



centre for research on
families and relationships

CRFR response to Tackling Child Poverty in Scotland: A discussion paper

The Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Tackling Child Poverty in Scotland Discussion paper.

Currently celebrating its 10th year, CRFR produces, stimulates and disseminates high quality social research and commentary on families and relationships. CRFR is a consortium research centre based at the University of Edinburgh and obtains funds from a variety of sources including the ESRC, the Scottish Government, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Leverhulme Trust, Health Scotland, NHS Education for Scotland, the European Union, the Big Lottery, Care Commission and Scottish Local Authorities.

Over the past few years, CRFR has commented on the development of the range of policies to tackle child poverty and support children in their early years in Scotland including:

- Written evidence for the Scottish Government's Tackling poverty, inequality and deprivation in Scotland document¹
- Written and oral evidence for the Scottish Parliament's Inquiry into Child Poverty in Scotland²
- Written and oral evidence for Susan Deacon's investigation into early years policy implementation in Scotland³

Issues associated with child poverty are important themes in much of CRFR's research. In addition, CRFR has provided research to the Scottish Government about families' experiences of life on low incomes and is a partner with the Scottish Government funded Growing up in Scotland (GUS) project, which tracks the lives of 8000 Scottish families and their young children from birth. This response aims to summarise and distil thoughts about the paper, based on relevant CRFR research and findings from GUS.

What about welfare and making work pay?

The paper rightly identifies the need to maximise the resources of households with children as an aim of the Scottish Strategy, and that the tax and benefit system and making work pay have roles to play. The tax and benefits system and the minimum wage are, of course, issues reserved to the UK Government and the Coalition has announced a number of policy changes in these areas.

However, we know that low incomes families in Scotland believe that government has a role in addressing low income but have mixed views over

the success of government intervention and those of its agents⁴. Parents living in deprived areas were more likely than other parents to report low access to services like childcare, health and leisure facilities. Parents living in deprived areas and/or in social housing were also most likely to be dissatisfied with their local facilities^{5,6}. Dealing with debt, issues related to long-term unemployment and ensuring access to good services and advice will have a positive effect on families with children. Mothers on low incomes combining paid work and caring for their families sometimes continue working even though it doesn't pay, suggesting that work itself is important for them. They identify support for the costs of childcare as important but not always sufficient and also suggest that governments need to tackle the problem of making work pay⁷.

Relationships matter

Family relationships in Scotland are changing. Half babies are born to unmarried parents⁸, some children have parents and siblings in different households, and we don't even have a name for some of the relationships that people often consider family relationships. Grandparents and neighbours often make up a child's family group. We also know that what happens in a family's neighbourhood and in other households is an important part of family life.^{9,10} However, these relationships remain strong and important. Most children under 5 in Scotland live in families who eat, play games and read stories together everyday¹¹. Most parents feel that people in their communities look out for each other's young children and can be trusted¹². Three quarters of parents with young children in Scotland have good informal support from family or friends giving advice and assistance.¹³ This needs to be recognised, nurtured and supported when tackling child poverty.

Supporting families and relationships

We know that it is important to support families who need help. We know that parents who feel supported have a positive impact on their child's cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural development. We also know that parents who feel supported are more open to seeking help and advice when they need it¹⁴.

We know that family change can be disruptive for all members of a family and that families need to be supported through this process. Children or young people experiencing family change through the divorce, separation, or re-partnering are also more likely to experience other changes such as moving house, town or school¹⁵. Family disruption or absence of a family member, in addition to other associated changes can stack up and push the balance towards risk for all family members¹⁶.

Supporting mothers and babies is not the whole story. Fathers, grandparents, other people considered part of families play important roles in raising children and need to be supported to do so.

Focusing on early intervention not just early years

At CRFR we take a lifecourse approach and we welcome this approach in the discussion paper.

“While the critical importance of the early years is clear, our early intervention and prevention approach applies throughout the lifecourse. It is about ensuring that people at risk or in the early stages of developing difficulties do not reach crisis point. p 11”

For example, grandparents play an important role in many families lives, including providing informal, unpaid childcare. Ensuring they are supported is important as is identifying families without such support.

Research and monitoring important

CRFR is concerned that child poverty outcomes in National Performance Framework and Single Outcome Agreements do not provide full picture of the complexities around child poverty.

Continued funding of the Growing Up in Scotland surveys is vital to monitor progress, to better understand how policies are working, to help define problems and to better understand people’s experiences from birth onwards. Qualitative work is also essential to understanding the complexities of child poverty and tackling it.

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- ¹ <http://www.crfr.ac.uk/reports/CRFR%20Response%202.pdf>
- ² <http://www.crfr.ac.uk/reports/CRFR%20response%201.pdf> and <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/lgc/or-08/lg08-3002.htm#Col1432>
- ³ <http://www.crfr.ac.uk/reports/Why%20relationships%20matter.pdf>
- ⁴ CRFR, McKendrick J, Cunningham-Burley S and Backett-Milburn K (2003) Life in low income families in Scotland: Research report. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.
- ⁵ Growing Up in Scotland Topic Research Findings No.3/2009 '*Parenting in the Neighbourhood Context*' Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- ⁶ CRFR, McKendrick J, Cunningham-Burley S and Backett-Milburn K (2003) Life in low income families in Scotland: Research report. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.
- ⁷ Backett-Milburn K, S Cunningham-Burley and D Kemmer (2001) Caring and providing: Lone and partnered working mothers in Scotland. Edinburgh: Family Policy Studies Centre and Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- ⁸ General Register Office for Scotland (2009) Scotland's Population 2008 – The Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends.
- ⁹ CRFR (2002) Parents, teenagers and family life: a qualitative investigation. CRFR Research briefing No. 7. Edinburgh: CRFR.
- ¹⁰ Growing Up in Scotland Topic Research Findings No.3/2009 '*Parenting in the Neighbourhood Context*' Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- ¹¹ Bradshaw P, Cunningham-Burley S, Dobbie F, McGregor A, Marryat L, Ormston, R. and Wasoff F. (2008) *Growing Up in Scotland: Sweep 2*
- ¹² Growing Up in Scotland Topic Research Findings No.3/2009 '*Parenting in the Neighbourhood Context*' Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- ¹³ Growing Up in Scotland Topic Research Findings No.3/2009 '*Parenting in the Neighbourhood Context*' Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- ¹⁴ Growing Up in Scotland Topic Research Findings No.3/2009 '*Parenting in the Neighbourhood Context*' Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- ¹⁵ Hight G and Jamieson L (2007) Cool with change: young people and family change. Edinburgh: CRFR
- ¹⁶ Hight G and Jamieson L (2007) Cool with change: young people and family change. Edinburgh: CRFR