Formal and Informal Kinship Care:
The Support Implications?

Sept 2014 : Copenhagen EUSARF

Dr Valerie O’Brien
Def of Terms : Two sides of the door ?

- Formal Kinship Care : placement of children in the care of the State (voluntary and court mandated) with relatives. Statutory laws, regulations & standards apply

- Informal Kinship Care : placement made either privately by family members or in conjunction with State authorities. ‘child in care’ laws…. etc do not apply.
Child welfare system has no legal responsibility for the living arrangements of children in *informal care*, though

- kin *may* have responsibility to notify authorities & state *may* provide finance (guardianship allowance; residence order allowance)
Questions

- What is the relationship between formal and informal kinship care in CW system?
- What are the drivers shaping the relationship?
- Are there tensions and if so, how do we manage the tensions?
- What are the service delivery implications?
  - Policy : Law : Values and Resource parameters leads to variations across countries
Methodology

- Part of bigger research project
- Research in kinship care: Assessment and decision making
- Outcome Research in FGC: 2010 – 2013 (323 families)

Today’s focus: Based on literature review & documentary analysis: aimed at conceptual development.
Outline of paper

- Contextual features
  - The ‘visibility’ and ‘invisibility’ of formal and informal kinship care

- Kinship care – benefits and challenges
- What is known re informal kinship care?

- Pathways

- Inherent Tensions: Finance / Gatekeeping / Values

- Maps to Enhance Service Delivery
Formal & informal kin care

Intersectionality:

What must we do?

What should we do?

What can we do?

What do we want to do?

Better outcomes children
Key context markers

- Values and Ideological shifts: what unspoken assumptions remain? How we deal with paradox?

- Lack of data and research limitations

- International Developments: *UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* (2009)
  - ‘Necessity’ and ‘Suitability’ Principles

- Cross cultural practices: Avoid ‘Western view: new colonialism?’
Research

- Available studies limited
- Methodology complexity
- Outcomes (in whose interest)
- Comparisons ‘like with like’
- Evidence based practice: inclusion?
  Data capture re informal care practice
- What is needed?
  Cause and effect – process and outcome
  Legislative procedural and practice trends over time
Achieving Better Outcomes for Children: Policy Trend

- Outcome movement / priority over process
- Evidence base, evaluation driven & accountability
- Inequality as influence on implementation issues: baseline
- Cross cultural issues:
## Profile of children in kinship care: Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No of children in care*</th>
<th>No and % in foster care</th>
<th>No and % in kinship care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>5,307</td>
<td>3,141 – 59.2%</td>
<td>1,552 – 29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5,347</td>
<td>3,134 – 59.1%</td>
<td>1,581 – 29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>6,175</td>
<td>3,748 – 60.7%</td>
<td>1,800 – 29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>6249</td>
<td>3,945 – 63.3%</td>
<td>1,799 – 28.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* % does not show numbers in residential care
Financing formal, informal care and welfare in Ireland

- **Formal kinship / foster placement**
  - €319 per week for under 12 and €346 for over 12 plus monthly children’s allowance (CA).

- **Informal placements**
  - Guardianship allowance for child: €161 per week. Certain criteria to be met plus CA

- **Social welfare**: €29.30 per week
- **Allowances are for the child**
BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN in Formal Kin Care

- Stability
- Identity
- Contact
- Sibs
- Mental Health
- Protection & Safety
- Behav/Devel

More favourable compared to non kin

More ambiguous findings
**KEY CHALLENGES**

- **Agency/Family**
- **Finance**: at the heart of the matter
- **Support**: less and complicated
- **Needs of Carers**: enormous given profile
- **Permanency**: stay longer in care?
- **Safety**: Stability, how safe/stable?
- **Assessment**: How to account for differences
- **Parenting skill/training**: with kin only?
- **Family dynamics**: impact of change of role...
Pathways between formal and informal

- Pathways largely unknown

- **Gatekeeping**:
  - ensure need for alternative care (*necessity*) &
  - Proposal meets needs, takes a/c circumstances & ‘in best interest ‘ of child (*suitability*)

- Operating what policies? : Continuum FS –FP –AC.
  - Explicit criteria re decision making / availability professional staff?
  - Availability of financial resources – family services
  - Accountability systems.
Pathways to **Informal** care

- **INFORMAL**
- Private family arrangement e.g. may or not be legal safeguards
  
- CW agency *previously* involved with birth family and child and
  
  * was instrumental in mobilising and supporting the creation of the kin placement

- Child previously in care of the state and use of different legal arrangement e.g. guardianship / residence order; used to divert child from system
Pathways to **formal** kinship placement

- Decision made to receive child into the care system: voluntary or court
- Emergency placement with family
- In a care placement and decision made to explore family placement
Decision making?

Pathways

Emergency Group 1

Group 2 In care

Diverted to informal Group 3

Agency 'encouraged informal Group 4

Informal / private

Private: no ref to agency

Group 5

Diversion
Profile of children & carers in informal care

- UK: Nandy & Selwyn (2012) approx 3% of children formal kinship
- Australia & USA similar rates
- Ireland: census data is not amenable to similar UK analysis:
  - Major data limitation but if approx 97% placements are informal, why so ‘invisible’?
- Consequences & for whom?
- What needs to happen?
Support: the key questions?

- What is the profile of the children and carers involved in both types of care?
- What do we know about support provision?
- If limited, what is preventing better support levels?
- What are the policy implications?
- What service model may be required?
What do kin want?

- Felt let down by agencies (Farmer and Moyers 2008, Broad 2004)
- Help with family dynamics (but respectfully and an ability to understand and work with ambivalence)
- Support re challenging behavior
- Help to navigate the extended family network
- Legal advise
- Information as to how the system works!
- Financial help
Profile ......

- Children: similar level of needs...and if so implications re outcomes / equity
  - Myth...children generally unproblematic (Hunt 2010)

- Carers: similar profile in terms of age, income levels, educational background......implications in terms of justice / equity
Fragmented funding and eligibility for support services ......what was available varied, complex and inflexible.

Rates of use of services low that they are entitled to and unclear why? Is it due to lack of information or simply want to stay away from statutory services?

Gleeson et al 2008
Challenges: Finance Policy

- Child’s needs: Family role in caring & pathways to care
- Quality care and the ‘Big Society’; New Liberal
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9tQt_1tj4g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9tQt_1tj4g)
- Cost of alternative care system
- Incentives, Income distribution & equity
- Professional Carers; kinship Care & informal kinship care: three sides of same coin or something different?
Policy clarification needed

- Re private informal family arrangements

- If mobilising extended family networks
  - what level of information is required by the family?

- What are different information needs that agency needs to provide?

- Implications if differential support services available to both child and carer based on pathways chosen
Policy Questions re role of State

- in overseeing private arrangements?

- Expect family to look after children?  *(moral / legal driver)*

- What if state diverts placements?
  - Basis if it is explicit?
  - Implicit and achieved through what processes / actions
    - With holding information
    - Power
Policy Questions

- In whose interests are gatekeepers working and who is carrying the costs?

- How are inequalities in society perpetuated against children? Implications for policy involved in driving outcomes?
Diversion Needed

- One system does not fit all
- Benefits in keeping informal care in place.
- Pathways analysis required: cost benefit analysis
- Diversion needs led
- Financial and other range of supports for both child and carer
  - Equity: scarce resources: gatekeeping
Support & Supervision Axis

High Support

Low Support

Low Supervision

High Supervision

Flexible & Explicit help

Flexible Assistance

Level of Cooperation ‘Safety remains an issue…

Risk: Too High?

Protection needs established

DIVERT

DIVERT?

( O’Brien (2013)
Central issues

- Kinship care is not a ‘cheap option’
- Many kin never planned psychologically or financially to take on the care of their family member
- Responding to an ‘emergency’ either in the private domain of family or in conjunction with the state can leave families at a disadvantage in the absence of clear and coherent information re what is involved.
Way forward

- Key to these questions is a pathway analysis of the key decision making junctures and the values, policies, practices and laws underpinning these junctures.

- Support needs to be provided and how best to do this while accounting
  - For difference and similarities
  - Equity
  - Incentivising
  - JUSTICE
Going forward

- Need to consider both formal and informal carers in family policy: FS – AC
- Square peg will not fit: ensure relatives, children/YP consulted and take key role re support service development
- Advocacy groups needed
- Implications for existing foster care organisations: unless voice is heard, is there a risk that there will be a THREE tier system?
References

O’Brien, V (2002) Children and Kinship Care can be downloaded here http://hdl.handle.net/10197/3035


- O’Brien, V (2013) Kinship Care : Stability, Disruption and the Place of Support Services, Foster Care News, available ifca.ie