Impact and evaluation are core to CRFR’s work, which is why it’s important for us to evaluate the impact of our efforts to share our research.

We do a variety of things to explore our impact, and recently surveyed our many stakeholders in the academic, public and voluntary sector communities through a freely accessible online survey. Thank you to the 83 people who took part.

Half said that CRFR research had influenced their work, for example: “To be more child-orientated in investigating parent-child relationships” and “Explained to colleagues about differing attitudes to domestic violence and how that may have impacted on a parent’s attitude”; and “To continually inform our work especially policy. We have used About Families research to update our publications for parents.”

Three quarters of those who took part said our research had encouraged them to seek out further research on themes that include; fatherhood, domestic abuse, intimacy, solo living, evaluation, sociology of families.

While social media tools such as Twitter are key communication channels for many, we learned that many of our stakeholders don’t have easy access to that kind of online information.

Email was voted by far the most popular way to receive information, and so email will continue to be a key communication tool for us, but if you are feeling adventurous look us up on Twitter @CRFRtweets or take a look at our blog and website.

www.crfr.ac.uk
Working with research

Improvements in policy and practice come from both applying research evidence and from evaluating and generating evidence from within existing services. Bringing together research and practice knowledge is both complex and vital.

CRFR’s project and partnership work supports the practical use of research evidence. Recent CRFR partnership projects have been helping build evaluation and research use into everyday work, and supporting practitioner research programmes.

Measuring impact

Our conference So What: measuring impact in services for children and families brought together speakers and delegates concerned with how to think about evaluating services in ways that bring genuine improvements to children's lives.

Presentations from the event, which reflected on evaluation and explored the views of funders, are all available online here: www.crfr.ac.uk/sowhat

Contribution analysis

One workshop group shared their experience of using a process called contribution analysis with CRFR co-director Sarah Morton. Sarah has been working with local authorities and third sector organisations to use contribution analysis to support planning, monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes from their work.

Contribution analysis is an approach to evaluation which encourages everyone involved in a project to reflect together on what is being planned and what they want to achieve, but together acknowledge the complexity of the task ahead and reflect on what can be influenced and where risks might lie. It is a process that encourages ongoing evaluation of what is working and why, linking activities to wider outcomes, in order to encourage reflection and adaptation of a project as it evolves in order to achieve success.
Evidence Request Bank development project

CRFR is leading the development of a new initiative to help third and public sector organisations and services to access and use evidence from social research.

Over the next few months, the Evidence Request Bank development project will review existing evidence on practice issues or knowledge gaps identified by a partner organisation and produce a report of the evidence in response to those issues. We will then support partners to explore and plan how to use the evidence, which will be publicly available online.

The project builds on a previous project led by CRFR, About Families (http://aboutfamilies.org.uk/). A clear message from project participants was that they need, and value, support to access social research, and welcomed a service which provides reliable, clear, independently appraised evidence in direct response to their practice needs.

The ERB development project is a partnership led by the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, with West Lothian Council, Parenting Across Scotland, Children in Scotland, and the Scottish Government. It is funded by ESRC, with additional funding from the Scottish Government and Parenting Across Scotland.

http://evidencerequestbank.org/

Practitioner research

CRFR has provided support for two practitioner programmes over the last year.

Changing children and families social work aimed to encourage culture change and practice development in children and families social work. As well as providing support for social work managers to foster a learning culture, and for practitioners to take time for critical reflection, the project supported nine small scale practitioner research projects.

Reflection by everyone involved identified common themes around creating a learning culture. For example:

• Leaders that model openness and reflection as well as nurture innovation are important for ensuring the organisation and staff are encouraged and supported to learn, change and develop.

• For knowledge to be shared it needs to be incorporated into existing continuous developmental activities, process and systems, such as appraisal and supervision.

http://www.crfr.ac.uk/projects/completed-projects/

This project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and was a partnership involving City of Edinburgh and East Lothian Councils and the University of Edinburgh, including Centre for Research on Families and Relationships.

The Practitioner Research: Older People project was a series of small-scale practitioner research projects led by those delivering care for older people. Practitioners came from NHS Lothian, Midlothian Council, West Lothian Council, Glasgow City Council, VOCAL and Alzheimer Scotland and were supported by staff from CRFR and IRISS. The project allowed practitioners to develop projects that related directly to their needs in providing services.

Some of the anticipated contributions to improving practice include:

• Better support for carers in Midlothian due to improvements to the carer’s assessment pathway.

• Improved quality of life for people with a diagnosis of dementia who use music-therapy at Alzheimer Scotland.

• Improved quality of service user engagement due to changes in the Nursing Assessment Tool for older people using NHS Lothian services.

http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/prop/

Claiming an evidence base

The conference saw the launch of a free online advice briefing: Claiming an evidence base for services and interventions. The briefing was produced by CRFR and Evaluation Support Scotland following analysis of the project reports of voluntary sector organisations funded by the Early Years Early Action Fund, managed by Inspiring Scotland.

Amongst other advice the briefing suggests:

When you’re planning a project:

Do: Think carefully how to incorporate data collection, analysis and evaluation tools into your work from day one.

Do: Research measurement tools you’re thinking of using to make sure they fit with your project and client group.

And when you’re reporting on outcomes:

Don’t: confuse ‘target achievement’ with ‘outcome achievement’, e.g. the number of clients participating in the programme rather than the numbers achieving the desired outcomes.

Don’t: use jargon and unexplained abbreviations – use plain English.

http://www.crfr.ac.uk/assets/CRFR_ESS_IS_Evidence_base_briefing.pdf
GPs and self-harm

Funded by the Chief Scientist Office, this study is exploring accounts of General Practitioners about their experiences of treating patients who have self-harmed. Interviews have addressed views on the meaning of self-harm, the relationship between self-harm and suicide, and challenges of assessing suicide risk in patients who have self-harmed.

Working on the project are Steve Platt (Edinburgh), Chris Burton (Aberdeen), Amy Chandler, and Caroline King (both CRFR). Amy presented early findings at the Choose Life Annual Forum on 3rd December. Choose Life is the National Strategy and Action plan to prevent suicide in Scotland.

Young people, self-harm and substance use

Amy Chandler is working on the SASH (Social Aspects of Self-Harm) Research Project, exploring the views of young people aged 14-16 about self-harm, including drug and alcohol use. She is looking at how young people talk about these issues, and what relationships – if any – they see between self-harm, drug and alcohol use. Most research on self-harm has been with adults, yet many people who self-harm start when they are aged 14-16. The SASH Research Project is collecting views from a range of young people both with, and without, direct experience of self-harm, drug and alcohol use.

http://sashresearchproject.wordpress.com/
A new two-year project is looking at how neuroscience is used in policies, services, and in family life, bringing together the sociologies of science, medicine, and family life. Current debates around early years are a good example of how neuroscientific ideas are being used in policies on how parents raise their children.

We will be mapping how neuroscience appears in public policy and in the media, looking particularly at young children, teenagers and older adults.

We'll be looking at how public policy influences how families see themselves and how they talk about the issues, for example stressing the importance of children's early years on the developing brain.

A second part of the project is exploring how family members either do or don't use neuroscience to define themselves or each other and what impact that might have. We are interested to see whether there are generational differences in using and valuing neuroscience and we'll be exploring this through group interviews.

The project is funded by the Leverhulme Trust and involves an interdisciplinary research team: Martyn Pickersgill, Centre for Population and Health Sciences, Sarah Cunningham-Burley, Co-Director of CRFR and Head of the School of Molecular, Genetic and Population Health Sciences, Ian Deary, Director of the Centre for Cognitive Ageing and Cognitive Epidemiology, and Tineke Broer, Research Fellow at CRFR. For more information, please contact tineke.broer@ed.ac.uk

Keeping youth away from crime: searching for best practices

CRFR co-director Kay Tisdall led an international study visit in Edinburgh on "Keeping Youth Away from Crime: Searching for Best Practices". Researchers from Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Netherlands and the International Observatory on Juvenile Justice joined University of Edinburgh colleagues to consider issues of criminology, education, child protection, and youth work, and to hear about Scotland's experiences, including the children's hearing system and youth justice. Delegates heard first hand from three young people who had experience of being looked after, from Who Cares Scotland. They visited a community project based at the Citadel Youth Centre in Edinburgh, which works with some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the area.

The overall aim of this EU-funded project is to find, identify and apply best practice in work with children at risk of becoming involved in crime. It's led in Edinburgh by Professor Kay Tisdall with Professor Sheila Riddell, Centre for Research in Education, Inclusion and Diversity.

Improving social scientists’ number crunching

CRFR associate research Dr Alison Koslowski is leading a project to promote a step-change in quantitative social science training supported by CRFR co-director Pam Warner.

The School of Social and Political Science at Edinburgh University is hosting one of 15 new UK Q-Step Centres, delivering new undergraduate programmes in quantitative social science, over the next five years. Although focussed at the undergraduate level, Q-Step aims to promote quantitative skills training across the education ‘journey’, from the recruitment of school students to specialist training for those going on to postgraduate work. Q-Step will also forge links with schools and employers.

Listening to children with disabilities

A strong body of research evidence highlights the struggle that disabled children and young people have in getting their voice heard. This can prevent them taking a central role in decisions about their education, care and leisure.

Whilst there is strong evidence of the disempowerment of disabled children and young people in decision making, there has been little attempt to establish what actually works and assists them. CRFR is working with Capability Scotland to better understand when and why children and young people feel empowered to make their own decisions, and what the role of parents and professionals might be.

By testing findings and trialling them with disabled children and young people and assessing their impact, we’ll work directly with them on issues such as access to leisure activities and their choices about education and social care, in particular self-directed support.

The project aims for disabled children and young people to be:

- listened to carefully, and their wishes heard and understood, by parents and practitioners as a result of them being better aware of both the impact of their actions and approaches for improving communication
- more appropriately involved in discussions and decisions that affect them, as a result of the identification of proven tools, approaches and strategies for achieving this
- better able to source, and rely upon, appropriate help as soon as possible to help them make their own decisions

Contact Sarah Morton s.morton@ed.ac.uk

Neuroscience and family life: the brain in policy and everyday practice

A new two-year project is looking at how neuroscience is used in policies, services, and in family life, bringing together the sociologies of science, medicine, and family life. Current debates around early years are a good example of how neuroscientific ideas are being used in policies on how parents raise their children.

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Gender Based Violence

CRFR hosts a range of international visitors, who bring their expertise to the centre to provide seminars, deliver public talks, and share their work as widely as possible. In autumn 2013 the centre hosted a visit by international domestic abuse expert, Professor Evan Stark, funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

During his stay, a key issue concerning the legal response to domestic abuse that he has highlighted in his research hit the headlines in Scotland.

When former MSP Bill Walker was given the maximum sentence of a year in custody for domestic abuse offences against his three wives and his step daughter there were calls for changes in the law to recognise the cumulative severity of his actions.

The case typifies the way domestic abuse is often seen in society, as a violent incident, to be treated case by case. It is a perspective Professor Evan Stark has been challenging through his research. Speaking about US legislation he said:

“We have a law that focuses on discrete incidents of violence, and because the vast majority of domestic violence incidents are trivial from a criminal justice or medical standpoint, the vast majority of domestic violence arrests and cases result in absolutely no sanctions that are significant enough, or even approach significant enough, to inhibit subsequent domestic violence crimes.”

“I think we need a law that punishes offenders at the same level that we would punish people that take hostages, or kidnap people, because what we’re really dealing with, although the analogy’s by no means perfect, is a kind of domestic terrorism. A kind of domestic hostage taking in which the victim has no outside to escape to, because the supposed safe place, the relationship, the home, the family network, has been identified as the point of imprisonment and entrapment.”

While in Scotland Professor Stark talked with public health officials, campaign groups, local and national government. He shared a working paper on the implications of coercive control for children’s wellbeing, and supported specialists to rethink the implications of adapting coercive control as a framework for their response to domestic abuse.

His publication: Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life, makes it clear that domestic abuse is not limited to violent action, but incorporates a range of controlling behaviours men may exert over women.

Professor Stark’s visit was supported by the Scottish Gender Based Violence Research Network, which links researchers doing gender-based violence work to policy makers and practitioners. The network is coordinated by Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, Zero Tolerance, and NHS Scotland’s national gender-based violence and health programme.

www.crfr.ac.uk/gbv-network

During Evan’s visit we launched briefing 69: Domestic Abuse and Gender Inequality: An overview of the current debate - http://www.crfr.ac.uk/assets/briefing-69.pdf

CRFR media impact

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<th>Violence against women</th>
<th>Separation agreements</th>
<th>Food and poverty</th>
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<td>Nancy Lombard’s research into children’s views on violence featured in September’s New Statesman “Violence against women starts in school” was based on an earlier online feature in <a href="http://theconversation.com/violence-against-women-starts-with-school-stereotypes-18440">http://theconversation.com/violence-against-women-starts-with-school-stereotypes-18440</a> She writes: “Authority figures such as teachers are more likely to turn a blind eye to boys being violent towards girls. If the violent actions of men towards women are normalised, girls may grow up to minimise abuse as part of their everyday gendered interactions with men rather than be encouraged to challenge it as behaviour that is wrong.”</td>
<td>The Herald’s headline “Women and the pensions battle” reported how women were more likely to accept agreements that supported stability for the family at the time of separation, but which were more likely to leave them financially worse off in the long run. Jane Mair, Fran Wasoff, Kirsteen Mackay’s research into separation agreements explores how they are reached, the decisions made and the implications. The briefing, Legally binding agreements: property division and child care when relationships break down, is online <a href="http://www.crfr.ac.uk/assets/briefing-68-web.pdf">http://www.crfr.ac.uk/assets/briefing-68-web.pdf</a></td>
<td>“Ignorance prevents healthy eating”, was the headline to The Scotsman’s coverage of co-director Jeni Harden’s research briefing on poverty for Scottish School of Public Health Research. The research with mothers of young children who were living on low incomes found that there was a lot of knowledge about healthy food but that financial and social demands made it difficult to act on that knowledge. <a href="mailto:Jeni.Harden@ed.ac.uk">Jeni.Harden@ed.ac.uk</a></td>
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Student profiles

We spotlight students or project staff who are part of the vibrant CRFR research community. For a full list of projects see www.crfr.ac.uk

Morag Treanor
The University of Edinburgh

Morag Treanor’s completed PhD studied the cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural developmental outcomes of children living in poverty and income inequality.

Children growing up in poverty and income inequality experience many disadvantages, which accumulate across the life cycle. This research used five sweeps of the Growing Up in Scotland birth cohort data to explore the impacts of assets and vulnerabilities of families experiencing multidimensional poverty and income inequality on children’s early social, emotional and behavioural developmental outcomes in Scotland. The results show that material deprivation has a large, negative effect on social, emotional and behavioural outcomes over and above the one associated with poverty. Family composition, in particular being a lone or separated parent, has no effect on social, emotional and behavioural outcomes once poverty is taken into the equation. Mothers’ closeness and support from extended family and friends is associated with greatly improved social, emotional and behavioural outcomes, especially for those children living in persistently low income.

One major conclusion is that children are like barometers, reflecting the pressure their parent(s) experience, which is detectable in their own early social, emotional and behavioural developmental outcomes.

Morag’s PhD was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) grant number ES/H013008/1. More detailed research findings will be published in a forthcoming briefing by CRFR.

Contact: Morag.Treanor@ed.ac.uk

Sharani Osborn
The University of Edinburgh

Sharani Osborn’s PhD looks at how today’s fathers draw on modern ideals of fatherhood to shape their own fathering identity.

Ideals of involved fatherhood and child-centred parenting inform parents’ understandings of and decisions about family life.

Analysis of in-depth interviews with a diverse group of fathers suggests that contemporary fathers draw on dominant ideals of fatherhood, valuing more intimate relationships, more involvement in care and more equitable partnerships with mothers than is characteristic of ‘traditional’ fatherhood.

Although much language is shared, experience is diverse. As well as variation in the organisation of time and labour in respect of paid work and care, there was variation in fathers’ experience of tension between their ideal of fatherhood and their capacity to realise that ideal.

There seemed to be least tension where fathers reported ‘enough’ time with children, some security and satisfaction in employment and an acceptance of the role of their partner as primary caregiver. Where fathers invest considerable time in solo care of their children, the satisfaction of doing so was accompanied by an awareness of the career penalty incurred. For fathers in non-working households, the ideal of involved fatherhood provided a language for valuing their daily labour and their contribution to their children’s lives. However, where fathers’ desire to care for children exceeded cultural expectations of fatherhood, some fathers described encountering relational, cultural or institutional limits on being able to provide the care that they wish to.

Contact: S1053917@sms.ed.ac.uk

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to CRFR co-director Heather Wilkinson and colleagues whose paper about a CRFR practitioner research project was the most downloaded paper from the Evidence and Policy Journal.

A collaborative approach to defining the usefulness of impact: lessons from a knowledge exchange project involving academics and social work practitioners by Heather Wilkinson, Michael Gallagher, and Mark Smith Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice, Volume 8, Number 3, August 2012, pp. 311-327(17)

Read the latest CRFR Briefings at: www.crfr.ac.uk

Claiming an evidence base for services and interventions, with Inspiring Scotland and Evaluation Support Scotland (CRFR conference briefing)

Feminist values and the governance of feminist organisations (CRFR briefing 70)

Domestic Abuse and Gender Inequality: An overview of the current debate (CRFR briefing 69)

Legally binding agreements: property division and child care when relationships break down (CRFR briefing 68)

Making sense of support: how parents view, experience and manage support for their everyday parenting (CRFR briefing 67)
People

Welcome
Tineke Broer joins the research team working on the project: ‘Neuroscience and family life: the brain in policy and everyday practice’.

New CRFR PhD student Eloi Ribe Montserrat’s will be looking at ‘Maintaining and extending ‘grandparent’-grandchild relationships’.

Kirsten Thomlinson, Communication and Knowledge Exchange Co-ordinator, returns from maternity leave on 28 January.

Congratulations
Morag Trainor, Emma Davidson and Fiona Morrison for gaining their PhDs.

Goodbye
Thanks go to Sarah Burton for the maternity cover provided over the last year. She will be missed by all at CRFR.

Catherine-Rose Stocks-Rankin completed work on the PROP project and has joined IRISS. She will continue to retain strong links with CRFR.

Events

Emotions Seminar Series at CRFR
Digital stories as an emotionally engaging pedagogical tool
22 January 2014
An attempt to realise loneliness: exploring R.D. Laing’s work with family narratives
12 February 2014
Belonging and being different – children’s emotional investments in social identities in a diverse primary school
12 March 2014
A Pocketful of Feelings: Mental health nurses’ experiences of managing work-related emotions through supervision
23 April 2014

Coming up in 2014
Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) Annual Conference
May 2014 • Edinburgh

Masterclass: Contribution Analysis
May 2014 • Edinburgh

CPD Training Courses
• Involving Children and Young People in Research and Consultation
• Using Creative Methods in Research with Children and Young People
• Using Digital Methods in Research with Children and Young People (subsidised places available)

Publications

A selection of the many publications by CRFR directors, researchers, staff and students.

Research commissioned by Scottish Government
Reports by Susan Elsley, Kay Tisdall and Emma Davidson:
Children and young people’s experiences of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child collates, analyses, and presents evidence on the views and experiences of children and young people in Scotland on matters linked to the UNCRC.
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/07/1108

Review of children and young people’s experiences of child protection systems
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/07/5859

Authors: Kay Tisdall, Ingela Naumann, Caitlin McLean, Alison Koslowski, and Eva Lloyd.

The language of generations
Associate researcher Gil Viry is a member of the international network GENERATIONES which has published Generations, intergenerational relationships and generational policy. This sets out key terminology on intergenerational relations in: German, English, French, Spanish and Italian. Download online: https://edupad.uni-konstanz.de/generationes-v8bmkqNO1z-KN

New book
In Northern Europe almost half of households consist of one person. This book presents a systematic sociological analysis of the growing trend of solo living across the globe, while also drawing on the voices of working-age men and women living in urban and rural areas in the UK
http://us.macmillan.com/livingalone/LynnJamieson

Where research meets action, who should do what?
CRFR hosted an international Twitter chat in December to discuss how research is put into practice. The online chat is hosted monthly by KMBChat: you can read the conversations online: http://bonniezink.com/kmbchat-archive/