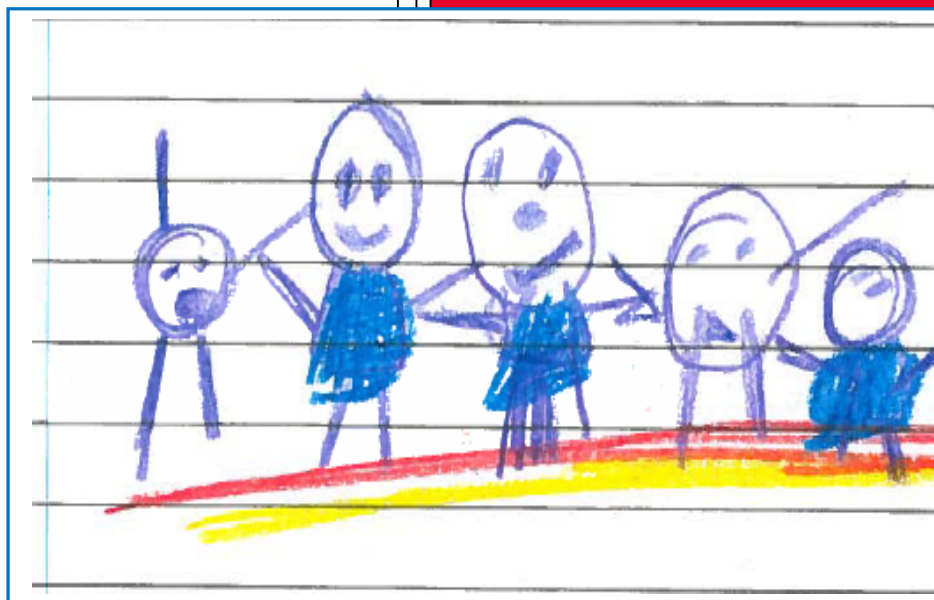


Child Protection Registration: The Role of the Wider Family



**HENDERSON Lesley and
DUNN Becky**

City of Edinburgh Council

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Introduction

The aim of this research is to investigate the role of the 'wider family' of children on the child protection register across the City of Edinburgh.

This research has been proposed against the backdrop of the researchers' experiences as practitioners in a children and families' practice team for the City of Edinburgh Council. Anecdotal evidence as well as our own experiences have been that where children's names are placed on the child protection register, the use of 'wider family' can help keep children safe. There is no specific guidance from the City of Edinburgh Council about involving wider family members where children's names are on the child protection register although it is protocol to explore family group decision making where a child is at risk of being accommodated away from home. Nor is there policy or specific guidance in Scottish legislation about the involvement of wider family where the child's name is on the child protection register. However, general principles about the involvement of 'wider family' can be found in both local and national government policy and guidelines.

There is limited research that seeks to establish the role of the wider family where the child's name is on the child protection register. However, there is a lot of research around the involvement of kinship carers, specifically where children are not able to live with (a) parent(s).

General Context

At the heart of any children and families' practice team sits the responsibility to manage child protection. Inherent in this is the role of engaging children and their families, where the child's name has been placed on the Child Protection Register. In 2012 the City of Edinburgh Council's Child Protection Case Conferences placed the names of 371 children onto the Child Protection Register.

Further to the introduction of the Children Act 1989 which at this time extended to Scotland, a paper was issued in 1991, entitled 'Working Together Under the Children Act 1989 - A guide to arrangements for inter-agency co-operation for the protection of children from abuse'. 'Working Together' prescribes the structure and use of Child Protection Conferences and the Child Protection Register.

All local authorities maintain a register of the names of children who have been deemed by a Child Protection Case Conference to be at risk of significant harm. The register has no legal basis but requires professionals to support and monitor the child and their family on an inter-agency basis. It also alerts practitioners who come into contact with the child that there exists this level of professional concern. Within Edinburgh the Child Protection Register is managed through the Lothian Child Protection Committee which comprises representatives from the City of Edinburgh Council, Lothian Health Board and Lothian and Borders Police (now Police Scotland). They produce detailed inter agency guidelines and meet on a regular basis to review the policies and procedures.

Where a child's name is placed on the Child Protection Register, a child protection plan is required to be maintained and regularly updated. 'Core groups' take place, most frequently on a monthly basis, in which the key professionals and family members involved meet together to review progress on the child's plan, and share concerns and risks. It is also frequent practice that the child in question is seen on a weekly basis. Registration is reviewed initially on a three month basis and then at a maximum of six month intervals. Children whose names are on the Child Protection Register may be living within the family home, with extended family members or in local authority care. In addition, unborn baby's names may also be placed on the Child Protection Register where there is sufficient concern at the antenatal stage.

City of Edinburgh Council context

Within the City of Edinburgh Council where this research took place, there exist a number of policies in relation to the involvement of wider family. The policy in relation to the standard assessment used by children and families' social work practitioners makes reference to involving the 'child, carers and family' (policy 4.1.1) and within the guidance for the assessment itself, there is an emphasis placed on practitioners to ask 'how supportive are grandparents, aunts and uncles and wider family members? Are there factors in the wider family or community which impact on the child/young person?' (City of Edinburgh Council, 2009). Evidence of protective adults or support networks are identified as protective factors when assessing risk to a child. Use of wider family is underpinned in legislation such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Article 5 makes reference to the duty of 'States Parties' to 'respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community' in providing direction and guidance to the child.

More recent policy and practice developments also mean that in cases where children need to be accommodated social workers and their managers must consider whether any family members are able to care for that child before placing a child with foster carers. If there are family members who may be able to take on the care of a child then the policy specifically requires a referral to be made to the Family Group Decision Making team. This team seeks to meet with family members, to organise a family group meeting to look at who is available in the family. Following a family member being identified to care for a child, a referral would be made to the kinship care assessment team to undertake an assessment of the kinship carer. If assessed as suitable a monthly payment would be made once the child is placed with the kinship carers.

However the emphasis of policy and practice is on involving family specifically to avoid children being accommodated.

The most recent demographics available identify that there were 495,360 people living in Edinburgh in 2011, and that at this time there were 73660 children under 16 living in Edinburgh (General Register Office, Scotland, as cited in Scottish Government, 2013). The City of Edinburgh Council consists of six neighbourhood teams which are organised by geographical area. Each neighbourhood team contains a children and families' practice team amongst other services. There also exists a separate city wide team for children with disabilities, as well as a hospital based team.

In 2012, there were 2706 children whose names had been placed on the Child Protection Register in Scotland, and on 31 July 2012, the City of Edinburgh Council's Register held the names of 227 children (Children's Social Work Statistics, 2011-12, Scottish Government). Records from this same date, for Scotland, recorded the following concerns noted at registration:

Concerns identified at case conference	Number of children registered at 31 July 2012	% of children registered at 31 July 2012
Neglect	1,006	37%
Parental substance misuse	918	34%
Parental mental health problems	516	19%
Non-engaging family	453	17%
Domestic abuse	758	28%
Sexual abuse	229	8%
Physical abuse	471	17%

Emotional abuse	1,016	38%
Child placing themselves at risk	46	2%
Child exploitation	9	0%
Other concerns	283	10%
Total concerns	5,705	211%

(‘Children's Social Work Statistics, 2011-12’, Scottish Government, 2013)

Literature: what do we already know of wider family involvement in child protection proceedings

There is an absence of literature specifically focusing on the use of wider family where children's names have been placed on the child protection register. Extended family involvement in literature has become almost synonymous with Family Group Decision Making to the point that this represents the majority of research that explores wider family involvement. One of the earliest pieces of research specifically looking at family involvement was published by Her Majesty's Stationary Office in 1995, and aimed to study the use of family involvement as partnership (Thoburn, Lewis and Shemmings). The authors argued that the context of this research was a climate in which 'partnership' had recently been embedded in law and where there was anxiety that this 'partnership' would jeopardise the safety of children. The research noted that few practitioners in their study had undertaken training to develop their skills in partnership working but that partnership working did not lead to poorer outcomes for children and their families.

In 'Troubled families: vulnerable families' experiences of multiple service use', Morris argues that the families involved in her study had significant input from extended family (2013). What is not clear is whether this had been part of the family practice prior to social work involvement, or as a reaction to the presenting crisis / crises leading to multiple service use. Morris noted the importance of a social work understanding of the practices at the heart of the family, the way that family 'do' life with each other, a concept expounded widely by Morgan (1996; 2004; 2011). She also notes that the extent of professional involvement directly with wider family can impact upon how messages are 'passed on' and how the involvement of social work is perceived and translated as it is passed from one member to another. She notes furthermore that family practices are neither neutral nor necessary beneficent.

Morgan as cited in Silva and Smart (1999) notes that a major change in the concept of family is that it has come to signify the subjective meaning of intimate connections rather than formal, objective blood or marriage ties. A basic core remains, which is the sharing of resources, caring responsibilities and obligations. Families 'are' what families 'do', rather than relying on an institutional definition of the family. It is this concept of family which we have used as our definition of wider family. We have used the term wider family as a way of encompassing this wider definition of family and we can therefore use this term to encompass step parents, step grandparents and others who people consider to be their family.

Finch and Mason (1993) argue that the role of extended family has changed and that there is no longer the same expectation of extended family members to own responsibility and offer commitment for their wider family members. Saltiel also comments on his findings that the complex and unconventional relationships between family members in his study further complicated matters for both the social worker and the family (2013). Saltiel reminds his readers that often there can be competing views, and that family dynamics in his study were often unstable as well as complex. Saltiel asks how roles are defined in reference to 'wider family' who may not be blood relatives, and who decides. He further points out that despite all this complexity, social workers frequently have to make decisions in short time scales based on conflicting information. The issue of confidentiality and families' right to privacy is raised by the Duke University Center for Family Policy (2006, as cited in Morris and Connolly, 2012) but this sits alongside the right of families to meaningful participation and self determination (United Nations' Conventions on the Rights of the Child, 1989, as cited by

Morris and Connolly, 2012). Morris and Connelly also raise the issue that family decision making has been seen by some as simply a method of avoiding local authority care, and used only for kinship care. They point out that multiple studies have evidenced that families value involvement, and that engagement with care plans is increased when Family Group Decision Making have been involved (ibid.). Turnell and Edwards point out that participation also requires a 'genuine openness and a structural commitment by professionals and their organisation' to families' ideas (1997).

Turnell and Edwards also recognise that engagement and participation with family is not always easy and cite public perception of child protection social workers as a barrier in building relationships (ibid). Yet they also acknowledge that 'external family members' who are willing to be involved can be a significant strength, but that this requires the wider family to be fully aware of the risks and concerns held by the children and families' department (ibid., 63).

The consensus in the existing literature is that wider family involvement is beneficial, however this was not specifically within the context of child protection registration. It was also recognised that the structure of families has changed, and is reflected in extensive discussion about family practices and how families operate. Despite these changes, the literature recognises that wider family continues to play an important role in people's lives.

Research Methodology

As the research aimed to explore practitioners' perceptions of wider family involvement, a predominantly qualitative approach was taken using semi structured interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. By using a number of different approaches, as well as analysing the quantitative data that accompanied the case studies, it was anticipated that triangulation would increase the validity of the findings. This was particularly important given the small scale of this research.

In the first instance, a database search was made using the system on which the registration of children's names is recorded. It was agreed by the researchers that the names of children who had been deregistered over the last six months would be gathered. By using the most recent cases, it was hoped that as much detail as possible would still be recalled by the social workers when interviewed or emailed. Furthermore, it was important that the child's name was no longer on the Child Protection Register to minimise the impact of researcher involvement on the case. It also had the benefit that a case could be examined throughout the process of registration. It was agreed that only children whose name had been on the Register for more than six months would be selected. The purpose of this was to target more 'complex' cases in which the involvement of wider family could be expected to have more of an impact, although it is recognised that this was a hypothesis based on the researchers' own experiences of practice rather than any evidence from research. Further to this, the core group and case conference minutes were examined starting with the child who had been most recently deregistered. This process continued until the prerequisite number of cases had been identified – twelve where wider family were involved and twelve where wider family were not involved. A number of 'back up' cases were also noted in case these were required. One of the advantages of this approach was that the researchers themselves identified the social workers that were to be contacted, which reduced the bias inherent in asking social workers to come forward who were willing to be interviewed. Of the twelve social workers contacted for interview where wider family were involved, the following outcomes were recorded:

Seven social workers responded to contact, two did not respond to contact, and three were unable to progress due to the particular circumstances of the case. One of the workers who did respond had been a senior social worker to the case and therefore gave as much information as could be recalled in the social worker's absence.

Of the twelve social workers contacted by email where wider family were involved, three responded in writing and two responded by phone.

Prior to contact with individual social workers, two research focus groups took place. The purpose of this was to gather information on social workers' perceptions of the use of wider family without reference to a specific case. It also allowed the researchers to follow the progress of the discussion between workers, as well as to ensure that the research questions were both understood and relevant to practitioners. Each focus group was provided with large amounts of paper for recording the main points being raised. Both focus groups constituted social workers, senior practitioners, early intervention workers and team leaders from the South Neighbourhood practice team. One of the social workers in attendance was also one of those interviewed due to one of their cases having been selected.

Ethics

Due to the fact that the research involved making contact directly with practitioners and also using case studies of children and their families, ethical consent was gained from the City of Edinburgh Council. It was confirmed that consent was not needed from the families whose cases were being discussed. Whilst social workers were individually selected, the first contact with them made it clear that they had been selected on the basis that one of their families had been recently de-allocated. It was also made clear that the research aimed to look at their views rather than to be making judgements about their work on the case. However, the practitioners were aware that being interviewed by peers could still have caused a level of stress particularly with regard to what level of effort was made to involve wider family. Social workers were also given the choice about whether they wished to take part and information given to them about the nature of the research both at initial contact and prior to the interview. In order to protect the confidentiality of both the practitioners and also the children and families referred to, all information was stored on work computers and locked filing cabinets, and the recorded interviews deleted once transcribed. In putting together the findings, permission was gained to use direct quotes from practitioners and the report sent to practitioners to confirm they were happy with the contents prior to being disseminated. Efforts were also made to ensure that individual practitioners and the families were not identifiable by omitting identifying information.

Research: Topics, Aims and Questions

Anecdotally the two practitioner researchers had noted in cases they worked with that the involvement of wider family members at an earlier stage in the child protection process had potentially avoided the need to consider children being accommodated with family members.

Specific guidance within the City of Edinburgh Council on the use of 'core groups' detail their purpose to 'support the parent(s), carers, the wider families and relevant others, where this is in the best interests of the child(ren), to promote the child's welfare'.

The aim of this research was to explore the practice of wider family involvement by children and families' social workers where a child's name has been placed on the Child Protection Register. The research data was gathered from a number of sources:

Two focus groups took place in the local neighbourhood in which the researchers worked via their team development meeting

Twelve social workers were identified who had involved wider family on a case where the child's name had recently come off the Child Protection Register. These social workers were interviewed.

Twelve social workers were identified who had not involved wider family on a case where the child's name had recently come off the Child Protection Register. These social workers were contacted via email and asked to respond to a written questionnaire.

The following research questions underpinned the gathering of data:

- 1 In what ways have social workers tried to involve 'wider family' members?
- 2 To what extent have 'wider family' members been involved?
3. Where 'wider family' members have been involved, what has been the perceived impact?

Findings and analysis

Background information on the cases

For confidentiality reasons, no personal information has been provided about the cases in question. However, a summary of the presenting concerns, number of children involved, age of the children and current residence of the children is detailed here.

What were the presenting issues leading to Child Protection registration? With regards to the seven chosen cases, the reasons for registration are detailed below. For one of the cases, there were three children within the family who were all placed on the child protection register. For the remaining six cases, there was only one child in each family.

Case 1	Parental learning difficulties, domestic violence
Case 2	Parental substance misuse, domestic violence
Case 3	Sexual offenders within family, parental learning difficulties, parental mental health
Case 4	Parental mental health, parental offending, homelessness
Case 5	Domestic violence
Case 6	Domestic violence, non engagement
Case 7	Domestic violence, parental alcohol misuse

At the point of registration, five of the cases involved unborn babies and the remaining children were 1 year old, 2 years old, 3 years old, and 10 years old at this time.

At the point of deregistration, seven children were living in the care of a parent and two children remained in local authority care. None of the children were living with kinship carers at the point of deregistration.

The wider family

When 'wider family' was explored within the context of the focus groups, the emerging theme was that wider family constituted those 'people who behave as family'. Blood relations, friends of the family, step family and other relevant people were mentioned specifically. This is in line with Morgan's definition of family (cited in Silva and Smart, 1999). Over the seven cases in which social workers were interviewed the following family and 'wider family' were involved:

Relationship to child	Number of cases
Mother	7
Father	7
Mother's partner	1

Father's ex partner	1
Maternal aunt	4
Paternal aunt	2
Maternal uncle	1
Maternal grandmother	6
Maternal grandfather	2
Paternal grandmother	3
Paternal grandfather	1
Maternal step grandfather	3
Paternal step grandmother	1
Maternal great grandmother	1
Maternal step great grandfather	1
Maternal great uncle	2
Maternal step great aunt	1
Maternal step great uncle	1
Family friend	1

Conversely, where some wider family members were not involved, the social workers interviewed spoke of this being in relation to the parents' own wishes (two cases), distance from the child and parents (four cases), family member illness (one case), and being in prison (one case). It was not always clear whether family who lived at a distance were fully aware of the situation or not, and therefore how much choice they had about whether to become involved.

A combination of reasons for wider family not being involved was given. Social workers who had not had any involvement of wider family were contacted by email and / or phone regarding the reasons for no wider family involvement (page ii, Appendix). Twelve social workers were contacted and five responded. The feedback from these workers was that in two of the cases family members were contacted by the social worker. In one case the maternal grandmother was contacted but was not willing to offer any support and in an another case the maternal grandfather attended the first Child Protection Case Conference saying he was going to be a support to the mother but this did not happen and the mother then had no further contact with him. In this same case two maternal aunts contacted the social worker offering support but then failed to follow up with this. The social worker stated that both gave the impression that they were 'going through the motions' because the mother had put pressure on them to help her to prevent her baby from being adopted. Both were clear that they were not (practically) in a position to help and there was no further contact. The breakdown of reasons for non involvement was family not living in the area (three cases), mental health issues (one case), drug/alcohol issues (three cases), history of sexual abuse (one case), deceased (one case) and parents not wanting family involved (two cases). From the information provided it seems that unless the child's parents are keen for family to be involved, the social workers do not actively seek out family members. This may be due to known risk factors, for example family members being risk factors themselves. As one worker commented, 'I would ...say that I did not put much effort into seeking out members of the wider family'. She then went on to explain that this was due to significant risks associated with the wider family being involved.

Wider family involvement

Wider family members had a number of different roles in their involvement. In all the interviews conducted and in both focus groups, it was clear that social workers were able to identify the multiple and sometimes conflicting roles that family members took.

Within the focus groups, social workers identified that one method of involving wider family members would be to make contact themselves via council records, communication with other agencies and through Family Group Decision Making. One social worker, when interviewed, identified that child protection procedures overruled the parents' wishes for wider family to not be involved, referring to the parents as 'furious' at first that this step had been taken. Aside from this however, the parents involved in the seven cases brought to interview were open to wider family support as a whole. In one case, a particular wider family member was not involved at the parents' request but other wider family was. In these seven cases, either or both parents contacted at least one family member themselves. At times, this led to a domino effect in which this family member introduced another member of the family. Prior to case conferences, it was typical that social workers would meet with the identified wider family members but outside of this, family members often instigated contact with the social worker or the family members' details were given to the social worker. Family group decision making was involved in three of the seven cases, and in each of these instances the worker made contact with family members as is their practice.

The table below outlines the ways that family were involved, as identified by the social workers interviewed. It is worth noting that social workers may have not identified a type of support in interview that was in fact offered.

Type of support	Case no.							Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Offered housing to parent and child	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	4
Attended case conferences	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	5
Attended core groups	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	4
Engaged with Family Group Decision Making	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	2
Development of child plan	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	4
Offered emotional support	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	7
Offered material items	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	2
Gave information to social work	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	5
Reported concerns	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	4
Child care	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	3
Regular contact with child	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
Offered to care for child	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	3
Facilitated contact	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	2
Non specific support offered e.g. 'would help if they could'	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	3

As can be seen from the table above, the most frequent support identified was in relation to wider family having contact with the child and in offering emotional support to the family. Offers to care for the child were only made in three cases. However this needs to be understood in the context that in only four of the cases was there a need for the child to be accommodated out with their parents' care, thus leading to a high percentage of offers of kinship care (75% of cases). Attendance at case conferences was mentioned in five of the seven cases, whereas only four out of seven cases involved family attending core groups. Social workers identified that provision of information to the Children and Families' Department also occurred in five of the seven cases and that family contacted the Department in four of the cases to report concerns.

The perceived impact of wider family involvement

The focus groups were asked about the perceived impact of wider family being involved. It was raised that depending on the dynamics of the family, risk could be reduced or increased by the involvement of wider family. The focus groups identified that wider family can lead to the child remaining at home or that family could offer care to a child who would otherwise be accommodated by the local authority. However they also felt that families can collude, or can actually undermine the parents of the child(ren). They felt that by involving wider family at case conferences, this could put the information out 'in the open' and that this in turn could create a protective factor. A number of ethical issues were discussed by the focus groups; issues of confidentiality of parents' and children's lives, the impact of blame within families, and the potential for an increase in family conflict were all mentioned. Other factors that impacted upon wider family being involved were difficulties in appropriate housing, and family's ability to offer sustained and long terms support. One group argued that sometimes wider family also 'have limited parenting capacity' and can cope for the short term, but that in the long term the child may still be accommodated. Both focus groups identified that practical support and everyday care was often provided by wider family involvement, and one focus group also added that wider family was often involved in attendance at meetings and in offering consistency to the child(ren).

In interview, social workers were asked about the perceived impact of wider family on the child specifically in reference to the 'My World' triangle that was developed further to the implementation of 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (Scottish Government, 2006). The 'My World' triangle has the child at the centre and each side of the triangle looks at different aspects of what a child needs (page vi, Appendix). The findings are presented below under the headings of 'My World' (ibid.).

How I Grow and Develop

In two cases, the wider family impacted by supporting the parent to attend health appointments for the child. In one case, there was reference to the wider family supporting the parent to take their child to the early years centre. In one case, the social worker identified that the wider family helped the child to become more emotionally literate, something both her parents struggled to provide her with: 'she has really comes on a lot in terms of her expression of emotion'. In this same case, the social worker identified that the child had become more confident since having the support of her wider family. Enjoying family and friends was the most widely recognised impact on the child's

development by wider family. In two cases, a wider family member facilitated contact between a child and parent, and in one case a wider family member supported a parent to attend contact who otherwise didn't: 'For a while [the father] seemed to have lost interest in attending contact but his mum collected him and took him and helped him maintain a routine'. In six of the seven cases, wider family had regular contact with the child. However in one of these cases this contact was abruptly stopped due to the wider family member no longer being the kinship carer, and consequently living at a considerable distance from the child. In one of the cases, the mother had prevented the family from being involved and the child was thus unable to enjoy contact with wider family. Subsequently, the mother was no longer caring for her child and the father allowed contact with wider family.

As evidenced above, wider family are perceived by the respondents to impact positively on children's growth and development. For the most part, this was in reference to wider family facilitating contact between children and their parents, and children and wider family.

What I need from the people who look after me

Informal care arrangements within the wider family such as taking a child overnight, or during the day for a few hours was remarked on in two of the cases. Everyday care and help was identified as being provided in five of the cases. In three cases, social workers noted that the parents were offered advice and support as parents, and in a further case the parent was supported to attend parenting classes. The social worker in one case called into question how helpful the advice was that was being offered by the maternal grandmother, given her own poor parenting of her daughter.

Social workers identified that some wider family members themselves posed a risk to the child and this needed to be considered within the context of wider family support. In three cases, there was a significant family member who posed a risk of sexual abuse, and in two of these cases a family member who posed a risk of physical abuse as well. In one of these cases however, one adult who thought that he would be deemed a risk due to his past offences, offered to leave the family home if it allowed the child to be rehabilitated back to their parent's care.

In some cases, wider family were proactively involved as 'gatekeepers' against risk, as one social worker described it. In three cases, wider family reported concerns to the children and families' department, and in one case, a neutral family member became involved in moving an ex partner's belongings to prevent the risk of further domestic violence.

At times, when the child was unable to live with a parent, a family member became involved in predominantly looking after the child. However, in one case the social worker raised concerns about the extent to which this protected the child and on a second case this ultimately broke down because of the conflict that arose within the family.

In two of the cases, wider family provided the social worker with critical information that helped them in their assessment of the child and their family.

In one of the cases, the social worker identified the significance of the wider family playing with the child, that the child 'gets a lot of affection from the family' who spend a lot of time with him.

In one case it was identified as critical to the child that wider family provided information about the family's history, background and beliefs. As the social worker stated: '[The mother] excluded wider family from [the child], so that's cutting off a whole part of [the child's] identity'... 'that sense of belonging is so important to [the child] and often the families we are dealing with are isolated at the outset so the children of those families are even more dependent on their family for their identity, for the sense of belonging'. However, in this same case the wider family also wanted to protect the child by keeping key information about the child's past from her. The social worker faced a lot of challenge in trying to help the family understand the importance of a child understanding their past. Other social workers did not comment on this factor at interview in relation to their specific cases. However in reference to another case a social worker had worked on, the social worker stated that wider family often provided information they were unable to get from elsewhere. She stated that in this case, at the point of applying for permanent substitute family care, 'mum wouldn't tell me who dad was, but granny did'.

Wider family involvement in what children need from those who look after them was found to be extensive in this study. Wider family were involved in a wide range of activities and roles to support the children within their families. At times, wider family assisted parents in meeting their children's needs, and at other were more directly involved.

My wider world

Provision of money and / or resources was mentioned within two cases. In one case this was by providing a car to the parent and in another case this was through material items that the child had lost in a fire.

In three cases, the wider family had offered housing to the parent and child / unborn child. However, in one case the parent decided not to accept this offer and in another case there were concerns about the suitability of the house due to its condition.

In many ways, the fact that wider family was involved could be seen to provide a sense of belonging to the child. In one case this was alluded to in the following way: 'the family rush in like a wall of water, to fill the void that's there...family who were looking to wrap her up and really focus in on her so she really loved that'

Social workers made reference to the 'wider world' less frequently than other aspects of the 'My World' triangle. This may be because of overlapping areas, in particular that of 'support from family, friends and other people'. However, two social workers made specific reference to wider family offering a sense of belonging to the child.

Overall perceptions

The social workers in both the focus groups and in interview were asked what their overall perceptions were of involvement of wider family members. The researchers were interested to note that all participants in the focus groups, all seven social workers interviewed and all five social

workers contacted by phone/email stated that their overall perception was that when family members were involved this was in the main of benefit to the children. There were a number of caveats to this when it was believed that due to known aspects of the wider family's involvement with substance misuse, mental health or sexual abuse the perceived impact would not have been positive. In one case where there was no family involvement the social worker pointed to the mother's mental health issues and due to her threat to try to abduct her child there was too great a risk in involving wider family members who may have disclosed to the mother the child's whereabouts.

A common theme emerged from the different respondents that by involving the family there is "real potential as they can be around when professionals cannot". However two of the social workers interviewed pointed to the fact that it was important to acknowledge that it can be difficult for family members to report to social workers about their relative and that they can't always be trusted to do this. Another three social workers also highlighted the importance of feeling able to trust family members and to be sure that they were able to put the needs of the child first. Four of the social workers spoke of 'intergenerational stuff', and that the grandparents or other siblings may have their own difficulties. One of these workers highlighted that this is the paradox at the heart of involving family members but despite this she felt it was important to do just that. The reason for this was eloquently described by another worker who stated that it is right that we always look to family because it's about what is going to meet this child's needs and give the child a sense of belonging: "if you strip away that sense of belonging to that family I think that's got potential to really do some emotional damage and make it more difficult for the child to cope"

Other examples of the social workers overall perceptions are highlighted in the quotes below:

- 'We probably wouldn't have been aware of the risks initially...if it wasn't for [reported concerns from wider family]'.
- Having family there 'made a real difference to managing risks'.
- I think it was critical in [wider family] giving us information that [the parents] weren't willing to give us. I think it was critical in giving us an insight into some of [the parents'] own circumstances.
- The parent 'would have struggle without [the support] and he knows it and he was very grateful for that'.
- The wider family 'were seen as I suppose, central, integral to the protective factors around' the child...'in full recognition of the issues'.
- '[We] would have taken into account the fact that this woman wasn't isolated, that there were family around who she seemed to rely on and spent time with and that kind of support network was taken into account in terms of the assessment'.

- 'We felt confident that having other people around gave a better chance of someone coming to tell us if they were concerned'.
- 'I think to look at a parent or parents on their own without including their own circle...you can't really do that. You need to look at their experiences'.
- 'At the family group meeting they were able to recognise the risks'.
- 'We would see [wider family support] as a positive and we often look to have FGDM [Family Group Decision Making] meetings to consider how family keep the child safe, even if they are at home not just the accommodation bit'.
- 'We need to try to involve families and encourage the child's parents to be open and honest with their own parents. It works best if the worker can develop a relationship with wider family members. It also helps if family members can see the limitations of the child's parents and can recognise the dangers'.
- 'It is not just about families being there to accommodate the child but about them being there to monitor situations more and being there for the child'.
- 'Essential...for [wider family] to be brought in and be part of [the child protection procedures] and I think it is that clarity and understanding they had [of the concerns] that ended up protecting that baby in the end'.
- There were 'concerns about honesty'.
- 'There was more pressure on me as a worker to be coming up with solutions and those solutions might not always have been agreed with by the wider family'.
- 'Sometimes [wider family involvement] can get in the way, particularly if there is difficult challenging parents that you are working with and they bring an equally challenging [family member]...it just means you have four battling against you as opposed to two'.
- 'The rest of [the] family has a cultural attitude to social work which means they are hostile'.
- The wider family members were 'totally unrealistic and [had] dangerous expectations'.
- You 'need to look closely at the history of family members. They can further de-stabilise the situation'.
- 'Mediation can be difficult'.
- '[It] can be difficult with estranged relationships'.

Despite social workers raising concerns about some of the impact of wider family, every social worker interviewed felt that the overall impact of wider family on their case was positive and in many cases 'critical'. This can be summed up by a quote from one of the social workers: "I think we have to work from the premise of who it is that can support this child and where do we take it from there". This approach is underpinned by the legislative framework of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, and is fundamental to the practice of children and families' social work.

Complexities

As the background literature evidenced, working with family 'practices' (Morgan, 1996; 2004; 2011) can be difficult and complex (Saltiel, 2013; Morris, 2013). Many of these complexities were addressed by the social workers in both interview and the focus groups. It also came to the fore when in contact with social workers who had not had the involvement of wider family on their case. Significant reasons for this non involvement was wider family living at a geographical distance and wider family having their own issues, thus being viewed as potentially part of the problem. A parent and child's right to confidentiality was sometimes at odds with child protection procedures in which the wider family were notified of concerns and some social workers felt that this could further add conflict within families and lead to blame.

Family members were also not always available at the same time, particularly for meetings, or there was a lack of consistency of support by family members. In a number of cases there was such conflict between different sides of the family that separate meetings had to take place. In one case, this was further complicated by wider family members sending threatening messages to a parent.

The level of emotional stress for the wider family was also acknowledged by social workers:

'guilt they felt...because they talked about having made a choice...and if they had had their time again they wouldn't have done that'

When asked about their involvement, social workers felt that at times they did not always seek to involve wider family at an early enough stage but that time was a factor in this because of the importance of developing relationships with wider family members and seeing them separately. This was further complicated where there was hostility by the family towards social work involvement, and social workers recognised that this impacted upon the plans for the child.

At times, further to these relationships having been developed and work undertaken, information came to light that meant plans needed to be changed dramatically. For example, one offer of kinship care was not taken up when the potential kinship carer's own child was accommodated into local authority care. It was recognised that there were often 'intergenerational problems', apparent in both this case and others.

Even when family members were hostile to social workers, it was stressed by workers that family members should be involved. However they pointed out that time restraints from work pressures restricted how much time they could devote to contacting and liaising with family members. This was particularly when a large number of wider family members were involved. As one worker commented 'it takes a lot longer to involve the family as I need to assess the family and manage all the family dynamics'.

Conclusion

Clearly social workers' attitudes to partnership working with families has significantly changed since the early study published by Her Majesty's Stationary Office in 1995. No social worker raised concerns that involving wider family would lead to poorer outcomes for children. All the social workers interviewed in relation to specific cases were able to evidence the significance of wider family involvement. Many of the benefits came as a result of much work with wider family members through their attendance, participation in plans and being made aware of concerns. It was recognised that this was time consuming. Sometimes this level of work was not undertaken for a number of reasons such as family already being involved and aware of concerns, geographical distance or due to social worker 'factoring out' some family members because of their perceived negative influence. This could be an area of further study, as to what level social workers exert control in 'managing' what family is involved or not. Due to the limits of the study and the number of factors involved in child protection procedures, it is not possible to evidence whether outcomes were better due to wider family involvement. However, the perception of the social workers interviewed was that there were positive outcomes despite some of the complex circumstances and risks.

Research focused on children and families' social work inevitably identifies time as a factor that would improve outcomes, and this is indeed something that would likely benefit workers in involving wider family. However, it is recognised also that family group decision making teams are not being used to their full potential or sometimes at the optimum stage in the child protection process. This has been raised in both the literature review and in the research study itself. Furthermore, it is not something specifically identified within policy at either local or national government level. Perhaps this needs further exploration so that social workers are encouraged to use the family group decision making team more effectively or to approach other teams who are resourced to offer such support. Within the City of Edinburgh Council, the newly created Multi-Systemic Family Therapy team and Family Solutions are two such teams in existence.

Those social workers who were interviewed put in variable levels of effort and commitment to include wider family from needing to do very little, to meeting each member individually and with others on multiple occasions. However, the child remained at the centre of every interview and social workers expressed their willingness to offer as much commitment as was required if it benefited the child.

As one social worker concluded:

'You could have a wider family that is supportive or you could have a wider family that is ambivalent or you could have a wider family that is part of the problem...there are risks involved in involving the wider family...but it's right that we always look to family'.

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APPENDIX

Focus Group Questions

1. When we refer to wider family what does this mean to you?
2. In your day to day practice in cases where children's names are on the Child Protection Register, in what ways do you seek to ensure the involvement of wider family?
3. What amount of effort would you put into initially involving wider family members where first involved / where a child's name is placed on the CPR?
4. How much effort would you put into keeping families involved where a child's name is placed on the CPR?
5. What impact do you think wider family can have for children whose names are on the CPR?
 - How has involvement helped or hindered progress?
 - What are your reasons for giving this answer?
 - Could you share examples?
6. What do you understand to be the Children and Families' Department's view of involving families where the child is on the CPR?
 - What has informed this view?
7. Are there any other aspects of wider family involvement where the child is on the CPR that you would like to add?

Information and Questions for Social Workers where wider family were not involved

I am a senior practitioner based in the South Neighbourhood children and families team. I am undertaking a piece of practitioner led research together with my colleague Becky Dunn. Our research aims to investigate the role of the wider family of children on the CP register within the city of Edinburgh Council. This has come about through the Children and Families Practice panel in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh.

The research project aims to help inform social workers when carrying out their work in child protection. It aims to share information about current practice and about the perceived impact of involving wider family members in the child protection process. The remit of the project covers the last 20-30 children who have been removed from the CP register in the last six months. To enable us to undertake this work we have been given access to Child Protection records and note that you are the allocated worker for child/children who have been recently removed from the register.

We are specifically looking to interview social workers who have worked with wider family members to find out their experiences of this. On looking at child protection reports, child plans and core group minutes we have not determined that wider family are involved in this case. If however this is not the case and wider family were involved we would like to interview you. This would take no more than one hour.

If the information we have looked at is correct and no wider family were involved we would really appreciate it if you could answer the following questions.

*Can you tell us what was the reason that wider family members were not involved in the child protection process?

(Depending on your answer to the above the rest of these questions may not be applicable)

*How much effort would you say you put into to try to get wider family members involved in this case?

*Is there anything else you would like to add about the involvement of wider family members in this case or any other child protection cases you are involved.

I would like to assure you that your replies are completely confidential and not attributed to any one individual. We will of course send you a copy of our completed research which should be available at the end of November

Thank you for your time

Lesley Henderson

Information Sheet for social workers being interviewed

Project Title

What is the role of the 'wider family' in the child protection process?

Invitation

You are being asked to take part in a research study that looks at the involvement of the wider family where children's names are placed on the child protection register.

This interview forms part of a piece of practitioner research that is being undertaken by senior practitioner Lesley Henderson and social worker Becky Dunn. Both practitioners work for the Children and Families' Department. The project is affiliated with Edinburgh University and has been approved by Edinburgh Council's ethics committee.

You were specifically invited further to one of your cases being randomly selected from across the City of Edinburgh Council as a case in which a child was recently de-registered from the Child Protection Register and where initial observations suggest that wider family were involved.

This study is not about evaluating your practice as a social worker. Our objective is to look at the following areas:

1. In what ways social workers have tried to involve wider family members;
2. To what extent wider family members have been involved; and
3. Where wider family members have been involved, what is the perceived impact of their involvement?

Time Commitment

The commitment is to one interview during work time, and will take no longer than an hour

Participants' Rights

You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time and without explanation. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to what point be withdrawn / destroyed.

You have the right to have your questions answered. If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask the researcher before the study begins.

Confidentiality / Anonymity

The data we collect does not contain any personal information about you and interviews will be recorded numerically rather by name of interviewee. The interviews will be recorded , transcribed and stored on the council laptops. The recordings will be deleted once transcribed.

The research will be written up as a paper that will be distributed within the council. Before this is done, you will be emailed a copy of the proposed final version. If you are unhappy with any part of

this that relates to your interview e.g an anonymised quotation being used, this will be removed / amended at your request. Per

For Further Information

Practice Team Manager for South Neighbourhood Andy McWhirter will be happy to answer any questions about this study at any time. You can contact him at Captain's Road Social Work Centre, 40 Captain's Road, Edinburgh, EH17 8QF. You can also contact him by telephone at 0131 529 5300, or by email andrew.mcwhirter@edinburgh.gov.uk.

Questionnaire for social workers interviewed where wider family was involved

1. Can you give me a brief summary of the case?
2. At what point did you first become involved in the case?
 - What family was involved at this point?
 - If wider family were involved how had they become involved?
 - What was their involvement at this time?
3. In what ways did you seek to involve wider family –
 - a. Before registration
 - b. During the registration period
 - c. After de-registration?
 - Did you meet with the wider family prior to the Initial Child Protection Case Conference?
 - Did the wider family attend the ICPC?
 - Did the wider family attend core groups?
4. What influence did the wider family have on the creation and development of the child protection plan?
 - To what extent were wider family consulted about what role they would be having?
5. What were the relationships like between:
 - a. You and the wider family?
 - b. The child and the wider family?
 - c. The parents and the wider family?
 - To what extent was it difficult to manage the relationships?
6. With reference to the 'My World' triangle, what was the impact of the wider family on:
 - a. The child?
 - b. The parents?
 - How did this impact change over time?
7. Did different wider family members become involved over the period of registration?
8. How able were wider family to sustain their involvement over the period of registration?
9. In your view, how helpful was the involvement of wider family in this case during the period of registration?
10. In your view, how helpful in general is it to involve wider family where the child is on the child protection register?

Anything else you would like to add of relevance?

My World triangle

