and key indicators for future research in the area of disclosure scholarship.

Conclusion: Disclosures of past abuse can be vital in the protection of current and future children. Therefore any system or service which facilitates and encourages the disclosure of childhood sexual abuse must provide a response which meets the needs of those disclosing. Using a methodology with the voice of the individual at its core this paper highlights how adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse hold valuable lessons for policy and practice in this area of child protection social work.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 34  Student Submission: 1
Format: Oral paper (15 mins)  Accepted Format:
Topic: Research on child welfare and protection
Family Welfare Conferences: Capturing Outcomes for Children and their Families

A Family Welfare Conference (FWC), known internationally as a Family Group Conference (FGC), is a joint family and professional decision-making model which provides for the involvement of extended family in planning for the care, protection and welfare of a child or young person in need. The FWC, similar to the FGC, is based on principles of partnership and empowerment of families and fits with the increased emphasis on strengths-based approaches for working with families. Conferencing offers a model to put into practice the spirit of partnership and inclusivity which can involve individuals and families in child welfare and protection work. It also enables children’s participation in decision-making (O’Brien, 2012).

When international research for FGC is examined, the earlier research focused predominantly on the practical application of the model, the experiences of different stakeholders involved and the implementation issues involved. There has been a call in recent times for research to focus more on the outcomes obtained.

This study aimed to identify the outcomes that FWC achieved through an examination of three years of referrals to the family welfare conference service in the greater Dublin area. In this paper an overview of both family and child outcomes are presented against a backdrop of

- The profile of children and families for whom referrals were made to the FWC service.
- An examination of how the referred cases move through the FWC process.
- A discussion of the factors that contribute towards differing outcomes and
- The identification of changes needed in the system.
- Finally, the methodological challenges involved in this kind of study are discussed, namely given that many of the families may also be involved in other services decision-making and thus identifying specific outcomes poses some difficulty.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 35
Student Submission: 0
Format: Oral paper (15 mins)
Accepted Format:
Topic: Research on child welfare and protection
A Values-Based Approach to Incorporate an Equality and Human Rights Focus in Work with Children and Young People

Children and Young People’s Services Committees present a unique opportunity for agencies across all sectors to plan together and to work in an integrated manner to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 requires public bodies to have regard to eliminating discrimination, promoting equality, and protecting human rights. This offers a new impulse for public bodies to address equality and human rights.

These developments offer new stimuli to advance equality and human rights for children and young people. Niall Crowley and Rachel Mullen have developed a values-based approach to implementing the new duty on public bodies. A group of organisations working with children and young people in Wexford is implementing an interagency programme to build capacity to use this approach in their work.

The values of dignity, autonomy, inclusion, social justice and democracy bring a focus on equality and human rights into the activities and practices of organisations. Organisations need to be more explicit about their values, in particular those that underpin equality and human rights; to establish systems to bring these values into play in their work; and to develop initiatives to address the issues raised by each of these values.

This oral presentation will explore the challenges posed by equality and human rights for work with children and young people; set out the new context for this work; identify potential in a values based approach to equality and human rights; set out how this can be implemented; and describe the experience of implementing this approach in Wexford.

Authors

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Meta Information

Submission ID: 36  Student Submission: 0
Format: Oral paper (15 mins)  Accepted Format: 
Topic: Practice innovations in child welfare and protection
Children Entering State Care in Ireland: have things really changed that much in a century?

In Ireland today most children enter the care system primarily for reasons of neglect and concerns about their welfare. These reasons are often associated with families living in absolute and relative poverty. In the early years after the foundation of the Irish state, principle reasons for placing children in state care also related to poverty.

While this is recognised in professional practice, relatively little research has been undertaken on poverty and child care placement decisions.

What do we know about the contexts within which these children and their families live and the impact this context has on placement decisions and types of care provided? Were reasons for care placement in 2016 vastly different from those of today? Has the advent of welfare, housing, health and education provisions vastly changed the basis for children entering state care?

This research focuses on the relationships between placements of children in care and poverty indicators using census data from 1926 and recent measures the relative affluence or disadvantage, compiled from recent censuses. Through the application of detailed information on deprivation to regional data of children in care (which provides information on where children came from, and where and why they were placed in care), the study identifies clear and enduring links between decisions in child care and deprivation, both in 1926 and in recent years. The research highlights the ongoing need to reduce child and family poverty and provide focused community-based policies to promote children’s welfare.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 39 Student Submission: 1
Format: Oral paper (15 mins) Accepted Format:
Topic: Research on child welfare and protection
Disclosure - From Telling To Who Else Needs To Know: Respecting Children's Privacy Rights in Legal and Statutory Systems

St Clare’s Unit Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), Assessment and Therapy Service works towards safeguarding children’s rights to speak about their experiences of sexual abuse in a safe and contained environment. In recent times, requests from both civil and criminal court cases for the unit to pass on personal information that children have confided in assessment and therapy has impacted on our ability to guarantee such containment. St. Clare’s Unit has experienced increasing legal requests for assessment source information, and have sought to defend the rights of clients to participate in an assessment process that reaches sound conclusions on allegations whilst safeguarding their right to discuss their worries, concerns and therapeutic needs without fear that this information would be shared in a public forum and with the alleged abuser. The therapy service has also experienced increased requests from the DPP’s office for access to therapy notes and continues to assert the right to privacy and confidential therapy for children who have experienced sexual abuse. Post sexual abuse therapy attempts to carefully create a stable, consistent, protected and confidential therapeutic relationship that can facilitate children to explore feelings of embarrassment, guilt, shame and responsibility. In order to fully explore these issues children attending therapy require the reassurance that the content of their conversations are private and will not be used for other purposes. This symposium examines in whose best interests the sharing of children’s intimate information in legal and statutory systems occurs. By following the journey of a child as they interface with statutory and legal services, this symposium scrutinises the line between children’s privacy and the system’s need to know. A child’s journey from disclosure looks at how their information is viewed and dealt with at various stages and asks how are children’s rights protected and safeguarded through this process.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 40  Student Submission: 0
Format: Symposium (90 mins)  Accepted Format:
Topic: Legal perspectives on child welfare and protection in Ireland
In and out of home care decisions: The influence of confirmation bias in decision supportive reasoning

The aims of this study were to identify the themes Social Workers regard as important in supporting decisions to remove children from, or return them to, their parents care. Further, the study sought to elicit underlying hypotheses about how Social Workers interpretate evidence. A case study, comprising a two-part vignette with a questionnaire was used. Participants were asked to rate a number of issues about the case relating to their assessment of the child’s needs and their proposed intervention, and to complete measures about their child welfare attitudes using a scale derived from a standardised instrument. Participants were also asked to provide a rationale for their decisions. The questionnaire was completed by 202 Social Workers in Northern Ireland. There were two manipulated variables, mother's attitude to the removal of her daughter into care, and the child's attitude to reunification 2 years later. In this presentation we use data derived from respondents’ qualitative comments explaining their reasoning for in and out of home care decisions.

Some 60.9% of respondent's chose the parental care option at part one, with 94% choosing to have the child remain in foster care at part two. The manipulated variables were found to have no significant statistical effect. However, three underlying hypotheses were found to underpin decisions; (a) child rescue, (b) kinship defence and (c) a hedged position on calculation of risk subject to further assessment. Reasoning strategies utilised by social workers to support their decision making suggest that they tend to selectively interpret information either positively or negatively to support pre-existing underlying hypotheses. This finding is in keeping with the literature on ‘confirmation bias.’ The research further draws attention to the need to incorporate open questions in quantitative studies, to help guard against surface reading of data, which often does not ‘speak for itself.’

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 41 Student Submission: 0
Format: Oral paper (15 mins) Accepted Format:
Topic: Research on child welfare and protection
Cherishing asylum seeking children equally? The challenges and dilemmas for social work practitioners

The direct provision system for asylum seekers is 15 years old this year. It has received much criticism throughout its existence. Within the critical commentary, much attention has been paid to the child protection and welfare implications of the system. Yet, despite this concern, the voice of social workers has been largely missing. Based on research conducted in early 2015, this paper attempts to address this gap by exploring the experiences of social workers working with children and families living in direct provision. The research involved a mixed methodology which included an online survey, interviews and focus groups. Participants highlighted the multiple challenges faced by parents and children living in direct provision, including challenges relating to parenting and challenges relating to the development and socialisation of children. In addition, participants talked about the difficulties they faced as professionals working within the context of the direct provision system, particularly regarding their efforts to provide equitable services. Social workers sought creative ways of attempting to ‘cherish’ asylum seeking children equally, within a context in which these children did not seem to be viewed as equals nor indeed as ‘children of the nation’.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 44 Student Submission: 0
Format: Oral paper (15 mins) Accepted Format:
Topic: Research on child welfare and protection
Participation of Children and Young People: From Pockets of Good Practice to a Universally Respected Right

Background

From the outset, Tusla – the Child and Family Agency has expressed a commitment to hearing the voice of children and young people. Its founding legislation requires that the Agency gives consideration to the views of children in the performance of its functions and in planning and reviewing the provision of services. While the Agency is obliged in law to involve children and young people in decision making and there are pockets of good practice in place, there is evidence that this approach to working with children and young people is not mainstreamed and the right of children or young people to participate in decisions affecting them is not uniformly respected. Tusla is currently developing a strategy to mainstream participatory practices within the work of the Agency.

Aim and Contribution to Learning

As the author of the background paper informing the development of the Tusla strategy on the participation of children and young people, the aim of this oral presentation is to share the learning in this background paper on how to embed a culture of participation within social work and social care services. The presentation will outline actions that are required at a governance and practice level to mainstream participatory approaches to working. In outlining the required measures, the presentation will endeavor to illustrate at all times how these actions can be operationalised in practice and be inclusive of all children who require the services of Tusla.

Authors

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Meta Information

Submission ID: 45  Student Submission: 0
Format: Oral paper (15 mins)  Accepted Format:
Topic: Policy perspectives on child welfare and protection in Ireland
Measuring Service Outcomes
If the primary purpose of the service is to achieve good outcomes for children, then should measurement be focused on outcomes rather than the processes by which they are achieved?

This “lightening talk” recommends that there should be a variety of approaches to service measurement at various levels of the provision mechanism, including ‘outcomes’; these must be aligned to the national policy context.

As almost all of the existing measures currently relate to structures or processes (measuring compliance with statutory or regulatory obligations); this concept, of the inclusion of outcomes measurement, would provide an additional framework for driving quality improvement.

This paper suggests that outcomes measurements should be predicated on specific markers of high-quality, cost effective care, derived from the best available evidence; these would be delivery standards. In return, the practical application of outcomes measurement should be:

• to allow providers to benchmark services when undertaking local audits

• to facilitate service specifications if commissioning through contract

• to understand and attain service user satisfaction

• to drive local improvements in quality and outcomes

• to allow for flexibility and diversity in local areas, tailoring to local needs within resources

Literature in healthcare advises of different types of outcome measurement for that setting: population outcomes, adverse events, the service user’s experience, support to access services etc. However similar indicators measuring outcomes and impacts are fewer in the social care environment. Is there an opportunity for Ireland to lead in this understanding?

The paper recognises that there will be many challenges to the realisation of this proposition, including user heterogeneity, resource allocation, risk adjustment and availability of data. However the concept warrants further evaluation in order to facilitate a full reflection on all aspects of delivery:

“Outcomes remain the ultimate validators of the effectiveness and quality of care” (Avedis Donabedian).

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**Meta Information**

Submission ID: 48  
Student Submission: 0  
Format: Lightening paper (7 mins)  
Accepted Format: Oral (15 Minutes)  
Topic: Policy perspectives on child welfare and protection in Ireland
**Back to the future - social work with children and families over the decades**

This paper will take a backward glance to the beginnings of child protection social work as we know it and demonstrate how it has evolved from a very rudimentary set of activities prior to the 1970s into the streamlined and highly regulated system that now operates. It will describe how community care social work evolved along a somewhat ambiguous trajectory through the 1980s and 1990s, attempting to adopt a policy orientation based on user consultation and family participation which could intervene early and proportionately with children who were vulnerable or at risk. It will illustrate how the historic revelations that came to light during the early 2000s together with more recent examples of poor practice brought about a shift towards a more proceduralised and bureaucratized service which operated high thresholds for intervention. The paper will go on to show how the aspirations that were articulated in early seminal policy documents such as the Task Force Report 1981 are once again optimistically reflected in the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support model being developed by the Child and Family Agency. While it acknowledges the positive opportunities presented by the reforms, the presentation will identify the type of obstacles that will need to be addressed in order to prevent the system from turning full circle.

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**Meta Information**

Submission ID: 52  
Student Submission: 0  
Format: Oral paper (15 mins)  
Accepted Format:  
Topic: Policy perspectives on child welfare and protection in Ireland
Interfacing informal and formal help systems: A critical Overview of Developments Within the Irish Child Welfare System

This presentation aims to document and critique the development and evolution of Family Support structures, processes and practices as ‘early help systems’ in Ireland through the later part of the 20th century up to the present day with a particular emphasis on the interaction between informal and more formal statutory structures, processes and practices.

The development of what can be termed child welfare services in Ireland has a chequered history which has recently been tainted as a result of the institutional abuse suffered by many early service users. The modern ‘statutory’ system, as established from 1970 onwards, has moved from an orientation that was a reactive mostly ‘protection oriented’ system to a present construction within a broader Parenting, Prevention and Family support emphasis. One effect of specialisation, re-orientation towards family support and greater formalisation of service structures is the creation of multiple interfaces. This raises many issues in relation to accessibility for families, gate keeping, thresholds, standardisation, allocation of resources and relationships with other elements of the system. A current trend is towards a process of standardisation of the, heretofore, less formal early help provision as exemplified by aspects of Tusla’s Mainstreaming and Development Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support, particularly Child and Family Support Networks and Meitheal. This presentation draws from evidence relating to the most recent developments that have informed this programme including the Identification of Need Project in Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan and the Limerick Assessment of Needs Project. The discourses underpinning these developments are critically examined, particularly in relation to the distinction between standardisation and functional interface on the one hand and homogenisation on the other. This analysis is considered within the context of the changing nature and orientation of child welfare systems from a global perspective.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 53 Student Submission: 0
Format: Oral paper (15 mins) Accepted Format:
Topic: Prevention and family support
Responding to Family Violence: New Challenges and Perspectives

The primary focus of investigation and discussion in the family violence literature has been limited to violence within intimate adult relationships and violence by parents towards their children. However, social workers in Ireland are challenged every day to carry out assessments and make decisions on the conflicting rights of the child to be consulted, their right to a family life and to a relationship with both parents and the rights of all family members to safety and protection. Indeed the international evidence would highlight the difficulties practitioners have in balancing the often competing and at time conflicting needs and rights of both perpetrators and victims in the contest of domestic violence specifically and family violence more broadly.

This paper focuses on two largely neglected issues of concern regarding children, parents and violence. Firstly we focus on the complex issue of post-separation contact for children where there has been a prior history of domestic violence perpetrated by their father against their mother. In doing so, we are seeking a greater insight into their views, feelings and understanding of contact with their father, reflective of a growing ethos of respect for the child’s position in a process that involves all family members. Secondly we address an emerging yet reported type of family violence: the various forms of emotional and/or physical abuse carried out by children under the age of 18 years against their parents, known as child-to-parent violence or parent abuse.

Overall this paper aims to support social workers in their critical reflection about what we mean by working with all family members where violence takes place at home. We propose that social workers are well positioned to respond effectively to family violence and outline some evidence supported responses to the problem of violence within the family.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 55  Student Submission: 0
Format: Oral paper (15 mins)  Accepted Format:
Topic: Research on child welfare and protection
Working with the most Vulnerable and at Risk Young People within the Country – Profile of a service set up to work with this Group.

The Assessment, Consultation & Therapy Service (ACTS) set up in 2013 on foot of recommendations in the Report into the Commission of Inquiry in Child Abuse 2009 known as the Ryan report. The service, which is part of the Child & Family Agency, was set up with a view to providing therapeutic services to young people in Special Care, Detention and/or a significant risk of such services linked to a history of significant adversity and clinical need. It is a National Specialist Service which also provides support and training to other professionals in their ongoing work with young people and their families.

ACTS is a multi-disciplinary team which includes psychologists, addiction counsellors/therpists, social care workers, social workers & speech and language therapists. Young people referred to the service generally present with a number of high risk concerns to a level where they are frequently deemed to present a real and substantial risk to themselves and/or others. Presenting concerns include: pattern of absconding with engagement in high risk behaviour, substance misuse, issues around attachment, trauma & loss, poor school attendance and/or attainment linked to frequency changes or poor engagement and physical or mental health issues. While all of these issues are well known to Social Workers, in our presentation we will give an overview of the service to date, details of the type of service offered to young people in the different settings while highlighting the challenges and considerations in the delivery of this service to date.

We will also present a profile of a typical referral to our service as a way of highlighting the complexity of the presenting issues, the importance of the relationship and the network of people involved in working together to support the young person move towards a more positive path for their future.

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Meta Information
Submission ID: 57  Student Submission: 0
Format: Oral paper (15 mins)  Accepted Format:
Topic: Practice innovations in child welfare and protection