Meat in the Sandwich

Associate Professor Carol Irizarry
Dr Keith Miller
Research Project with Families SA

ON KINSHIP/RELATIVE CARE

Dr Keith Miller
Dr Carol Irizarry
Aim of Research

• Better understand Kinship care through the views of:
  ❖ Aboriginal Carers
  ❖ Non-Aboriginal Carers
  ❖ Staff – Support Workers and Caseworkers

• Identify Practice issues around K/C
• Examine Role of K/C within SA alternative care system (out of home care, OOHC)
Definition

(AIHW, Child protection Glossary, accessed 08/04/16)

Relative/kinship care is a form of out-of-home care where the caregiver is:

- A relative (other than parents)
- Considered to be family or close friend
- Member of child’s community (in accordance with their culture)
- Reimbursed for care of child

For Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander chn, a k/carer is a member of their community, a compatible community or from same language group
### Numbers in Aust

(AIHW, 2014, Child Protection Australia 2012-13)

#### Table 6.1: Overview of funded out-of-home carer households, on average in 2012-13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authorisation type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foster carer</td>
<td>9,943</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative-kinship carer</td>
<td>12,709</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both F/c and R-K/c</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respite-only carer</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>0.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-term guardianship</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>23,354</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Comparison of numbers
(AIHW, 2014, Child Protection Australia 2012-13)

- On average day: 23,354 households
- On average day: 31,966 children
- Nationally, rate of children 7.8 per 1,000
- In NT, rate of children 11.7 per 1,000
- 93% chn in out-of-home care in home-based
- 43% in foster care, 48% in r-k/care
Indigenous children
(AIHW, 2014, Child Protection Australia 2012-13)

• At 30 June 2013, 13,952 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care

• This is 57.1 per 1,000 children

• Nationally, rate of Indigenous children in out-of-home care is 10.6 times that of non-Indigenous children
Who was in the research

Number of Carers: 44
• Aboriginal Carers: 11
• Non-Aboriginal Carers: 33
• Staff: 81

How the data were collected

• Focus groups and meetings with couples and individuals
• Focus groups – support workers & caseworkers
• Staff survey
Aboriginal carers reported:

* Support workers primarily give carers support
* Caseworkers primarily support the children
* Both workers were perceived as helpful
* They wanted workers to be:
  “energised, kind & not too nosy”

Issues they identified as concerns:

* Keeping child safe while maintaining family contact
* Maintaining cultural education
* Avoiding family reunification if child is not safe
* Didn’t always know the questions to ask the agency
* Frequent caseworker turnover
• with Kinship Care [you] get a phone call at 2am, [you] are not just dealing with a child in crisis, but a whole family in crisis.

• (Carer statement)
Non-Aboriginal carers reported:
* Support workers seemed to be on their side
* They wanted an organisation that fostered respect

Issues identified as concerns:
* Needed more training & user friendly information
* Respite care and access to resources also needed
* Felt some workers questioned their parenting of their own children
* Reunification aims not always good for all children and needed to assess where it was best
* Wanted more autonomy over raising the child
* Child often left too long with biological parent
“We enrolled the child in kindergarten and school. We were told that we had no authority to do this to a ‘Government’ child.”

(Carer statement)
Carers’ most common experiences

“Meat in the sandwich!”

* Crisis situation when child arrives
* Lack of preparation for child/ren
* Grief for their son or daughter who is the child’s parent
* Loss of grandparent (aunt/uncle) role
* Struggle to negotiate family dynamics
* Want to make decisions for child without undue agency approval
Carers’ most common experiences

“Meat in the sandwich!”

* Suddenly new expenses with arrival of child
* Randomness of payments & inconsistencies
* Child’s behavioral issues often incurred expenses
* Reimbursement needed for school trips, clothes, medications, start-up necessities
Staff responses

• Wanted additional knowledge and skills from the Aboriginal Consultants
• Felt family interactions could be problematic and stressful especially around reunification
• Important to include Kinship Carers in decision-making
• Identified Carers as having a sense of responsibility and obligation to child/ren
• Felt Carers sometimes misunderstood their role
• These views matched the literature around kinship care
• Difficulty of Carers being parent to birth parent while caring for grandchild as a parent

• “We provided a safety plan in writing so that if the birth parent turned up on the doorstep, the Kinship Carer could say, ‘It was not my decision but was made by the agency.’ ”

• “Obligation is the heart side, the Carers’ need to do it, they have no choice. Commitment is when the head kicks in.”

(staff members)
Outcomes:
Areas of Agreement - Carers and Staff

1) Kinship Carers and staff saw their primary responsibility to **KEEP CHILD SAFE**
2) Kinship Carers and staff saw Kinship care as a valuable alternative to foster care
3) They shared concerns about stressful family dynamics & birth parent contacts
4) Carers have the major involvement around handling family stress and negotiating the agency
Outcomes:
Areas of Disagreement - Carers and Staff

1) Who has primary responsibility for child?
2) Attachment – Carers felt “obligated” to take child and assumed this best option – Staff felt Carers needed to be assessed & felt uncertainty
3) Communication, respect and trust – the idea of being “supervised” by agency could be interpreted as insulting. Grandparents in particular saw themselves as the “expert” in terms of the child but staff had the “duty of care” and legal responsibility for child/ren
Discussion Points
References
