

Kinship Care

‘Exploring relationships in kinship arrangements’



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Research**

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The Research

In loco Parentis. An exploration of the experiences and needs of kinship carers in formal and informal kinship care families: A life course paradigm.



The Research



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Research**

What facilitates or impedes effective parenting for informal and formal Kinship Carers?

The **life course paradigm** focuses on the complexity of situations people find themselves in at any given time (Burton-Jeangros and Sacker, 2015). **Narrative inquiry** in the form of in-depth interviews form the methodological basis for the study.

Ten informal kinship carers and **nine formal kinship carers** have participated (phase 1). Emerging themes include inequalities in support, unclear terminology, complex family dynamics, invisibility of kinship carers and a lack of recognition.

Co-Production



From idea inception right through to project completion, KCI and Tusla design and shape the process

Locating myself in the research

Personal and professional experience



What is Kinship Care?



- Kinship care is an arrangement where children are raised on a full-time basis by relatives or close family friends, often following unexpected and adverse circumstances (Hunt, 2020).
- Due to trauma, such as bereavement, alcohol/drug addiction and/or abuse, kinship carers find themselves parenting in *loco parentis*, with little time to prepare for the changes to their circumstances.
- An informal arrangement would be made by the family themselves or a formal arrangement would be instigated by Tusla.
- 1/10 children worldwide live in kinship care

The benefits of Kinship Care

- Children's sense of **identity** is maintained/Children often prefer it
- Children and young people can live with people they already **know and trust**.
- There is a greater chance of **siblings being kept together**.
- It helps to create **stability and continuity** in a child's life.
- Children may experience **less stigma**, being cared for by extended family members, than if they are placed with a new family.
- There is **less risk of 'placement breakdown'**.

Kinship Care Ireland 2023

"they are at home essentially, with people who know and love them...still have the chance to see the rest of the family and all, connected if you know what I mean" Jenny

Despite the value, many vulnerabilities exist

- Often under supported (expected)
- Poverty
- Health related issues
- Managing complex relationships
- Housing/ overcrowding
- Supports for other children if present
- The reason for the placement
- Lack of policy (recently highlighted)



Emily Delap and Gillian Mann of Child Frontiers. November 2019.

The most common group of Kinship Carers are.....
What might the challenges be for this group?



Kinship Carers are....



- largely, but not exclusively, comprised of older families, experiencing poverty, headed by single women, (many grandparents) (Zuchowski et al. 2019; Lee et al. 2016; Gleeson et al. 2016), experiencing a range of health issues (Sharda et al. 2019; Lee et al. 2016).
- grandparents, older siblings, aunts and uncles, other relatives or friends of the family
- more likely to be experiencing challenges themselves and are often parenting children with increased care needs due to their past traumas (Kinship, 2022).

Why this? why now?



While kinship care is increasing in many countries internationally, it is also a **well-established care option in Ireland**, formally and informally, with kinship carers emerging as a vulnerable group in their own right, as they try to navigate their parenting roles.

The Kinship Care Ireland Inaugural report (2019) highlighted the need for increased **awareness of the unique needs of kinship carers**.

New spotlights on **family based care as a preferred option** for vulnerable children, across Europe and Ireland

European Developments



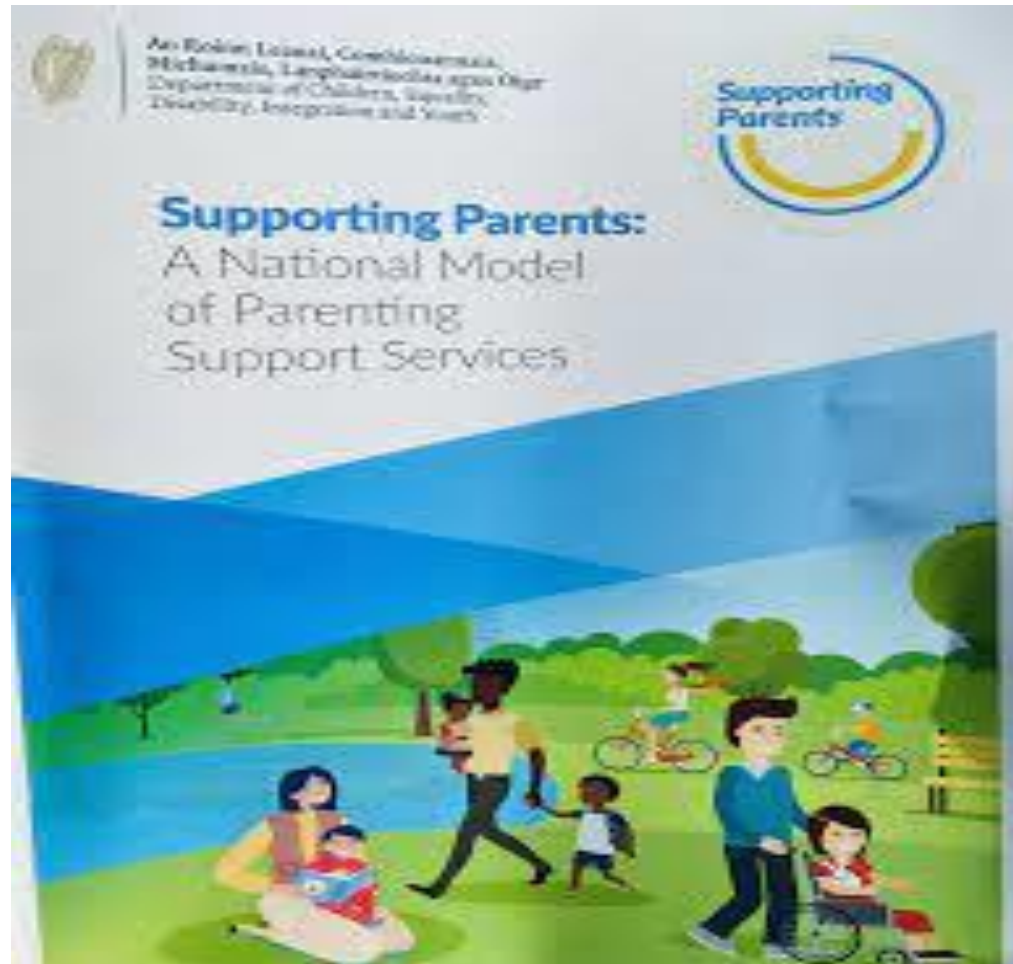
- The **European Child Guarantee** places the rights and needs of children at the heart of European policy (Sacur and Diogo, 2021) and highlights family-based care (foster care and kinship carer) as the most suitable forms of alternative care for vulnerable children (Frazer 2020).
- EU Convention on the Rights of the Child: March 23, recommendation to **develop a policy on the rights of children in informal kinship care**

Unique use of family placements



- Ireland is among the countries with the highest use globally of family placements with up to **92% of children in alternative care** being cared for in **family settings** making Ireland of interest globally.
- In 2020, approximately 26% of children placed by Tusla were placed in relative foster care (Citizen information 2022).
- Informal placements?

A turning point for Kinship carers in Ireland



Supporting Parenting: A National Model of Parenting Support Services

launched in Ireland in March 2022, p.6 defines a parent as

“ any person with a parenting role, which is any person with primary or major responsibility for the care of a child under the age of 18 years” The definition expands to define who a parent can be *“The term parent is applied in the most inclusive manner as possible, and includes biological parents, adoptive parents, foster carers, step-parents, kinship carers, and guardians”*.



Many kinship carers, both formal and informal, feel unsupported by agencies

(NicMhuiris 2019)

Caitríona set up Kinship Care Ireland in 2019.

She knew that the lack of support wasn't right – not only for them as the carers, but also for her nieces and their own children. All their lives had been upended. (Irish Times, 2020)



What are the differences?

Relative/ Kinship Care

Non relative care

What questions might new kinship carers be asking?

Ambivalence

Impact on practice ?

Differences (first bond)

“relative fostering is a lot harder than general foster care. A lot more emotion, the whole family is wrapped up in it, everybody is involved with it. Not just this person had a child and now this person is looking after them, it’s the whole family always, it’s the whole network”

Deborah

“I had to put (grandchild) first but she’s ‘my’ child”

Jenny

Hope and commitment

“These are my daughters’ children. I would have painted over a lot of the cracks so it’s been a long road”

Donna

“Initially we hoped that my daughter would be ok to take him back, it was actually heroin she was on and I didn't know.... we hoped that she would go into rehab. In the July that didn't happen....I had to get custody”

Alice

Complex relationships

“A lot of carers come into this from a really good place...they want to look after their own, love them to bits, feel they can do it, but then you have Tusla, the birth parents and that complicates things”

Sally.

“I had to step back from supporting her. The relationship with the children’s mother, it wasn't good, you know, in the sense that she would take advantage...she'd look for money and look for you know, she'd offload a lot of her problems on me, I was her main support, not just with the children, and of course, when the children came to me then...that support was gone. I had to stand back, and that part of it was difficult”.

Veronica

Managing access

“Access visits are really difficult, my daughter can be abusive to me.....I asked for the social workers to manage the access and they really make you feel like you are being awkward”

Margaret

I found looking after my own grandchildren much harder...the whole experience was much harder, it was very hard to maintain boundaries....when it came to visits... the social workers, you know, because of my past experience in fostering I was able to kind of use the social workers... to help me maintain a barrier, you know, or a boundary...If the children were asking for phone calls or extra access, I was able to say it's not my decision, it's a social worker's decision and we have to stick by these rules”

Veronica

Age and stage in life

“I was a lot younger when I reared my own... and it’s tiring and busy, was hoping to be retiring.... I didn’t think I’d be doing this now”

Pamela

“I never thought it would last this long, I just live in hope that things will get alright, I hate asking for anything”

Áine

“We are on the wrong side of 60 for all this without proper support and respite”

Peter.

Commitment and obligation.... Choice?

“fostering....gives the child a status...I wouldn't have been able to cope with the thought of him going into care, to be with somebody else like even for a night”

Alice.

“so the children had come to stay with me and my wife, but my wife didn't want the children didn't want it. It was a bit shocking, and again I go back to the fact that my grandma brought me up...I couldn't not do it, but it did impact on my relationship with my wife”

Barry

Views of services

“I have to prove myself here and a bit like the social workers saying ‘sure why would I be paying the granny or an aunt’, you know, so if it's articulated or not, I do feel every kinship carer carries that sense of obligation that stops them from seeking their rights”

Susan

This expectation, to care because you are ‘family’ accentuates the view that it’s not a choice necessarily but a reaction to circumstances

(kinship, 2022).

Identity, Visibility and Terminology

Confusion for service providers and family members.

“people don’t really understand what it is, it can be isolating and lonely, even knowing where to start looking for support”

Donna.

“I suppose, for me trying to make sense of it all... and who are we? and how can we expect services to understand who we are if it’s not clear”

Claire

Parenting (boundaries, styles, changes across time)

“My grandson...he was more difficult, obviously with all they had been through. They were traumatized, and this, you know, showed up in their behaviour, and he was very aggressive”

Veronica

“my sister had a very different parenting style to me, that was a challenge”

Susan

“coming from no routine, coming from chaos and stuff like that, and she's doing well, you know, with the routine here”

Sally

Supports

“it’s a bit like a lottery of supports available”

Alice

“we struggled.....It was all down to trauma, it was trauma based, and we were never informed of any of that”

Sally

“she was on my side, you know that meant a lot”

Pamela

“not just what services but to have ‘any service’ that awareness around the impact of trauma or loss on the child.... that lack of understanding

Claire

Recognition and value of Kinship Care

“we deserve the same monetary value as foster carers get, you know I mean it's not for money, believe me, you wouldn't do this for money but we need to be able to access the right support for the children”

Alice.

Impact on practice? A precursor to parenting....

- Understanding of and ability to address 'ambivalence'
- Supports for other children if present
- managing complex relationships
- self regulation
- self care
- Listened to and supported in a way that meets current need (across the parenting trajectory)

Children in kinship care may have additional issues and needs, such as emotional and behavioural difficulties, as they have often experienced early trauma, chaos, crisis and loss

(KCI, 2023)

Impact on practice?

- International research emphasises that for children to thrive in kinship care, children and their carers need to receive effective and tailored support, of timely and sufficient duration (Brown et al. 2019).
- Formal kinship carers have access to supports and training through Tusla
- informal carers reported little knowledge or awareness of where to access appropriate support for themselves and their kinship children.
- For formal kinship carers, issues pertaining to accessing appropriate and timely supports (trauma informed) was raised as a gap in the parenting supports they require.

Responsive supports, what's important?

Timing (time sensitive interventions),

Human agency (strengths-based perspective),

Historical place and context (terminology, policy development)

Linked lives (family and social support)

Parenting across the life course, sensitive to the needs of younger carers and grandparent carers.

Kinship Care Ireland



Kinship Care Ireland (the national advocacy group supporting and promoting increased visibility/supports for informal kinship carers)

KCI in partnership with kinship families and key stakeholders, promotes the recognition, rights and entitlements of children, young people, and families in kinship care, through the provision of information, supports, services and advocacy, for systems and legislative change.

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Thank You!



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