



centre for research on
families and relationships

The Centre for Research on Families and Relationships Response to 'Ideas for a fairer Scotland' July 2010

Introduction

The Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) welcomes the opportunity to comment on 'Ideas for a Fairer Scotland', the second stage consultation document to help formulate the Scottish Labour Party's manifesto for the Scottish Elections in 2011.

CRFR produces, stimulates and disseminates high quality social research and commentary on families and relationships.

CRFR was established in 2001 and depends on funding 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.

Concepts and issues related to families and relationships impact everyone and cut across all areas of policy. This submission will outline evidence generated by CRFR in certain issue areas and will discuss the importance of supporting evidence-based policy development.

The Co-Directors at CRFR would also welcome the opportunity to discuss any issues related to families and relationships or issues related to the development of evidence based policy development with relevant people in the Scottish Labour Party.

CRFR

www.crfr.ac.uk

We are a consortium research centre whose main office is at the University of Edinburgh, with partners at the University of Aberdeen, University of Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian University, UHI Millennium Institute and the University of Stirling.

CRFR undertakes social research on families and relationships across the lifecourse using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Our research programmes encompass diverse themes and inform policy, practice and debate in Scotland, the UK and internationally.

Drawing on our collaborative and inclusive approach, we generate and build on partnerships across and within the statutory, voluntary, and academic sectors, through our collaborative research, knowledge exchange activities and a programme of CPD, events and research dissemination.

1. A prosperous, sustainable Scotland

Role of social science research, knowledge generation and exchange

The consultation document rightly mentions businesses and trade unions as partners in delivering a prosperous, sustainable Scotland. However it does not recognise the role that universities play by contributing ideas for developing businesses, public services and voluntary sector that support all who live in Scotland.

Universities are often recognised for developing direct commercial applications for business, but social science knowledge developed at Scottish universities and research centres like CRFR provide the high quality, objective and evidence based information essential to debates about how to tackle particular policy problems and issues (see ‘Supporting evidence into policy making’ section below).

Work-life balance is important to a prosperous and sustainable Scotland

CRFR has done a considerable amount of research on the topic of work-life balance. While employment issues are technically a reserved issue, there are many things the Scottish Government can do to promote good practice at the Scottish level both as an employer and a Government. A commitment to the promotion of policies that promote a good work-life balance should be included in the manifesto.

We have found that women are keen to participate in the workforce and think that their participation is good for them and their families. However, the economic benefits of work are often minimal and lack of affordable childcare is a problem.

Past CRFR projects include:

- [Work-life balance in Scottish food retail companies](#)
- [Work and Family Lives: The Changing Experiences of Young Families](#)
- [Workplace policies and practices of care](#)
- [Worklife balance across the lifecourse](#)

Being prosperous is about more than just a ‘living wage’

Issues associated with poverty can add up to make it difficult for families and young children. A recent report of an analysis of data from the Growing up in Scotland (GUS) study (For more information about GUS, see ‘Measuring the impact of inequalities’ section below) demonstrated that low income cannot be isolated from other disadvantage in terms of negative impact on children’s development.

The effects of living in poverty are complex. Children living in the most deprived areas are more likely to have experienced long term health problems, poor general health, accidents, behavioural problems and language development difficulties.

Relevant research:

[Growing up in Scotland: The Circumstances of Persistently Poor Children \(Funded by Scottish Government\)](#)

[Life in Low Income Families In Scotland \(Funded by Scottish Executive\)](#)

The report, *Life in low income families*, explored the views and experiences of poverty amongst those who live in low income households. The report did show that low income was a factor:

- there is a wide held belief that work doesn't pay
- there is a sense of not having enough to participate fully in Scottish society
- people managed resources in a wide variety of ways but often found this stressful

However, the finding showed that experience of life in low incomes was also impacted by:

- Lack of childcare
- Lack of access to and provision of services
- Living with debt and the high-pressure techniques of firms offering high-interest credit
- Difficulties dealing with officials
- Neighbourhood dissatisfaction

Families felt that government had much to do to address low income. However, there were mixed opinions over the success of government intervention and those of its agents.

2. A caring, healthier Scotland

Measuring the impact of inequalities and using that information

It is vital that good information is gathered so that we are able to better understand health inequalities, inequalities more generally, and how they may combine to impact the lives of people who live in Scotland.

The Growing up in Scotland (GUS) study is an excellent example of this. GUS is an exciting study that follows the lives of 8,000 children and their families in Scotland from infancy through to their teens. This is one of the largest longitudinal studies ever done in Scotland.

GUS has been running for five years and is now able to see how early experiences can have an impact later on in a child's life.

Some GUS findings this year found that the following may help reduce early inequalities in health:

- direct actions to improve child health
- improving the health of parents and carers
- improving local services

The second stage of GUS (2008-2013) has recently been commissioned by The Scottish Government. The Scottish Centre for Social Research

Relevant link and research:

www.growingupinScotland.org.uk

[The circumstances of persistently poor children](#)

[Health inequalities in the early years](#)

[Maternal mental health and its impact on child behaviour and development](#)

[Children's social, emotional and behavioural characteristics at entry to primary school](#)

[Impact of the home learning environment on child cognitive development](#)

(ScotCen) leads the study, in collaboration with CRFR and the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at Glasgow University.

CRFR provides comment and advice on the development of the survey, analysis of data and advice on follow-up studies. It also provides the development and delivery of the dissemination and engagement strategy for the report. This strategy ensures that the rich and important information gathered by the project gets to people who can use it to help them develop policy and practice. It also ensures that the information gets to them in a format that is relevant to them and they are able to use.

Continued funding of the GUS study, its analysis and disseminating the findings is vital to help us understand how to work toward reducing the impact of inequalities in Scotland. It could provide part of a framework for measuring the impact of legislation on health and social inequalities.

It is also vital that there are studies that examine, in-depth, individual's lived experiences. Studies like GUS provide large scale snapshots of what is happening across Scotland. Further studies that aim to listen to and understand people's stories can help us pick apart how complex circumstances work to impact people's lives.

There is also a role for studies that pull together all the work that has already been done on an issue in one place for analysis.

A programme of qualitative research supports the development of this type of knowledge. In addition, a programme for dissemination and knowledge exchange helps to ensure that once this knowledge is generated, it can be translated and mobilised into policy making and practice development.

CRFR had an ongoing funding arrangement with Government to provide 'on tap' academic expertise, advice and consultancy on a range of issues and organise events to promote knowledge exchange between the CRFR network and government that ended in March 2010.

Supporting parents, carers and young people to talk about sex

Children and young people find it difficult to talk to their friends and parents about sex. However, when they do talk about it, peer communication and relationships are most important. A ChildLine/CRFR study that investigated calls to ChildLine about sexual health recommended the following:

- young people have ongoing needs for information, so education must be provided throughout the years in education
- the sexual health curriculum needs to challenge young people's conceptions of normality

Relevant research:

[It's my body: calls to ChildLine Scotland about sexual health & wellbeing](#)

- children and young people must be provided with a clear understanding of their rights
- confidential services that give consideration to children and young people's expressed needs and wishes are essential
- greater social recognition and education is needed concerning abuse perpetrated by people the children know and love
- services and interventions need to address sexually aggressive behaviour by other young people, particularly partner abuse perpetrated by young men against young women

How mums feel matters

Supporting mothers with mental health problems may have a direct impact on young children's development and well-being and could enhance children's early school experiences. The GUS study found the following:

- almost 1/3 of mothers' experienced poor mental health at some point before their child is 6 years old
- children whose mothers were emotionally well had better social, behavioural and emotional development than those whose mothers had brief mental health problems
- children whose mothers had short spells of feeling anxious or depressed had better development than those whose mothers had repeated mental health problems over some time
- mums who felt anxious or depressed were more likely to have relationship difficulties and poor social support from family, friends or from the local community

Relevant research:

[The circumstances of persistently poor children](#)

[Health inequalities in the early years](#)

[Maternal mental health and its impact on child behaviour and development](#)

[Children's social, emotional and behavioural characteristics at entry to primary school](#)

Consultation with older people and people with dementia to improve care

Led by the work of Dr. Heather Wilkinson, CRFR has been involved with a number of innovative projects to improve the care experience of people with dementia and older people in general. Central to this work has been the importance of inclusion and social justice for these often marginalised groups in the development of research, policy and practice.

Relevant links and publications:

www.sdwg.org.uk

www.connect-in-care.net

[Let's talk about it - Using stories to improve care for older people: a practical guide](#)

Examples of this work include:

- Heather is a founder member of the Scottish Dementia Working Group which is now an independent group run by people with dementia. The working group campaigns to improve services for people with dementia and to improve attitudes towards people with dementia.

- CRFR also administered the Connect in Care project was a network for staff involved in caring for older people and resulted in a practice development pack.

3. A safer Scotland

Including the experience of all impacted by domestic abuse when developing policy and practice

Not all women who experience domestic abuse are the same. Older women, like younger women, experience domestic violence in large numbers and suffer significant physical, emotional and social consequences. Because of existing attitudes about women and age, these older women have been virtually invisible in policy and service provision. Listening to older women’s stories, involving older women in service design and re-design and including older women in policy and decision making are all tools for developing and delivering better policy and appropriate services.

Relevant research:

[Older women and domestic violence in Scotland](#)

[After domestic abuse: children’s perspective on contact with fathers](#)

Contact between children and their fathers following parental separation is a sensitive and controversial subject. This is especially so where there has been a history of domestic abuse before parental separation. Children felt that they should make a significant contribution to decisions relating to contact with their fathers. They felt their opinions were important, as it was their lives about which decisions were being made

The Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006 ensures that courts consider whether contact is in a child’s best interest where there has been a history of domestic abuse. Monitoring will be necessary to determine how well professionals implement this Act, how well the courts understand the impact that unsafe contact arrangements can have and how well legal and social services professionals listen to children’s views about contact.

CRFR is currently preparing a response to the Scottish Government consultation on Child Protection Guidance. It will include specific issues that should be considered in relation to domestic abuse (see child protection section below).

3. Scotland of opportunity

Improving behaviour by supporting parents and early screening for problems

Analysis of GUS data showed that most children don’t have difficulties with behaviour when they start school. For those that do, GUS found family circumstances and structure have only a limited impact on child behaviour.

Relevant research:

[Children’s social, emotional and behavioural characteristics at entry to primary school](#)

Parenting style has some impact. Children who had experienced shouting or smacking and had less social interaction with other families were more likely to have behaviour problems. However, it is not clear whether the use of harsh discipline and low social interaction could be a cause of poor behaviour, or a response to it.

Children who had experienced difficulties at pre-school age were likely to continue to have difficulties as they started primary. Hyperactivity and attention problems were those most likely to carry on.

Given the often long-term nature of these difficulties, it appears there would be benefit to early screening, in the preliminary pre-school period for example, of these behaviours and their patterns of co-occurrence.

Those children displaying difficulties matching the most problematic groupings could, along with their parents, be provided with the necessary support to manage and improve such difficulties. Furthermore, a more tailored transition process to ensure that moving into the school environment does not encourage deterioration of behaviour may be advisable.

Supporting evidence into policy making

CRFR has contributed significantly to the development of knowledge about social issues and to Government's development of policy on these issues. Activities include:

- Ongoing funding arrangement with Government (now completed) to provide 'on tap' academic expertise, advice and consultancy on a range of issues and organise events to promote knowledge exchange between the CRFR network and government
- Participation in the Scottish Government PhD scheme
- Special Projects (e.g. the dissemination contract for the Growing up in Scotland survey)
- Contribution to consultations (e.g. Scottish Parliament Inquiry into child poverty in Scotland) and Government and parliamentary groups (e.g. Family Law Stakeholder group, Cross Party Group on Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse, etc.)
- Support to partners in the voluntary sector and practitioners to do research to contribute to policy and practice development (e.g. Practitioner Research Programme and ESRC CASE studentships, etc.)

- Work with policy and practice organisations to develop research to help identify and understand emerging social issues (e.g. research briefings series, issue-based events and projects like About families, see box)

There are also a range of current and upcoming projects that will help inform current debates and policy and practice debates of the future (see box).

Together with attracting and supporting high quality research team, the CRFR approach has been to establish a team to deliver a programme that aims to support the exchange of information between policy makers, practitioners and the University.

It is clear that funding for research is going to be put under significant pressure in the foreseeable future. At CRFR we are concerned that our activities that play such an important role in policymaking and developing the use of academic research in policy making is under threat.

Ideas to develop more and better evidence-based policy development:

- Continue to support the development of relationships between academics and policy makers.
- Ensure an academic research consultant is part of every consultation process. This could be an academic or group of academics who have particular expertise with the issue or a knowledge exchange representative from a university.
- Fund liaison people in Universities to facilitate or broker the exchange of information between researchers and external audiences. These posts would work to promote the use of specific research and research findings in policy and practice development. These posts would work as a knowledge broker to help translate findings and policy needs into workable exchanges.
- Ensure that government funding for research includes meaningful amounts of resources to support the range of activities that promote and share research findings.

Tackling poverty and inequality

Support for all families and relationships not just those on low incomes. Over and over our research shows that relationships with and between family and friends are very important in supporting individuals and greater wellbeing.

[About families: gathering evidence, informing action](#)

This project is a collaboration between CRFR, Parenting Across Scotland and Capability Scotland.

It will pull together information from helplines, service-users views and available research to identify the issues that concern parents and what we might do about them.

Some current and future CRFR projects:

Illness behaviour amongst people with self-limiting conditions who telephone NHS 24

Young people's anticipated futures as partners and parents

Antisocial behaviour and children: their spaces, relationships and interactions with formal policy

Effect of family policies on the household division of paid work and care

Parenting in the early years in Scotland compared to other European countries

Health for All Children: How professionals and parents experience the implementation of Hall 4

Babies' diets and family life in Scotland

Exploring children's outcomes at the transition to primary school of children experiencing poverty in Scotland

Relevant publication:

[Why Relationships Matter: Research evidence from CRFR](#)

CRFR has recently produced a booklet outlining some of our evidence about why relationships matter and how to support them. Key points include:

- Supporting families and relationships through change is important. Even strong families need help sometimes. Over a lifetime, all families can go through periods of time where they experience change and they need help.
- Factors associated with poverty can add up to make it harder for families. Working towards reducing health inequalities, debt and issues related to long-term unemployment will have a positive impact on families and children.
- Supporting community development can help families. Parents living in deprived areas are most likely to report their community as not being 'child friendly'. Mothers and children living in deprived areas are more likely to be without important wider family or friend support and also less likely to feel comfortable approaching formal services. Special tailored support for groups of mums might also be helpful.
- Listening to and supporting children and young people are important for strong families. Finding ways of listening to children and respecting how they define their needs, rights and interests and including them in discussion and decision making will help support relationships in the long term. Also finding ways of supporting children's relationships with adults and other children may help families through tough times.

Protecting vulnerable children

Over the last 9 years CRFR has conducted several research projects which uncover issues about children's lives and adult survivors' lives which have highlighted issues about abuse. Over these projects there are some key themes emerged:

- Children do not trust adults with their confidences
- Children feel if they tell adults that their lives will be taken out of their control and they will not be properly consulted on decisions which affect them
- Children confide in friends and friends can be a key source of support. Friends are not however included in policy either as a source of support or a source of disclosure about abuse, and when children's lives change friends are often left behind.

Relevant research:

[Care and support need of male survivors of childhood sexual abuse](#)

[After domestic abuse: children's perspectives on contact with fathers](#)

[Cool with change: young people's concerns and family change](#)

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