THE IRISH REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LAW AND POLICY

The Irish Review of Community Economic Development Law and Policy is an online journal, published four times a year by the Northside Community Law Centre, in Coolock, Dublin. The journal seeks to offer a platform for interaction that encourages greater scholarly and academic collaboration in the areas of social policy, law and community development, promoting the practice of CED law and policy in Ireland and learn about these initiatives in other countries.

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THE IRISH REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LAW AND POLICY

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EDITORIAL

Colin Daly & Maria Antonieta Nestor

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With the advent of the children's referendum to take place in Ireland in the near future, and grateful to the suggestions of Ciarán de Buis, Director of Start Strong, we are delighted to present the second issue of The Irish Review of CED Law and Policy, which focuses on the theme of children.

Our call for submissions on topics exploring the links and boundaries between CED law and policy with the general theme of children received submissions from Ireland, Russia and the Philippines.

We discovered that the breadth of topics related to children and which CED law and policy touches upon is much broader than envisaged. The articles published are a small reflection of this and hopefully they will open the path for further interest in the area.

In this edition we begin with three articles describing how certain programmes aimed at early years interventions are working on the ground. These articles highlight how the outcome of such interventions can influence the formulation of CED policies, particularly how they positively impact children, their parents and their communities. The first article by Dr. Pauline McClenaghan evaluates the Growing Child Parenting Programme by describing the scientific evidence underlying the programme, outlines the fully-experimental longitudinal evaluative study before moving on to the analysis of its impact on children’s development and how it can influence policy.

The following article by Dr. Sean McDonnell and Lorraine Kennedy speaks to us about the impact of community cohesion on parenting practice in the form of a research study carried out in West Dublin, research that examines the unique combined effects of neighbourhood characteristics on parental behaviour, noting the reasons as to why the development of services that support families within communities is important. This study complements the next article written by Ellen Twist, Sean McDonnell and Lorraine Kennedy which offers an exploration of the outcomes of a pilot evaluation of the Incredible Years Parent and Babies Programme providing further research-based evidence for future policy formation.

We then move to Russia and Ms. Natasha Kravchuk offers her views as to how children’s participation should become a priority for government policy while discussing the relationship between the realisation of the right of the child to express his/her views and democracy. Together, these articles remind us that CED policies that benefit children’s development should be viewed as a whole and not just as part of separate components. It suggests, investing in early childhood education and the overall development of children should be part of how CED develops.
In relation to the lawyering aspects of CED law, Professor Ursula Kilkelly informs us of the new Child Law Clinic at University College Cork and how it is operating. We have also decided to republish Dorcas Gilmore’s article relating to the setting up of youth entrepreneurship legal services as it provides us with a reminder of how young people can contribute to their community and our responsibility to develop their entrepreneurial skills.

We finally wrap up our issue with Dr. Joe Larray’s review of the book Towards a Second Republic, written by Peadar Kirby and Mary P. Murphy providing further food for thought in relation to the type of society we want to create for future generations and society in general.

In conclusion, we observe that CED law and policy, particularly the formulation and application of research-based policies, can make a difference not only in children’s lives but also in their local communities and among their families. In this regard, CED law and policy acts as a backdrop, providing further support for ensuring children’s lives and their rights are respected and enabling them, as they grow, to have a voice and a place in which they can develop their potential.

Le Meas.

The Editors

Colin Daly and Maria Antonieta Nestor
LIFESTART: EDUCATING PARENTS, DEVELOPING CHILDREN

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Abstract

This paper examines the evidence base informing the context, structure and delivery mechanism of the Lifestart Growing Child parenting programme and home-visitation service offered in communities in 20 areas in Ireland and outlines the fully experimental longitudinal evaluative study, currently in progress, that is assessing the impact of the Lifestart programme and service on parental efficacy and child development outcomes.

Keywords

Child development, family context, home-learning environment, parent education, home-visitation.
Introduction

Educational research has for decades consistently demonstrated that the foundations for learning are constructed in the earliest months and years of life when human brain development is most rapid and when synaptic patterns1 that organise and structure learning are formed (Davies 1999). It is also in early life that children acquire the competence and coping skills that affect their life trajectories (Barlow & Parsons 2002; Brooker 2008). These findings have been supported by an increasing volume of empirical evidence that confirms that early childhood experiences and, in particular, a child’s relationship with its parent/care-givers has important influence on his/her future physical, intellectual, psychological, economic and social well-being (Blout 1989; Engle 1999; McCain & Mustard 1999; Webster-Stratton 2001; Place et al 2002; Newman 2002; National Conjoint Committee 2002; Rogoff 2003; Schweinhar 2004; Appleyard et al 2005; Abbot & Langston 2005; Bamford et al 2006; Evans 2006; Heckman 2006a; Flett 2008). Given appropriate care in the earliest phases of life children make remarkable strides in physical and motor development, in linguistic and cognitive functioning, in emotional and social skills and in regulatory capacities (Grover 2005). Appropriate care crucially includes a stimulating and responsive interactive relationship with and attachment to a caring adult. And while early childhood experiences may not set ‘an indelible blueprint’ for adult wellbeing, the first months and years of life have been shown to provide ‘a sturdy or fragile base’ for all that follows, up to and including adulthood (Shonkoff & Phillips 2000).

Material disadvantage and economic hardship have been shown to negatively impact, to a highly significant extent, on child development and learning outcomes. Yet the research also shows that parenting is an important proximal variable2; one that can militate against adverse childhood outcomes and improve future life chances. Hence while the environment is key to development in early life, relationships are at its core and we tend to understand the most significant of these relationships in terms of ‘the family’. But the family, as Jagger & Wright point out, is neither a pan-human universal nor a stable or essential entity. It is ‘flexible, fluid and contingent’ (1999, 3) and understandings of childhood, as well as child rearing practices, vary across societies and cultures (Jenks 1996; Alanen 1988; Kagitcibasi 2007; Pence, A. R & Hix-small 2007). The research shows, however, that close familial-type relations, in whatever form they take, are crucial to the well-being of children. Familial processes are foundational to identity formation, interpersonal connectedness, cultural belonging and social embeddedness. Early learning within the family determines how children view and define self, how they handle interpersonal and social relations and how they engage with the world; and these experiences within families help to shape and channel children’s innate biological characteristics into cultural paths (Shweder 1995, Pence & Nsamenang 2008).

Yet of all social institutions, the family is the one that has been most affected by various changes taking place in the contemporary world. Families today are very different from families of even a generation ago (Evans 2006). In some societies and communities, families are struggling with economic, social and political conditions that are undermining their ability to give appropriate support to young children. In others, the OECD countries especially, the current generation is the first in which a majority of children are spending a large part of their early childhoods in some form of childcare rather than with their own families in their own homes. Regardless of the time parents now get to spend with their children, in all societies and communities customary parenting patterns, traditional child rearing practices and family norms are being disrupted by economic and social change. The experiential hands-on training

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1 Connections between nerve cells - see footnote 5.
2 A variable is something that can be changed, such as a characteristic or value. Variables are generally used in psychology experiments to determine if changes to one thing result in changes to another. A proximal variable is a variable which mediates between other variables e.g. Poverty effects on child development are mediated (and therefore influenced) by the quality of parenting.
parents in the past received from extended family members or from cultural or religious traditions are now largely unavailable to the majority of contemporary parents, at a time when the quality of parent-child interactions are being increasingly identified as crucial to child learning and development outcomes, to childhood health and educational achievement, to future adult well-being, employment status and opportunity and to citizenship participation and social engagement.

Increased knowledge about the factors influencing childhood learning and development has made parenting an important topic in scientific, educational and policy research and supporting parents is now an international imperative embedded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which states that while the family is responsible for guaranteeing a child’s rights, families must be supported in this role by the State (Article 18.2). Many policy makers in Britain and Ireland now look to parenting support targeted at families ‘at risk’ as an important preventive social intervention aimed at reducing the economic and social costs of poverty and inequality. Developing the optimal conditions for early childhood development is viewed by many as ‘one of the best investments a country can make if it is to compete in a global economy based on the strength of its human capital’ (Moreno & van Dongen 2007) and these optimal conditions include (1) integrating learning with all aspects of child care and (2) enhancing the pedagogical role of parents. Working to produce these two conditions, within the home and family context, is the aim of the Lifestart Foundation.

The Lifestart Foundation is an Irish voluntary body working to produce better child development outcomes by educating parents on how young children develop and learn. The Growing Child programme, licensed by the Foundation, is a parent-directed child-centred structured curriculum of information, knowledge and practical learning activity for the parents of children from birth up to five years of age. The programme incorporates the latest knowledge, information and techniques relevant to the promotion of child development, health and well-being and it provides parents with an in-depth month by month view of child development, covering all facets of development and learning: physical, emotional, intellectual, creative and social. Trained and qualified family visitors make evidence-based knowledge available and accessible to parents by visiting them in their own homes to explain and discuss their child’s development.

**Early Childhood Development**

The Lifestart programme is grounded in culturally relevant theoretical principles and research on early childhood learning and development. The programme draws on insights from a wide range of disciplines and perspectives in child development theory aimed at explaining cognitive, emotional and social development in children, child language acquisition and learning, and the emergence of the concept of self and the formation of identity in early life. Much of this theorising has been dominated by developmental psychology (Piaget 1952, Erikson 1968, Kohlberg 1966, Vygotsky 1978a, Bronfenbrenner 1979, Bruner 1986, Bandura 1986) but has more recently also been informed by advances in biology and neuroscience that link brain development and learning to the interactions between biology and lived experience (Shonkoff & Phillips 2000, Johnston 2005, Kuhl & Rivera-Gaxiola 2008), and by new paradigm sociological approaches to the study of childhood (James, Jenks & Prout 1998, Corsaro 1997, Jenks 1996, Qvortrup et al 1994, Waksler 1991) which understand childhood as a social construction and which see children as social actors and meaning-makers, ‘active in the construction and determination of their own social lives and the lives of those around them’ (Prout & James 1990, 8).
Developmental Stages

Piagetian constructivist models of human development assume that children actively engage with their physical and social environment, constructing cognitive models to make sense of their world, gradually acquiring increased sophistication in their intellectual, social and moral reasoning and understanding. This process of development, change and transformation is conceptualised in terms of a sequence of age-approximate stages reflecting interactions between maturational processes and children's progressive structuring and restructuring of their experiences, as they attempt to assimilate or accommodate the world into the mental models or schemata they have created to impose order on their experiences. Other important stage theorists include Kohlberg (1981) who applied this approach to an understanding of moral development and Erikson (1968) who applied it to personal and social development. Developmental psychology has tended to view these stages as 'natural' progressive sequences in children's physical, mental, cognitive, socio-emotional and moral development and therefore as invariant and universal; an interpretation of Piaget's work that has had a very profound and, sometimes inappropriate, influence on the design of educational systems and child welfare programmes. One facet of the critique of stage theory has been the perspective's tendency to conceive of very young children as passive recipients of care and in doing so to position them as 'potential citizens' rather than competent and active social participants and rights-holders from birth (Uprichard 2008).

‘Research in the last decades has impressively confirmed that children from an early age are explorers with boundless curiosity and that they are judicious decision makers and social actors each with their own unique goals, interests and ways to communicate feelings and intentions’ (Doek, Krappmann & Lee 2006, 32).

The new understandings arising from this research imply an approach to child development that emphasises the plurality of developmental pathways and of children's roles in influencing their own development (Estep, 2002, 143). Much of this research suggests that child development, rather than being characterised by abrupt transformations in domain-general reasoning and cognitive functioning, reflects gradual and continuous improvements in cognitive capabilities (McShane 1991, Thelen & Smith 1994, Elman et al 1996, Kail 1997, Lewis 2000, Siegler et al 2003). Studies have found evidence of the simultaneous occurrence of different kinds of cognitive activity - narrow forms of domain-specific learning and wide-ranging developments - across the entire cognitive system, as well evidence of the non-linear co-operation of mutually interdependent parts of the cognitive system to produce new emergent properties.

As children grow they become more efficient at encoding information from the environment, are able to process information more quickly, make more effective use of learning and memory strategies and have more knowledge upon which to build future learning.

Other theorists argue that children are born with innate learning abilities that are specialised for particular domains of thought (Springer & Keil 1991, Mandler 1992, Spelke 1994, Hatano & Inagaki 1996, Wellman & Gelman 1998, Geary & Bjorklund 2000). This approach seeks to explain the ways in which specific cognitive abilities have evolved in response to environmental pressures and how genes and the environment interact to produce development.

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3 Processes of change as children develop and grow.

4 A mental model of aspects of the world or of the self that human beings construct to facilitate the processes of cognition and perception, in other words to help them to make sense of the world.
Innate knowledge, these theorists argue, is crucial to the development of such skills as ‘face recognition, semantic categorisation, language and the understandings of people’s minds’ (Maynard & Thomas 2004, 12). Children’s innate understanding in these areas is organised in terms of naïve or informal theories which, through the acquisition of new information, are refined and extended to create new and better theories or in the absence of new information are developed through ‘representational re-description’ (Karmiloff-Smith 1992) whereby existing knowledge is spontaneously converted to new and superior forms. Evolutionary developmental psychology distinguishes between ‘biologically primary abilities’ determined by evolution that require limited nurture from the environment and ‘biologically secondary abilities’ such as reading which are determined by culture and therefore require a much higher level of external support (Bjorklund 2000).

Like Piaget, the majority of core-knowledge theorists and those who take an information processing approach to cognitive development assume ‘stage-like’ sequences in terms of age-related improvements in children’s cognitive capacities but unlike Piaget they define the increasing complexity of development in terms of the child’s information processing abilities or the integration of innate and new forms of knowledge rather than in terms of logical properties. Research in the field of developmental cognitive neuroscience, which seeks to understand complex mental functions such as cognition and emotion in terms of the architecture, structures and functions of the developing brain, confirms sequential processes in human cognitive development (Johnson 2005) and in the last two decades has generated a number of core concepts in child development theory (Heckman 2006a).

Firstly, neuroscience confirms that the architecture of the brain and cognitive development are influenced by the interactions between genetics and individual experience. Secondly, the development of the neural pathways that underlie cognitive development and the mastery of skills follows hierarchical rules in that later attainments build on foundations that have been laid down earlier. Thirdly although adaptation continues throughout life, human abilities are formed in a predictable sequence of ‘sensitive periods’ during which the development of specific neural circuits and the behaviours they mediate are most ‘plastic’ and therefore optimally receptive to environmental influences.

Each of these periods is associated with specific areas of neurological circuitry and with specific human abilities and each builds on circuits and skills laid down in the previous period. Fourthly, cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional competencies are all interdependent. Development in each domain enhances development in all the others and all are powerfully shaped by the experiences of the developing child (Heckman 2006b, 1900-1902). And finally, mutually rewarding social and communicative interactions are essential prerequisites for the development of healthy brain circuits and the successful acquisition of increasingly complex skills and competencies (NSCDC 2007). Hence human brain development and behaviour are crucially dependent on interactions with culture; a developmental process that is not simply the result of a particular balance between nature and nurture but rather one that represents a rich and complex synergy between biology and culture (Donald 1991, Plotkin 2001, Quartz & Sejnowski 2002, Cole 2007).

‘Rather than culture acting only to supplement, develop and extend organically based capacities logically and genetically prior to it, it would seem to be an ingredient to those capacities themselves’ (Cole 2007).

The social world is therefore primary in organising the very possibility of human development because development requires the appropriation of what is essentially the historical experience and products of prior generations and this

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5 A concept in the study of the nervous system that describes the interconnections in the human brain through which signals are passed, relating to movement, thought, feelings etc.
is achieved because young children are cared for using the culturally accumulated experience of others (Cole 2005). These findings confirm the assumptions underlying socio-cultural theories of learning. Vygotsky, who initiated the socio-cultural approach within developmental psychology, viewed culture as the ‘species-specific medium of human development’.

**Parent-Child interaction**

By focussing on the importance of social interaction and emphasising activity as the basic unit of analysis, Vygotsky’s understanding of human development broke with traditional approaches in developmental psychology. Like Piaget, he viewed children as active agents in their own environment, engaging with the world around them. Where the two theorists differ is in the emphasis Vygotsky placed on cultural and social processes in learning and development. Development arises, he argued, through the social interchanges and dialogues between the child and his/her parents, teachers and other representatives of culture and is thus a collective endeavour, expressed in activities involving tools and signs whereby the child appropriates historical experience in the form of actions, meanings, skills and values. The basic abilities, such as the capacity to attend and remember that infants are born with, are thus transformed into higher mental functions and through social interactions, children internalise increasingly mature and effective ways of thinking and problem solving.

‘Any function in children’s cultural development appears twice or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category... and then within the individual child as an intrapsychological category.’ (Vygotsky 1981, 163)

Whereas Piaget stressed that a certain developmental stage has to be reached in order for learning to take place, Vygotsky understood learning itself as a process of development. The transition between learning and development takes place in what he called the ‘zone of proximal development’ referring to the distance between the most difficult task a child can perform without help and the most difficult task s/he can do with the support of an adult or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky 1978a, 86). Post-Vygotskian researchers developed the idea of ‘social scaffolding’ to capture the assistance a child receives from parents, teachers and peers in reaching developmental goals. In order to scaffold a child’s learning, instructors build temporary frameworks to support a child’s thinking at a higher level than they can reach on their own, using tools and signs as mediators to transmit knowledge and practical learning routines (Berk 2003).

**Language Development and Child-directed Speech**

Vygotsky (1986) reasoned that social interactions benefit children’s thinking owing to the input of language. He argued that language makes thought possible and that progress in thinking is mediated by language. Others theorists argue that some form of thought is present before children have adequate language to express their understandings and that language development is possible precisely because children have an intuitive ability to grasp the meaning of and make sense of human situations (Bloom 1970, Donaldson 1978, Bruner 1983, Wells 1986). While this debate continues, there is a growing consensus that there is a very strong link between thought and language; that the pre-verbal stage lays the foundation for later language learning; and that adults have an important role in helping children to develop language. Research in the 1970s demonstrated that mothers and babies quickly establish what Trevarthen (1979) called ‘proto-conversations’. He found that from birth these conversations are often initiated and terminated by the child and are supported by sensitive and appropriate responses by the mother.
Later research confirmed the social skills of newborn babies (Murray & Andrews 2000) and the role of parents in providing what Bruner calls a Language Acquisition Support System (LASS).

‘The infant’s Language Acquisition Device⁶ could not function without the aid given by an adult who enters with him into a transactional format….In a word, it is the interaction between LAD and LASS that makes it possible for the infant to enter the linguistic community – and, at the same time, the culture to which the language gives access’ (Bruner 1983, 19).

Many studies have shown that children who have been deprived of human interaction have major and long-lasting deficits in speech and language (Desforges & Abouchaar 2003) and that, other things being equal, deficient verbal mediation between parent and child is a prime factor in poor educational achievement (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn 2000, NICHD 2002). Instructing parents in the use of specific conversational techniques with their children can enhance young children’s language development, memory skills and problem-solving capabilities (Whitehurst et al 1988, Tzuriel 1999, Boland et al 2003).

Social Participation

But verbal communication is not the only way in which adults contribute to early childhood learning. Rogoff’s (1990, 1997, 2003) concept of ‘guided participation’ expands Vygotsky’s understanding of zone of proximal development by stressing the inter-relatedness of child and adult roles and highlighting the importance of tacit forms of communication and of children’s participation in everyday routines and practices. Rather than view children as separate entities that become capable of social participation, Rogoff argues that children are inherently engaged in the social world even before birth. They enter the world prepared to learn to participate, advancing throughout development in their skills in independently carrying out and organising activities in their culture (Rogoff 1990, 22). The guidance of more culturally competent adults and the mediation of culturally meaningful symbols allow children to become more confident in their acquired skills and in their ability to perform culturally valued routines and activities and to take what they have learned in the family context and apply it to new situations. Because guided participation is influenced by patterns and dispositions towards culturally structured activities that exist in families and are passed down through generations, the nature of these culturally structured activities varies within and across communities. These ‘repertoires of practice’⁷ are deep-seated cultural dispositions and are difficult to change.

‘People’s repertoires of practice describe the formats they are likely to employ in upcoming situations, based on their own prior experience in similar settings. Repertoires of practice are highly constrained by people’s opportunities and access to participate directly or vicariously in settings and activities where particular formats are employed’ (Rogoff et al 2005, 27).

How children make transitions across cultural settings and practice boundaries - for example enter into formal schooling - is powerfully influenced by the perceived relevance and value of what has been appropriated through cultural participation within the context of their family and community and under the guidance of primary caregivers who have, in consequence, a crucial role in child development and well-being.

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⁶ A concept developed by Chomsky (1959) to explain what he viewed as the innate predisposition of humans to learn language.

⁷ Habitual ways of doing or understanding things, influenced by cultural context or setting.
Play

Adults are understood to have a similarly important role in promoting children's learning and development through play. Piaget considered the development of play to be closely linked with cognitive development and he associated different kinds of play with different developmental stages: master play with the sensorimotor stage; symbolic or pretend play with the pre-operational stage and games with rules with the operational stage. Hence he understood play as a product of the development process. Vygotsky again reversed this relation and stressed the significance of play in child development in the earliest years of life.

‘Play creates a zone of proximal development in the child. In play, the child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour, in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself... play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form, and is itself a major source of development.’ (Vygotsky 1978b, 102).

While Piaget presented the child as a 'lone scientist', Vygotsky emphasised the social and cultural aspects of play. He argued that during play children learn to separate thoughts from objects, a critical feature in the development of higher mental functions, and are able to think in more complex ways than in their everyday lives (Vygotsky 1978b). They make up rules, use symbols and create narratives and scripts. They become conscious of social rules and the rules of behaviour that go unnoticed in daily life, learn to exercise self-regulation and self-control, to co-operate and to resolve conflict. Play that involves practice, imagination and the re-creation of events enhances children's cognitive, problem-solving and communication skills and through play children come to terms with their inner emotional states, learn to deal with their fears and anxieties, to manage their emotions and to empathise with others (Donaldson 1978).

Those working in the Vygotskian tradition again emphasise the role of adults in fostering children's development through play. Bruner (1972) suggests that child cognitive development and learning can be extended and nurtured if play is scaffolded by sensitive and intelligent adult interventions. So important is the role of adults in the promotion of learning through play that many contemporary theorists stress the necessity of raising the status of play as a promoter of learning in early childhood education and of increasing practitioner interventions in children's play activities to scaffold learning in all early years settings (Smilansky & Shefataya 1990, Moyles 1994, Bruce 1997, Davies 1999). If scaffolded play does indeed provide the rich context for learning described by theorists, then providing these kinds of sensitive and intelligent adult interventions in the home and in the context of family life is clearly crucial. The research confirms that 'a secure, stimulating home environment with time devoted to play, reading, talking and listening to infants and young children, lays down the foundations for cognitive and social skills’ (OECD 2002, 3).

Emotional Bonding

The crucial role of parents and the family in caring for, nurturing, protecting and socialising young children is well established across cultures (Ricketts & Anderson 2008). Research conducted by the World Health Organisation suggests that an ongoing, warm and stimulating relationship between parent(s) and child is just as important to children's survival and development as are the provision of food, child care and discipline (WHO 2004, 1). The WHO research confirms the early work of Bowlby (1951, 1953) and Ainsworth (1967) on attachment theory, which identified the importance of a loving adult bond with young infants in ensuring their future physical, psychological, social and cognitive development (Betherton 1992).
The WHO research indicates that the most critical aspects of familial relations that have a positive impact on development and learning outcomes in young children are sensitivity and responsiveness on the part of caregivers. Sensitivity refers to parental awareness and close monitoring of the young child and the signs and vocalisations the child makes to communicate his/her needs and wants (Ricketts & Anderson 2008, 62). Parental responsiveness refers to the ability of caregivers to meet those needs in an appropriate manner (WHO 2004, 1). The positive effects on human brain development and learning of maternal/paternal ‘sensitivity/responsivity’, ‘mutuality/reciprocity’ or ‘serve and return’ intimacy, as these parent/child one-to-one interactions have been variously called, have again been confirmed by research in neuroscience.

‘Serve and return happens when young children naturally reach out for interaction through babbling, facial expressions, words, gestures and cries, and adults respond by getting in sync and doing the same kind of vocalising and gesturing back at them, and the process continues back and forth. Another important aspect of the ‘serve and return’ notion of interactions is that it works best when it is embedded in an ongoing relationship between a child and an adult who is responsive to the child’s own unique individuality. Decades of research tell us that mutually rewarding interactions are essential prerequisites for the development of healthy brain circuits and increasingly complex skills’ (NSCDC 2007, 6).

Self, Identity and Resilience

Sensitive and responsive caregiving also establishes a close emotional bond between parent/s and child that provides young infants with a sense of security and a ‘mirror reflecting a tender and sympathetic view’ of themselves and of the world (WHO 2004, 2). This close bond provides a secure base from which children can develop an understanding of how human relationships should work and it helps children form healthy interpersonal relationships with others as they grow older (Chase-Lansdate, et al 1995). Strong parent-child emotional connectedness has also been shown to be essential for intellectual as well as emotional and social development, to improve academic outcomes, to promote mental health, to have protective effects in terms of reducing risk behaviours in later life (Lezin et al 2004) and to be crucial in the formation of positive conceptions of self and personal identity.

Few contemporary developmental psychologists or educational theorists now conceive of self as a simple unitary concept. Self is generally viewed as ‘a highly complex organization of multiple constructs—interrelated, yet expressing a variety of different functions’ (Schaffer 2006, 74) and children are in consequence understood to acquire an equally complex bundle of mixed and sometimes conflicting identities through their diverse early life experiences. Identities that are positive are composed of those aspects of self-concept, self-esteem and self-belief that enable a child to feel a sense of individuality and agency and of belonging in their social world, to develop appropriate cultural competences and to achieve emotional well-being. All of which are important prerequisites for developing the resilience that enables children to meet the challenges and stresses of growing up. The multifaceted nature of identity enables children to call on different strengths and different ‘selves’ in the different contexts and circumstances they encounter in social life (Brooker & Woodhead 2008). These selves are shaped by local environments and values, by the unique ‘developmental niches’ that children inhabit (Super & Harkness 1977).

The idea of ‘developmental niche’ refers to ways in which (1) different family beliefs about child rearing (2) the different sets of material and contextual conditions within which child-rearing takes place and (3) culturally defined child development goals are all combined to create different psychosocial environments for children.
Some of these environments promote individuality, others a ‘collective’ sense of identity and still others ‘individuality within connectedness’ (Brooker & Woodhead 2008, 17). Different societies and cultures and different communities and groups within societies and cultures, exhibit marked variations in the types of interaction considered desirable between caregivers and children. But regardless of wide cross-cultural variations in parenting styles, the process of socialization in providing emotional support is at the base of parent-child interaction. Interaction provides both the content and the medium for parenting, and is vital for healthy child development and for the stabilisation of the adult personality (Ricketts & Anderson 2008, 61); outcomes that are achievable within many different family forms. Family structures are less important. What is crucial is that the family, whatever its form, is a safe, secure, stable and emotionally supportive context for development.

Yet even in these circumstances developing an identity may not always be a positive process. Research into children’s early social relationships often highlights ways in which children’s ‘positive’ categories for self-differentiation and self-definition may sometimes have negative consequences for those who are defined as outsiders and who therefore experience themselves negatively - as different and excluded. The stereotypical construction of certain groups of children as ‘immigrants’, ‘ethnic minorities’, ‘socially deprived’, ‘socially excluded’ or ‘at risk’ may also undermine young children’s ability to construct a positive self-image, a sense of possibility, of agency and efficacy. Developing personal identity is a dynamic process embedded in the child’s multiple activities and relationships. It is best described as constructed, co-constructed and reconstructed through the child’s interactions with parents, peers, teachers, and others and by his/her routine daily activities and encounters within a succession of immediate contexts and the wider social contexts with which these interact.

Family as a microsystem

Informed by systems theory, Bronfenbrenner (1979) elaborated what he called the ‘ecological approach to human development’, which he defined as:

‘.the scientific study of the progressive mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded’ (1979, 21).

Child development, he argues, proceeds within a complex series of dynamic and mutually interacting ‘nested contexts’ that influence both the child and the capacity of caregivers to foster the healthy development of children. Development is thus influenced by the whole context of a person’s life, rooted and socially embedded in these multiple interconnecting contexts.
Bronfenbrenner (1986) distinguishes five main aspects of the ecology in which children grow up:

- **Microsystems** made up of the various settings in which children directly participate – the family, childcare, neighbourhood, community and school.
- **Mesosystems** refer to the relation between different microsystems such as the connections between a child’s home and school which involve complementary and/or conflicting practices and belief systems and the informal/formal communications between parents and teachers.
- **Exosystems** are systems which affect the child indirectly by virtue of their influence on microsystems, such as a parent’s economic status, employment setting and practices.
- ** Macrosystems** represent the dominant belief system and the institutions that shape the cultural environment in which children develop.
- **Chronosystem** refers to influences on development that are specific to a particular historical period.

Bronfenbrenner views children, caregivers and the environment as mutually influential (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 1998). Like Vygotsky, he sees children not as the passive recipients of external influences but as active agents shaping their environment through their interactions with others; a process mediated by historically inherited symbols, objects and tools and structured by practices associated with child participation both in the immediate microsystem environments in which they are embedded and at exosystem intersections, where the children’s immediate lived experience and their parent/caregiver’s wider social world interact. It is in this dynamic interaction, between the individual child and the various environments that s/he experiences, that together lead to development throughout life. A pictorial image of Bronfenbrenner’s model is depicted in Figure 1 below.

As the child develops s/he is able to exercise more influence upon developmental pathways through the decisions s/he makes. The combined effects of the child’s growing agency and the dynamic interactions that occur between her/him and his/her environment will be unique for each individual. There is, therefore, no single or ideal developmental pathway for every person. Environmental impacts on developmental outcomes will also reflect the balance between protective and risk factors that contribute to children’s relative vulnerability and resilience in the face of adversity. The impact of circumstances is not fixed however - even family circumstances of a highly negative nature can be mediated by other factors in the environment; an assumption confirmed by research in life course theory (Elder 1974).

Life course theory is a perspective closely related to the ecological approach to human development. It explores child development within a socio-historical framework. The life course approach is particularly sensitive to ways in which macrosystem changes shape children’s capacities to negotiate their developmental pathways and influence their future agency and life choices. Using this approach Elder, for example, was able to trace the differential impact of the Great Depression on children who were at different ages when their families were deprived of income. Bronfenbrenner (2005) has also incorporated the life course approach into his latest and more fully developed ‘bioecological model’
of human development. The major social changes taking place in modern industrial societies, he argues, may be altering ecological conditions conducive to human development to such a degree that the process of making human beings ‘human’ may be in jeopardy.

‘Without time for and recognition of parenting as the key nurturant force in all of society, we are faced with the potential disintegration of our social fabric’ (op.cit 267).

Ecological and life history theories of child development draw particular attention to: the interconnections and mutual influences between children and their caregivers’ worlds; how social, economic, political and cultural processes mediate children’s experiences and activities at every level within the social system; how childhood transitions at ‘boundary-crossing’ are affected by the compatibility or otherwise of the roles, norms, relationships, expectations and practices within different interacting systems; the risk and protective factors in children’s ecology; and the pivotal role of interventions and programmes in enhancing, reinforcing and complementing primary caregivers efforts to stimulate child learning and development. The well-being of children is, therefore, closely tied to family context, to where they live and the quality of the neighbourhoods and communities where people interact and share experiences and the types and quality of community supports and social networks to which parents have access (Janus & Offord 2000; Freiler 2002; Janus et al 2003; Janus & Duku 2007).

**Risk and Protective Factors**

The work of Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner and others has shifted the emphasis on risk and protective factors primarily from within the individual to factors in the environment - in the systems, family contexts and communities in which children live and grow and to the socio-economic and cultural factors inhibiting or encouraging positive parental interactions with young children. Factors that inhibit the amount of attention parents and caregivers can pay to children include gendered patterns of child rearing and changing family structures affecting male involvement with their children, economic and social obligations and priorities, poor parental health and well-being, the presence of a sick or disabled child within the family, the lack of education among parents and low levels of child development knowledge among parents. Some contexts are not conducive to childhood development and learning because they undermine the capacity of parents to provide appropriate support to young children. Poverty in particular impacts on caregivers and caring relationships. It can mean limited access to services, poor environmental conditions, inadequate material resources, social instability and overworked, demoralised and socially isolated caregivers. Poverty is also often associated with early motherhood, which statistically puts children at a greater risk.

While there is little direct empirical knowledge about how children experience poverty, we do know: that the impact of poverty on children’s health, well-being and life chances is largely indirect, mediated through the negative effects on family functioning and on the lived environment; that poverty stresses children’s caregivers; and that the architecture of the developing brain can be disrupted by stress. Children born to poor parents are more likely to have a low birth rate and to die in infancy than children of more affluent families. Low birth weight increases the risk of future poor health outcomes and low levels of well-being among children. Poor children are more likely to suffer developmental delay and adverse developmental outcomes in terms of the acquisition of fine and gross motor skills, language acquisition, emotional and psychological stability, social skills and the capacity for future learning (Blout 1989; Webster-Stratton 2001; Place et al 2002; Newman 2002; National Conjoint Committee 2002; Schweinhar 2004; Appleyard etc al 2005; Heckman 2006). There is also a strong correlation between poverty and emotional problems in early childhood and poor mental health and social functioning in later life (Meltzer & Gatwald et al 2000; Kim-Cohen et al 2003; Maughan & Kim-Cohen 2005; Bamford 2006). Other health problems associated
with child poverty include higher accidents rates, behavioural problems, higher rates of decayed teeth and teeth extractions, obesity and speech and language difficulties; and research shows that children with communication problems often have other underlying health and medical conditions that go unnoticed (NISLTF 2008). A UK study investigating four year olds living in areas of deprivation found that up to 55% of children in some neighbourhoods had speech, language and communication learning needs (Locke et al, 2002). Young people with communication needs have lower educational attainment and evidence suggests that disadvantaged parents, particularly young or first-time mothers, do not know or understand the three key contributors to positive infant speech, language and communication development (SLC), so important to cognitive ability and to later educational outcomes; i.e. parent-child interaction, child-directed speech and book-sharing (Whitmsh 2011). A third of children with speech and language difficulties develop mental health problems and more than 75% of people in the UK with mental health disorders have communication difficulties. A Polmont Young Offenders Institute survey (2003) found that 70% of young offenders had significant communication problems and a UK national study carried out in 2001/2002 showed that re-offending rates fell by as much as 50% for individuals who received targeted speech and language therapy to improve their oral communication (NISLTF 2008).

Children from low socio-economic backgrounds are at higher risk of educational disadvantage than those from higher socio-economic backgrounds, are much more likely to leave school without qualifications and much less likely to obtain third level qualifications (Clancy and Wall 2000, Clancy 2001). Gershoff (2003) examined the effects of low income on the development of kindergarten children using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 and found that at school entry, children from low-income families had already fallen behind their more affluent peers on physical, intellectual and social measurements of development. Children who start school behind, particularly on more than one dimension of school readiness (physical and motor development, language and literacy, social and emotional development, approaches to learning and cognitive development) have difficulty catching up. As much as half of school failure, Phillips & Eustace suggest, may be attributable to gaps in learning and development before children enter school (2008, 21-22).

Parenting Education

Adverse developmental outcomes in early life therefore impact: on future health, on educational performance, on adult economic opportunities and employment and on adult citizenship engagement - thereby reproducing a cycle of poor health, reduced opportunities and lifechances and low levels of democratic participation. Through a series of longitudinal studies of children and their family and life situations Rutter (1979) developed a list of risk and protective mechanisms that consistently impact on the children's lives across time. As well as poverty, risk factors identified include long parental working hours, uninvolved parenting, poor parental supervision, unclear family expectations, poor childhood transition experiences, problematic peer groups, antisocial behaviour, alienation and media influences. The presence of two or more of these factors, Rutter argues, puts the individual child at greater risk of experiencing poor developmental outcomes. The protective factors which appear to increase resilience in the face of difficult circumstances include good cognitive skills, well developed interpersonal skills, self-efficacy, personal responsibility, positive learning experiences and good social support; all attributes associated with good parent/child interactions and relationships, supported by assets in community and society.

Research by Liontos (1992) on family/school relations suggests: that most parents, regardless of their circumstances, really care about their children; that all families whatever their form have strengths; that parents have important perspectives about their children; that parents can learn new parenting techniques; and that insights into how children develop and learn can affect how people parent.
In a review of research evidence on parent education interventions, Desforges & Abouchaar (2003) found that there is good evidence that initiatives designed to help parents develop their capabilities as educators, particularly in the pre-school and early primary school period, are effective and that gains can accrue to children even in the most marginalised of families (Bronfenbrenner 1975, Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, Epstein 1996, Kagitcibasi et al 2001, Zeedyk 2002; Flett 2007). The most important finding identified in the review was that ‘at-home good parenting’ particularly the creation of a good ‘home-learning-environment’ has the most significant positive effect on child development outcomes.

‘The most important finding from the point of view of this review is that parental involvement in the form of ‘at-home good parenting’ has a significant positive effect on children’s achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnics groups’ (Desforges & Abouchaar 2003, 4-5).

A finding confirmed: by Melhusi et al (2008) whose multilevel analyses indicate powerful effects for the home learning environment on children’s literacy and numeracy achievements at school entry and at the end of the third year of school, effects which could still be identified several years later; by the EPPE longitudinal study of early childhood experiences (Sylva et al 2004) that suggests that the link with the home learning environment is the most crucial factor in effective early education; and by research by Schweinhart (2004) who demonstrated that the effects of good parenting continue into adult life. Actions to motivate and enable parents and caregivers to encourage their children’s learning and development can, therefore, improve child development outcomes and prevent poor outcomes for at-risk children. Available evidence also suggests that positive outcomes are enhanced where these actions also contribute to: strengthening community assets and informal social networks; help build more cohesive and socially integrated communities predisposed to children’s health, safety, learning and developmental needs; improve families’ access to and uptake of good quality early education and childcare facilities; sign-post families to other relevant services; and support closer parent links and involvement with schools (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993, Bronfenbrenner 2005, Phillips & Eustace 2008).

The Lifestart Programme

The Growing Child curriculum was devised by a parent and developed by a group of academics and child development experts at Purdue University USA. It was adapted by educational and child development specialists in Ireland to be delivered in the home to parents of children up to nursery school or primary school entry and culturally adapted to meet the needs of contemporary Irish parents. The curriculum is structured in such a way as to engage parents in children’s learning, to inform and educate them and to provide them with knowledge, information and developmental activities in an integrated sequence, appropriate to children as they grow, develop and learn. Informed by the knowledge that child learning attainments are built on foundations laid down earlier, knowledge acquired at one developmental phase is reinforced and enhanced at another; hence the same topic may be addressed in different ways on a number of occasions, reflecting different age appropriate developmental expectations and contexts.

The curriculum is, in this respect, spiral in nature and it includes half-year/yearly developmental checklists, based on learning milestones that allow parents to assess their child’s learning and development. Development milestones are presented only as a guide to typical development expectations within the context of the local culture.
The uniqueness of each cultural setting and of the individual child and his/her individual developmental strategies and pathways is emphasised and each developmental achievement is celebrated in order to promote the child’s growing agency, confidence and self-esteem.

Lifestart takes a constructionist view of learning and development, uses a reflective dialogic pedagogy and a contextualised and activity-orientated approach to the promotion of learning in both children and adults. Family visitors do not instruct parents on child development theory or on parenting practices, but rather share evidence-based knowledge with parents, working through practical activities with parent and child in ways that enable parents to apply and evaluate this knowledge in the context of their own situation and experiences. The long-term supporting relationship between the parent and the family visitor, equipped with a high quality integrated child development curriculum, is a unique feature of the Lifestart Programme. Each monthly issue of the Growing Child includes explanatory notes on child development, capacities and potential at the age to which the issue refers and suggests things that the parent might do to improve the home learning environment and to enhance and further their child’s development and learning. Complex child development concepts and insights are explained in clear and readable text accompanied by pictures, and learning is linked directly to parent/child day-to-day activities, experiences and contexts.

During the home visit the family visitor: discusses the content of the Growing Child with the parent; encourages her/him to reflect on the child’s progress; assesses the parent’s practice; models play and communication and learning activities; sets goals for further development and learning; and discusses any problems or concerns. The programme is supported by a well-developed library of age appropriate books, toys, music, art materials and learning resources that parents can use to enhance parent/child interaction, to scaffold learning and to encourage language, cognitive, and social and emotional development. The family visitor focuses on strengthening parent-child bonds and on promoting parent-child interactions that will support learning and development, illustrating the importance of serve and return conversations, of listening, of gestures, language, movement, play and learning interactions; promoting and supporting the kind of scaffolded sensitive and intelligent adult interventions to which Bruner refers; initiating activities and interactions that will promote emotional attachment, creativity and social skills, as well as physical and intellectual development.

Thus the Lifestart approach is to take reified expert knowledge on child development, make this knowledge available and accessible to parents and in dialogue with parents connect parents’ intimate and personal knowledge of their children with the public knowledge of experts; a process that modifies both the parents’ own knowledge and the knowledge of experts through the adaptation of expert knowledge to parents’ diverse situations and contexts. The family visitor is not a didactic instructor but a joint participant in a learning process enacted in a social context in which parent and visitor collaborate, share each other’s knowledge, including the parent’s intimate knowledge of their own context and circumstances and their personal knowledge of their child; a process in which the child is also an important social actor imposing her/his own influence on learning outcomes. The Lifestart programme is not, therefore, a transmission-orientated remedial programme but one that aims to enable and empower parents to enhance and, where necessary, modify the most crucial microsystem context of early childhood learning and development by enriching parents’ awareness of how their interactions with their children influence and support child development, by deepening and informing parental knowledge and skills and by supporting parents to construct and maintain a positive home-learning and nurturing environment.

8 A sociological theory of knowledge that emphasises the ways in which knowledge is socially generated.
To be able to derive the maximum benefit from schooling, children entering formal education need to have appropriate levels of health, cognitive skills, language, social competence and emotional maturity and confidence to be able to communicate with and relate to teaching staff and to mix with and socialise with other children. They need to be capable of independent action, have practical personal skills, understand the concept and function of rules and be able to perform successfully within a rule-orientated learning environment. They need to have conceptual knowledge of the alphabet and of numbering and to be intellectually inquisitive and learning-motivated and responsive. The Lifestart Programme is consciously and specifically designed to assist parents to help their children achieve this level of school readiness and to enable parents to support their children through transitional processes, including changes in the child’s identity, social relations and roles. Desforges & Abouchaar (2003) found a causal link between parental involvement with schools and the parents’ perception of their role and their levels of confidence in fulfilling it. The social support provided by Lifestart aims to raise parents’ awareness of their role in their children’s learning, to enhance their confidence and efficacy in the performance of this role both at home and in home-school relations, to affirm parental knowledge of the learning needs of their children and to ensure that this information is shared with educational practitioners to improve school ‘child-readiness’ (Broström 2005; Dunlop & Fabian 2007; Brooker 2008).

The importance of self-efficacy and building individual and group confidence and self-esteem is also reflected in the adoption and promotion of a community development approach to programme delivery. Local communities are the places where the circumstances and the nested contexts of people lives and those of their children come together. They are the social spaces within which bonding processes are enacted and renewed and identities constructed and reconstructed, where people learn and internalise ‘repertoires of practice’ that structure their actions and responses in the situations they encounter, where boundaries of different kinds of practices meet and where social need is identified, defined, measured and ‘provided for’ by statutory agents and other social actors. By taking a community development approach to programme delivery and embedding service provision in the communities they serve, Lifestart draws upon human, cultural and social capital within communities. The family visitor functions as an information resource and a mediating agent between the family and the wider community, providing and supporting parent access to relevant health, social service, child-care and other services and encouraging and supporting parent engagement with preschool and primary school teachers. S/he works with parents to modify and change the immediate ecological contexts in which child learning and development takes place; helps parents and children to combat socially ascribed and internalised negative identities, to form new relationships and to develop new or modified more positive identities. The family visitor also encourages and supports parents to take an active role in their communities, to train as family visitors or to become members of local Lifestart management committees. She facilitates parent and child engagement in shared activities with other families and parent involvement in community activities and in local social action, establishing networks and building community structures that promote and support improved outcomes for children.

Family visitors are generally recruited in the areas where the service is delivered and for this reason, and because the service incorporates an important universal dimension they can gain access to the neediest of homes and to the homes of hard to reach families, enabling Lifestart family visitors to deliver an important early intervention and prevention family support service to families with more intensive support needs.

9 The service is generally offered to all parents who sign up for it or is made available to all first-time parents in any given neighbourhood in which the service is offered.
Working in collaboration with public health nurses, health visitors, social workers, teachers and other statutory and voluntary sector partners, family visitors, in response to need, can increase the regularity of home visits, break the Growing Child curriculum down into bite-size pieces suited to parent learning and support needs, deliver sessional intervention or context-specific information to parents and sign-post parents to and support them to avail of other children and family support services.

**Measuring Programme Outcomes and Impact**

The Lifestart programme and home-visitation service is currently being delivered in Ireland (NI and the ROI) and through affiliates in Zambia and in Macedonia. In Ireland the service is being delivered to approximately 4,000 families and is available in 20 locations in: Donegal (county-wide), Drogheda, Carlow, Kilkenny, Offaly, Kildare, Sligo, Leitrim and Dublin (Cherry Orchard and Mulhuddart), Derry City and county, Belfast City (Shankill and Poleglass), Down, Enniskillen and rural Fermanagh, Strabane and rural Tyrone. The service is offered through the Lifestart Foundation, its three outreach centres in Belfast, Derry and Mid-Ards, a Foundation regional company in Donegal and through 14 other local service providers affiliated to the Foundation.10

The Foundation and its affiliates have over many years been monitoring and accumulating data on programme and service impact and outcomes and this evidence has largely been based on recorded observations by Lifestart practitioners, parental self-reports and interviews with independent professionals and others working with parents and/or children whose families have received the Lifestart programme. While this evidence is considerable and much of it has been collected and analysed by independent evaluators (McGuinness, 1990, McNelis & Kelleher, 1995), the methodologies used and the specificity and sometimes small scale and potentially unrepresentativeness of study samples have weakened the perceived credibility of the evaluative evidence. This is not unusual in the field of parenting education where the majority of studies have been found to be ‘technically weak’ in that they fail to use techniques deemed capable of measuring, in scientifically credible ways, effects over time (Barrow 2008, Evans 2006). Aside from a number of large-scale longitudinal studies conducted in the US and Australia of programmes, such as the Perry Pre-school Program, Incredible Years or the Nurse-Family Partnership Program, reviewers have until recently found little longitudinal data relating to parenting interventions, in the UK and Ireland. Part of the reason for this is that most community-based parenting programmes in these countries lacked the resources to conduct longitudinal studies. Reviews of the limited evidence that is available (Sweet & Appelbam 2004, Evans 2006, Flett 2007, Phillips & Eustace 2008) does, however, suggest: that educating parents is more effective than intervening directly with children; that children are better off if intervention takes place early; that the most effective interventions are those which take place in the parent’s home; that the programmes that work best are those which provide regularity and intensity of inputs through one-to-one home visits over at least a year; that two to three years of intervention are more likely to sustain gains over time and that parenting programmes are most efficacious for ‘at-risk’ families. In the light of the available evidence, the Lifestart Foundation sought and acquired funding from Atlantic Philanthropies under its Children and Youth Programme to conduct a full-scale empirical study into Lifestart programme and service impact.

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10 There are 109 Lifestart employees in Ireland delivering the Lifestart programme and family support service. The service is largely funded through service level agreements and contracts with statutory children and family support service providers.
The Lifestart Longitudinal Study

The design of the Lifestart study was based on the interim results of a quasi-experimental study also funded by Atlantic Philanthropies and undertaken by a research team based at Queens University, Belfast. A fully experimental research design and logic model was developed by the principal investigators working on the quasi-experimental study, in collaboration with the Lifestart Foundation and with the support of the Dartington Social Research Institute. The logic model was based on a number of key assumptions about how Lifestart works and the expected impact and outcomes:

- Lifestart is a two-generation programme in that there is a focus on both parent/caregiver and child outcomes.
- The primary impact of the programme is on parenting outcomes, which in turn impact positively on child development outcomes.
- Parents who have received the Lifestart programme are better able to promote, through appropriate care and nutrition, their children's physical health.
- By knowing how to provide secure attachment, to be emotionally available, to interact with and to be sensitive and attentive to their children's developmental and learning needs, they are better able to foster their child's emotional well-being, social skills and behaviours and resilience and coping skills.
- By understanding how to provide suitable stimulation, appropriate developmental experiences, encouragement, reassurance and learning support, parents can promote cognitive development, the acquisition of fine and gross motor skills and language acquisition.

Expected outcomes for children whose parents have taken the Lifestart Programme are: that they are better developed – physically, emotionally, intellectually and socially; tend to have better connections with their peers and their communities; have fewer behavioural problems; are better prepared for formal learning than other children and have improved life chances, especially but not exclusively where economic, social, environmental or other circumstances put children at greater risk of adverse developmental outcomes.

Parent and child outcomes are reinforced through the promotion, in the communities in which Lifestart operates, of a social environment conducive to childhood learning and growth.

The causal relationships between parent and child outcomes are depicted in the Lifestart programme logic model in figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Lifestart Logic Model

http://www.dartington.org.uk
The Lifestart Study research design incorporated two strands:

1. A multi site randomised controlled trial (RCT) aimed at evaluating the impact of the programme on parent and child outcomes.
2. Qualitative case studies and interviews with parents and stakeholders aimed at understanding the process of programme delivery and exploring parent and child outcomes in more depth.

Recruitment of families to the study began in 2008 and was completed in December 2009. 655 parents contacted the study and 435 met the inclusion criteria; 221 were randomly selected to the intervention group (i.e. to receive the programme and home-visitation service) and 215 were randomly assigned to the control group. Parents and children participating in the study will be tested on outcomes on three separate occasions:

1. When the child enters the evaluation (aged less than one year)
2. When the child is aged 3 years
3. When the child is aged 5 years

The parent and child outcomes and the measures being used to assess them are outlined in table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Outcomes</th>
<th>Parent Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Well-being (confidence, stress and fearfulness, social support)</td>
<td>TOPSE (Tool to measure Parental Self-Efficacy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Skills (parent-child relationship, knowledge of child development)</td>
<td>Parenting Stress Index, Knowledge of Child Development Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded-ness in the community</td>
<td>Social Capital Measures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Outcomes</th>
<th>Child Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Skills, fine and gross motor skills, language acquisition</td>
<td>Bayley Scale of Infant Development (III), British Ability Scales (BAS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-cognitive skills: emotional well-being, behaviour, social development</td>
<td>Ages and Stages Questionnaire¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Parental Report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base-line data collection was completed in 2010. Sweep two data collection, using the BAS, began in March 2011. Data collection visits are currently up to date, with families being contacted and visited within 4-6 weeks of the child turning three years of age. 244 visits have so far been completed. Sweep three data collection will begin when the first child turns five years of age in May 2012. The youngest child in the sample turns five years of age in November 2014. The final data analysis and the study write-up will take place between November and December 2014¹²

¹² For further information on the Lifestart Study contact Dr Sarah Miller (s.j.miller@qub.ac.uk) or Dr Laura Dunne (l.dunn@qub.ac.uk).
An interim evaluation research report, based on a postal survey and a series of in-depth interviews with parents, was also completed in 2010, 10 ½ months after the intervention had begun and one year into the 5 year study. The interim findings indicated positive significant change in parental efficacy.

‘The outcomes and pathways as perceived by parents and described in the interviews are consistent with the theory of change depicted in the Lifestart logic model, which hypothesises that improvement in parent outcomes, arising as a consequence of the programme, mediates the change in child outcomes’ (Miller et al 2010, 3).

Conclusion

All the available evidence on child development suggests that supporting intellectual, emotional and psychosocial development in the early months and years of life contributes directly to improved educational performance and to better adult economic opportunities and life chances. Improved physical and emotional care in early childhood contributes significantly to better long-term health and improved psychological and emotional well-being and sociability in adolescence and adulthood. Children who have had good parenting are less likely as adults to be unemployed, to live in poverty, to experience poor health, to suffer from addiction and psychological disorders or to be involved in crime. They are more likely to form stable relationships and to become good parents themselves generating a ‘virtuous cycle’ resulting in long-term gains for individuals, communities and society.

The Lifestart longitudinal study, whatever its final research findings, will make a contribution to our understanding of the impact of such an intervention in parenting education and family support and will better enable policy makers to assess whether such an intervention produces the benefits and savings theorists, practitioners and service purchasers expect of it.
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Abstract

Social capital and community cohesion have an impact on neighbourhoods and the people who live within them. This study sought to examine the unique combined effects of neighborhood characteristics on parental behaviour. Communities characterised by a high degree of risk and a lack of trust it is assumed would negatively influence parenting practices and this would be reflected in scores on a generalised parent rating scale. A Local Cohesion and Neighbourhood Interest Survey (NIS) & a Parent Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI) were applied to a sample of 137 parents from a demographically deprived area in west Dublin to test this hypothesis. Analyses of the questionnaires indicated a strong correlation between both questionnaires with those parents who experienced the community as a negative environment demonstrating parenting difficulty across a range of parenting dimensions including, warmth, consistent discipline, limit setting and communication.

Keywords

Community cohesion, social capital on parent practices.
Introduction

How neighbourhoods affect families has emerged as a key question in understanding the causes and effects of positive family growth and development. Over the course of the last 25 years people with low incomes have become increasingly likely to live in large outlying housing estates with high concentrations of unemployment. Some of the ways in which these neighbourhoods and specifically the collective norms, to which they operate, impact upon the individual have been examined in past literature. However the focus has been predominantly on adolescents or young adults and not on children or families. Few studies have looked at the way neighbourhoods influence families especially parents. This article addresses the question of how Community norms (shared community orientations about whether a behavior is right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable (Klitzner et al 1993)) influence parenting practices and does so by viewing these outcomes through a prism of community cohesion. Community Cohesion is an expansive concept made up of many elements. A simple definition is that it is associated with people’s sense of community, their sense of belonging to a neighbourhood, caring about people who live there and most importantly, believing those who live there care about them (Portney and Berry, 2001). Putman (1993) argues that social cohesion and in particular social capital profoundly influence parenting approaches. A cursory examination of social capital would seem to support this view.

Putman (1993) suggests positive social capital; (a sense of belonging, community cooperation, reciprocity and trust, positive attitudes towards community institutions and participation in community activities,) creates, for the individual or family, an enveloping and supportive network, a barrier of sorts against the most corrosive effects of poverty and disadvantage.

It also, he suggests, enables the individual parent to look outward with confidence, secure in the belief that the community is safe and productive for their children. Similarly Coulton (97) argues that Communities who demonstrate higher levels of social capital and cohesion provide a distinct supportive pattern for the families who reside there. They manifest higher levels of social support networks for families and demonstrate a generalised trust of others within the community. This, he suggests, creates a generalised feeling of belonging and pride within the community which in turn encourages high levels of participation in community activities and engenders a strong sense of collective community spirit. In living life in such communities, Coulton (97) argues the family is encompassed by a sense of collective efficacy where similar norms and values consciously and unconsciously shape their environment and their lives in the most positive of ways.

The evident effect of social capital and cohesion on individual and families has been demonstrated in several recent studies. These studies suggest the effect of social cohesion extend beyond simply enabling families to overcome adversity and negative family circumstances. Stafford et al (2003) for example, indicates the positive impact of community cohesion on general health outcomes. He found that residents living in neighbourhoods with high levels of social capital were less likely to have poor self rated health. Whilst Meyers (2005) found that the effect of living in a neighbourhood with low trust is comparable to a fifteen year increase in age. Apart from effects on physical health, high levels of community cohesion and social capital also have been found to produce positive effects on mental health with neighborhood cohesion found to produce lower levels of depression amongst families even when researchers controlled for family level characteristics (Aneshensel & Sucoff, 1996). Similarly O’Brien-Cauley (2008) in a meta analytical review also found that communities with higher levels of cohesion were associated with lower levels of crime, child abuse and maltreatment.
These outcomes are consistent with established theories. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) and family systems theories (Simons et al. 1996) suggest that family and social/environmental contexts interact to influence developmental outcomes. Indeed Bronfenbrenner’s model puts the child firmly at the centre of multiple and inter-related levels of social systems of which the neighbourhood context is one. The theory goes still further by indicating that as the child develops and grows the neighbourhood influence becomes increasing powerful and that this influence can generate both positive and negative outcomes. Bronfenbrenner’s theory indicates the subtle influence of neighbourhood on child behaviour and parenting practice with exposure to neighbourhood and environment influencing children in a direct way, through interactions with the neighbourhood but also in an indirect way, through the influence of the neighbourhood on both parenting styles and parenting behaviours.

The possibility of negative effects of poor community cohesion is apparent in the work of Conger et al (1994). They found that low neighbourhood social capital was connected to emotional distress that inevitably disrupted parenting, resulting in the use of harsh and punitive discipline techniques. These findings were further supported in a series of later studies by Dorsey and Forehand (2003) which found that low levels of social capital in a neighbourhood resulted in decreased levels of parental support and monitoring, factors that are increasingly viewed as having an important and damaging effect on parenting outcomes. Similarly Fram (2003) who studied the effect that social support and social capital had on parenting practices in welfare participating mothers found that higher levels of parenting stress and lower levels of support were related to more controlling discipline and less maternal warmth. Tellingly Fram also found that neighbourhoods with high levels of perceived danger also generated more controlling discipline techniques amongst parents with physical discipline being to the fore in the majority of cases studied.

The aim of the current survey was to examine if levels of community cohesion and perceived social capital had a similar impact on parenting within an Irish context. The study was undertaken by Archways, a philanthropically funded organisation whose remit is to provide evidence based interventions and preventative programmes for families with children and teenagers experiencing social emotional and behavioural difficulties. Archways views the family as the pivotal focus for intervention and change and as such have developed a range of services designed to empower and support families to identify and resolve their difficulties in a holistic and creative manner. Prior to the implementation of these services Archways conducts detailed needs analysis to Archways programme implementation strategy.

The study undertaken examined parenting in a low status socio economic area of West Dublin. This area has experienced significant development in the last ten years with new estates being built and many new families moving into the area. The area consists of five estates, the oldest of which was built in the 1980s. The other four estates were new developments initiated in 2005. Of the five estates two comprise mixed developments (private houses and council rented accommodation) whilst the remaining three estates comprise mainly social housing. These estates consist of medium to high density housing with a large amount of apartment or mezzanine type units. Residents across the estates, have consistently expressed concerns about the lack of facilities and the quality of services in the area. They indicate that the community infrastructure needed has not developed at the same rate as the population in the area. Consequently residents have reported high levels of dissatisfaction with regard to housing, services and general facilities in the locality. (Paredes 2009). This lack of facilities makes community integration and the development of cohesion in the area particularly difficulty. The study sought to establish residents’ perceptions of different elements of social capital in the locality and to ascertain the impact (if any) the hypothesised low levels of community cohesion had on both parenting perception and practice within the locality?
Method

Over a one month period in 2010, 140 residents in a demographically disadvantaged area of west Dublin were asked to complete two questionnaires concerning community cohesion and parenting practice. A Quota sampling methodology was applied. The total sample surveyed represented 20% of the population (approximately some 140 houses). 28 sets of questionnaires from each of the 5 area estates were collected. Respondents had to have lived in the area for a three year period and have a child under 18yrs of age. Respondents included both two parent and single parent families. Whilst 140 residents initially completed the questionnaires, three respondents subsequently withdrew from the survey. Each participant was given the option of filling out the questionnaires with the community surveyor or by themselves. 12% of the total surveyed selected for the self completion option.

Whilst participation was voluntary, to increase engagement local residents were recruited to act as Community Surveyors. Community Surveyors were recruited through local groups and community development workers. An initial meeting was held, within the area, for all those interested in acting as surveyors (a total of 18 attendees) and from this pool eight were selected to participate in the process. Those selected were provided with a three day training workshop designed to (1) inform them of the research background (2) familiarise them with the questionnaires and (3) help address any questions regarding the use of data they might encounter from residents. Community surveyors did not participate in the analysis of the completed questionnaires.

Measures

Residents were asked to complete three questionnaires (1) the Parent Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI) (Gerard, 1994) a 78 item self report questionnaire which measures general attitude towards parenting as well as eliciting responses specific to a parent’s relationship with a particular child. Scores are provided for seven scales including parental support, satisfaction with parenting and communication. High scores on the PCRI indicate strong parenting skills while low scores indicate poor parenting skills. (2) The Local Cohesion and Neighbourhood Interest Survey (NIS) a 95 item, self report that is designed to measure different elements of community cohesion and neighbourhood involvement. The survey addresses three main areas including social capital, community cohesiveness and neighbourhood attachment. The questionnaire is designed to establish residents’ attitudes towards services, safety issues and supports in the neighbourhood (3) Respondents also filled out a general demographic information questionnaire which focused on family education, health, housing and ethnicity. The three questionnaires together took residents approximately thirty minutes to complete. Each resident was given the option of filling the questionnaires out with a community surveyor or by themselves.
Participant Profile

1. The age range of respondents was between 22 and 56 years of age with the biggest response rates in the 24-39 years of age ranges.
2. 19 of the respondents were male and 118 female.
3. Two children was the norm in locality with 32.7% responding to this category.
4. 16.8% of respondents noted that one or all of the children had some type of chronic difficulty (options given included learning, learning and behaviour and physical).
5. 39.4% of residents had been unwell in the last 12 months. The most common outcome from these illnesses was a GP visit either with or without medication (62.3%). 9.4% saw counsellor/psychologist while 28.3% sought treatment from a specialist.
6. With regard to child illness, 37.9% had been unwell in the last 12 months. 70.3% of children’s illnesses were cleared by a GP visit with or without medication. 4.3% saw a counsellor/psychologist while 8% sought treatment from a clinical specialist.
7. 40.3% of residents sampled were single and had never been married. 31.3% was married, 6.7% were separated and 3.7% divorced. 9% of the sample was living with their current partner.
8. 21.7% of respondents noted that their partners were not at all involved in the rearing of their children.
9. 77.8% of respondents in the sample were living in council rented accommodation and 24.4% of the residents sampled felt the condition of the building they were living in was sub standard.

Results

Summary of PCRI Results

Overall the results of the PCRI showed residents clustered in the lower percentiles on many of the PCRI sub scales. Particular difficulties were found in the autonomy, communication, support and limit setting sub scales.

In the autonomy sub scale 72.4% of parents in the sample fell in the 25th percentile or below for autonomy indicating a difficulty promoting their children’s independence and allowing them freedom. Difficulties are also seen in the communication sub scale of the PCRI where 62.5% of parents fell in the 25th percentile or under, far below the norm for this instrument. On the limit setting sub scale 47.3% of respondents scored in the 25th percentile indicating that these parents experienced difficulty setting limits and disciplining their children. Analysis of the support sub scale also showed a high number of scores in the lower percentiles (51.8% in the 25th percentile or below) indicating that a substantial amount of parents, just over half the sample, felt that they did not get enough practical or emotional support as a parent. Whilst for overall satisfaction with parenting, the largest grouping of scores fell within the 50th percentile (28.6%) the amount of parents that fell within the lower percentiles were substantial with 56.3% of parents falling in the 25th percentile or below indicating that these parents questioned the decisions that led them to becoming a parent and were unhappy with many aspects of parenting. The Involvement sub scale demonstrated the most even dispersion of scores; most parents fell in the 50th percentile (31.2%). On either ends of the spectrum on this sub scale the scores were fairly evenly balanced with 25.1% in the 75th and above percentile and 30.4% in the 10th and below percentiles.
Main findings of the NIS

1. 51.8% residents indicated that their area was one that they enjoyed living in whilst 38% indicated they would prefer living in another area. It is of note however that the relatively high levels of satisfaction with the area is not consistent with the findings overall.

2. Only 4.4% of respondents or in real terms 5 people were very proud of the local neighbourhood while 52.5% of residents were either not very or not at all proud. Similarly when people were asked how strongly they felt about their immediate neighbourhood only 5% felt very strongly while 38% felt not very strongly or not at all strongly.

3. Agency trust in the area was low with 64.2% of residents disagreeing that the neighbourhood has received adequate resources. 44.5% felt they had little or no trust in their community representatives, 83.2% had little or no trust their political representatives and 53.3% have little or no trust in the policing services in the area. Related to this lack of trust was a feeling of lack of control over the area. Over half of residents (53.3%) believed they were not well informed about local affairs while only 25.5% believed they could influence decisions in the area.

4. Community participation rates were low with only 19.7% getting involved with a local organisation and only 32.8% of people indicating that the significant problems in the area could be addressed by their participation.

5. Safety issues emerged as one of the biggest concerns. During the day 31.4% of people felt either a bit unsafe or very unsafe while 3.6% would never go out alone. These percentages increased when asked about walking after dark with 63.5% feeling either a bit unsafe or very unsafe and 18.2% of residents responding that they would not go out alone after dark. All residents indicated that they felt very high levels perceived dangerousness after dark with over 50% of residents feeling that it was unsafe or very unsafe to walk alone at night.

6. Some 31.1% of residents had experienced some kind of crime committed against them in the last six months. Residents were also asked to rate various social problems are in their area. The highest response rates come from speed and volume of traffic (75.9% believed that this was a very big problem or a fairly big problem) and parking (73% see it as a very big problem or a fairly big problem). Rubbish, gangs of teenagers hanging around the streets and the use of alcohol or drugs in the area are also perceived as significant problems (67.9%, 64% and 69.5% respectively). Next to be rated were car crime at 55.5% and graffiti at 51.9%.

7. Trust issues within the community are also apparent. 45.3% of people responded that they knew few of their neighbours whilst 58.4% of residents would only trust a few of the people in the neighbourhood with a further 30.7% of people believing that the area was not one where neighbours looked out for each other. When asked who they would ask for help if they needed a lift or were ill only 9.5% of resident would ask a neighbour.

8. The overall feeling of social isolation was further illustrated by the fact that when asked how many people residents felt they could turn to in a crisis that lived within a 15 min walk the largest response set was 18.7% who had 1-2 people.
Discussion section

The results produced by the local interest network survey indicate that the development of community feeling and cohesion in this community is and has been particularly difficult.

The profile of the area produced depicts an insular community with low levels of neighbourhood trust. Indeed the overall community pattern is remarkably similar to that recorded in deprived communities in both Scotland and England (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). These authors describe communities characterised by a low level of complete trust in neighbours. Indeed they found in that in all of the communities canvassed less than 8% of respondents trusted their neighbours and therefore consciously limited their interaction to one or two immediate neighbours. Within these communities, the authors suggested, a pervasive view developed that ‘keeping yourself to yourself’ was the only way they could protect their family from outside influence. The authors concluded that in these deprived neighbourhoods community relations were fragile with lower feeling of personal safety, less trust in neighbours and significant levels of crime leading to the development of what were essentially transient populations.

The experience of those living in the west Dublin community would appear to mirror this experience. In this community, residents feel neither a sense of belonging nor pride in the locality. They do not have established links to others or a sense of trust in those sharing the neighbourhood with them. The community which the data describes is a community in which residents believe services are poor and that they have not received the resources a community of that size should. Political and statutory agencies are not trusted and residents believe they have little control over matters in the area. This contributes to a low sense of belonging and a sense of powerlessness regarding the community’s future—a process which prevents residents from getting actively involved. Serious issues around safety and trust, also inevitably, lead these residents to isolate themselves and their families from a community they perceive as both threatening and intimidating. This perception is not entirely inaccurate. The responses to the incidence of crime question on the NIS suggest a community very much under siege a view supported by information from the anti social team in the area, where overall 155 complaints and 133 incidents of anti social behaviour were reported between 1st January and the 31st August 2009 a figure doubling that of other deprived areas in West Dublin such as Fettercairn and Jobstown in Tallaght.

Research in recent year indicates that parenting in such conditions can be extremely problematic and the findings produced in the PCRI would seem to confirm this. The parents surveyed indicated difficulties across a range of parenting dimensions including the inconsistent use of positive disciplinary strategies. This finding is consistent with Jarrett (1997) who suggests that parents in more dangerous neighbourhoods tend to display less warmth and use more harsh and inconsistent discipline styles than similar parents in safer neighbourhoods. Similarly Garbarino & Kostelyny (1993) found that parents living in environments perceived as unsafe adapt their parenting styles and increase their use of physical discipline in an attempt to keep their child falling under undesirable influence.

Whilst McLoyd (1990) indicates parents faced with an unsafe living environment manifest higher levels of chronic tension and stress and as a consequence demonstrate a greater propensity to discipline their children reactively and negatively.
The lack of trust in a community is also likely to have a negative effect on parenting behaviours and particularly on the amount of freedom a child is allowed. This again is consistent with the PCRI findings produced here. Recent research by Seaman (2003) showed that parents are more willing to allow their children greater freedom of movement when they know and trust the parent's of their children's friends, a situation the NIS results indicate is clearly not the case in this area. Coulton (1996) similarly, found that living in unsafe neighbourhoods inhibits the formation of trusting social ties. He argues that although such relationships may provide critical mutual aid and pooling of resources, they are also likely to involve high costs in terms of expectations of reciprocity, as well as exposure to counter mainstream norms, illegal activities or even violence. If a resident believes that their neighbours have different ideals and morals to them, he suggests, they are unlikely to mix or to allow their child mix within the community. In this way they seek to minimise the effect that the neighbours and the community can have on them and their family. Similarly Borland et al. (1998) investigated parents' perceptions of the hazards and dangers faced in their communities and found, not surprisingly, that parental fears and feelings of security were shaped by location. They found that parents living in housing schemes and disadvantaged areas were more likely to fear tangible dangers identified as local gangs and neighbours, whereas in more privileged areas, parents focused on outside influences such as 'stranger danger' because they saw their neighbourhoods as relatively safe. They indicate, as a consequence, that supervising children as closely as possible is the strategy most favoured and most used by parents in a deprived urban setting. Vieno et al. (2010) also suggests that Social capital is inversely related to safety concerns and positively related to parental support and solicitation. Vieno argues negative social capital and safety concerns have indirect effects on children's anti social behaviour through their effects on parenting. He suggests that the construct of safety concern, composed of fear of crime and concern for children, represents an important psychological factor which influences parent’s daily decisions regarding their children's activities and autonomy. In more supportive communities, he argues, parents tend to have a more open relationship with their children, can afford to be more solicitous toward their children and, as a consequence, tend to know more about their children’s daily activities. Most tellingly, Vienos, studies suggest that the perception of danger has a direct effect on parenting regardless of whether the danger is exaggerated or real. This has huge significance for the area surveyed where it is evident that the resident’s perception that it is a dangerous place is based in actual fact when the levels of crime in the last six months and the level of estate issues are compared to similarly deprived areas.

The particular difficulties observed on the limit setting sub scale of the PCRI are also of note. The parents surveyed clearly indicated that they have difficulties setting limits and disciplining their children. Research by Denham et al. (2000) found that parents who demonstrated more positive parental strategies such as limit setting and consistency tended to have children who had less externalising behaviour problems. This link between limit setting and problem behaviours continues into adolescence, with teenagers more like to display delinquent behaviour if there are low levels of limit setting in the household and a perceived lack of investment in the community (Lahey et al, 2008). Looking at the kinds of estate problems that are present in this community, they represent the kinds of activities that delinquent non-boundaried teenagers are likely to engage in i.e. speeding traffic, alcohol, graffiti and car crime. The lack of limit setting imposed by the parents, it could be argued, is therefore further contributing to a natural cycle within the area, wherein parents set low limits for their children and the children in response develop delinquent behaviour. These delinquent behaviours then add to the anti social behaviour problems and sense of the estate being a dangerous place.
Analysis of the support and communication sub scales on the PCRI also indicates that a substantial number of parents feel that they do not get enough practical or emotional support as a parent, do not feel satisfied with their role as parent and are unhappy with the communicative relationship they have with their children. It is possible that low scores on the support sub scale may be related to issues surrounding trust of neighbours and the community which were evident in the NIS. This is clearly the case for those that do not have relatives or family living in the area. If they do not trust their neighbours then issues such as a lack of support, particularly in times of crisis, may be related. Previous research would support this link. There is a wealth of research that suggests that the social support available to the parent can act as a stress buffering factor especially in time of need. The more support available to the parent, both formal and informal, the higher the feeling of efficacy in parenting and the more likely the parent is to function in an healthy, positive manner (Ghate & Hazel, 2002). Vonda’s (1990) research indicates that deprived communities are more prone to suffer from social fragmentation and a lack of community cohesion, leading families in these areas to be more isolated and less well supported than elsewhere. There is also some evidence to suggest that formal supports may be lacking more generally in disadvantaged communities, either semi formal (provided by community groups) or formal (statutory health or social welfare organisations). Indeed recent reports from England (SEU, 2000) suggest that services are increasingly not reaching those who need them most either because the services themselves no longer exist or because they don’t meet the local needs. These findings are consistent with the NIS outcomes produced for this study.

In terms of the levels of parental satisfaction produced on the PCRI, a link can be made between the demographic characteristics of the sample, trust in the community and low satisfaction scores. There are a high number of one parent families and low income families in the area. It is probable that these demographic characteristics have had an effect on the satisfaction levels with regard to parenting. Research has shown that low income and single parent families suffer from higher levels of stress and psychological distress than is the norm. Avison, (1995), for example, has shown that single mothers have greater exposure to ongoing financial strain, the stresses of care giving and other sources of stress than is experienced in the community generally. He suggests, that the higher levels of psychological distress experienced often, for these parents, translates into a feeling that they aren’t providing as good a life for their children as they would have liked and that this gap between parenting expectations and the realities of their situations, inevitably, causes lower levels of satisfaction with parenting.

Low levels of perceived parental communication were also striking when looking at the PCRI Outcomes produced in this study. However, once again these finding are not inconsistent with prior research. Studies have consistently demonstrated that neighbourhoods where parenting is characterised by eliciting i.e. encouraging the child to express opinions and taking the child’s view into consideration are associated with lower externalising and internalising behaviours in the children (O’Brien-Caughy et al, 2008). Corroborating this is a study from America which suggests that adolescents who report positive and open communication between themselves and their parents are less likely to engage in externalising behaviours (Davidson & Cardemil, 2009). The PCRI responses, in this article, show that parents in this area found communication and discussion with their children difficult leading to a lack of problem solving and problem redressing between parent and child. These findings are consistent with Hill and Herman-Stahl (2002) evaluation which found that mothers living in unsafe neighbourhoods were more likely to withdraw from their child and unconsciously avoid discussing issues viewed as problematic or troubling particularly if it relates to behaviours outside the immediate boundaries of the home. This may come from an acknowledgment that the child has to negatively adjust to a neighbourhood seen as unsafe, however Coulton (96) argues it creates a cyclical relationship between parent and child that actively increase anti-social behaviours in the area thus adding to safety issues in the neighbourhood.
Conclusion

Social capital and community cohesion have been shown to have an impact on neighbourhoods and the people who live within them. Communities characterised by a high degree of risk and a lack of trust are likely to have a negative impact on parenting and consequently on scores on the PCRI.

Relationships between the issues seen on the NIS and on the PCRI were clearly apparent. Low scores on autonomy and limit setting seen in the PCRI may be understood in the context of a community in which there are serious issues around trust and safety. Parents may understandably be reluctant to allow their child the space to grow up and be autonomous and independent if they perceive the community around them as unsafe. Weak and inconsistent discipline and limit setting from parents may contribute to anti social problems in the neighbourhood amongst the teen and pre-teen population, as can be seen reflected in the significant problems of alcohol/drugs and teen problems reported in the NIS Survey.

Research would indicate that there are three main community characteristics associated with low levels of community cohesion which can be directly linked to parenting areas or dimensions clearly experienced as problematic by the participants in this study. Clearly safety issues and high levels of perceived risk in a neighbourhood have a cyclical relationship with limit setting and autonomy. Parents who are having difficulties setting limits with their children are more likely to have children who engage in delinquent behaviour. This behaviour is likely to increase levels of anti social behaviour and therefore safety concerns in the area are themselves likely to increase. The safety issues present in the community may also affect communication between parents and their children. This relationship effect, is supported by research which indicates, that parents living in environments perceived as unsafe become more authoritarian and non communicative as a way of reacting or coping with the stress of the environment.

Neighbourhood Trust or the perceived lack of such trust also appeared to be impacted by parental feelings of support, satisfaction and communication within the community. Those in the survey who indicated a lack of support, who did not have relatives or family living in the area, reported high levels of neighbour mistrust and remarkably low levels of community belonging. Low levels of satisfaction with the area in general and low levels of pride in the community were reported from amongst these parents. These residents' links to the community were tenuous and as a consequence they were less likely to develop permanent links within the community or indeed to their neighbours. For such families the development of support systems was more likely to be outside of the immediate neighbourhood which in turn further isolated them from the community. This was especially the case for younger families with children and was reflected in the generally poor satisfaction levels they reported with regard to parenting supports within the community.

The development of services which support families in the area, both formally through the provision of parenting supports and informally through the development of links between residents and the creation of support networks in the neighbourhood, is clearly needed. However this process will be significantly hampered by the significant levels of mistrust residents expressed with regard to both service provision agents and community and political representatives in the area. Whilst some level of resident concern is to be expected given the difficulties within the area, the levels indicated suggest a community disempowered and jaundiced in terms of service engagement. The pervasive nature of these feelings would not solely influence parenting practice but could hinder any attempt to generate collective action or sense of responsibility within the area. To bring about lasting change, given the embedded nature of some of the difficulties present, a process of community empowerment and engagement will be required.
References


THE INCREDIBLE YEARS PARENT AND BABIES PROGRAMME: A PILOT STUDY IN WEST DUBLIN. CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION AND SOCIAL POLICY

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Abstract

The Incredible Years Parent and Baby Programme aims to support parents of babies aged 0 – 12 months. The study describes the pilot implementation of the programme with first time mothers in West Dublin, a region encapsulating areas of low socio-economic status and high crime (e.g. drug use). These social issues are well established risks to social and emotional wellbeing and can contribute to negative familial relationships, with long-term consequences for both parents and children. The study aimed to determine whether the IYPBP could produce benefits for new mothers in the constructs of maternal stress, post-natal depression and sense of parental competency.

Participants (n=36), were new mothers who were recruited to the programme by Public Health Nurses in five health centres in Dublin West. The Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS), The Parent Stress Index – Short Form (PSI-SF), and the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC), were administered to mothers both pre and post intervention. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with six mothers (n=6), who completed the programme to capture their experiences.

The study reports significant reductions in measures of maternal stress and depressive symptoms and significant improvements in scores in parental satisfaction, efficacy and competency. Semi-structured interviews conducted post programme revealed benefits for mothers in the areas of: (1) Parental confidence and competence (2) Emotional response to child (3) Normalisation of experience (4) Learning about their baby (5) Having access to a supportive and non-judgmental space (6) Having access to a medical professional (7) Increased and maintained social support.

This is the first time that this programme has been delivered in an Irish context. Given the importance of early maternal relationships this result is of significance the services and the community. Implications and future directions are discussed.

Keywords

Incredible Years, parenting programme, depression, stress, parental competency, early intervention.
1. Introduction

There is a growing body of evidence to indicate the benefits of parent training programmes (Griffin et. al., 2010; Kelleher & Mc Gilloway, 2006; NICE & SCIE, 2006). Studies have shown that group-based parenting provision can achieve long-term outcomes for both parents and children (Moran et al. 2004), including Webster-Stratton's Incredible Years programme (Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1997). The Incredible Years (IY) suite is made up of a series of training programmes for children, teachers and parents. These programmes have accrued over thirty years of research, evidencing significant and maintained results, comprising reductions in child conduct problems (both at home and school), increased positive interactions between parents and children and improved child social competency ratings (Webster-Stratton, 1998).

There has been some criticism of developer-led research in early intervention, with some concerns raised over the validity of programme claims (Eisner, 2009). One such concern addresses the issue of how robust programmes are in withstanding the inevitable dilution of model fidelity once programmes are not directly overseen by the developer. As programme operations expand in response to the growing need for service provision there has been further independent research into their efficacy. While some early intervention programmes have withstood these more rigorous investigations, including the IY programme (Lindsay et al. 2011), there are some demonstrating more modest or conflicting findings (Eisner et al. 2012; Moran et al. 2004). Amidst much debate as to how these results are interpreted and the consequences of such research for informing social policy, we can only look to further examine the potential that early intervention has alluded to.

There are findings which suggest that early intervention is effective in preventing or ameliorating child behaviour problems (Barnett, 1995; Karoly, et al. 1998; Barlow & Parsons, 2003; Moran et al. 2004), however, the target age range of parenting programmes has predominantly focused on children aged three to twelve years. Research indicates an association between maternal negative behaviour and stress when the child is in its infancy and the later development of problematic child behaviours (Barry et al. 2005, Tremblay, 2005), which can contribute to maintained negative relational patterns between mother and infant (Williford et al. 2007). Involvement in parenting programmes has been found to promote maternal psychosocial health (Stewart-Brown et al. 2003), acting to scaffold mothers through the challenges of parenthood which, in turn creates more positive mother-infant relationships. In summary, the impact of parenting programmes can be mutually beneficial and protective for both mother and infant.

Early parenting intervention seeks to scaffold or engender child nurturing and development from the outset, avoiding the onset of child behaviour problems. There is some evidence to suggest that early intervention may be more effective at producing and maintaining change (Allen, 2011; Moran et al. 2004), it has been found that programmes targeting parents of younger children aged (2–3 years) maintained programme effects at 1 year follow up (Gross et al. 2003). In addition to the social benefits, there is a body of evidence from America which outlines significant economic advantages for early intervention programmes (Aos et al. 2011), particularly for those populations identified as ‘at risk’ (Lee et al, 2008).

In response to both social and economic costs there is a growing need for such provisions for parents and children identified as ‘at risk’ or ‘marginalised’. In an Irish study, Morley (2008) reported a lack of social support and awareness of services for first time parents. Contained within Dublin North-East and Dublin West are areas of low socio-economic status, with higher incidence of drug and alcohol misuse (Irish Focal Point, 2011). The literature reports that parental substance misuse can have serious consequences for the quality of parenting (Davis, 1990, in Horgan, 2011).
Some of the reported impacts included a tendency towards an inconsistent parenting style comprising severe and unpredictable punishments for the child and high levels of parental frustration and impatience. As previously discussed, these kinds of stressors can have serious and ongoing implications for the relationships and psychosocial health of the parent and child and can place the child at increased risk of being taken into care.

In 2009 there were 1,123 children in care in the HSE catchments of Dublin North-East and Dublin West. The most frequent primary cause of admission to care (27.9%) was family problems where financial or housing difficulties rendered them unable to cope. The second most frequent cause was abuse attributable to neglect of the child (17.2%). Other common reasons for admission to care included: (a) Family problems: drug and alcohol abuse in the family (10.7%), mental health problem or intellectual disability in the family (6.5%); (b) Abuse: physical abuse of the child (7%); (c) Child problems – child emotional and behavioural problems (5.8%), (Health Statistics, Section E, 2011). These figures are largely reflective of the social challenges in these areas of Dublin. The issue of housing and financial insecurity is an unsettling yet unsurprising statistic that is both representative of and additive to many social difficulties. The issue of neglect being the second most common factor for children being placed in the care of the state is of significant concern. Neglect can be defined in terms of ‘an omission, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, and/or medical care’ (Children’s First Guidelines, 2011). The accumulation of economic disadvantage partnered with additional stressors such as the challenges of being a new parent could contribute to the risk of neglect and consequent admission to care for the child. Both neglect and physical abuse are known to have severe and long-standing impacts on an individual’s physical, social and emotional wellbeing, (Kairys et al. 2002; Children’s First Guidelines, 2011). The number of children being placed into care for these reasons alone represents a significant challenge for services to implement further (preventative) supports for parents and children at risk.

In terms of other causes such as drug and alcohol abuse, mental health or intellectual disability, it is likely that considerable resources, including interagency working, would be required to provide adequate supports for the family. It is interesting whether parenting programmes could serve to educate and scaffold the parent-child relationship and prevent child admission to care, particularly for those parents with intellectual disability. Parents with intellectual disabilities face a high risk of having their children admitted to care (Booth et al. 2005; Valuing People Now, 2009), frequently, neglect is the most common concern (Booth et al. 2005; Tymchuk & Andron, 1990). This omission of appropriate care often stems from a disparity between the child’s needs and the skills and experience of the parent (Bakken, 1993; McGaw, 2000). These findings suggest that further steps should be taken to equip and enable parents with intellectual disabilities to learn appropriate parenting skills, rather than initiating court proceedings potentially leading to the child being removed from the home. These additional supports could be offered to parents earlier, even prior to birth of the child, if it is identified that further supports may be required (Valuing People Now, 2009). National Federation of Voluntary Bodies (2009) and Valuing People Now (2009) support the right of people with intellectual disabilities to become parents and dictate that appropriate supports should be provided to sustain the family unit. Furthermore, Booth & Booth (1993) suggest that every avenue for support and prevention should be explored before a child can be taken into care.

There has been much interest from agencies involved in social care as to whether parenting programmes could be used to improve the outcomes for families involved in the child welfare system. One small scale study by Casey Family Programs, (2010) showed significant results for families in the child welfare system using the Incredible Years Parent Training Programme.
As a result of programme engagement parents reported decreased levels of stress, increased levels of empathy for their child and rated family and overall support more positively. Lack of empathy has been a documented characteristic in abusive parents (Research to Practice Notes, 2006). The increase in parental empathy towards their children is significant in reducing risks associated with child abuse and neglect. These results offer insight into the potential impact for parenting programmes such as IY with high-risk populations. Although the findings from this study were positive, there were several issues noted with regard to programme implementation within this population: (1) it was expected that high-risk families would take longer to master the components of the programme (2) there were often barriers to programme engagement/completion due to challenges in participants’ lives. These findings also allude to adaptations requiring increased flexibility with regard to programme implementation.

There is some evidence to suggest that for families of economic disadvantage, parent training is more effective when delivered to individual parents than groups (Lundahl, 2006). The reason for this finding is of interest. One possible explanation may be that individual support may assist these families in the generalisation of skills acquired from the programme and provide a higher intensity of support than gained in a group setting.

The outcomes of the IY programmes have been evaluated for a diverse range of groups, including those identified as high-risk (e.g. neglect, abuse, anti-social and criminal behaviour), (Webster-Stratton, 2009). In addition to the BASIC parenting programmes, an ADVANCED parenting programme recommended for use with child welfare populations has been developed for parents of children aged 4-12years (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2012). This addition to the IY suite allows for more in depth support around the issues of parental mood, stress and further focus on skills such as problem solving. In line with the recommendations of Lundahl, (2006) for ‘at risk’ populations, the programme also offers individual support for parents. Webster-Stratton suggests a minimum of four home visits by IY facilitators in addition to group support and also recommends the small group therapy programme (Dinosaur school) is offered to children (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2012), (for more details on the Dinosaur school see Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). Currently there is one format for the IY parent and babies programme.

Figure 1: Topics covered in the IYPBP

In 2008, Webster-Stratton introduced the Incredible Years Parent and Babies Programme (IYPBP), an eight week course that targets parents of new babies aged 0-12months. The programme aims to promote parental understanding regarding their child’s development and reduce stress. The mode of programme delivery, through group discussion and a diverse array of video vignettes, uses the theory of social learning as a vehicle of change and support for parents.

The IYPBP comprises six main topics (Figure 1), supporting parents to learn how to: (1) observe and read babies’ cues and signals, (2) understand how babies learn, (3) identify the significance of providing a physical and tactile environment, (4) respond to babies developmental needs, (5) prioritise finding time for themselves in order to renew their energy for parenting, (6) encourage babies emerging sense of self, communication and observational learning. The current study explores the outcomes of a pilot evaluation of IYPBP for first time mothers recruited from five health centres in Dublin West.
2. Method

Quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis were used to explore the experiences of first time mothers who completed the IYPBP.

The study aimed to determine whether the IYPBP could produce benefits for new mothers in the areas of maternal stress, post-natal depression and sense of parental competency. The following measures, were used to assess change in these constructs: The Parent Stress Index – Short Form, (Abdin, 1995), The Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale, (Cox, Holden & Sagovsky, 1987), and the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale, (Johnston & Mash, 1989). A pre/post design was used to assess change prior to commencement of the programme and upon programme completion. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted post-programme to capture participants’ experiences.

2.1 Participant Profile

First time mothers were recruited to the study through five health centres in Dublin West. Participants were first time mothers with a mean age range of 25-34 years. The majority of mothers were of Irish descent, and educated to degree level. Most participants described their marital status as living with their partner (cohabiting).

Of those mothers who enrolled, 43 completed the programme and 36 completed the necessary quantitative measures for the analysis (n=36). In addition, six mothers (n=6) completed semi-structured interviews four-five months post completion of the programme to explore mother’s views on: (1) the implementation of the programme, (2) changes in their parenting behaviours, and (3) their social support.

2.2 Measures

Parent Stress Index-Short Form (PSI-SF):
The PSI-SF is a self report questionnaire administered to parents of children aged up to twelve years. The PSI is based on the theoretical model of the determinants of dysfunctional parenting (Abidin, 1976). This model suggests that parental stress is a combination of child characteristics, parent characteristics and situational variables related to the role of being a parent. The PSI-SF consists of 36 self report items that are easily understood, well researched and widely used.

The 36 items in the PSI-SF measure three subscales, 1) Parental Distress 2) Parent Child Dysfunctional Interaction and 3) Difficult child. The items on the PSI-SF are scored on a five point Likert scale, with the parent being asked to rate items on the scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A total stress score is generated by summing the scores of all three domains. Data is also collected on parental gender, marital status, ethnic group and the child’s age and gender. The PSI-SF reports good levels of internal consistency giving Cronbachs alpha scores of .87 for Parental Distress, .80 for Parent Child Dysfunctional Interaction, .85 for Difficult child and .91 for the Total Stress score (Abidin, 1995).

The Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS):
The EPDS is 10 item self report questionnaire that can be administered to mothers of infants to identify candidates at risk of postnatal depression. The EPDS is easy to administer and in numerous studies has proven to be an effective screening tool (Cox et al. 1987). Mothers are asked a number of questions relating to how they have felt in the previous week. Items are scored on a scale from one to three and the higher the score the increased the risk of postnatal depression is. Mothers who score above 10 are likely to be suffering from a depressive illness of varying severity. The EPDS is not a diagnostic tool and the score should not override clinical judgment. A careful clinical assessment should be carried out to confirm the diagnosis. The EPDS has god internal consistency, Cox & Holden (2003) reporting a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.87.
Parenting Sense of Competence (PSOC):

The PSOC is a sixteen item self-report measure assessing the constructs of Parenting Satisfaction, (parenting frustration, anxiety, and motivation), and Parenting Efficacy, (perceived problem-solving ability, and capability in the parenting role). These two subscales are summed to produce Parental Competence score. Each item presents a statement to which parents are requested to indicate their level of agreement on a six point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. According to Ohan, Leung & Johnston (2000) the PSOC has good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .80 reported for mothers for both satisfaction and efficacy subscales.

2.3 Programme Delivery

A unique feature of this study is the involvement of the Public Health Nurses (PHN’s) in participant recruitment and programme implementation. PHN’s are employed by the Health Service Executive (HSE) to provide a range of health care services in the community e.g. schools, health centres, community centres and homes. In their roles, PHNs have regular access to new mothers and are therefore well placed in the community to identify and recruit those who may be in need of or are interested in the IYPBP.

Implementation of the programme to five groups of first time mothers was completed in two hour blocks. The programme was run fortnightly, over eight weeks in five community facilities in Dublin West. Each group was delivered by a Public Health Nurse (PHN) and a facilitator, both of whom were trained in the IYPBP and working towards accreditation.

Peer support meetings for all facilitators were run between each session to discuss any issues and to assist programme planning and implementation. These meetings also enabled ongoing reviews of practice and promoted adherence to the model in order to maximise programme fidelity.
3. Results

The following results were gained from the study. Both quantitative and qualitative results will be explored with regard to mother’s experiences and outcomes of the programme.

3.1 Quantitative Results

A pre/post design was used to see whether there were any changes in the scores on the EPDS, PSOC and the PSI-SF. A paired samples t-test was used to analyse the data. All quantitative results reached statistical significance (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Subscale / Total Score</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean Score Difference</th>
<th>Significance Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh Post-natal Depression Scale (EPDS)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre 7.06</td>
<td>Post 4.92</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>p&lt;.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parenting Sense of Competency (PSOC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental Satisfaction</td>
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<td>Post 42.50</td>
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<td>p&lt;.005</td>
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<td>Post 34.58</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Parental Competency</td>
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<td>Post 77.08</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Distress</td>
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<td>Post 21.22</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction</td>
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<td>Post 16.53</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>p&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult Child</td>
<td>Pre 20.06</td>
<td>Post 17.97</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>p&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Stress</td>
<td>Pre 66.14</td>
<td>Post 55.61</td>
<td>10.53</td>
<td>p&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 - Quantitative Results for the EPDS, PSOC & PSI-SF

3.1.1 Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) - Results

Analysis of the results revealed a significant decrease on scores on the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale from pre (M=7.06) to post (M=4.92).

3.1.2 Parenting Sense of Competency Scale (PSOC) - Results

Analysis of The Parenting Sense of Competency Scale (PSOC) revealed significant increments in: (a) Parental Satisfaction from pre (M=38.47) to post (M=42.50), (b) Parental Efficacy from pre (M=31.31) to post (M=34.58) (c) Parental Competency from pre (M=69.78) to post (M=77.08).
3.1.3 Parent Stress Index-Short Form (PSI-SF) - Results

Analysis of the Parent Stress Index – Short Form (PSI-SF), showed significant reductions in the subscales of (a) Parental Distress from pre (M=26.03) to post (M=21.22), (b) Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction from pre (M=20.06) to post (M=16.53), (c) Difficult Child from pre (M=20.06) to post (M=17.97), (d) The sum of the subscales scores Total Stress from pre (M=66.14) to post (M=55.61). Full details of statistical output can be found in the Appendix.

3.2 Qualitative Results

Analysis of the semi-structured interviews with six mothers (n=6) revealed three main themes and seven subthemes (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Programme</td>
<td>Parental competence and confidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Normalisation</td>
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<td>Model of implementation</td>
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<td>Life as a Mother / Environment</td>
<td>Going back to work</td>
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<td>Reality vs. expectation of being a new mother</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental Stress Index Short Form (PSI-SF)</td>
<td>Change in family support systems</td>
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<td>Parents</td>
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<td>Partners</td>
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<td>Changes in social support systems</td>
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<td>Friends</td>
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<td>Other programme participants</td>
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Table 2 - Themes and subthemes from semi-structured interviews

3.2.1 The Programme

Parental competence and confidence

All mothers interviewed acknowledged the impact the course had on their parenting behaviours. One of the most significant changes to be flagged here was an increase in a sense of competence and confidence in their parenting. Several mothers found that the programme reassured them that they were responding in appropriately to their baby which helped them to feel more confident as a parent and consequently to be consistent in their parenting:

‘It made you feel more confident about what you were doing, it reinforced what you were doing.’

‘You hear so many things... it’s hard to know what’s the right thing to do... it gave me a bit more confidence to see things through and to do things.’
Some mothers noted that the programme produced changes in the way they responded emotionally to their babies when they were unsure about what to do:

‘I found at the start if he cried and I knew he was fed and changed and happy...I’d panic a little bit...but the course made me don’t panic, be patient.’

**Normalisation**

The programme provided mothers with an opportunity to talk about parenting with other mothers, fostering an atmosphere for sharing experiences and supported learning. One mother commented that the course provided a fresh resource for her that was not otherwise available (due to other social supports being at work) and created opportunity for normalisation of experiences:

‘The best thing about the course, was just getting, getting out of your normal routine, because everyone else is in work and you’re kind of at home and you know after all the visiting is over kinda things get, not monotonous but, it was nice that you had somewhere else to go and that other people were in your situation and umm and it was nice to know about (baby’s) development and how he was getting on.’

**Model of Implementation**

Mother’s stressed how different their experience of the IYPBP had been to other community programmes they had engaged with, e.g. parent and toddler groups, emphasising the value of the learning from the programme:

‘I went to a baby group there, I’m in one kind of now, to let the baby play around and I just don’t have the get up and go to go, towards what I did have... Yeah I think it was more exciting, knowing that we were going to learn things.’

Mothers appreciated the open and honest atmosphere where they could share their experiences without any judgement. This non-judgemental forum allowed them to be uncensored about their struggles:

‘Yeah it was great the support was great, with us all being first time mothers you see, I found that it was great that we could say listen, this is the problem, and nobody said ‘Oh well I don’t really like that, I don’t like to hear that you know youse [sic], kind of you and [Public Health Nurse] would kind of say well that’s natural for everyone to have.’

The course emphasis on supported, shared learning that was relevant to the developmental stage of the infant created an open forum for information for mothers. Two mothers expressed how valuable the course had been in providing an opportunity to learn about their baby’s development:

‘It was just, it was great, with having (IY facilitator) there or (PHN), you can ask questions just so you’re in contact with people who are kinda going through the same thing and if you need help then it’s there, I felt it very good as well, it made you feel good that to have somewhere to go every week that you’re going to see people who are going through the same thing.’

‘It wasn’t just a group of mothers sitting around exchanging stories you know.’
The presence of the Public Health Nurse (PHN) in addition to the group facilitator provided a level of expertise that mothers found hugely beneficial and reassuring:

‘The public health nurse being there was such a comfort in a lot of ways, knowing that every week there was a public health nurse there and you could ask about a rash or whatever.’

One mother stated that having the PHN and the other mothers in the programme meant that she was able to ask about any concerns in the group instead of going to the doctor. The implications of this are significant, having both resource and financial benefits for mothers and the health service:

‘Umm, well (facilitator) was there and then (Public Health Nurse) was there which was brilliant because she’s the baby nurse, and umm, you can ask them any questions you wanted to and you didn’t actually need to go to the doctor to, you didn’t have to pay for the doctor ‘cause at least, everybody was there that had babies they knew if there was something wrong you could just ask them all in case you thought, ‘cause you don’t know you’re only after having a baby, you never had it before and they’re all there to help you, so it was very good.’

The programme also served to provide mothers with further knowledge of available resources and encouraged positive ongoing relationships with the PHN’s:

‘... (PHN) kept saying I’m in the clinic, I’m only a phone call away and then even popping down then or me popping up just to if I had an issue, and still to this day, I know I can just run up there before I run to my doctor, and say that’s the problem.’

3.2.2 Life as a Mother / Environment

**Going back to work**

Most mothers interviewed returned to work on either a part time or a full time basis. The prospect of returning to work elicited mixed responses from mothers. Interviews revealed a mutual sense that there were both positive and negative aspects of returning to work. One mother noted how returning to work allowed her to gain back some of her self identity and independence:

‘It’s nice to get a little bit of yourself back...feeling the confidence of yourself back again... you’re not (baby’s) Mam for a while.’

All mothers who returned to work expressed a sense of guilt, and acknowledged an emotional conflict between their desire to go back to work and anxieties about leaving their baby. Mothers who placed their children in crèches admitted how uncomfortable they were with the situation however, acknowledged that there were no alternative options:

‘I felt bad for (the child) that he would be in a crèche with strangers and that I had no choice... I still feel even now I wish he wasn’t there five days a week.’
Although these mothers struggled with their feelings about having to use crèches they spoke of the benefits they observed for the child:

‘He is a very happy baby there and he loves going there and he’s learned loads, his social interaction with others is great.’

The majority of the mothers interviewed had family members minding their child during working hours. Mothers who availed of this resource felt more at ease over leaving the baby and noted the additional benefit that their child was developing relationships with their family:

‘He was with my mam I didn’t feel like I was leaving him with strangers... leaving him with someone I know and trust.’

Reality vs. Expectations of being a new mother

Interviews captured both positive and negative things about the discrepancy between mothers’ expectations and the reality of being a parent. Many mothers talked about how much harder the reality of parenting was, the loss of sleep, the anxiety over how they were doing things and the high expectation they had for themselves as parents:

‘The reality was completely different... I knew it would be hard but I didn’t know what kind of hard to expect or what it meant.’

One mother talked about the anxieties she felt prior to the birth of her child. Her expectations of parenting were that she wouldn’t be able to cope but was surprised at how positive her experience had been, and how happy she was to be a mother:

‘I was always worrying that would I be a good mother, would I be able to play with her, teach her things and learn (sic) her (...) I kept kinda going I wouldn’t be able for it, I won’t be able for a baby (...) It just relaxed, it just was real like I always say to (husband) I should have had her years ago because the atmosphere like is just amazing, with your own child, that it’s just, you’re just in great humour all the time.’

3.2.3 Changes in Support

Changes in Family Support Systems – Parents

Participants talked about changes in their main support systems since their babies had been born. For the majority of mothers, family had become a lot more important, with the maternal grandmother often being cited as their main support. Mothers revealed feeling closer to their parents since the birth of their child, often phoning them for advice about the baby:

‘It is after bringing us closer, now we always were close, but it brought us closer, you know I’m ringing her up for help going, what do I do here, what do I do here, and first of all she’d be like ‘I forget it was so long ago!’ But now yeah, she’s very helpful and all so it’s grand.’

‘I’d say definitely with my parents I’ve come, become closer to them as well, because they just love (baby) yeah they just adore him.’
Changes in Family Support Systems – Partners

Partners were also listed as a main support for participants. There was an acknowledgement that their relationship with their partner had changed due to the arrival of their child. It brought many couples closer but there was also an acknowledgment from one mother that a new baby can be a strain on relationships:

‘It’s tough on couples as well because you both have different expectations...we got to talk about how had it impacted our relationships... A lot of them (partners) felt that we were overprotective…’

Changes in Social Support Systems – Friends

Mothers reported that since the arrival of their child that they had less time to keep in contact with wider support systems such as friends, particularly those friends who didn’t have children of their own:

‘The ones who actually don’t have kids it’s very hard to meet up with them because you generally meet up with the kids and the kids play.’

This can result in a reduction in social capital which can negatively impact on perceived support. The group aspect of the programme serves a protective function, affording mothers new connections with mothers of similar aged infants.

Social support from other programme participants

The value of the support from other programme participants was strongly identified in the interviews. All of the mothers expressed how useful the group aspect of the course was to normalise their experiences of motherhood and to meet new people with whom they had something in common:

‘It made me feel like I had friends that had babies the same time and it just made me feel much, much better.’

Mothers felt that the structure of the course fostered friendships with other mothers, creating additional social supports. As a result of the support and friendships established in the group, all mothers interviewed had maintained contact with group participants. Mothers identified that they still contacted other group members to arrange playdates with their infants and many utilised Facebook to share pictures of their baby, keep in touch and share advice:

‘Our group was quite close and we all met up regularly and we still do.’

‘We’re still going through different milestones and we’re still asking how are you coping with that.’
4. Discussion

Quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate clear benefits of the IYPBP for first time mothers and their babies. On completion of the Incredible Years Parent and Babies Programme (IYPBP), the scores on the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS), and subscale and total scores of the Parent Stress Index – Short Form (PSI-SF) showed significant reductions. There were also significant increases on subscale and total scores on the Parenting Sense of Competency (PSOC) scores.

Semi-structured interviews conducted post programme revealed benefits for mothers in the areas of: (1) Parental confidence and competence (2) Emotional response to child (3) Normalisation of experience (4) Learning about their baby (5) Having access to a supportive and non-judgmental space (6) Having access to a medical professional (7) Increased and maintained social support.

The current study demonstrates the utility of the IYPBP in significantly reducing maternal stress and depressive symptoms, whilst significantly increasing parental satisfaction, efficacy and competency. Interviews with mothers also report evidence of increases and benefits in parental confidence, support, social capital, coping skills, parenting skills and positive mother-infant interactions. These findings will be discussed in relation to current research, limitations and future considerations.

The findings of the study demonstrate significant decreases in maternal stress and depressive symptoms after IYPBP completion. In addition to the quantitative findings there was a reduction in clinically significant scores on the EPDS, that is, scores that are indicative of depression warranting further assessment/treatment. These findings are in line with those of Stewart-Brown et al. (2003) who that parenting programmes can promote maternal psychosocial health. This in turn, plays a protective role in the mother-child relationship preventing or minimising maternal negative behavior and stress which can impact the relationship and lead to child behavior problems, (Barry et al. 2005; Williford et al. 2007) and antisocial and criminal behavior in later life, (Tremblay, 2005). Tremblay (2005) suggests that intergenerational transmission of risk factors such as these begin in early infancy and factors such as poverty, family dysfunction and coercive parenting styles are significant predictors.

Contained within Dublin West & Dublin North-East are areas of low socio-economic status (SES). As one of the risk factors for child and youth behavior problems is poverty this is of concern. Within the aims and scope of this programme, there is little resource available to ease this problem; in addition it is unlikely to be the sole contributing factor to negative mother-infant relationships. Barry et al. (2005) found that even when low SES families were controlled for in the study there was still a significant association between parental stress and distress and child disruptive behavior problems.

For other family risk factors, there is the potential to provide additional supports to prevent or alter dysfunctional relationships and inconsistent, punitive or coercive styles of parenting that may prove counterproductive and damaging. The results of the IYPBP are suggestive of a scaffolding effect for mothers, acting to eliminate or reduce the symptoms of stress and depression that could potentially lead to negative outcomes for the mother-child relationship and the long-term social and emotional wellbeing of the child. The findings are suggestive of more positive, higher quality mother-infant interactions as a result of the IYPBP, leading to better psycho-social outcomes for both mother and child. One mother identified changes in her emotional responses regarding her infant’s demands, learning to be more patient and less anxious when she was unsure why her baby was crying. This change in maternal response would have positive consequences for interactions with the child and associated relational and psycho-social benefits for mother and infant.
Parental satisfaction, efficacy and competency all significantly increased with mother’s involvement in the programme. The results suggest that mothers were more satisfied with their relationship with their baby, felt they were more capable parents and were finding it easier to cope with the challenges of motherhood. Bandura, (1997) found that perceived competency in a task can influence activity choice, the amount of energy expended on that task and persistence in behavior. Applied to parenting, significant increases in perceived parental competency would have a considerable impact on the energy and time invested in parenting the child. This is likely to have a powerful effect on the child’s emotional, social and cognitive development, particularly in conjunction with the higher quality interactions resulting from the decreased maternal depression and stress scores.

It is interesting to consider the role of mothers’ expectations in relation to their perceived satisfaction, efficacy and competency. Kalmuss et al. (1992) reports that expectations of the experience of motherhood are an important mechanism in determining how easily mothers adjust to their role. When mothers’ experiences are less challenging than they anticipated, maternal adjustment is reported to be smoother and more positive. However, as Harwood et al. (2007) report, when the reality of parenting is more difficult than expected, mothers report a more negative relationship with their child and a higher incidence of depression. These negative interactions are also likely to impact on mothers’ perceived satisfaction, efficacy and competency as a parent.

In line with Kalmuss, (1992), one mother whose anxieties had been high prior to the birth of her child, rated the reality of parenthood as extremely positive. For the majority of mothers’ interviews revealed that the reality of parenting was much more challenging than they had imagined. Despite these findings, parental satisfaction, efficacy and competency significantly increased on completion of the programme. Similar findings have been discovered by Tremblay et al. (2005) and Shaw, et al. (2005) who postulate that these effects could be mediated by the natural maturation process and the increased ability of the child to regulate their emotions. In the absence of a control group is it difficult to state findings with any certainty, however, in the current study there is some qualitative evidence to suggest these findings are likely to have been influenced by the programme. Interviews found that the programme did contribute to mothers’ feelings of increased parental confidence and competence, suggesting that the programme functioned to engender skill acquisition and perceived capability.

From interviews with mothers changes in social supports were strongly identified, with many participants feeling closer to their partners, and extended family. Interviews revealed that for some mothers, parenting brought additional challenges in terms of the relationship with their partners. This is a factor which could warrant further investigation with regard to enhancing support. In relation to other social contacts, there was an acknowledgement of the challenges mothers faced in keeping in touch with friends, particularly those without children. A new child can be a risk factor in social isolation, particularly for first time mothers. In an Irish study, Morley (2008) found a lack of social support and awareness of community services for first time parents. As one mother in the pointed out in the interviews, partners and friends are in work during the day and there can be a tendency to remain in the house with the child. This is of concern in relation to the wellbeing of parents and children as higher social capital has been linked to better health outcomes (Morgan & Swan, 2004). The results from interviews suggest that the programme played a role in creating new links in the community and fostering new friendships with other first-time mothers, serving to bolster social capital. The generation of new social contacts may additionally guard against depression and other psycho-social health difficulties which can further impede an individual’s connection to social and community resources. The group aspect of the programme and the promotion of an open and non-judgemental atmosphere allowed a forum for mothers to share their experiences of motherhood and gain a sense of the normalcy of their struggles. One mother reported that even 4-5 months after the programme had ended participants were still asking each other how they were coping, suggesting a maintenance of this support.
The involvement of the Public Health Nurses (PHN) in the current study was a highly valued addition to the programme in providing professional advice and support to mothers, in line with Tarkka et al. (1999) and Wilkins (2006). Mother’s rated the presence of the PHN as hugely beneficial in relieving their anxieties and normalizing their experiences. As mother’s were able to ask the PHN about any concerns they had about their baby this served to conserve community resources, such as doctors time and the financial cost attributable to these visits. Mother’s were also more knowledgeable about the availability of PHN’s in the community, serving to increase local supports, as called for in Morley (2008).

The involvement of PHN’s in programmes to improve outcomes for such populations is currently being promoted, particularly in the United States, (Association of Community Health Nursing Educators Research Committee, 2010). The employment of PHN’s to facilitate programmes such as IYPBP make sound practical and economic sense. PHN’s possess a high skill set that is, as we have reported in this study, of great benefit to the community, furthermore they are well placed in the health service to be providing such supports that link naturally into their professional role. Even with ‘at risk’ populations, the involvement of PHN’s have been shown to be effective in the early prevention of child abuse and neglect, however, this contact alone has been ineffective in maintaining non-abusive relationships (MacMillan et al. 2005). These results speak to the potential for PHNs to be involved in the provision of early intervention services that are both effective and enduring, particularly for the most disadvantaged.

The participant demographics for the mothers in the current study were different to what we might expect given the population trends of the local area. The reasons for this are of interest and may warrant further investigation and a more structured selection process. There is duty to provide care and support for those most in need, particularly for those groups assessed as ‘at risk’, such as parent populations impacted by abuse, neglect (Children’s First Guidelines, 2011) and intellectual disability (Booth et al. 2005; Valuing People Now, 2009).

Other Incredible Years Programmes have demonstrated positive outcomes with ‘at risk’ populations (Casey Family Programmes, 2010; Webster-Stratton, 2009) and adaptations in programmes for older children (4-12years) have been made to accommodate those most in need (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2012), including the introduction of individual support for parents, in line with Lundahl, (2006) and Casey Family Programmes, (2010). Outcomes for early intervention (from birth to 3years) have been shown to be more effective at producing and maintaining change, (Gross et al. 2003), particularly for those most at risk, (Allen, 2011). The effects of early intervention promote social and emotional development and produce long term benefits in educational and vocational achievement, mental and physical health and the prevention of criminal behaviour, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy (Allen, 2011). Given the benefits of intervening early for maintained change and the documented sustained negative effects of abuse (Kairys et al. 2002; Children’s First Guidelines, 2011), drug use (Horgan, 2011), negative parenting styles (Barry et al. 2005; Tremblay, 2005; Williford et al. 2007), disorders such as mental health problems (Tsivos et al. 2011), and intellectual disabilities (Tymchuk &Andron, 1990; Booth et al. 2005), on families it is essential that we respond to support those populations most at risk.

Future research considerations could comprise assessing the impact of the IYPBP on such populations. As the research assesses the efficacy of the pilot delivery of this programme in Ireland there is much scope for such investigation. Given the success of other IY programmes in maintaining change (Webster-Stratton, 1998), it would also be of interest to see whether the IYPBP can also support these claims or whether more longitudinal intervention is required. If IYPBP can produce or initiate change, particularly for those families ‘at risk’ there are clear social and economic benefits (Aos et al. 2011; Lee et al. 2008).
This paper presents not only an account of findings to date, but is indicative of a potentially viable and cost-effective service delivery model (via the employment of PHN’s), if the programme was to be rolled out on a larger scale. One limitation of the research presented is that as control group data is currently being attained it was not available for evaluation. Any findings are presented with this acknowledgement and cautious interpretation as to causality is advised pending further comparative data.

Conclusion

The pilot evaluation of the IYPBP in West Dublin presents clear benefits of the IYPBP for first time mothers and their babies. The study reports utility of the IYPBP in reducing maternal stress and depressive symptoms, whilst increasing confidence, satisfaction, efficacy, competency, social capital, support, positive mother-infant interactions, coping and parenting skills. The certainty of these claims will be confirmed with the attainment of comparative data from a control group (currently in progress).

Future research could investigate the effectiveness of IYPB with ‘at risk’ populations and further explore the utility of paternal involvement in IYPB in bolstering both parental and father-child relationships. Positive results with these groups could be directive in informing social policy and best practice in the response to and prevention of negative outcomes for children and parents.
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### 7. Appendix

#### 7.1. Statistical Results

**Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) - Results**

Analysis of the results revealed a significant decrease on scores on the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale from pre (M=7.06, SE=.70) to post (M=4.92, SE=.63), t(35) = 4.20, p<.001 (two-tailed). The mean decrease in EPDS scores was 2.07 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 1.11 to 3.17. The eta squared statistic (.58) indicated a large effect size.

**Parenting Sense of Competency Scale (PSOC) - Results**

Analysis of The Parenting Sense of Competency Scale (PSOC) revealed significant increments in: (a) *Parental Satisfaction* from pre (M=38.47, SE=1.33), to post (M=42.50, SE=1.12), t(35) = -3.16, p<.005 (two-tailed). The mean increase in *Parental Satisfaction* scores was 4.03 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -6.62 to -1.44. The eta squared statistic (.47) indicated a large effect size. (b) *Parental Efficacy* from pre (M=31.31, SE=.73) to post (M=34.58, SE=.78), t(35) = -3.76, p<.005 (two-tailed). The mean increase in *Parental Efficacy* scores was 3.28 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -5.05 to -1.50. The eta squared statistic (.54) indicated a large effect size. (c) *Parental Competency* from pre (M=69.78, SE=1.51) to post (M=77.08, SE=1.67), t(35) = -4.19, p<.001 (two-tailed). The mean increase in *Parental Competency* scores was 7.31 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -10.85 to -3.77. The eta squared statistic (.58) indicated a large effect size.

**Parent Stress Index-Short Form (PSI-SF) - Results**

Analysis of the Parent Stress Index – Short Form (PSI-SF), showed significant reductions in the subscales of (a) *Parental Distress* from pre (M=26.30, SE=1.08) to post (M=21.22, SE=1.05), t(35) = 4.44, p<.001 (two-tailed). The mean decrease in *Parental Distress* scores was 4.81 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 2.61 to 7.00. The eta squared statistic (.60) indicated a large effect size. (b) *Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction* from pre (M=20.06, SE=1.02) to post (M=16.53, SE=.77), t(35) = 4.06, p<.001 (two-tailed). The mean decrease in *Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction* scores was 3.53 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 1.76 to 5.29. The eta squared statistic (.57) indicated a large effect size. (c) *Difficult Child* from pre (M=20.06, SE=1.01) to post (M=17.97, SE=.97), t(35) = 2.45, p<.05 (two-tailed). The mean decrease in *Difficult Child* scores was 2.08 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .36 to 3.81. The eta squared statistic (.38) indicated a large effect size. (d) The sum of the subscales scores *Total Stress* from pre (M=66.14, SE=2.54) to post (M=55.61, SE=2.28), t(35) = 5.75, p<.001 (two-tailed). The mean decrease in *Total Stress* scores was 10.53 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 6.81 to 14.25. The eta squared statistic (.70) indicated a large effect size.
CULTURE, DEMOCRACY & THE CHILD’S RIGHT TO EXPRESS HIS/HER VIEWS (RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVE)

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Abstract

The main focus of this paper is the relation between the realisation of the right of the child to express his/her views and democracy in Russia. With this in view, I will study the interconnection between the right to express the views and the right to participate. Further, I will give an overview of the specifics of democracy in Russia, how they influence political participation, and what could be done to prevent the further infantilisation of citizens in Russia. Finally, I will explore traditional perceptions with regard to children’s participation in Russia and the legal framework and practice of the implementation of the child’s right to social and political participation.

Keywords

Russia, child, views, participation, democracy, culture.
Introduction

Until recently the practice of the realisation of the child’s right to express his/her views and its influence on democracy was a subject of neither study by scholars nor interest by legislators or average citizens. Where studies were carried out, most were concerned with typology, approaches and boundaries of the participation with the focus on either political (Thomas, 2007) or social (see, for example Cashmore, 2011, or Kalabikhina et al. 2010) participation. Another set of studies considered a right to express the views rather as a procedural right, one of the guarantees to secure then child’s access to a court (Berro-Lefèvre, 2008). Studies on democracy in Russia concentrate mainly on the question if Russia is a democratic state and what are the specific features of Russian democracy (Oleinik, 2008, Petrov et al. 2010).

One reason for this is that Russia is notoriously famous for other problems in the field of children’s rights, such as violence\(^1\), institutionalization, and vagrancy (The International Journal on Children’s Rights, 2009). All of them are considered by the child protection bodies (both state and NGO-based, international and domestic) as far more acute and significant than the rights of the child to express his/her views in matters affecting him/her and to participate in the decision-making processes. Despite the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by Russia back in 1990, the term “participation” generally appeared in children’s rights discourse only in 2005 after the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding observations on Russia\(^2\) had been adopted where the Committee had expressed its concern that “article 12 of the Convention is not adequately applied in families, schools and other institutions and not fully taken into account in practice in judicial and administrative decisions and in the development and implementation of laws, policies and programmes”. Due to the necessity to submit the fourth periodic report to the UN Committee Russian authorities conducted a preliminary survey on the realisation and protection of this right\(^3\). The analysis of this report concludes that the right of the child to express his/her views is seen through the prism of the child protection activities or child participation in various “Child’s Public Councils” (analogous to Russia’s Federal Public Chambers\(^4\)) – a clear top-down administrative initiative with the emphasis, again, on the issues of child protection.

The second reason for the absence of academic and professional interest in the issue of children’s participation lies within the cultural context. Nowadays the understanding that the child is (or should be) not the object of care by parents and authorities, but rather the subject of rights, the realisation of which the state is obliged to guarantee, is no longer disputable on the level of international human rights bodies. However, on the societal and family level the capability and appropriateness of child participation in decision-making remains an issue (Matthews et al, 1999, 136). Traditional paternalistic attitudes towards the child as a person with limited capacities, unable to appraise the situation and form the judgment is based on Domostroy\(^5\) and supported by the Russian Orthodox Church and

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1 Only in 2009 more than 108 thousand children became victims of violent acts, more than 1,6 thousand of them died (Protection of children from violence: Interregional thematic report. – M., Institute of the family and Upbringing RAO. 2010, p.3).


3 Child participation in activities on the protection of their rights: Interregional thematic report. – M., Institute of the family and Upbringing RAO. 2010.

4 “One of the Public Chamber’s functions is to facilitate coordination between the socially significant interests of citizens of Russia, NGOs, and national and local authorities, in order to resolve the most important problems of economic and social development, to ensure national security, and to defend the rights and freedoms of citizens of Russia, the Russian constitutional system, and the democratic principles of the development of civil society in Russia” ([http://www.oprf.ru/en/about/](http://www.oprf.ru/en/about/)).

5 Domostroy or Domostroi (Russian: ДОМОСТРОЙ, Domestic Order) is a 16th century Russian set of household rules, instructions and advice pertaining to various religious, social, domestic, and family matters of the Russian society. Core Domostroi values tended to reinforce obedience and submission to God, Tsar and Church. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domostroy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domostroy)).
prevents dissemination of “Western values” and forms public policy in this regard.

Over the past few years, opinion polls have shown a decrease in young people’s political participation in Russia (see VTsIOM and Public Opinion Foundation polls below). According to surveys, Russians believe that they are not able to influence the decision-making processes in the country as they have not been able to influence the decision-making process even in their own families. Due to the traditional disregard towards the views of the child in family issues (in which the state allegedly has no right to intrude) the young generation got used to the fact that nothing depends on them. This passiveness was supported by the official policy aimed at alienation of citizens from democratic procedures (by which the Russian democracy is characterised (Lipman, 2011)). Altogether these efforts have led to the “infantilism” of Russian citizens - young people attribute the state with the social role of the parent and take all the state’s decisions with a passive obedience.

In this paper I am going to study cultural attitudes towards child participation in Russia and Russian state policy in this regard. I will look at how traditional perceptions together with legislation and court’s practice of disputes with the participation of children might be related to the passiveness of Russians as citizens. I argue that social (particularly in family proceedings) and political participation are to a great extent interrelated and the promotion and protection of the child’s right to express his/ her views is crucial for building a democratic, truly social6, child interest oriented state.

The right of the child to express his/her views and the right to participate

Respect for the views of the child became one of the four guiding principles of the UNCRC7.

Article 12 of the Convention reads:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

The UNCRC was not the first international human rights document setting this right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights8 had already declared that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (Article 19). Provision of the corresponding article in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights9 (“Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference” (Article 19)) confirmed its primary importance for realisation and protection of human rights and democracy. Article 12 of the UNCRC thus basically reiterates the provision declared in other international instruments. This repetition however is of primary importance as it addresses certain cultural perceptions. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

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6 The Russian Federation is a social State whose policy is aimed at creating conditions for a worthy life and a free development of man (Art 7 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation).
8 Rossiyskaya gazeta (December 10, 1998).
(the Committee) has been consistently emphasising that a child shall be regarded as an active subject of rights and that a key purpose of the Convention is to emphasise that human rights extend to children. The Committee has rejected what it termed “the charity mentality and paternalistic approaches” to children’s issues. It invariably raises implementation of Article 12 with State Parties and identifies traditional practices, culture and attitudes as obstacles to this realisation.\footnote{Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. United Nations Children’s Fund/ 2007, p.149.}

Another significant feature of Article 12 is that it not only requires that children should be assured the right to express their views freely, but also that they should be heard and that their views be given “due weight”\footnote{As a party to the Convention, Russia is legally obliged to realize this provision for those under 18 years old.}. The implementation of this provision involves profound and radical reconsideration of the status of children in most societies and the nature of adult/child relationships. It requires us to listen to what children say and to take them seriously. It requires that we recognise the value of their own experiences, views and concerns (Lansdown, 2001, 1). The important question here is when a child should be trusted to be able to form and express a valid opinion. It is noted that Article 12 does not set any lower age limit on a child’s right to express views freely. It is clear that children can and do form views from a very early age, and the UNCRC provides no support to those States that would impose a lower age limit on the ascertainment or consideration of children’s views (UNICEF, 2007, 153). In its General Comment No. 7 on "Implementing child rights in early childhood", the Committee encourages States Parties to construct a positive agenda for rights in early childhood:

\begin{quote}
... A shift away from traditional beliefs that regard early childhood mainly as a period for the socialization of the immature human being towards mature adult status is required. The Convention requires that children, including the very youngest children, be respected as persons in their own right. Young children should be recognised as active members of families, communities and societies; with their own concerns, interests and points of view.\footnote{Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 7, 2005, CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1, para. 5.}
\end{quote}

In deciding how much weight to give to a child’s views in a particular matter, age on its own should not be the criterion. The twin criteria of age and maturity must be considered instead. Maturity is not defined by the Convention. It implies the ability to understand and assess the implications of the matter in question. This does not mean that young children’s views will automatically be given less weight. There are many issues that very small children are capable of understanding and to which they can contribute thoughtful opinions. Competence does not develop uniformly according to rigid developmental stages. The social context, the nature of the decision, the particular life experience of the child and the level of adult support will all affect the capacity of a child to understand the issues affecting them (Lansdown, 2001, 6).

The focus of this paragraph is the correspondence between the right to express the views and the right to participate. It is noted that numerous authors refer to Article 12 of the UNCRC as speaking about participation (Matthews at al., 1999, O’Donnell, 2009, Head, 2010, Cashmore, 2011, and others). They generally note that the Convention upholds the rights of children to participate in decisions that affect their lives. The text of the Article, adopted in 1999, however, does not contain this particular term (O’Donnell, 2009, 4). It appears only in the comments given by the Committee in 2006, following its Day of General Discussion on “The right of the child to be heard”. 
The Committee emphasized that:

... Recognising the right of the child to express views and to participate in various activities, according to her/his evolving capacities, is beneficial for the child, for the family, for the community, the school, the State, for democracy.

To speak, to participate, to have their views taken into account: these three phases describe the sequence of the enjoyment of the right to participate from a functional point of view. The new and deeper meaning of this right is that it should establish a new social contract. One by which children are fully recognized as rights-holders who are not only entitled to receive protection but also have the right to participate in all matters affecting them, a right which can be considered as the symbol for their recognition as rights holders... 13

With these words the Committee finalised the transformation of the children's rights discourse from child-saving (protecting children) to propagating the personhood, integrity and autonomy of children (protecting their rights) (Freeman, 1998, 434) - the transformation which would be welcomed by the states back in 1990.

The UNCRC sets out a number of other obligations on the rights of participation by children (Matthews, 1999, 136): Article 13 (The right to freedom of expression), Article 14 (The right to freedom of thought), Article 15 (The right to association and assembly), Article 17 (The right to appropriate information), Article 29 (The right to an education which will encourage responsible citizenship). Although these articles do not contain the term "participation" they presuppose active participation of a child in the respective activities. This way the right to participation should be considered as a broader one which cannot be equated to the right to express views. The latter nevertheless is the core, the basis for the other related rights.

Before considering the traditional attitudes towards child's participation and its relevance to democracy development it is important to review how the right to participate is actually understood. Thomas notes that "participation" can refer generally to taking part in an activity, or specifically to taking part in a decision-making. It can also refer to either to the process or to an outcome (Thomas, 2007, 199). Matthews et al note that participation implies processes of involvement, shared responsibility and active engagement in decisions which affect the quality of life (1999, 136). It is a field of practice which includes initiatives involving young people according to their race, ethnicity, class, gender, or other social identity; in education, environment, housing, or other issues. It includes efforts by young people to organise around issues of their choice, by adults to involve young people in community agencies, and by youth and adults to join together in intergenerational partnerships. The issue is not necessarily whether the effort is youth-led, adult-led, or intergenerational, but rather whether people have some effect (Checkoway, 2011, 341). Lansdown (2001, 16) characterizes participative initiatives as those where the aim is to strengthen processes of democracy, create opportunities for children to understand and apply democratic principles or involve children in the development of services and policies that impact on them. The meaning of the right to participate is obviously contested (Roche, 2002). The unlimited scope on the possible activities related to the participation is one of the reasons for this.

A division of participation into "social" and "political" is the most interesting for the aims of this paper. According to Thomas (2007, 200), a social participation discourse speaks of networks, of inclusion, of adult-child relations, and of

the opportunities for social connection that participatory practice can create. Alongside this there is an alternative discourse that is more or less overly political—that speaks of power, and challenge, and change. To some extent these alternative discourses relate to different versions of participatory practice; however, they may also be describing the same practice from different perspectives. The latter thesis might be illustrated by the possibility to apply the typology given below both to the political and social participation:

Types of Child Participation

(in accordance with the extent of the child’s involvement in the process)

1. Non-involvement: the project is designed and run by adults; children are either not consulted at all or the consultation is tokenistic.
   
   Example: Children are consulted on how to better enlighten youth with regard to AIDS prevention but no feedback is ever provided to them on their input and their involvement in the initiative ends there.

2. Assigned but informed: adults decide the project but children volunteer for it; children understand the project and know who decided to involve them and why; adults respect children's views.
   
   Example: Adults enlist the help of children in cleaning up a nature reserve and children organise their own group initiatives.

3. Consulted and informed: the project is designed and run by adults but children are consulted; they fully understand the process and their views are taken seriously.
   
   Example: A School Improvement Committee is chaired by teachers although the views of student representatives are considered before the decisions are taken.

4. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children: although adults have an idea, children are involved in planning and implementation; children are involved in challenging the outcomes and taking decisions.
   
   Example: Children are invited to participate as researchers on child rights violations and then work with community leaders to design responses to the problems identified.

5. Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults: children have an idea, set up projects and come to adults for advice and support.
   
   Example: Youth raise the need for a peer-to-peer counselling service on suicide in their community—community leaders ask the local community centre to work with youth in establishing one.

6. Child-initiated and –directed: children have an idea and decide how the project will be carried out; adults are available but do not take charge.
   
   Example: A youth-led organisation initiates a campaign against family violence in their community and seeks the assistance of women’s rights NGO for advice on advocacy and lobbying.

We can see that quite paradoxically the typology of child participation starts from “non-involvement”, or “non-participation” of children in social and political activities (which includes a tokenistic participation) thus documenting the still existing and widespread practices of not listening to children. Matthews et al. (1999, 136) suggest three factors which contribute to this culture of non-participation. First, there remain discourses within society which question the appropriateness of children’s political involvement. Second, there are those who doubt the capability of children to participate. Third, even amongst those who believe in the principle of children’s right to have a say,

14 We can indubitably expand the notion of adult-child relations into the family relations and include a child participation in the family disputes into this category.

there are uncertainties about the form that participation should take and the outcomes which might result. All three factors reflect the traditional attitudes towards children inherited from the times when children were the attributes to their parents. Such attitudes, fully supported by Russian traditions, will be analysed in this article, but before that it is important to provide the reader with some background with regard to the specifics of political participation in Russia.

**Russian democracy and participation**

In-depth research of forms of democracy and concepts is not within the aim of this study. I will go just a little bit further than separating the term into “demos” and “kratos” and stating that the principle of rule by the people is the essence of democracy (Oleinik, 2008, 13) in order to comment on the political regime in Russia, its main trends and obstacles to political participation.

“The great right of every man, the right of rights is the right of having a share in the making of laws” (Waldron, 1998) as William Cobbett addressed it, is realised in Russia by means of participation in elections of the President, deputies to the State Duma, lower chamber of the Federal Assembly - Parliament of the Russian Federation, deputies to the regional parliaments, and heads of the municipal unit (in some regions). Elections of the members of the Council of Federation (the upper chamber of the Parliament) and heads of the regions were replaced with their appointment – a clear sign of the limitation of citizens’ political participation.

The competitive elections are seen as the core element of the democracy. It is the main component of the “minimalist” definition, according to which democracy implies competitive elections held on a regular basis. (Oleinik, 2008, 11). Similarly, elections are in the middle of the other definitions, applied to Russia, including:

- A non-liberal democracy (a combination of relatively competitive elections and absent rule of law) (Oleinik, 2008, 23);
- A sovereign democracy (“people vested in power, governmental bodies and their policies are elected, formed and guided exclusively by the Russian nation in all its diversity and integrity”) (Surkov, 2006);
- An over-managed democracy (a system with highly centralized state authority concentrated in the executive branch, formal institutions of democracy, including room for at least some candidates to oppose incumbent authorities on the ballot in elections to powerful posts and the systematic functional replacement of these institutions by substitutions) (Petrov, 2010, 3).

Participation of adult citizens in political processes, including elections, is a right, not an obligation. A long list of authors point to a problem of a democratic society with insufficient citizen involvement and support (see, for example, Howe et al. 2009, 21). Taking decision on whether or not to participate in elections in Russia people are influenced, among others, by certain political trends.

One of such political trends is a concept of sovereign democracy which basically means “that there are no external pressures on people vested in power, governmental bodies and their policies. Its second feature is the lack of the independent civil society” (Oleinik, 2008, 25). The concept remains to be in demand throughout Asia, where governments give citizens increasing economic and social liberties but monopolise political power. At the same time the 2008-2012 Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, claimed that Russia is a young democracy, trying to portray itself much more as a variant of Western democracy with certain Russian specifics, (not as an alternative model) and abandoning its long-standing argument that Russia is a “special case” democracy justifying many authoritarian practices. (Recknagel, 2010).
This position of Russia, which is a recognised “global supplier” of a certain type of governance (Petrov, 2010, 2), gives a signal that certain attitudes towards the civil society are acceptable (if not supported) on the international level.

Another important political trend is the systematic gutting of existing institutions of democracy and their frequent functional replacement by substitutions and further strengthening of their dependency from the central authorities. The creation of a whole network of substitutions is perhaps the most prominent feature that distinguishes over-managed democracy from other types of hybrid regimes. Many works that recognise such substitutions portray them as nothing more than window dressing, intended only as a kind of Potemkin village to deceive the international community and perhaps a regime’s own population into thinking the country is more democratic than it really is. The tendency is of the further centralisation and steady increase in state efforts to control (“manage”) a political system that had previously been more liberal rather than by liberalising a previously more authoritarian system (Petrov, 2010, 3, 4). It is also contributed by Russia’s authorities’ efforts to communicate to the public that so long as the state is providing something beneficial, protest is unproductive and indeed impermissible. The rulers argue that their role in this non-participation pact, as it was called by Petrov (2010, 12), has been to supply the steady economic growth that took place under Putin after a decade of collapse, Russia’s return to global leadership, a perception of stability and a sense that the country is being guided by a strong and capable leader. This message was again and again repeated during the recent opposition-initiated activities on Bolotnaya and Sakharov’s squares and the most recent Novy Arbat demonstrations. Thus efforts by those in positions of power to push citizens further and further from decision making are another reason for citizens not to participate in political processes.

The mentioned trends could not be analysed without taking into consideration the cultural specifics of the country. Characterising the power in Russia Mezhuyev (2000, 97) correctly pointed out that “the secret of this power – in its attitude towards the people as a foolish child – an object not only for exploitation, but constant “father’s care” for the sake of preservation of its moral purity and child’s innocence. People can touch you, but it should be punished in case of the bad behaviour. How can you give this foolish child a complete freedom? Democracy for this power is a synonym of the political freedom without morals, the source of moral dissoluteness and moral spoiling”.

This is, in my view, an ideal description of the relationship between the power and the people in Russia. The paternalistic attitude, I further argue, leads to the passiveness, or, “infantilisation” of citizens.

Polls consistently demonstrate that Russians are not deluded by the actions of the Russian authorities’ inefficiency, corruption and widespread violations of human rights. They routinely respond in surveys that government officials are corrupt and self-serving. According to a poll conducted in mid 2010, 80% of the citizens believe that “many civil servants practically defy the law.” (Lipman, 2011). The interest towards participation in public and political life is decreasing. Russians were most active politically in the years 2004 and 2007, when only one third of the citizens did not express themselves at all (32 and 39% respectively). Presently almost two thirds (61%) of Russians ignore public and political life of the country. The Participation of others is limited to participation in elections (27%). The most massive were the elections of the President in 2004. The willingness of young people to participate in the work of political organizations also declines. In 2006 the number of young people who were willing to become a member of a party or political organisation reduced by half/50%.

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17 Vladimir Putin was reelected in 2004.
siors, which was quite significant in 2005 (youngsters were much more active politically) practically disappeared.\(^{18}\)

The key arguments of people ignoring political life have changed during the last four years. Previously the main reason referred to was the usefulness of participation (29%) and lack of qualification (27%), now the usefulness of participation is the second most often referred to reason (25%), while the most often referred to reason is the lack of interest towards political sphere in principle (36%).\(^{19}\)

People willingly abandon the political realm shifting their interest to the private sphere. It is a model best described as a no-participation pact (Lipman, 2011). Despite opportunities for self-expression, community and activism remain marginal and do not alter or weaken the state’s dominance over society. Russians would rather use their skills and talents for self-fulfilment abroad than be the driving force of Russia’s modernization. This political alienation is accepted by an overwhelming majority of Russians\(^{20}\). The surveys found that nearly three-fifths of adult Russian citizens felt “absolutely no” responsibility for what happens in their country, with an additional quarter feeling only a tiny amount of responsibility (Petrov, 2010, 12). Acting within the non-participation pact Russians had basically referred their right to decide to the government, feeling not able to participate or not interested in participating, but altogether happy that those in power proceed without them therefore ensuring their basic economic and social needs.

It might be argued that Russian passiveness is rooted in more than 70 years of communist regime which did not give any opportunity to people to decide – on who will rule, where to live, what to wear - and new generations of Europe oriented people will be able to change the country. However, the opinion polls (above) demonstrate this point of view is false. Young people’s lack of interest toward political life and, generally, the future of their mother country was nurtured in their families. Though they follow the changes occurring in the country, this is rather an interest of an observer than the one of an active participant\(^{21}\). Further infantilisation of the population in country will lead to the autocratisation of power. And the only way to change the direction is to undertake urgent measures aimed at political motivation of young citizens and those who will be able to take part in elections in the very near future.

Children are a significant part of civil society and have much to contribute to the governance of the country they live in, not only in the future, but now; influencing the social politics of the state through democratic mechanisms created by the state or through their parents. The participation of boys and girls in family decision-making would represent the broadening and deepening of how we enhance (or, in the case of Russia I would still say, “build”) democracy (Thomas, 2007, 200). Reflecting on how to raise a proper citizen, Lansdown agrees that only providing children with the opportunity to experience democratic decision-making will help them to acquire the respect for their own views, capacity and willingness to listen to others and thus begin to understand the processes and value of democracy (Lansdown, 2001, 6). Schools and local communities were identified as the most appropriate spheres for child’s participatory development. I argue that the first and the most important environment for a child is the family environment. This is the place where truly ‘transformative, dialogical and participatory’ (Barrow, 2010, 87) practices can teach a child that his/her opinion really matters. This allegation does not imply that citizenship education

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\(^{20}\) Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has enjoyed high and steady approval ratings for years. About 70 percent of respondents in a February 2010 poll said they approved of Putin’s performance. President Dmitry Medvedev’s approval ratings are only slightly lower. (http://wciom.com/index.php?id=61&uid=639).

\(^{21}\) According to the VCIOM poll conducted on Bolotnaya square on 4 February 2012, only 8% of participants were students. 8% - took part in the demonstration because of the curiosity, 4% - “came with friends”. Press release No.1415 (http://wciom.com/index.php?id=61&uid=639).
in schools or their participation in state initiatives is not important. However, the study of the traditional cultural perceptions shared and supported by the family (below) confirms that this should be the focal point of the efforts applied. Treating children within the family as persons, able to form and to express an opinion which influence a final decision will support the development of new citizens – self-respecting, active and willing to build a true democracy in Russia.

Cultural context affecting the right of the child to express views in Russia

The right of children to have rights is not a matter of dispute any more (Freeman, 1997). It is hard to imagine now that less than a couple of hundred years ago this question was completely out of the public discourse. For centuries children were viewed as nonpersons, the property and responsibility of their parents, who had a right to control their upbringing, even their very existence. Children could not participate in the political or civic life of their countries (Wald, 2004, 1721). While legitimate children were seen as property of the father, illegitimate children were even in a worse situation – they were seen as the property of no one. Such a child was nullius filius and had no legal relationship with his or her parents. Accordingly, no one had any obligations to care for or to protect them. Early bastardy laws were aimed at preventing illegitimate children from becoming a charge on the community (Roche, 2002). In the mid-1800s, many industrialized countries began assuming state responsibility for promoting and protecting children's well-being. The developments were focused on the care of children with no parents, or parents who were too poor to support and protect them (Bennett et al, 2009, 784), or the protection of children from severe physical abuse by their parents (Wald, 2004, 1721). Wald notes that laws affecting the status of children, adopted over the next 100 years in the western industrialized countries, focused on their protection and not their autonomy or fuller integration into the economic and political life of their countries. Except where parental behaviour was seen as inimical to the social order, parents continued to have virtually total authority over their children's upbringing.

Presently, despite the acceptance of the concept of children's rights, the idea that these rights could take the practical form of a claim enforceable against others (including parents) remain problematic both in philosophical and practical terms. In many countries giving children any autonomy within the family would be incomprehensible. Moreover, priority to parental or family authority over child's rights and interests may be demanded by a society's political, cultural, or religious traditions. In some countries, supporting parental autonomy is seen as critical to supporting political and cultural diversity. In some countries, supporting parental autonomy is seen as critical to supporting political and cultural diversity. In others, the proper role of parents may be seen as teaching children to accept national cultural values and traditions and not as helping children to develop into 'autonomous' adults (Wald, 2004, 1722).

In Russia, as well as in other western countries, a child was traditionally seen as an object of property rights rather than a subject of any rights. The old Russian language used the same word for identifying “children” and “slaves” (chad’). In the 15th through to the 18th centuries the Orthodox church and the priests remained the main spiritual guide for Russians and were promoting certain child-rearing practices, based on Domostroy (Domestic Order) – the
Russian moral codex of that time. Core Domostroi values tended to reinforce obedience and submission to God, the Tsar and the Church. The main way to treat the child according to Domostroy was to “teach him/her with fear”. In paragraph 21 “How to teach children and to save them with fear” parents were advised “not to pity a youngling while beating him: if you punish him with a rod, he will not die, but become healthier”, “not to smile in vain playing with him”, “not to give him liberty at youth”. It was only in the middle of the 17th century when the State started to form its structures of childcare. By the 19th century the state system of the childcare and protection was already formed but it was still too early to speak about a child’s right to have any views not to mention the right to express them. The Soviet ideology was not helpful to the upbringing of a person with independent opinion or judgment either. It was the view of the Soviet State that a child should live and get education within the State care institutions. An average child in the overwhelming majority of families would start his/her education at the age of one year in the nursery, then continue to a kindergarten and, at the age of 7 years – to school, where after regular classes (from 9 a.m. till 1 p.m.) many children had to stay for “prolonged hours” (until 6 p.m.) in order not to be left at home without family supervision. By the time a child reached the age of maturity, he/she had limited emotional contacts with parents and was largely influenced by the official/soviet ideology denying independent thinking and promoting the state/group values, one of which was that the majority’s opinion was always the correct one (The International Journal on Children’s Rights, 2009).

The break-up of the Soviet Union and the appearance of the modern Russia – a state with the considerable international influence directed towards the further centralization of power – gave an impulse for the restoration of these traditional values and attitudes. These values - such as family, children, love and friends were put as an antithesis to the “market” values, such as money and career (Varlamova et al. 2006, 62). The latter were presented as “western values”, heterogeneous to average Russian people. A considerable revival of an interest towards religion, Orthodox Christianity, started after perestroika and continues as a trend (Bauer, 2010, 107). According to the public opinion polls, 75% of Russian citizens consider themselves as Orthodox Christians. The majority supports the main postulates of the Church with regard to the social and family life. Another important development of last 10-15 years – in spite of the declared separation of the religious associations from the state and their equality before the law (Article 14 of the Russian Constitution) - a clerical ideologisation of power is taking place (Buryanov, 2011). The Orthodox Church is presently active not only in the field of education (where it has a definite preference, manifested, amongst others, in the adoption of state sponsored programs of orthodox religious education in schools), or family protection (opposing the introduction of the juvenile justice under the pretext that it will give the state the possibility to take away children without a proper reason), but in the political field as well. On the recent Bishop’s Council conducted in Moscow on 2 February 2011 the decision was taken to allow priests to participate in state elections in case this is needed to confront the forces aimed at contesting the Russian Orthodox Church. Obedience to the church and to the state power as a main postulate of this church is largely supported by the governing officials.

25 The real author is unknown, but the most widespread version was edited by the archpriest Silvester, an influential advisor to young Ivan IV. To modern researchers, it is a precious account about Russian society and the life of wealthy boyars and merchants (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domostroy).

26 For the aim of this paper under perestroika we mean the whole period of reforms (1985-1991).


28 Praktika zayavleny i deystvy ierarkhv, dukhovnsvsta, monashestvuyushhih I miryan vo vremya predvybornyh kampany. Problema provizheniya dukhovnsvstvorn svoih kandidatur na vborah (Practice of statements and actions of bishops, clergy, religious and laymen on the campaign trail. The problem of clergy nomination to stand for election) (http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1400896.html).
Civil servants demonstrate support and respect for the Orthodox Church approaches, including in the issues of child protection. Now when we are in the 21st century and while we have access to the international community's experience in child participation brought up in the comments of the international or regional human rights bodies or within the frame of international dialogs, Russia still preserves the paternalistic attitude towards its children. Children are denied their right to participate with the reference to a traditional "Russian" understanding of this issue.

The group of UNICEF experts conducted an analysis of models of child participation in Russia (Kalabikhina et al, 2010). The study noted that the discussion on whether it is feasible to involve children in decision-making is still going on in Russia. Those against child participation refer to the child's lack of capacity to effectively participate in the decision-making process: referring to his/her certain development level, susceptibility to influence by adults, legal status, the communicational barrier between children and adults etc. In addition to scientifically based arguments there was a set of myths preventing child participation practices from spreading, among others: “Obligations for children come first and rights after”, “Our traditional culture does not presume consideration of the child's views”, “To give children their civil rights would mean to deprive them of their childhood”, “Child participation in the political processes decrease their parents' influence on them” etc. (Kalabikhina et al, 2010, 26).

European research notes that in spite of a growing lobby in favour of children's rights to participate, there remains intransigence in some quarters about whether such political involvement is appropriate. Lansdown (1995, 20) identified three reasons why some adults are reluctant for children to take part in decision-making that will impact on their own life and the lives of others (interestingly enough, his research made 15 years earlier than the one by Kalabikhina et al. was phrased in almost the same words as “specific Russian” cultural attitudes were formulated.). First, giving children the right to have a say would threaten the harmony and stability of family life by calling into question parents’ "natural" authority to decide what is in the best interests of a child. Second, imposing responsibilities on children would detract from their right to childhood, a period in life which is supposed to be characterized by freedom from concern. A third strand to the argument is that children cannot have rights until they are capable of taking responsibility.

Six years later Lansdown came up with a more detailed list of obstacles to the promotion of child participation (Lansdown, 2001, 8):

- Different values and habits of young people and adults;
- Place of youth in the social hierarchy (in some cultures young people have traditionally very low position and influence);
- Patronizing of youth by adults;
- Negative stereotypes (all the young people are...; all adults are...), mutual misconceptions and biases;
- Belief that it is the job of someone else to work on youth participation;
- Belief that nothing will change, even if a young person participates;
- Young people who participate are not representative of the whole youth.

The item about negative stereotypes could be best illustrated by the images given by Foster (2001, 7) (the image of carefree, irresponsible youth with an appetite and aptitude for sex, drugs and rock and roll) and Mokwena (2001, 17) (young people as a socially inert, self-absorbed group with little or no interest in the political process).

29 Pri prinyatii resheny po yuvenalnoy yustitsii Pavel Astakhov rukovodstvuetsya blagosloveniyem patriarha Kirilla (Taking decisions on the juvenile justice Pavel Astakhov is led by the blessing by patriarch Kirill) (http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=39063).
The list above as we see is of the very general character and does not provide any specific reference to certain countries. Being “traditional” for many countries, including Russia, these perceptions represent a shared approach towards children and children’s participation.

What makes the public discourse outside Russia so different from the one inside the country is the continuing discussion on the impermissibility of treating children as “adults-in-waiting or human becomings”. Understanding that not listening to children not only fails to acknowledge that they are the citizens of today (not tomorrow), but also undervalues their true potential within society and obfuscates many issues which challenge and threaten children in their “here and now”, started to form more than 10 years ago (Matthews et al, 1999, 137). Relevance of a certain treatment of children within society and within a closer circle – the family – to the future self-perception of the young person as citizen able to influence the authorities’ decisions, the child’s ability to be something else than obedient subordinate of the state power was confirmed by the study of young people’s transitions to citizenship. This study found that identification with citizenship reflected a number of factors, including not just age but also social class, experience of paid work and community involvement, and more subjective factors such as feeling that one had been treated respectfully and had been able to have an effective say. This suggests that, while it is unlikely that citizenship will be a primary element in children’s emergent fluid identities, it is more likely to be salient where they have experience of being treated respectfully as citizens and have had the opportunity to participate (Lister 2007, 700). Experience of being treated respectfully within the family and having had the opportunity to participate in deciding on some family issues, I might add, is even more important than training in political participation.

The family is the first and the most influential environment for the child and his/her behaviour later in various groups would depend on a particular values and attitudes cultivated within it. Russian modern family sharing (even partially) traditional "submission to God, the Tsar (President) and the Church", I argue, will not be the most fertile ground for the development of an active citizen, able to form judgment and to stand for his rights. I am far from saying that Russia will return to a medieval style of child-rearing, however, I find it important to note the existence of certain traditional beliefs, supported by the state. Culture, traditions and familial relations are the most difficult to change and long-term comprehensive state politics is needed to alter them. Legislation promoting the child participation is the first and the foremost instrument the state can use to democratize the family. The existing legislation and the practices of child participation in Russia will be covered in the next paragraph.

Law and practice in the field of child participation in Russia

The end of the Communist era was marked by a change of perception of the state’s role in the child’s life on a political level. Russia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and thus undertook an obligation to respect and observe globally-acknowledged children’s rights. During the following years legislators have undertaken significant efforts to bring the Russian legislation concerning the rights of the child directly or indirectly into compliance with the UN Convention. However, Russian cultural attitudes and stereotypes with regard to the right of the child to express his/her opinion remain more or less the same as they were twenty years ago. People, including law makers and State officials, still consider a child unable to participate in decision making processes. This inevitably influences the substance of the laws enacted as well as the practice and application of these laws. In this paragraph I will look at the law relating to the right of the child to social and political participation and the practice of its application in Russia.

The Constitution of the Russian Federation\textsuperscript{31} adopted in 1993 contains several articles related to the right to express one’s views, which could be fully applied to a child: on the freedom of conscience and freedom of religion (Art. 28), on the freedom of ideas and speech (Art. 29), on the right to association (Art. 30), on the right to participate in managing state affairs both directly and through their representatives (Art. 32), on the right to participate in cultural life (Art. 44). Thus, the Constitution provides for the basis for realisation of the child’s right to participate. However it would be a mistake to say that the constitutionally guaranteed principles of child participation were elaborated in greater detail in family or procedural legislation.

The Family Code of the Russian Federation (1995)\textsuperscript{32} – the key legal act, regulating the status of the child in Russia - stipulates all the main rights of the child in a separate chapter. Article 57 of the Family Code provides for “the right of the child to contribute his opinion in any family decision concerning his/her interests, and the right to be heard in any court or administrative proceeding”. The law refers to the obligation of the authorities to “take into account the opinion of the child over 10 years old”. However, while setting this obligation, the Family Code immediately releases the authorities from it, stating that the child’s opinion should be ignored when such an opinion contradicts the child’s best interests. The reference to the age itself in the mentioned provision does not directly contradict the UNCRC’s provision that “the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child”. UNCRC studies note that setting a minimum age on the right of the child to be heard, for example in custody proceedings following separation or divorce of parents, is a usual practice for the States, but the Convention provides no support for this, and States cannot quote the best interests principle to prevent children from having an opportunity to express their views (UNICEF, 2007, 153).

The concept of “the best interests of the child” is not defined anywhere in the Russian law and authorities interpret it in accordance with their personal understanding of the child’s interests in a particular situation. This often contradicts the very sense of the UNCRC. Any interpretation of ‘best interests’ must be consistent with the spirit of the entire Convention – and in particular with its emphasis on the child as an individual with views and feelings of his or her own and the child as the subject of civil and political rights (UNICEF, 2007, 38). In its comments the Committee noted that “… it regrets that the determination of what constitutes the ‘best interests’ seems to be the decision of adults alone involving little consultation with children, even when they are able to state their opinions and interests…”\textsuperscript{33}

This is exactly the way Russian authorities understand the concept of the child’s interests: NOT to hear the child before the court of justice or administrative authority to avoid his further emotional stress. The concept, which is universally applied when decisions are made about children, enables courts to individualise decisions for the “particular child” (Henaghan, 2008, 118). In Russia it is used as a general all-purpose reference by a judge or administrative officer when needing to explain why the child was not given the possibility to express his/her opinion. This is done notwithstanding the requests of children themselves to be heard or medical certification confirming that the child is psychologically stable and willing to give the testimony and ignoring the latest surveys stating that most children (91%) said that they should be involved, some of them directly referred to feeling better if they knew what was going on and had some control over the situation, rather than being entirely at the ‘mercy’ of their parents’ actions and decisions (Cashmore, 2011, 517).

31 Rossiyskaya gazeta (N 237, December 25, 1993).
33 Albania CRC/C/15/Add.249, para. 26.
The existing Civil Procedure Code (2002)\textsuperscript{34} does not ensure the child’s participation in the process or access to justice either. According to its Article 37, “The ability to exercise the procedural rights by their actions, to discharge the procedural duties by their actions and to order the representative to conduct the case in the court (the civil legal capacity to sue) shall belong in full measure to citizens, who have reached the age of eighteen years... The rights, freedoms and lawful interests of an underage person and of citizens who are restricted in their legal capacity shall be protected in the proceedings by their legal representatives... “. The situation of the conflict of interests between the child and his/her legal representative is referred to by the Family Code, which stipulates the right of the child to apply for protection to the state care authorities and, after reaching the age of 14 years old – to the court (Article 56). The situation of a conflict between the child and the state care authorities is not considered by the legislation at all.

Article 37 of the Civil Procedure Code stipulates the obligation of the court to draw into participation persons aged between 14 and 17 years old. At the same time the code does not contain any provision describing the procedural status of this child. The absence of a law which would provide for the procedural status of a child in court proceedings makes this obligation of the court and the right of the child to participate in civil proceedings illusory. The courts allege they do not have the authority to accept petitions from children. The limited procedural ability of the child \textit{per se} does not, in any aspect contradict the child’s rights provided for by the Russian Family Code and UNCRC. The lack of legal capacity is the essence of the concept of minority (O’Donnell, 2009, 2). The limitations on the procedural status of the child, however, should not influence the level of protection of his/her rights. Meanwhile the absence of the procedural status leads to the impossibility of the child not only to take an active part in the proceedings, but also to initiate proceedings for the protection of his/her rights. A vivid example of this could be the case of Kornilin and Kalmykova\textsuperscript{35} (2005). In this case X, 17 years of age, was not allowed by the court to participate in the proceedings with regard to the termination of the contract between state care authorities and the foster family where he has lived for 13 years and his transfer under into a state care institution. Due to the fact that X, being underage, had a limited procedural capacity he could not file any motions himself. The state care authorities who were his legal representatives, were not interested in having him contribute to the establishment of the facts and did not file the relevant motion with the court. The court itself did not initiate this procedure. As a result, X was not allowed to express his opinion about the level of care provided to him by his foster family and the termination of the contract with this family was supported by the court.

Most countries have taken some steps to ensure the right of children to be heard in legal and/or administrative proceedings (including the capacity of children to give evidence and their capacity to initiate legal action to defend their rights). In most cases the steps are limited in scope and generally not sufficient to protect and ensure this right (O’Donnell, 2009, 52), but these measures still achieve a certain level of protection. In a number of jurisdictions children are able to instruct lawyers to represent them in private as well as public law proceedings (Roche, 2002) – these measures are not only useful for the protection of the child’s interests, but also for the detection of the facts of the violation of the child’s right to participate. The case of S.P., D.P., and A.T. v the United Kingdom\textsuperscript{36} considered by the European Commission of Human Rights shows how effective can be the participation of the state appointed lawyer in the case of child’ rights protection. The lawyer in this case, was appointed to represent the children in the proceedings on the domestic level, but at a certain stage came to the conclusion that the interests of children required the initiation of proceedings against the state and filed an application with the European Commission of

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\textsuperscript{34} RF Code of Laws N 46, Art. 4532 (SZ RF N 46. Art. 4532).

\textsuperscript{35} The interests of X (17 years old) were represented by the non-governmental organization YURIX.

\textsuperscript{36} Application No. 23715/94.
Human Rights. Such an independent action by the lawyer acting for the child would be an important guarantee in the realization of the child’s right to participate. Presently, in Russia, the law does not provide for the obligation of the state care authorities to appoint a lawyer to protect a child’s interests in the case of his conflict with his legal representatives or the state itself. Moreover, Russian law “On the Bar” does not provide for free legal aid to the child unless he/she is kept in the correctional or penitentiary institution (Article 26).

The absence of any legal basis (apart from one provision of a declaratory character) of the realization of the child’s right to social participation is clear from the given overview. I allege that the absence of a body of law in this regard and the state’s tolerance towards the practices of violation of the principles set in the Constitution stem from the same cultural attitudes discussed in the previous paragraph. The fact that such attitudes have a real effect could be also demonstrated by the low level of child participation in legal proceedings in various countries in Europe. The practice of the European Court of Human Rights is very indicative in this regard. It shows that most cases that involve children, particularly where issues of family life were at stake, were introduced by adults claiming their rights and interests in relation to children, rather than the protection of the rights and interests of children themselves (Berro-Lefèvre. 2008, 72).

The non-willingness of the Russian state to promote child participation goes beyond the problem of the right of the child to express his/her opinion within family disputes. Political participation is encouraged only if strictly within state policy. Children’s participation in public activities is stipulated in the law “On the basic guarantees of the rights of the child in the Russian Federation” (1998), the law “On public associations” (1995) and the law “On state support to the youth and child’s public associations” (1995). While the first sets the principles of child’s participation (in accordance with the law and traditions of peoples of the Russian Federation (Article 4 of the law “On the basic guarantees...”); the second sets the forms of associations and sets the principles of state regulation of their activities. The law “On state support to the youth and child’s public associations” identifies which children’s organizations have particular state support. It sets the measures taken by the state to promote children’s associations and “policies aimed at social making, development and self-realization of children and youth as well as for the protection of their rights” (preamble). The scope of activities of such associations can be best characterized by their rights, set in the Article 5 (1) of the law:

...have right to... prepare reports to the president and the Government of the Russian Federation on the situation with children and youth, participate in discussions of reports of federal bodies of executive power on the said issues, and to make suggestions on the state youth policy; to make suggestions to the subjects of law initiative with regard the laws related to the interests of children and youth, participate in preparation and discussion of the draft federal programs in the field of state youth policy...

While speaking about the practice of political participation of children, it should be noted that almost all the initiatives have been initiated (openly, as a state initiative, or through other persons) by bureaucrats of different levels. A good example is the new structure of a Children’s Public Counsel, instituted by the Children’s Ombudsman under the RF

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President in 2009 “with the aim to hear and to consult children on different matters”. Russian regional powers have undertaken the similar initiatives - Youth Parliaments, Children’s Public Legal Chamber, and Children’s Ombudspersons instituted in various Russian regions. Although they might be effective from the point of protecting the rights of the child they cannot be seen as a realisation of the child’s right to participate as children there are not allowed to influence real decision-making. Although to a certain extent they contribute to the children’s awareness of their right to express their views, they are not designed to expand the culture of responsible decision-making.

There are several problems that were noted in the 2010 report of the Children’s Ombudsman under the RF President on “Child participation in activities on the protection of their rights” as obstructing the further development of children’s participation in Russia:

- **Legislative shortcomings** that allow authorities wide discretion as to taking a decision with regard to whether the child’s opinion should be or should not be taken into the account;
- **Lack of information** about the child’s right to actively participate in the life of his/her family, public and political life of their country;
- **Lack of professional staff** trained to implement the principle of children’s participation in practice;
- **Lack of state funding** of initiatives involving children’s participation.

The necessity to address the structural deficiencies was formulated by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its comments on the latest Russia’s report:

> …further efforts be made to ensure the implementation of the principle of respect for the views of the child. In this connection, particular emphasis should be placed on the right of every child, including children who are members of vulnerable and minority groups, to participate in the family, at school, in other institutions and bodies and in society at large. This right should also be incorporated in all laws, judicial and administrative decisions, policies and programmes relating to children...  

Realisation of these complex measures will indubitably contribute to the change in the cultural perceptions nourished within the family. It will further contribute to making children active members of the society, able, and crucially, it will add to their willingness to participate in democratic procedures. Whether Russia is willing to achieve this aim, or will continue to follow the traditional paternalistic attitudes towards children is still an open question.

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41 Child participation in activities on the protection of their rights: Interregional thematic report. – M., Institute of the family and Upbringing RAO. 2010, p. 18.
42 Ibid., p.16.
43 CRC/C/RUS/CO/3, p. 7.
Conclusion

Results of opinion polls have proven that political participation of citizens in general and of the youth in particular are decreasing in Russia. Russians believe they are not able to influence the decision-making processes in the country and are not interested to do it anymore. This passiveness is supported by the official policy aimed at the alienation of citizens from democratic procedures by their frequent functional replacement by substitutions and further strengthening of their dependency from the central authorities. This trend is accepted by an overwhelming majority of Russians, including young people who do not feel any responsibility for what happens in their country.

Child participation in the social sphere though is guaranteed by the Russian Constitution is not necessarily supported by the laws which make the right of the child to actively participate, for instance, in custody proceedings illusory. And again, unlawful practices in this sphere are tolerated and thus supported by the higher authorities. Non participating children grow up to become non participating citizens who are happy that the authorities will be able to proceed without their active involvement.

This “infantilisation” of citizens is supported by traditions in families and Russian Orthodox Church promoting obedience and submission to God, the Tsar and the Church. Used to the paternalistic attitudes within the family young people attribute the state with the social role of the parent and take all the state decisions with a passive obedience. The study of the law and practices with regard to child political participation shows that the state’s efforts are not aimed at raising citizens able to having a share in ruling the country and taking responsibility. The future of Russian democracy thus lies within Russian families where children should be treated as respected responsible persons able to form and to voice opinions. The involvement of children in decision-making on this level, including in family disputes, is crucial for changing traditional Russian perceptions about children and their right to participate. Due respect to the views of the child will not only support their formation as active citizens of their country (and of the regional and global community) free of traditional biases but will also start the chain reaction of children’s participation.

“No one in Russia was in doubt about the outcome of Sunday’s presidential election. Vladimir Putin’s triumph was assumed.”

The end of Putinism. By Jackson Diehl, Monday, March 5. The Washington Post

(http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/putins-future-in-doubt-in-russia/2012/03/01/gIQAm0cWrR_story.html).
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THE CHILD LAW CLINIC AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK: AN INITIATIVE IN LEGAL EDUCATION & SUPPORT FOR STRATEGIC LITIGATION

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Abstract
This paper is aimed at offering an account of the history and development the Child Law Clinic, established at the Faculty of Law, University College Cork in 2011. The Clinic provides graduate student-led research services to lawyers litigating or seeking to litigate children’s issues.

Keywords:
Child law, clinical legal education, children’s rights.
Introduction

The Child Law Clinic was established at the Faculty of Law, University College Cork in 2011. As an innovation in Irish legal education, the Clinic provides graduate student-led research services to lawyers litigating or seeking to litigate children's issues. It is committed to the reform of child law and to this end it organises seminars and conferences designed to raise awareness about child law and children's rights. It also undertakes funded and commissioned research and supports legal professionals and legal and children's organisations that could benefit from its services.

The Background

The Clinic has its origins in two research initiatives undertaken by its Director, funded by the Irish Research Council of the Humanities and Social Sciences and the National Academy for the Integration of Teaching and Learning (NAIRTL). The first supported a visit to colleagues in Philadelphia including those involved in providing student-led advocacy and legal services at Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania, and it facilitated contacts with one of the United States’ most successful strategic litigation initiatives, Juvenile Law Centre (www.jlc.org). The model for the Clinic was developed during this research trip and it led to a successful application to NAIRTL for support to research similar models in other jurisdictions, as well as to explore available child law education in Ireland. In relation to the latter, the research concluded that there was virtually no graduate or professional education being offered by Irish third level institutions in the area of child law and in this way it provided support for the development of specialised child law education leading to the launch of the LLM in Child and Family Law in September 2011. A roundtable with legal practitioners was undertaken in October 2010 to explore how the Clinic might serve their needs and in this way both the LLM and the Clinic are evidence-based initiatives.

The Clinic was launched in January 2011 by Marsha Levick, Chief Legal Counsel and Deputy Director of Juvenile Law Centre, Philadelphia. Since that time, it has gone from strength to strength.

The Aims of the Clinic

The Clinic is made up of staff and graduate students, including students on the LLM in Child and Family Law meaning that it is comprised of highly skilled legal researchers with knowledge of child law and children's rights in Irish and international law. The aim of the Clinic is to put this knowledge and expertise at the disposal of those seeking to advance law reform – through litigation or other activities – relating to children. The service is free and highly confidential, where appropriate.

The Clinic aims to promote both progressive child law and the protection of children's rights by:

- Improving the quality of children's representation;
- Promoting evidence-based reform in all areas of child law;
- Supporting lawyers to litigate children's issues.

As a clinical education initiative, it has the advantage of offering students’ experience of how child law operates in practice. Through their involvement in the Clinic, students have had the opportunity to observe the application of the law first hand through their research and their engagement on the issues with practising lawyers.

2 In addition to the Director, there are currently four staff, five PhD students and eight LLM students involved in the Clinic.
They enjoy unique exposure to the legal challenges and obstacles facing children and their lawyers in asserting children's rights and they work together to develop innovative legal argument capable of reforming how the law treats children. This ‘clinical’ experience is unique to the Faculty of Law at UCC and those involved in the Clinic have already gained hands-on experience unavailable to their peers elsewhere. This has undoubtedly enhanced the legal education available at UCC to ensure that those qualifying from our programmes are equipped with both legal knowledge and the skills of its application. It is hoped that those who participate in the Clinic will emerge with the skills and knowledge that equips them to become influential lawyers for children.

Cases submitted to the Clinic are managed by student leaders and decisions in the Clinic are taken by the group collectively. The diversity of the Clinic members is one of its unique and important features. In particular, there is considerable expertise in child law among its staff and student members, and many of those involved have expertise in other areas of law too, such as family law, human rights, immigration law, constitutional law, torts and criminal law. This ensures that the Clinic has access to a wide range of perspectives in its deliberations of the issues that come to the Clinic’s attention. It also means that all Clinic members learn from each other enabling a collaborative learning environment.

The Work of the Clinic

The Clinic's main work is providing legal research services to lawyers litigating or proposing to litigate children's issues. In this regard, the aim of the Clinic is to develop not only accurate but persuasive legal argument pertinent to the issue being litigated with a view to strengthening the quality of legal submissions being made. Lawyers seeking to avail of the Clinic's services, make initial with contact the Director to outline the issue or concern. This might be a broad issue or a very precise one. It may be urgent – requiring immediate attention - or not time restricted. Depending on the circumstances and the nature of the issue, it is brought to the attention of the Clinic at the appropriate opportunity. Following initial brainstorming, the issue is assigned to the research team and a student is appointed to lead on the case. A conference call is organised with the solicitor/barrister if necessary to clarify the facts or the focus of the query. The Director takes responsibility to finalise the brief and to submit it to the lawyer at the appointed time.

Feedback from lawyers who have worked with the Clinic is very positive. They have expressed gratitude for the professional, timely and comprehensive information received and they have also been impressed by the quality of the legal argument developed by the team.

A range of child law issues have come to the Clinic's attention since its establishment including the rights of children in care to access her siblings; a child's right of access to court; the right of a child to be protected from abuse in foster care; the limits of information exchange between family law and criminal courts and the operation of the in camera rule. Special care cases have also come before the Clinic and its members have also contributed to litigation before the European Court of Human Rights.

The Clinic has also been involved in other legal activities which provide students with unique insights into the practice of law. Seminars with legal practitioners have taken place. In January 2012, the Clinic heard from Professor Kirsten Sandberg, member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on child protection and children’s rights. The event was chaired by Emily Logan, Ombudsman for Children. Later that month, the Clinic hosted an event on the constitutional amendment together with Campaign for Children. On 9th March 2012, the Clinic hosted an international child law conference, supported by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences, to bring together Irish, UK and European scholars to consider the challenges and issues of legal scholarship and practice.
Almost 100 delegates attended to hear presentations on law reform and legal challenges on issues of alternative care, guardianship, religious freedom and adoption as well as international perspectives on children’s rights and legal education. On March 8th, the Clinic hosted ‘Dear Minister; Proposals for Child Law Reform’ together with the Public interest Law Alliance. This event facilitated practitioner and academic colleagues to raise issues of concern in Child Law - including child protection, alternative dispute resolution, hearing children in court, early intervention in families and constitutional reform - together with potential solutions.

The Clinic is writing a briefing paper on the legal issues relating to the proposed campaign to amend the Constitution on children’s rights. When finalised, it is hoped that this will provide a major resource for children’s organisations and advocates seeking to participate in the referendum campaign. The Clinic has been commissioned by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and the Children’s Rights Alliance to write a ‘Know your Rights’ Guide to Irish law for young people and their carers. Finally, three members of the Clinic have just submitted the Clinic’s first Amicus Brief to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the subject of Separated Children.\(^3\)

**Conclusion**

The Clinic is an original and innovative response to the need to improve the quality of child law in Ireland while providing students with access to how child law operates in practice. It has helped to deepen the relationship between the legal profession and the Faculty of Law in a way that is mutually beneficial and it serves to highlight the strengths and roles of both parties in advancing progressive child law reform. It has begun to raise awareness among practising lawyers of the contribution that research can make to litigation and of the importance of partnership in this respect. As such, it sets an example of what can be achieved in the academic setting, with a direct impact on the practice of law. The Clinic also has a role to play in helping the local community understand the implications of child law on children’s lives and in this sense it hopes to reach out beyond the academic world into the real lives of children and their families.

The Child Law Clinic can be found on Facebook\(^4\), Twitter\(^5\) and on the web at [http://www.ucc.ie/law/childlawclinic](http://www.ucc.ie/law/childlawclinic).

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3 As with all of the Clinic’s documentation, this will be available on the Clinic’s website.

4 [http://www.facebook.com/childlawucc](http://www.facebook.com/childlawucc)

5 #childlawucc
EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOW-INCOME YOUTH: MAKING SPACE FOR YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP LEGAL SERVICES

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A generation without the hope of a stable job is a burden for the whole of society. Poor employment in the early stages of a young person’s career can harm job prospects for life.¹

Young people in the United States are on the verge of losing the economic advantages gained by their parents. The loss of wealth resulting from the 2008 foreclosure crisis directly impacts intergenerational transfer of wealth. Parental net worth significantly affects the wealth prospects of children.² In addition to parental wealth and income losses, youth are facing greater challenges to entering the labor market. The current economic downturn directly affects the employment prospects of low-income workers and youth workers. The employment rate for teens is at its lowest level in sixty years.³ Low-income youth are hardest hit by the racial wealth gap. Lack of employment disproportionately affects youth of color.⁴ For example, as few as 20 percent of black youth are employed at any one time.⁵ Racial economic disparities in employment opportunities, income, and wealth place low-income youth of color in the worst position with few employment options and no transfer of intergenerational wealth upon which to build.⁶

This economic reality is even bleaker when combined with the increase in the youth population in the coming years. In the United States, the youth population is projected to increase 10 percent by 2010, with youth of color, who are disproportionately low-income,⁷ accounting for the greatest increases.⁸ The increasing numbers of low-income youth of color make the need for more emphasis on the economic lives of these youth of paramount importance.

Dorcas R. Gilmore is a Skadden Fellow with the Community Law Center (CLC) in Baltimore. The author would like to extend her sincere gratitude to Brenda Bratton Blom, Chad Harris, Susan Jones, and Susan Butler Plum for their comments, guidance, and continuous support. Special thanks to Ella J. Gilmore for being a phenomenal role model and for demonstrating the importance of youth enterprise in community development.
Low-income youth of color live in the same underserved communities that have been the focus of community economic development (CED) practitioners. CED efforts have tackled the economic and social effects of discrimination on the health and vitality of underserved communities using a variety of strategies to build structural supports in low-income neighborhoods, fostering thriving communities. Some of these strategies include affordable housing development and retention, creation of community banks, support for strong social services organizations, and small business development.

Despite over forty years of CED work, there continues to be a need for a strengthened and broadened commitment to economic justice. This economic justice mandate must also extend to and focus on the lives of low-income youth of color. Small business development for low-income youth is one asset-building tool to address the loss of assets and the increasing wealth gap; it also offers youth the tangible and intangible benefits of actively participating in the economic life of their communities. Youth enterprise development, or youth entrepreneurship, provides another means of addressing the racial disparities in wealth acquisition, growth, and transfer. Youth entrepreneurship is a potential path toward racial and economic justice for low-income youth of color.

This article proposes targeting small business legal services to youth in low-income communities as a component of CED and as a means of fostering youth empowerment and community engagement. Using the case study of a new youth entrepreneurship legal services project in Baltimore City, the Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative, this article advocates youth entrepreneurship legal services as a tool for advancing racial and economic justice in low-income communities. The Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative is a model for providing holistic, community-based small business legal services to low-income youth. This model highlights the important roles that CED lawyers can play in providing these legal services.

Role of Small Business Development in CED

The reality of racial discrimination in the marketplace continues to impact communities of color in the twenty-first century. From growing wealth gaps to declining wages, the urgency of the need for a continued and renewed commitment to economic justice has never been clearer. This “economic justice imperative” requires a variety of tools to combat past and current income and wealth gaps. Small business development is one important tool in building assets and services that are responsive to low-income communities’ needs.

Small business development is a vital part of CED. In this context, CED strategies include building jobs, skills, and social networks. Small businesses are the foundation of economic growth and development, producing 60 percent to 80 percent of all net new jobs created in the United States economy since the 1990s. Strong small businesses and supportive services enable sustainable CED. Small businesses create jobs in low-income communities, whether through self-employment in a microenterprise or employment opportunities in a larger small business. Also, small enterprises, especially minority-owned enterprises, are more likely to employ low-income people of color living in economically distressed communities. Ultimately, small business development benefits low-income individuals and communities.

CED practitioners have focused on not only increasing the number of small businesses located in low-income communities but also increasing the number of businesses owned by low-income entrepreneurs.
Low-income entrepreneurs face significant barriers to viable business development, including lack of financial, human, and social capital. These challenges to accessing financing, navigating business operations, and creating social networks impede the growth of low-income small businesses. Small businesses, like all businesses, need the assistance of lawyers to provide a range of transactional legal services, such as contract drafting, the formation of limited liability legal structures, and the protection of intellectual property. These legal services connect enterprises to valuable technical assistance and financial resources. CED lawyers have worked to assist their clients in bridging the divides of traditional capital, human capital, and social capital, which are the foundation of business success.

Problem: Lack of Youth Participation in Economic Development

Young people ages ten to twenty-four make up 27 percent of the world’s population, and there are more youth today than ever before. Youth unemployment is a global problem. In 2005, about 85 million young people worldwide were unemployed. The urgency of this problem and its impacts on communities are clear from the United Nations’ initiative to address youth unemployment as one of its Millennium Development Goals.

The problem of youth unemployment significantly affects low-income youth in the United States. Economically disadvantaged youth encounter numerous obstacles to successful employment: perceptions of academic skills, actual academic skill deficits, low self-esteem, lack of exposure to a range of employment options, and difficult living conditions. In the United States, the number of unemployed youth ages sixteen to twenty-four years old during July 2008 was 3.4 million. Youth unemployment rates, like adult rates, demonstrate a racialized pattern with youth of color disproportionately unemployed. Latino and black youth have higher unemployment rates than Whites and Asians.

In the short term, youth unemployment impacts the economic resources of youth and their families, but there are long-term implications as well. For youth most at risk of economic marginalization, employment experiences increase their chances of employment after high school. Youth unemployment is a global and national problem with significant effects on young people and their communities. Youth disconnection from the formal labor market creates greater instability in the communities where these youth live.

Youth Entrepreneurship Is a Solution to Youth Unemployment

Whether in developing countries or in low-income communities in developed countries, many young people need to work to survive. To address this problem, the persistent question regarding youth employment must be answered: how can young people with few job skills and less education find work? One answer to this question is enabling young people to utilize their unique skills and experiences to create their own jobs through youth entrepreneurship.

If youth entrepreneurship is to become a sustainable and central piece of reducing youth unemployment and increasing economic development in communities, youth must learn the skills of business formation and growth, as well as believe in their business ventures and their ability to be successful. Through the process of business development, youth enhance both their skills and their sense of self-efficacy and self-actualization. Entrepreneurship opportunities and training provide young people with employment, educational development, and self-empowerment.
Youth Employment

Young people creating their own jobs is one of the most direct means of addressing the youth unemployment problem. Young people who design and operate their own businesses become owners and employers instead of employees, job seekers, and unemployed people. Youth entrepreneurial development is a viable means of addressing youth unemployment and related social problems.  

Youth entrepreneurship not only creates jobs for young people, it also brings young people’s assets into the labor market. Some of these assets include loyalty, new ways of thinking, energy and enthusiasm for training, sophistication with technology, and positive responses to high expectations.

Youth entrepreneurship is both nationally and globally recognized as an important solution to the problem of youth unemployment. The secretary-general of the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Labour Organization established the Youth Employment Network (YEN) to provide recommendations to global leaders on youth unemployment. In 2001, YEN issued its recommendations with four priority areas: employment creation, employability, equal opportunities for young men and women, and entrepreneurship. Under the fourth priority of entrepreneurship, YEN encouraged nations to make the creation of enterprises easier for young people.

There are many short-term and long-term effects of youth employment. In the short term, employment for “at-risk” youth provides job skills. Some evidence suggests that moderate youth employment in high school also creates closer connections between school and work. Furthermore, entrepreneurship training may have the long-term impact of helping some youth find gainful employment because the training teaches them about economic life and personal responsibility.

Educational Development and Youth Empowerment

In addition to providing needed jobs for unemployed youth, youth entrepreneurship also enhances academic success and self-empowerment. Entrepreneurship education is a means of connecting youth to school, community, and work. Young people learn through the operation of their businesses how to apply abstract academic concepts to real, meaningful situations. This knowledge and experience leads to improved academic performance in school. Entrepreneurship education programs lead to greater financial literacy and improved math, reading, and communication skills.

Entrepreneurship education makes academic study relevant for many students and challenges youth to think about how they can contribute to addressing a need in their community through the development of a business or organization. By developing an enterprise or organization, young people learn that their ideas and dreams can come to fruition and are valuable to others. Real exposure to others who value their skills and ideas empowers young people with the confidence to dream and develop their ideas in other aspects of their lives. The benefits of youth entrepreneurship and the impacts of youth employment on future job prospects make youth entrepreneurship a good vehicle for fostering educational achievement and economic opportunities among low-income youth.
Shanice’s Story: The Power of Entrepreneurship Education

In 2001, I designed and taught a social entrepreneurship course, Youth Entrepreneurs Creating Community Change, in the Apopka Area Youth Entrepreneur Training & Employment Program (AAYETEP). The AAYETEP was located in the central Florida community of South Apopka, a one square-mile area that is a predominantly low-income, African American community. The AAYETEP was a local government-funded economic development and youth development program operated in partnership with the area’s community association. As a teacher in AAYETEP, I witnessed firsthand the impact of youth entrepreneurship education in engaging low-income youth of color meaningfully in the economic development of their communities and fostering greater youth participation in community development.

Shanice was my student in the AAYETEP. She was a ninth grader who felt she had nothing to offer a youth entrepreneurship program. She had average grades, was shy, and was participating in the community-based program because of the monetary stipend. However, at the course’s conclusion, she stood before a room of over 100 Apopka area residents and presented her social enterprise that addressed a community problem she identified as most pressing: teen pregnancy. Her group’s social enterprise idea was a nonprofit peer-to-peer educational group led by teenagers that would perform skits and role plays in schools, community centers, and religious institutions to educate other teenagers about the facts of teen pregnancy. Through the AAYETEP, Shanice became confident, knowledgeable, and determined. Her personal development and the development of her classmates impressed adults in the audience. Community residents saw youth who were aware of the community’s problems and poised to create change. Several adults stood up to express their pride in the community’s youth.

The AAYETEP increased economic and financial literacy; enhanced reading, math, and employability skills; and engaged low-income youth in their communities. Ultimately, the youth received financial support and technical assistance in launching their enterprises. This local government-funded program won awards for government innovation and had many of the attributes of a successful community-based entrepreneurship education program. However, one crucial element was missing, i.e., legal education for business ownership and legal assistance to advise youth in developing viable small businesses.

Need for Youth Entrepreneurship Legal Services

As stated above, youth enterprise development is a CED strategy that provides opportunities for youth to gain business and financial literacy skills while operating their own businesses. Also, youth enterprise development offers youth an appreciation for entrepreneurship, an understanding of the role of business in creating jobs, and a strengthened commitment to their communities.

Youth enterprise creation and growth are gaining traction in the international and national arenas as economic development strategies to support low-resource communities. In 2007, the first Global Youth Microenterprise Conference was held in Washington, D.C. This conference spotlighted the growth of youth enterprise as a development strategy and its success as a tool for building assets and nurturing leaders in low-resource communities across the globe. Nationally, in 2008, the Aspen Institute’s Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy Group produced a national policy agenda for integrating entrepreneurship education into the framework of American public schools.
There are many examples of youth entrepreneurs and youth entrepreneurship programs that illustrate young people’s ability to gain academic skills and attain professional success in small business development. Successful youth entrepreneurs often utilize their youth to their advantage and are able to overcome the legal hurdles of minor status by having supportive adult mentors. Despite the success of some youth entrepreneurs and the growing trend of greater youth entrepreneurship educational opportunities, young people encounter far more obstacles than adults to beginning their own enterprises. These barriers are the result of financial and economic inexperience and lack of assets, as well as the legal limits placed on youth small business owners.

For greater numbers of young people to enter the arena of small business ownership, they must have the support of lawyers and technical assistance providers to assist them in navigating the terrain of enterprise development. Youth entrepreneurs are in great need of assistance from the legal community. This unmet need for legal services first became apparent to me as a teacher in the AAYETEP in my community. The ABA recognized this need in its report America’s Children: Still at Risk, citing the provision of legal services to youth entrepreneurs as an area of needed services. Not only do youth entrepreneurs need legal services, but the legal community must be willing to meet this need. In order to meet this legal need, lawyers must begin by providing pro bono business legal services to youth entrepreneurs.

Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative: A Case Study

As a Skadden Fellow at the Community Law Center, Inc. in Baltimore, Maryland, I am addressing this unmet legal need by creating a community-based youth entrepreneurship legal services project, the Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative. This fellowship project idea began with the belief that entrepreneurship offers young people the opportunity to believe in themselves and in their abilities to bring their ideas to life with support from their communities. Based on my experiences as a teacher in the AAYETEP, I conceived of the Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative to fill the legal education and representation gap in the AAYETEP. Though the Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative did not begin in the same community as the AAYETEP, its purpose was to fill the need for business legal education and legal services that prevented youth in the AAYETEP from growing their businesses. The Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative is a project that was born from an understanding of the power of youth entrepreneurship education for low-income youth and a commitment to simultaneously promoting youth engagement and CED in low-income communities of color. The development of this project underscores the importance of collaboration, community engagement and support, and an interdisciplinary approach to enterprise formation and growth.

An Integrated Model of Small Business Legal Services for Youth

The Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative’s goals include traditional CED goals of small business development, as well as youth development and youth empowerment goals. The Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative’s four broad CED goals are to (1) assist youth in developing microenterprises and cooperative work opportunities in target communities, (2) increase financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills of youth in target communities, (3) increase youth participation in economic development decisions in their communities, and (4) enhance youth engagement in their communities.

A legal services project focusing on small business development for low-income youth must enable youth to foster an entrepreneurial mindset and gain entrepreneurship skills. This holistic and integrated approach to entrepreneurship legal services includes business education, financial literacy, and employability skills training.
These nonlegal components of an integrated model are essential to developing groups of youth entrepreneurs that can utilize small business legal services.

This integrated model of delivering small business legal education and legal services incorporates the business skills, mentorship, and community support needed for youth to launch microenterprises through collaboration with three other organizations: a community association client, a youth entrepreneurship education organization, and a small business technical assistance provider. In this model, at each stage of the business development process, youth have access to counsel and education regarding how to best develop their business ideas. Each organization collaborating with the Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative has a different role in providing holistic, community-based entrepreneurship education and legal services for low-income youth in Baltimore City.

This integrated model has five pieces: (1) youth development and engagement, (2) entrepreneurship education and business technical assistance, (3) business mentoring, (4) small business legal services, and (5) coordination of services and resources among collaborating organizations. Figure 1 is a representation of the model.

Each collaborator’s role is based on its expertise and area of influence. The collaborators’ areas of expertise enhance the Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative. In this model, each organization plays a crucial and slightly different role.

Each organization provides its services outside the collaboration; however, by collaborating the depth and breadth of services are expanded. This holistic model offers existing and future youth small businesses significantly improved and greater assistance.

The collaborators and their respective roles are as follows:

**Community Association Client**
- Advertises and recruits interested youth in the community
- Links youth to community resources and supportive adults

**Youth Entrepreneurship Organization**
- Offers youth an engaging method and structure to learn the basics of entrepreneurship education
- Teaches youth the value of small business development for themselves and their communities

**Small Business Technical Assistance Provider**
- Assists youth with developing businesses by providing targeted technical assistance
- Provides connections to adult business owners who can serve as mentors to youth entrepreneurs

**Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative**
- Coordinates the collaboration by bringing the community association client together with the expertise of small business technical assistance providers and youth entrepreneurship education organizations
- Provides legal education and legal services for youth entrepreneurs and youth businesses
Finally, each organization’s area of expertise enhances the collaboration. Community associations recruit the necessary human resources for the collaboration’s success: youth who are interested in entrepreneurship, youth development professionals, and supportive adults (paid and volunteer) who are the basis for initiating a youth entrepreneurship project. Youth entrepreneurship education organizations serve as the entrepreneurship education and business development experts to ensure that youth understand entrepreneurship, view it as an option, and design plans for personal and business development. Small business technical assistance providers offer targeted education and business mentorship opportunities. CED lawyers connect their clients to business services and provide the legal education and counsel for youth entrepreneurs to overcome the legal hurdles to business development and growth. Ultimately, the collaboration requires coordination to ensure ongoing support for youth enterprises.

**Lawyer’s Role in the Collaborative Model**

In this collaborative model, the role of the lawyer is to provide legal services and coordination of the collaboration. The coordination role includes identifying partners, building relationships, sustaining momentum, and developing a framework for collaborative engagement. In terms of legal services, the role of the CED lawyer serving low-income youth entrepreneurs is multifaceted, including business lawyer and adviser, educator, and resource builder.

The role of the business lawyer in this model is both traditional and nontraditional. Many of the legal issues are familiar to transactional corporate attorneys: entity selection and formation, contract drafting and review, business licensing, zoning regulations, commercial lease negotiation, intellectual property protection, and applicable employment laws. These traditional legal issues pose nontraditional challenges with low-income youth entrepreneurs. Youth under the age of majority are limited in their capacity to enter contractual relationships.

Because of these limitations, the ability of minors to form businesses is restricted. The business lawyer must structure the business to maximize youth voice and participation while recognizing the need for the involvement of non-minors with the authority to bind the company in its transactions. Also, the business lawyer is an adviser to youth entrepreneurs, assisting with identifying and addressing potential future challenges. In this role, the CED lawyer fosters positive decision making and demonstrates the ability of the law to help build communities.

The lawyer must also be able to play the role of educator, breaking down business law concepts in a manner that is understandable and even entertaining for youth. From the legal steps necessary to develop a small business to the options for business formation, business legal education is a significant part of the attorney-client relationship. Educating clients about a range of legal issues is often an important component of small business legal services.

Finally, with youth entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs, the role of the lawyer as resource builder is critical to the success of youth entrepreneurship services. Connecting youth with the resources of small business technical assistance providers, business owners, and other professionals provides young entrepreneurs with the foundation to develop skills, resources, and social networks to succeed in their schools, communities, and careers. The lawyer helps youth entrepreneurs negotiate their interests with those of the community in order to incorporate youth entrepreneurs into the fabric of the community’s development.
Conclusion

CED lawyers can serve communities, further CED, and promote youth leadership and engagement by providing pro bono business legal services to low-income youth entrepreneurs. Using the Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative as a case study of a youth entrepreneurship legal services project, this article proposes that CED lawyers can and should develop business legal services for low-income youth. Youth entrepreneurs can be positive agents for change in their communities, leaders for other youth, and innovators for their community’s economic development. It is essential that youth have opportunities to develop positive decision-making skills and to experience the relevance of their contributions to their communities. Youth entrepreneurship is a vehicle to facilitate these youth development and CED goals.

Youth entrepreneurship has both individual benefits to youth entrepreneurs and collective benefits to the low-income communities in which these youth live. Youth enterprise development in low-income communities is another tool to meet the economic justice imperative of bridging the racial wealth divide between low-income youth of color and their counterparts. Youth economic investment provides opportunities to change young people’s future personal opportunities and promote community development and empowerment in their communities.

America’s youth are suffering great economic losses. Fostering youth enterprise development is one way for CED lawyers to address this urgent need and continue building assets in low-income communities. This is an area that warrants greater attention by CED lawyers as racial wealth gaps increase and youth economic opportunities become more limited. Lawyers are needed to assist low-income youth entrepreneurs because of the unique challenges that youth entrepreneurs face. In addition to the challenges of low-income entrepreneurs, low-income youth entrepreneurs face legal barriers at every stage of business development. Executing contracts, obtaining permits, and securing financing require an adult. These legal barriers pose additional challenges to ensuring youth ownership and youth voice in business development.

CED efforts have not focused on supporting youth entrepreneurship in low-income communities. The current economic environment underscores the need for strengthened community development strategies in low-income communities to achieve economic justice. This article provides practitioners with a model for serving youth entrepreneurs. Economic justice requires including youth as vital contributors to the economic development of their own communities.


4 Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Dep’t of Labor, *Unemployment Among Youth, Summer 2008* (Aug. 29, 2008), http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2008/aug/art05.html “The July 2008 unemployment rates for young men (15.0 percent), women (12.8 percent), whites (12.3 percent), blacks (24.8 percent), and Hispanics (16.0 percent) increased from a year earlier. The jobless rate for Asians (8.4 percent) was about unchanged from July 2007.” Id.

5 Campaign for Youth, supra note 3, at 2.

6 Id. at 3; Shapiro, supra note 2, at 60-84.


8 Campaign for Youth, supra note 3, at 3.


14 Jones, supra note 11, at 58.


29. See supra note 4.

30. Id.


33. Id. at 10.

34. Id. at 3-4.


37. Id.

38. Chaplin & Hannaway, supra note 31. The authors define at risk as students who have low academic achievement and lack parental support in school. Id.

39. Id.


44. Shanice is a fictional name; this example is a composite of two actual youth participants in the AAYETEP.

45. In 2005, the Orange County, Florida, county government received a National Association of Counties Achievement Award for the AAYETEP.


48 Aspen Inst., supra note 40, at 5-6.


51 See Schoof, supra note 35.


53 Founded in 1986, the Community Law Center, Inc. is a nonprofit, public interest law firm that provides legal services and technical assistance to grass-roots organizations, nonprofits, and small businesses to improve the quality of life and economic viability of communities. The Community Law Center uses a variety of community lawyering models to advance community economic development goals.

54 Larry A. DiMatteo, Deconstructing the Myth of the “Infancy Law Doctrine”: From Incapacity to Accountability, 21 Ohio N.U. L. Rev. 481, 484 (1994). However, minors’ contracts for necessities are one of the major areas in which minors are required to uphold their contractual agreements. Id. at 488-91.

For four years now, the Irish state has been engulfed by the most serious economic crisis in its history. This is no mere recession, nor solely a crisis confined to one or two sectors, nor indeed a national crisis. Rather Ireland is in the spotlight internationally alongside several “old” and “new” European countries whose flaws have been mercilessly exposed by a global crisis the magnitude of which has as yet not been plumbed. While it is by now a commonplace to say that we should not waste a crisis, it is by no means agreed what constitutes wasting this one. All that is sure is that things will change dramatically for Ireland as the hubris of the “noughties” yields to what looks at best like Sisyphus and more likely nemesis in the ‘teens of the still young 21st century.

Kirby and Murphy’s contribution, Towards a Second Republic, is a key addition to the growing literature on this subject and, usefully, was published after the momentous election of 25th February 2011, the inception of the 31st Dáil and installation of a Fine Gael-Labour government on the basis of taking 113 out of 166 seats between them. The book is a valuable contribution in that it covers a lot of ground, synthesising a range of existing academic work, official reports and commentary on the crisis. It examines the critical scholarship on the political context, including the electoral system, political parties, social partnership, weaknesses in Irish political culture, and defects in the “public sphere” which they view as significant contributory factors in the crisis as manifested in Ireland. They continue with an account of the civil service bureaucracy, the Department of Finance’s dominance and its conservatism, the centralism of the state, and repeated failures to achieve devolution. Here they also review the literature on the crisis, partly attributed to “groupthink” via incorporative strategies such as social partnership but more particularly attributed to cronyism at the highest level, and media influence in recent times. Moreover, the civil servants were often trumped by populist politicians, as typified by Finance Minister McCreevy’s crass “decentralisation” programme. Despite embracing the “new public management” ideologies, the Irish state still relied on poorly structured and egregiously governed entities like FÁS.

There is a chapter covering the overall direction of the economy in the boom years and the course of the crisis from 2008. The book examines the impact of this long period of expansion, and early years of the crisis, on distribution, and there are chapters respectively identifying the “losers” and the “winners”. The chapter on the “losers” reviews in some depth the quantitative research and also qualitative dimensions of poverty and its impact on individuals. The one on “winners” scrutinises the nouveau riche and emphasises the continuing advantages of indigenous elites in the building, business, financial, high-tech and professional sectors. This chapter also points up the cosy interconnectedness of the powerful and wealthy classes as evidenced by networks of overlapping directorships.
These outcomes are linked to the political culture and governance analysed in the earlier sections.

There is a good chapter on the European context which shows Ireland’s initially positive but more recently negative relations with the integration project. The critique is rounded and resists the temptation of Europe-bashing; it nevertheless weaves into the Irish story the changing direction of the European project from a social-market model to an increasingly competition-centred and competitiveness oriented neo-liberal one, and points to criticisms of ECB policy on interest rates during the boom years, and lack of regulation of the interbank lending that fuelled the bubble economy in Ireland. However, they place the main focus on the domestic front and a government mentality that was much more in favour of light touch regulation and a low tax regime than typically applied other EU states.

There is an interesting comparative chapter that looks at other countries and “their” crashes. The examples come from across the globe, including Latin America (Argentina, Uruguay, and Costa Rica), Europe (Iceland, Finland, Spain). These pen pictures help throw some light on several facets of the crisis in Ireland. While they offer no obvious blueprint and are very diverse cases, the authors make the point that clear and purposeful government built on solid principles of citizenship and governance for the public good, and a readiness to stand up against market interests when required, are common traits worthy of deeper study. There is some discussion, drawing on the 1980s work of Katzenstein (1984), on the strategies of small states in the face of powerful international forces. Given the deepening of global de-regulation since then, however, one might ask whether most states can now be regarded as “small”, as witness Italy’s vulnerability to “the markets”.

Despite the breadth of analysis, this book is not merely intended as academic scholarship. The title of the book is programmatic in tone and chimes in with a trend towards more fundamental reconsideration of the direction of the Irish state, its governing ideology and the prospects for democratic life in the course of and after the debacle. The concept of republicanism figures prominently not only in the title but also as a core theme in the book as a whole. Other writers, such as Fintan O’Toole (2010) and indeed Michael D Higgins (2011), since elected President of Ireland, have also focused on the concept of republicanism, either to get to a new Republic or to renew its spirit. In all instances, “republicanism” is defined not as it entered the vernacular in Ireland over the past forty years but as a core political value involving democratic citizen engagement to the broadest and deepest extent, through rights and duties, and a political process and institutions resolutely focused on the pursuit of the public good.

Kirby and Murphy’s volume portends not just a renewal of a spirit of republicanism, active political citizenship in the sense of a focus on res publica and the re-centring of politics on the public good, but also constitutional and institutional change designed to embody and accelerate such a renewal. Indeed, the choice of the term “Second Republic” signals a qualitative leap, rather than a revival of spirit or an incremental reform of the constitution. Kirby and Murphy note that the need for such qualitative changes should not surprise us and may be both necessitated and facilitated by crises (they cite France’s replacement of the Fourth by the Fifth Republic in 1958 and Kenya’s replacement of a post-colonial constitution in 2010 as illustrative of the range of cases) (211).

Presumably the term “second” is simply a device to emphasise the break with “the past”. Obviously, a literal reading, implying an actual arithmetical nomenclature for republics in Ireland, could prove especially testing during this “decade of centenaries” and the authors, in going for a “second” one, might be asked to say explicitly what period was covered by the first! Should we not consider the 1916 Proclamation, the Democratic Programme of 1919, the Saorstát Éireann (Free State) constitution of 1922, or Bunreacht na hÉireann (1937) as memorable landmarks warranting inclusion in such a scheme?
In fact, though, the substantive focus of Kirby and Murphy’s nomenclature is quite removed from this source of potential diversion. What they are really interested in is the political economy of the Irish state. In this context, 1958 marked a watershed in relation to the substantive elements of modernisation of Ireland and defined a new political economy around export led industrialisation, dismantling tariffs, deepening foreign trade, attracting foreign investment, entering into the European Economic Community etc. Arguably, this was a new Republic, which now needs replacing. Taking a long view, it may be credited with transforming Ireland from a stagnating conservative rural backwater into a growing economy with free education, health care, housing, a welfare state, greater economic independence from the UK, and greater engagement in a wider European and global economy. However, as a model of development, it is described by Kirby and Murphy as but one possible path, which in time became more deeply committed to principles of neo-liberalism. Implicit in the model, from the start, were tendencies towards widening of income and wealth dispersion, while many of the “pre-republican” traits in our political culture, such as paternalism, patronage, “pedigree” (pro- and anti-Treaty), patriarchy, clericalism, etc, were reproduced. Thus, the ground was prepared and the seeds sown for a regime of poor oversight, cronyism and corruption in key areas of public regulation and governance. The massive rejection of Fianna Fáil and its PD remnants in the 2011 election (and, perhaps unfortunately, the electoral wipe-out of the Greens) provides a potential opportunity to garner the support of the demos for a clearout of the Augean stables. Beyond that, however, there is considerable disagreement as to the remedy for Ireland’s current woes. The crisis is massive, private debt is strangling many households, unemployment is corroding huge layers of society, state services are being wound back successively every year to the point where living standards are dropping, health care is increasingly unaffordable, and educational expectations at third level are seriously threatened for the rising generation. A longer term schedule for return to a “rising tide” is inevitable and it is here that matters of substance, pertaining to the economic model as a whole, come to the fore.

Kirby and Murphy relate Ireland’s impasse to the economic model set in place since the late 1950s and, globally, to neo-liberalism, which has been embraced by Ireland’s political elite. A key aim of the book is to critique the current model and review alternatives that might figure in defining the real content, i.e., the political economic underpinnings of a new (let’s forget the numbers) republic.

A key source of influence on Kirby and Murphy in this context is the work of Karl Polanyi, whose star has risen in recent decades, in view of his prophetic critique of the claims of his neo-classical peers - Austrian School economists and market libertarians such as Ludwig von Mises and the progeny of this School such as Friedrich von Hayek. Polanyi’s critique also anticipated the downside realities of neo-liberalism, not only in relation to the debates from the 1930s to the 1980s between socialists and liberals, but in relation to issues of environmental sustainability and macro-economic management of capitalist economies which have been fore-grounded more recently. Against intellectual claims for the minimal state and liberation of spontaneously self-regulating markets, Polanyi argued that, far from being spontaneous, generalised commodity production and exchange was brought about through coercion - particularly in relation to labour and land (for example, the enclosure movement in Europe from the 1500s on and the new Poor Law in England from 1834). Along with money, he argued, land and labour constituted commodities only in a “fictional” sense, and that to view labour, land and money in the same terms as assembly line widgets is to ignore the importance of embedding markets in societies. Land, labour and money are on the interface of economy and society, economy and environment and economy and polity. Land, labour and money cannot be defined simply in terms of commodities because they are the very reason why it is essential to set boundaries around markets and commodification. In this sense, historically, markets are planned, often coercively by the state, but need to become embedded in a more civilized structure of society based on norms and standards relating to the conditions of living, human dignity, environmental safety and sustainability.
Money as a commodity is fictional because its critical role in governing market society constitutes a key aspect of protecting markets from their self-destructive and indirectly societally disintegrative, tendencies. Polanyi referred to this as a “double movement”. Although pitched at a high level of abstraction, the ideas of Polanyi are congruent with the macro-economic theory of Keynes and the growth of welfare states. Additionally, due to the references to land, they also translate into a basis for environmentalism and address what economists limply refer to as spillovers or externalities. Polanyi’s critique of capitalism is also distinct from Marxian political economy, which is also experiencing a revival, but which plays no part in the analysis offered in the present study. Kirby and Murphy’s critique of the Irish economic collapse can be related to Polanyian foundations, and from these they elaborate three ideal-typical models for longer term regeneration on Irish economy and society. Briefly, these are:

1. **Weak liberal model**: Essentially this would involve a continuation of the existing pattern based on low corporate taxes, export-led business and favoured by FG and FF, tightening up regulatory laxness and institutional efficiency, but with a continuation of an unequal society with a weak public sphere;

2. **Developmental social democratic model**: This model would entail more state activism, with a state strategic investment bank. Ideally, it would foster some strong national brands (such as Nokia in the Finnish case). This is a model supported by TASC and (prior to the election) the Labour Party, and the ICTU, and has been viewed sympathetically by the NESC; the model involves high tax, high social investment, greater equality, better distribution. However, they acknowledge that resistance to this option is very strong in “public discourse”.

3. **Ecological socialist model**: Challenges continuous GDP growth as the ultimate end, addresses the “peak-oil” challenge, arrests environmental degradation, and promotes lower carbon emissions. Typically this option would be supported by Green Party and wider ecological movements, but is not very popular and is often regarded as putting a brake on recovery and development. This option, however, is one that needs to be addressed and must be propelled by global level momentum because the carbon footprint and other ecological degradation by individual countries are not charged to them but globally and into the future (the “externality” problem).

The authors are not explicitly prescriptive but are most critical of the first model and appear to make a stronger case at times for the third. There is a major question here as to how an economy like Ireland could change track without major challenges to the political basis of the present model. Esping Andersen’s typology of welfare regimes also drew on Polanyi for its core concept of “decommodification” but the whole point of welfare regime theory that resulted was that different states get locked into specific forms of double-movement and, once institutionalised, policy choices become path dependent; hence liberal regimes do not easily change into social democratic ones. Thus, the options as set out appear to have didactic rather than programmatic efficacy. While the book is useful at this level, it does not outline the steps between crisis-resolution in the present and a new economic model for the longer term.

Similarly, on the political front, the authors do not set out an explicit blueprint for constitutional or institutional reforms. Perhaps this is unfair comment, since there are many references throughout the text to possibilities. However, there is no single point where they set out, in summary, a compelling way forward. Clearly, one of the targets of the book is the new government’s commitment to a constitutional convention, reform of political institutions, reform or possibly abolition of the Seanad, and broadly, renewal of the republic. Here, the authors review and explore various options for electoral reform, unicameralism etc., without drawing definitive conclusions or believing that institutional reform of itself will change the direction and momentum of political life sufficiently to create a new republic in substance. They laud the programme for government and list its proposals in so far as they go. (Since the book was written, one of these proposals, to give greater powers to Oireachtas committees, was defeated in a referendum).
However, they criticise the limitations of the Programme for Government, for lacking a focus on “equality, participation and separation of power(s)” and for containing few concrete proposals on “enabling participation and creating deliberative democratic forums” (194/5), and they caution that the government may settle for the low hanging fruit.

Evidently, Kirby and Murphy are sceptical of the prospects for anything substantial from the coalition. They have an eye to Labour and the possibility of further realignments, particularly on the political left, with a possibility of a future left government that could truly break the mould. To this end they finish the book with a fascinating chapter providing an account of the welter of political and social movements, ideological currents, “civil society” initiatives and tendencies to emerge over the past two years. It is not really clear where the authors are positioned in relation to all this flux although it is apparent that they are involved in it and broadly favour a shift to the second and third models they outline. There are some signs of hope for an alignment of Labour and the opposition left parties in a 2016 general election but these are tempered by fears that Labour will become hoist on its own petard in the meantime. The focus for aspiration shifts to “civil society”, but the definition of civil society oscillates between broad and narrow. The narrower concept points to civil society as an agency or a range of social movements for change along radical lines while the broader definition – a field in effect –includes associations of business interests, and neo-liberal movements pushing in the opposite direction. The authors call on the government, in effect, to promote deliberative civic forums as key to renewing the republic. On the evidence of its actions so far, however, far from taking this up, the coalition is accelerating the wind-down of such fora as existed over the past two decades, at local and national level, and has little time for what is seen as lobbying by community and voluntary organisations. Deliberative engagement with civil society appears to be off the agenda and a “lean state” with a firm hand against any let-up in austerity is the preferred route.

Meanwhile, dramatic shifts in the electorate in the run-up to the 2011 election, and restlessness among the activist layers between the state and the citizens, is indicative of the realities. The current government’s parliamentary majority was granted by a traditionally conservative electorate that was united mainly by anger at the previous centre-right Fianna Fáil dominated coalition and by a desperate hope for a reprieve from the relentless tide of misery that threatens to engulf citizens into the future. The new government is not ideologically coherent and, politically speaking, is a coalition of right and “centre-left”. Its programme for government is anchored in the dictates of the EU-IMF bailout terms and although the government has told the electorate that the crisis is “not your fault”, the best it can offer is an attempt to seek to re-negotiate the worst aspects of the bailout while continuing with the same austerity programme.

To many it will seem that the Fine Gael-Labour government is destined to lock Ireland into the weak liberal model. While the coalition is stable on the basis of parliamentary numbers, and as yet still in credit with the demos, it is walking a political tight rope. While there is evidence that popular support both for the new government and for independent deputies and “left” opposition parties in the Dáil is holding up, and contestation of austerity measures outside the political institutions continues sporadically on single issues, there is no inevitability about the evolution of events. The centre may or may not hold but either way the prize of a new republic will not be easily won. By providing a valuable frame for public debate and deliberation, however, Kirby and Murphy have made a genuine contribution towards achieving this goal.

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