

Post Qualifying

**Research Methods Programme provided by
Ulster University and employer organisations**

Research and Evaluation Studies Undertaken

2018-2019 as part of the

**“ Research and Evaluation Methods in
Social Work Module” (SWK752 Module)**

&

**“Research and Evaluation to
Inform Social Work (SWK754)**

Abstracts

2019

Preface

Social Work Research Methods Programme

The Research Methods Programme provides two postgraduate, post qualifying modules for social workers approved by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council as part of the Professional in Practice Framework:

- The Evidence–Informed Professional and Organisation (SWK 751)
- Research and Evaluation Methods in Social Work (SWK 752)

The programme provides three modules for users of social care services and their families:

- Using Evidence to Inform Professionals and Organisations (SWK 753)
- Research and Evaluation Methods to Inform Social Work (SWK 754)
- Innovation and Co-production in Social Work Research (SWK 755)

The modules for social workers are accredited by the professional regulatory body, the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, and enable candidates to gain Requirements of the Professional in Practice Framework as detailed below. They require employer support and post-qualifying practice experience for entry. They are designed particularly for Senior Practitioners, training officers and other experienced social workers to gain knowledge and skills in using evidence to inform their practice and service development in their organisation. These modules achieve credit towards the Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma and MSc in *Professional Development in Social Work*.

The modules for service users and carers equip them to carry out roles in developing social care research, such as membership of research committees and grant awarding panels. These modules achieve credit towards the Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma.

All modules are 60-credit Level 7 (postgraduate) modules and are designed to develop knowledge and skills relevant to social work research-related activity and culture in Northern Ireland in support of the *Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2015-2020* (Health & Social Care Board, 2015).

Research and Evaluation Methods in Social Work module (SWK 752) Research Evaluation Methods to Inform Social Work module (SWK 754)

These modules require the 'Evidence' Module (SWK751 or SWK753 or equivalent) as a pre-requisite for entry. Candidates build on the literature review undertaken during that module (or equivalent) to undertake a work-based research, service evaluation or professional audit project agreed with line management. Candidates develop knowledge and skills in designing and managing a project that will support robust, evidence-based development of professional practice and services. An additional booklet on the outcomes from these modules will be produced and placed on <http://www.ulster.ac.uk/dare>.

Learning Outcomes

- Demonstrate competence, leadership and initiative in negotiating and collaborating with a range of stakeholders and fostering reciprocal relationships in undertaking a research, audit or evaluation project relevant to their role.
- Create a focussed and answerable research, evaluation or audit question which addresses a practice issue, using informed judgement to select an appropriate methodology.
- Negotiate complex ethical and governance arrangements to secure approval for an innovative project and access to data.
- Gather relevant data in accordance with a rigorous research methodology.
- Analyse the data and interpret the findings in the context of current literature and policy by writing a postgraduate dissertation which makes worthwhile recommendations for service improvement in line with organisational and social work principles.
- Influence change through delivering an oral presentation to managers, professionals and service users which critically appraises and applies knowledge from the project to inform practice.

Both modules have identical, joint classroom teaching; require the same academic entry requirements, and require similar assessment. They are designed to contribute to improving our Social Work Services to individuals and families by improving knowledge and skills, service quality and the effectiveness of organisations delivering social care services. The module runs for one academic year from September to September each year.

This document provides full abstracts and contact details for those who undertook research and evaluation module of the post qualifying course between 2018/19. To obtain copies of the research and evaluation studies please contact the individuals directly. Contact details are included on each abstract. Electronic versions of the abstracts are also available on the University website <http://www.ulster.ac.uk/dare>.

[Abstracts from the academic year 2016 onwards are also available in this website. See pages 18-19 of this document for a list of names, project titles and contact details.](#)

This report will also be placed on the Northern Ireland SCIE page under Evidence, Innovation and Quality Improvement.

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Title of Study

How does the “Heart of Living and Dying” conversation enable people to talk about death and dying and support them to plan ahead?

Abstract

Context

Advance Care Planning (ACP) is one of the four priorities of the Regional Palliative Care Programme Board but the literature identifies issues regarding timing of when it’s introduced as well as gaps in health and social care professionals’ knowledge, skills and confidence in relation to its use. The Heart of Living and Dying (HLD) group process is an initiative which brings ACP into the public domain, encouraging everyone to consider their hopes, preferences, wishes and then plan ahead for their final years. This evaluation considers if it addresses those issues of “timing” and “health and Social care professionals confidence of ACP.

Methodology and Methods

This service evaluation was informed by qualitative data which was gathered from five focus groups comprised of people who had participated in the HLD. An aide memoire was used to guide the discussions in order to capture their experiences and views of any impact which they perceived the HLD had on them. Data from the focus groups was recorded and transcribed and uploaded to Nvivo software. Thematic analysis was applied and themes were identified and discussed with reference to any current research, legislation and policies. Based on the evidence, conclusions were drawn and recommendations made about its application to practice.

The study was co-designed with a service user advisor, including the aim and objectives of the study and the aide memoire for the focus groups. The service user advisor independently coded a randomly selected transcript and also advised on the findings of this study.

Findings: Thematic analysis identified three key themes:

- Participants require a strong sense of emotional safety in order to have such sensitive conversations.
- Health and Social Care Professionals reported that their experience of participating in the HLD increased their confidence in relation to offering and facilitating ACP conversations.
- For most participants, planning ahead is a complex, staged process rather than a single record making event and reported that their experience of the HLD gave them a renewed focus on how they want to live their lives now.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This service evaluation confirms the difficulty of finding the right time to conduct ACP conversations.

The HLD supports people to reflect on their own living and dying and to begin to plan ahead for their final years.

Given that the HLD group process was perceived to enhance confidence of professionals, consideration should be given to its inclusion as a topic within the original ACP training.

Findings indicate a positive effect from having these conversations in a group setting rather than one to one. A group approach to ACP could be worth further exploration.

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Title of Study	Getting co-production off the ground: The experience of service users and social workers who have tried
Abstract	

Context

The term coproduction has recently re-emerged in Northern Ireland health and social care policy and there is a renewed interest in supporting the meaningful involvement of service users in statutory social services. Opportunities are available for service users to get involved in more ways and at more levels than before. This means increasing expectations that social workers involve service users in a way beyond what the profession traditionally considered as partnership approaches. The study provides some insight into the experiences of service users who have availed of opportunities to become involved in coproduction type activities with statutory social services. It also draws on the direct practice experience of social workers who work to involve service users in a variety of ways in their efforts to make coproduction a mainstream activity in social work practice.

Methodology and Methods

The paper reports on a small-scale, coproduced qualitative study that explores the implementation of coproduction in statutory social services. A group of service users who have a range of coproduction experience informed the research design and the analysis phase of the study was conducted in partnership with one member of the group.

The study involved thirteen participants in twelve semi-structured interviews: six service users and seven professionally qualified social workers. The qualitative data from interviews was collected systematically and findings were organised into key themes using computer based data analysis software.

Findings

From the study findings, three main categories are identified and discussed, these are; meaningful involvement, challenges/barriers and work place culture. Although, there were diverse experiences in terms of how meaningful the process was, it was evident that coproduction has potential to empower service users and social workers to collectively make positive differences in the planning, design and delivery of social support services. The study also finds a range of challenges and barriers that are well established in previous research, that unaddressed will slow or even deter progress to the implementation of coproduction as a mainstream social work activity. An overwhelming finding related to the current climate in which social workers practice, a combination of work pressures and lack of time to build relationships with service users greatly affects their capacity to integrate the approach into their practice.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although, this was a small study, it provided a platform for service users and social workers to voice their experiences of coproduction. Whilst mainly positive, the critical perspectives give an insight into what is not working and will inform innovative and creative ways to overcome them. It is evident that the workforce is under major pressure and that more resourcing and funding is needed to sustain social work support services. It was clear that social workers are concerned about paperwork and processes detracting from time with service users. Organisational support is required to address the issues raised and enable social workers to have the time and space required to develop coproduction as a core social work method. Alongside this, further research with a focus on outcomes is needed considering what works and why and if the inclusion of service users made any difference to the outcome.

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Title of Study

Foster Carers' Experiences of the Role of their Personal Support Networks in Helping Develop Resilience.

Abstract

Context

Foster carers undertake a vital role in caring for children who cannot live with birth family. Fostering agencies face challenges recruiting and retaining foster carers whilst the numbers of children requiring foster placements continues to rise annually. In this context, this study explored the role of foster carers' natural support systems through family and friends in helping them to develop resilience, to provide insight into how agencies might harness this support and recommendations for practice.

Methodology and Methods

This was a qualitative study which used purposive sampling to recruit a sample of eleven experienced foster carers from one HSC Trust. An Aide Memoire was devised and semi-structured interviews were conducted which explored concepts around resilience, the challenges of fostering and how foster carers experienced the role of their families and friends in providing support. The data from the semi-structured interviews was transcribed from voice recordings and analysed using Thematic Analysis, assisted by the NVivo software to facilitate coding and identification of themes.

Findings

Results indicated that most foster carers in the study had a personal and familial view of their own resilience and considered their experiences of fostering enhanced this, alongside training. The ending of child placements impacted on this. Most of the foster carers experienced positive input from family. Adult children of foster carers were particularly helpful to many participants and some became good advocates for fostering. Where participants had support from friends, these tended to be current or former foster carers and an understanding of the fostering role was a key measure of the effectiveness of the support. Life stages affected the availability of this support. Relationships with professionals were very important and one professional could impact positively or negatively on the motivation to continue to foster.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions include recommendations for practice in the areas of professional relationships and information provision, refreshing training, harnessing the input of adult children of foster carers, keeping quality of support networks under review and considering ways to increase such support. Further longitudinal research exploring the process of developing resilience with a less experienced cohort and a wider study, involving participants from all five Trusts and the independent sector could provide additional insights.

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Title of Study

Parent perspectives on family based short breaks in The Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

Abstract

Context

There is a disparity in the provision of short breaks to children with a disability and their families in Northern Ireland. The Southern Health and Social Care Trust offer a range of short Break provision which includes family based short breaks. Family based short breaks allow a child with a disability to spend time in a home of an approved carer affording carers a break from their caring role. There is a dearth of research pertaining to short breaks including family based short breaks in Northern Ireland and the potential impact, if any, this has for the child and their families.

This report details an evaluation that was completed with parents of children availing of family based short breaks within the Southern Health and Social Care trust.

Methodology and Methods

The use of qualitative research methods allowed the rich and meaningful real life experience of 11 respondents to be captured via semi structured interviews. Thematic analysis of data using NVivo has resulted in 4 clear themes.

Findings

- Respondents feel short breaks are useful and provides them with a much needed break from their caring role.
- Findings suggest regular family based short breaks provide benefits for parental health and wellbeing and can have benefits for relationships within families.
- Parental anxiety remains as families fear the impact of not having short breaks in the future.
- Respondents are satisfied with the service they receive but have made suggestions for service improvements and have identified gaps in the provision.
- Respondents feel a package of support is invaluable

Conclusions and Recommendations

While this was a small localised evaluation the findings of this evaluation echo that of research of other forms of short breaks and other interventions which support families of children who have a disability.

The evaluation has provided a baseline of the usefulness of family based short breaks in this area and makes recommendations on a local, regional and strategic level and reinforces the need for services to be delivered in response to individual need.

Name of researcher	Janet Johnstone
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Title of Study**Experiences of adoption disruption in Northern Ireland: the parents' perspective****Abstract****Context**

Adoption today can present major parenting challenges due to the impact of trauma experienced by most children who become adopted (Selwyn, 2014). A small number of families experience a disruption in their adoption. There is concern that this number will grow. Most research studies examining adoption disruption attempt to answer questions about prevalence or cause. Little is known about what the breakdown of an adoption is like as a lived experience. This qualitative study examined disruptions that occurred in thirteen established adoptive families in Northern Ireland from the perspective of the adoptive parents, with the aim of providing practitioners with insights that will inform policy and practice.

Methodology and Methods

Ethical approval was sought and granted by the Ulster University Research Ethics Committee. Semi-structured interviews were used with a purposive sample of parents from thirteen families who had experienced an adoption disruption. The recorded data gathered was transcribed, coded and thematically analysed using NVivo software.

Findings**Parenting challenges**

Child aggression and violence were common along with very controlling behaviours. Girls in their early teens were at risk of sexual exploitation. Social media was a major concern. The influence of birth family was present in many cases.

The role of social services

Lack of preparation for the challenges faced and missing information at matching were reported by parents. Other common themes were inadequate support and judgemental attitudes from many professionals as well as a lack of continuity among support workers.

How the breakdown came about

Key factors: the likelihood of serious harm to family members; excessive stress to parents and extreme disruption to family life; the inability to keep the child safe; the child wanted to leave; parents' support networks disappeared; the lack of professional support.

The adopted child in care

Were mostly voluntarily accommodated in foster, residential and secure care. Parents wanted, but found it difficult, to work in partnership with the Trust. They felt disempowered as parents.

The impact on family life

Parents experienced prolonged fear, stress, guilt and grief which impacted negatively on health, relationships and work. Siblings were also affected as well as other family members and friends.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The presence of *fear* leading to a lack of *trust*, resulting in the need to *control* characterized all the key players in this study: children, parents and social workers. Creating a place of safety is a core condition for therapeutic adoptive parenting and for the services tasked with supporting adoptive families.

To improve the lives of children and families living with severe challenges, the cycle of fear must be broken, and trust built with families through:

- honest and open practices at every stage of the adoption journey: recruitment, preparation, matching, placement and support
- a respectful, working partnership between parents and competent, trauma-informed workers

This study explored adoption disruption from one perspective only, that of parents. Other research is required to capture views from agencies and the adopted person.

Name of researcher	Elizabeth Lyttle
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Title of Study

‘My experience of school’ – The perspectives of adoptees aged 16-21 years.

Abstract

Context

As an adoptive parent, qualified teacher and trainer for Adoption UK, the researcher has become increasingly aware that school can pose considerable challenges for adopted young people and their families. A recent UK wide survey conducted by Adoption UK (2017) (www.adoptionuk.org) revealed that adopted children were permanently excluded from school at a rate of just over 20 times that of the general pupil population and were five times more likely to receive a fixed term exclusion.

As there is currently no systematic gathering of data on adopted children in schools in Northern Ireland, research is required to investigate their experience, identify challenges they may face and make evidence-informed recommendations.

Methodology and Methods

This qualitative research focused on capturing the voice of adopted young people. Data was gathered through semi-structured, one to one, face to face interviews with nine adoptees.

Participants had been adopted from care in UK and attended mainstream school in Northern Ireland for at least one year. Interviews were conducted and transcribed by the researcher and thematic analysis applied using NVivo software. Common themes were identified and discussed in line with current research, legislation and policies in order to draw conclusions and form evidence-based recommendations.

Findings

The main findings correlated to those of a systematic review of evidence conducted by the researcher in 2018 and can be categorised under the following key headings; the impact of being an adoptee, the adoptee in school and the teachers' approach.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study found that whilst every adoptee's journey is unique, it can be the case that they face major challenges in the school environment as a result of the ongoing impact of their early life experiences. How the adults around them respond can have huge influence over how these challenges go on to impact their experiences of school. The research highlighted that not every school responds appropriately, and this can have a devastating impact on the adoptee's emotional well-being and their ability to thrive in the school environment. Adolescence was identified as a particularly challenging time for post adoption support teams have a vital role to play in preparing for and supporting adoptees and their families through this potentially difficult time. The urgent need for training on the impact of developmental trauma and attachment for all adults working with adoptees in an educational and family setting was identified.

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Research and Evaluation Studies 2018

Title	Reviewer	Organisation	Email address
What works best when completing Pre-Birth Risk Assessments ? Social Workers' perspective	Jane Hindes	Southern HSCT	Jane.hindes@setrust.hscni.net
Does a Practice Learning Opportunity increase a student Social Workers Emotional Intelligence?	Robby Nelson	Southern HSCT	robby.nelson@setrust.hscni.net
An evaluation of social work in involving patients with Dementia in decisions related to hospital discharge	Robyn Lennox	Northern HSCT	Robyn.lennox@northertrust.hscni.net
Self-Harm and Adolescence	Elaine Pollock	Southern HSCT	Elaine.pollock@setrust.hscni.net
A service evaluation to examine the impact of implementing a new Scaled Inspection Tool (S.I.T) on inspectors	Suzanne Cunningham	RQIA	suzanne.cunningham@rqia.org.uk
Do service user and practitioner training in co-production enable service improvement within health and social care?	Sonia Patton	Service User	sjpatton924@gmail.com

Research and Evaluation Studies 2017

Title	Reviewer	Organis- ation	Email address
Staff experience and perceptions of assessing individuals with a dual sensory loss and learning disability	Liz Tanner	Southern HSCT	liz.tanner@southerntrust.hscni.net
Restorative approaches with families in elder abuse	Carole Kirk	Northern HSCT	carole.kirk@northerntrust.hscni.net
Developing team resilience as a strategy to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue in a statutory residential child setting implementing therapeutic practices	Adrian Graham	South Eastern HSCT	adrian.graham@setrust.hscni.net
Ageing out from foster care, the support and experience of young people	Franz Kavanagh	South Eastern HSCT	francis.kavanagh@yahoo.co.uk
Female care leavers' experience of the staff-child relationship while living in an intensive support children's home in Northern Ireland	Jenni Rice	South Eastern HSCT	jennifer.rice@setrust.hscni.net
Fitness4Survivors: A pilot study examining the impact of a 10-week CrossFit exercise program on fitness and quality of life with teenager and young adult cancer survivors in Northern Ireland	Simon Darby	Belfast HSCT and CLIC Sargent	Simon.Darby@clicsargent.org.uk

Research and Evaluation Methods in Social Work Module (SWK 752)

Research Evaluation Methods to Inform Social Work Module (SWK 753)

Contacts

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<p>Programme Secretary</p> <p>Ms Emma Craig Administrator Ulster University Tel: 028 9036 6554</p> <p>pgresearchmethods@ulster.ac.uk</p>	<p>School Office</p> <p>Research for the School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences Room 17G07 Ulster University Shore Road Newtownabbey BT37 0QB</p> <p>www.ulster.ac.uk</p>

Improving and Safeguarding Social Wellbeing : A Strategy for Social Work 2012-2022 **Strategic Priority 3** adding value, delivering outcomes places a focus on continuous improvement and a focus on demonstrating outcomes and learning from practice.

The Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2015-2020

Priority 4 placed importance on recognising, valuing and maintaining the skill base of those social work practitioners who have already acquired academic credit for research.

Priority 6 is to ensure the experience and knowledge of social workers, service users and carers are used in research evaluation and audit.

Strategic Priority 7 is to ensure that research related activity promotes the principles and practice of personal and public involvement, equality and human rights. The Research Methods Programme utilises these skills through the provision of mentoring, supervision and the provision of teaching inputs on recognised courses for the benefit of other practitioners, service users and carers wishing to engage in research activity.

The Strategy is available at <http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/swresearch/>

The module supports the vision of the: Improving and Safeguarding Social Wellbeing: A Strategy for Social Work in NI 2010 - 2022) available at <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/improving-and-safeguarding-social-wellbeing-strategy-social-work-northern-ireland>

Notes:

