

CRFR RESPONSE TO SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMITTEE'S INQUIRY INTO CHILD POVERTY IN SCOTLAND

Introduction

1. The Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) welcomes the opportunity to comment on this very important inquiry into child poverty in Scotland.
2. CRFR produces, stimulates and disseminates high quality social research and commentary on families and relationships. 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.
3. 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.
4. We build research capacity through supporting new researchers, offering research training and through our PhD and Post Doctoral programme. We provide a stimulating research environment through a programme of seminars, conferences, visiting fellow, associated researchers and our Register of Research Interests.
5. 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.
6. CRFR was established in 2001 and attracts 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.
7. The combination of our research experience, the range of issues covered and our work across sectors makes CRFR well qualified to contribute to the Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Communities Committee's inquiry into child poverty in Scotland. This submission will discuss the importance of evidence-based policy development and will highlight CRFR research relevant to the debate about child poverty in Scotland.

Effective scrutiny of progress

8. The Local Government and Communities Committee will scrutinise whether the Scottish Government is reaching a range of targets regarding child poverty, including the UK based 2010 and 2020 targets and the Scottish Government objectives set out in its Economic Strategy.
9. Targets such as these can provide a useful benchmark to determine progress. It is important to remember however, that targets only provide an indicative marker of progress. In order to understand the subjective and objective experience of child poverty and the structural barriers that mitigate against its elimination, more information is necessary.

10. CRFR is involved in a range of research that will be useful in the Committee's deliberations. For example, the Growing up in Scotland¹ (GUS) project, carried out by the Scottish Centre for Social Research in collaboration with CRFR for the Scottish Government, will follow the lives of a national sample of 8000 of Scotland's children from infancy through to their teens and is one of the largest longitudinal studies ever done in Scotland. This study is wide-ranging and provides the opportunity for analysis that will offer insights into children's experiences and outcomes in relation to their experiences. Recent analysis² of GUS data clearly shows the interrelationship between a number of factors and measures of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage.
11. While the study is only in its first few years, it is already providing a snapshot of the experiences of children and their families in Scotland. Also, the longitudinal nature of GUS will enable the longer term effect of disadvantage and changes in socio-economic circumstance to be tracked, as well as the improving effect of different services. This type of research and information can provide a very rich understanding of the dynamics of child poverty in Scotland and aid the Committee with its deliberations.
12. In addition to evaluating whether targets are met, evidence about people's lived experiences is essential for determining progress toward eradicating poverty. It is important to develop a process that includes hearing these experiences. CRFR research, Consulting on children's services: Getting the views of children, parents and services providers³, showed that having some type of process is essential for getting people's views and understanding their experiences. The study found that an effective consultation strategy with children and families requires of full range of methods. It also stated that good consultations be worthwhile (not tokenistic), visible, action-oriented, realistic and fit for purpose.
13. In addition to a structured consultation process, high quality research into people's lived experiences adds further important evidence about child poverty. For example, CRFR research projects like Cool with Change⁴ and Understanding Cohabitation⁵ explore people's lived experiences and provide a rich picture of whether policies are working or not. It is important that the Committee supports a meaningful consultation process and research into people's lived experiences when scrutinising progress towards eradication of poverty.

¹ For more information about GUS see <http://www.crfr.ac.uk/gus/index.html>

² Bradshaw P, C Martin and S Cunningham-Burley (2008) Growing Up In Scotland Study: GUS Exploring The Experience and Outcomes For Advantaged and Disadvantaged Families, Edinburgh, Scottish Government Social Research
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/03/12101843/0>

³ Adam R, S Cunningham-Burley, J Smith, M Scott, S Milne, and S Anderson (2004) Consulting on children's services: getting the views of children, parents and services providers, CRFR commissioned by South Ayrshire Council & Arran Health Board
<http://www.crfr.ac.uk/Reports/rb%2035.pdf>

⁴ Hight G and L Jamieson (2007) Cool with Change – Young People and Family Change, Edinburgh, Scotland's Families/CRFR
<http://www.crfr.ac.uk/Reports/CWC%20final%20report%202007.pdf>

⁵ CRFR (2008) Understanding cohabitation: A critical study of the Living Together as Husband and Wife Rule in UK social security law. CRFR Briefing 37
<http://www.crfr.ac.uk/Reports/rb%2037.pdf>

Committee's role and evidence-informed policy development and scrutiny

14. CRFR believes that policy-making can be enhanced through consideration of a range of evidence from a variety of sources and that high quality research has a key role to play. Good, independent research needs to be at the heart of monitoring outcomes both intended and unintended. CRFR believes that the Committee can play a central role in ensuring that evidence-informed policy making and evaluation is part of scrutinising progress. Support for projects like GUS and research into the lived experiences of children and families is essential to this.

Employment

15. CRFR produces research on a variety of topics that can inform the debate about supporting parents into, and remaining in, work in Scotland. Here is a list of relevant research, publications and research briefings from across the CRFR network.

Work-life balance across the lifecourse

CRFR Briefing 21 (March 2005)

<http://www.cfr.ac.uk/Reports/rb21.pdf>

In Summer 2004, CRFR held an international conference to explore work-life balance across the lifecourse. This briefing outlines some of the main issues from the conference, explores what we might learn from international comparisons, and makes recommendations for policy and for further research.

Caringscapes: experiences of caring and working

CRFR Briefing 13 (February 2004)

<http://www.cfr.ac.uk/Reports/rb13caringscapes.pdf>

There is growing interest in ways in which people combine working with caring, and what can be done to make the balance of work and care more manageable. This paper explores experiences of caring and working, and argues that new ways of thinking need to be developed.

Family, care and women's transitions to paid work

Sue Innes and Gill Scott (2002)

Rosemont Lifelong Learning Centre

This study suggests that women using the Rosemont Lifelong Learning Centre do not experience the move from full-time motherhood into training or employment as easy. This study looked at the nature of family commitments that constrain women's choices, the cost of transition and the 'poverty trap', and the health of family members and the women themselves.

Gender Care and Transitions

CRFR Briefing 2 in association with the Scottish Poverty Information Unit (January 2002)

<http://www.cfr.ac.uk/Reports/Gender%20care%20and%20transitions.pdf>

This briefing considers how women with dependent children move into training or employment and the role of both formal and informal care in supporting them.

Caring and providing – Lone and partnered working mothers in Scotland

Kathryn Backett-Milburn, Sarah Cunningham-Burley and Debbie Kemmer (2001)
Family Policy Studies Centre for The Policy Press in association with Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/details.asp?pubID=350>

This qualitative study explores the views and experiences of working mothers. The authors set the women's accounts of the complex balancing acts they perform to manage their daily lives against the wider backdrop of changes in society. The study was supported by focus group discussions with a range of policy-makers and practitioners. The authors stress the importance of a holistic approach to policy and practice, one that supports flexibility and choice, and one that listens to mothers and their children.

Benefits and Services

16. CRFR produces research on a variety of topics that can inform the debate about how benefits and service provision relate to child poverty in Scotland. Here is a list of relevant research, publications and research briefings from across the CRFR network.

The impact of poverty on children's experiences of services
F Wager, N Bailey, R Day, D Hamilton, M Hill, C King (2007)
Glasgow Centre for the Child and Society (Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde); Save the Children UK – Scotland Programme; and Scottish Centre for Research on Social Justice (University of Glasgow).
http://www.strath.ac.uk/media/media_62005_en.pdf

This study arose from the identification of a gap in knowledge and corresponding need for the development of a better contemporary understanding of children's experiences of poverty. Whilst there has been much quantitative empirical work and many official statistics produced documenting the extent and distribution of childhood poverty within the UK and sometimes comparatively, less qualitative research evidence existed considering children's own perceptions of their experiences of poverty. Therefore, the study sought to build on the few studies that had explored children's own experiences of poverty, with a specific focus on children's perspectives in relation to services, and an emphasis on the effect of poverty on children's access to, perceptions of and use of services.

Cool with Change – Young People and Family Change
Scotland's Families/CRFR
Gill Hightet and Lynn Jamieson (2007)

<http://www.crfr.ac.uk/Reports/CWC%20final%20report%202007.pdf>

Cool with change was a three year research project funded by the Community Fund with support from the Scottish Executive. It is the result of a collaboration between Scotland's Families (Family Mediation Scotland, One Parent Families Scotland, Relate Scotland, Scottish Marriage Care and Stepfamily Scotland), a consortium of organisations with a long and impressive track record of providing support to families, and CRFR. Cool with Change breaks new ground by combining in-depth research of young people's experience of family change in Scotland, reflection by service providers on the implications for their services and consultation with young people about possible future development of support services.

Home and School

CRFR Briefing 27 (February 2006)

<http://www.crfr.ac.uk/Reports/rb27.pdf>

This briefing reports findings from a Scottish study of the links between mental health and behaviour in schools.

Supporting vulnerable young people

CRFR Briefing 19 (January 2005)

<http://www.crfr.ac.uk/Reports/rb19.pdf>

This study looked at young people who took part in programmes of planned mentoring. In this briefing we focus on what young people thought about the relationship with their mentors.

Life in Low Income Families in Scotland: A Review Of The Literature
Scottish Poverty Information Unit & Centre for Research on Families
and Relationships (CRFR), Gill Scott , John H. McKendrick, Sarah
Cunningham-Burley and Kathryn Backett-Milburn (2003)

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/09/18064/25742>

This review is the first stage of a research project which explores the views and experiences of poverty amongst individuals and groups living within low income households with at least one child under the age of eighteen.

Life in Low Income Families in Scotland: Research Report

Centre for Research on Families and Relationships

John H. McKendrick, Sarah Cunningham-Burley and Kathryn Backett-Milburn (2003)

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/09/18143/26158>

This report is the second stage of a research project which explores the views and experiences of poverty amongst individuals and groups living within low income households with at least one child under the age of 18.

Understanding children's lives: how children and parents experience
and understand social and health inequalities

CRFR Briefing 4 (March 2002)

<http://www.crfr.ac.uk/Reports/Children%20&%20inequality.pdf>

Children's differing social circumstances and experiences are part of the pathways implicated in health and illness in adulthood. However, children's own perspectives tend to be absent from adult-defined data about health and illness. Little is known about social and cultural processes in childhood; even less is known about children's own agency in making sense of and recreating the health cultures in which they grow up. This research into children's lives was developed to address such gaps in research, interviewing children and parents in two contrasting localities.

Equality

17. CRFR produces research on a variety of topics that can inform the debate about how equality relates to child poverty in Scotland. Here is a list of relevant research, publications and research briefings from across the CRFR network.

Gender equality in Scotland

Commissioned by The Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee

Sue Innes (2002)

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/historic/equal/reports-02/eor02-07-01.htm>

The aim of the research was to identify gaps in research on gender inequality in Scotland with the following objectives:

- to identify policy areas which currently lack research on gender inequality;
- to identify the type and scope of research currently conducted in these areas - whether it is quantitative, qualitative, small or large scale;
- to identify research conducted in a range of contexts including academic but paying particular attention to research conducted by voluntary sector and community groups; and
- to inform subsequent committee work on gender inequality.

Other research on tackling poverty, inequality and deprivation

18. CRFR produces research on a variety of topics that can inform the wider debate about child poverty and inequality in Scotland. Here is a list of relevant research, publications and research briefings from across the CRFR network.

Understanding cohabitation: A critical study of the Living Together as Husband and Wife Rule in UK social security law
CRFR Briefing 37 (March 2008)

<http://www.crfr.ac.uk/Reports/rb%2037.pdf>

Drawing on research with men and women who have had relevant personal experience of 'the cohabitation rule', this briefing identifies problems with its underlying assumptions about unmarried couples' relationships and their financial support obligations to each other.

Fertility variations in Scotland: actual, expected and ideal fertility
CRFR Briefing 32 (April 2007)

<http://www.crfr.ac.uk/Reports/rb32.pdf>

This briefing reports some key findings of a recently completed research project that investigated the attitudes to fertility of men and women of child-bearing age in Scotland. This study found that there are links between deprivation and fertility.

Families in society - boundaries and relationships

Edited by Linda McKie and Sarah Cunningham-Burley (2005)

Policy Press: Bristol

The changing nature of families, their enduring and multi-faceted significance in society, and their value as a focus for the exploration of social change have ensured that families have remained a prominent focus of academic enquiry. Acknowledging the increasing diversity and complexity of families, this innovative book proposes a new conceptual framework for understanding families and other relationships that both challenges and attempts to reconcile traditional and contemporary approaches.

Feeding families and influences on healthy eating in Scotland: findings from a qualitative study

CRFR Briefing 9 (May 2003)

<http://www.crfr.ac.uk/Reports/ResbriefingRUHBC.pdf>

Joint briefing with the Research Unit for Health, Behaviour and Change (RUHBC)

A series of policy documents in the 1990's highlighted the contribution of dietary factors to morbidity and mortality in Scotland. Primary care was identified as one setting where advice about diet and healthy eating may be effective. Less is known, however, about attitudes and practices relating to food and feeding in families. This qualitative study explored these issues with couples who had primary school children.

CRFR Briefing 3: Family Policy in Scotland

<http://www.cfr.ac.uk/Reports/Fam%20Pol%20Briefing%203.pdf>

(February 2002)

This briefing looks at the development of family policy in Scotland, considers the interplay between devolved and reserved matters, outlines the Departments of the Scottish Executive responsible for family policy, and considers the relationship between children's and family policy. It is a summary of a document produced with funding from Joseph Rowntree Foundation, looking at the feasibility of a Family Policy Forum in Scotland.

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