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***Reflections on inequalities experienced by kinship  
carers in the UK:  
insights from research***

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# Kinship care defined

## Family and friends care

The care, nurturing and protection of children who are separated from their parents or whose parents are unable to provide that care and support. Instead this care is provided by grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles or other relatives, godparents, step-grandparents, or other adults who have a relationship or connection to the child. This may be a permanent arrangement, or temporary, formal or informal.

Grandparents Plus (2016)

# What the research says...

- Since the introduction of the Children's Act in 1989, kinship care has become an expanding placement option for children in the UK (Broad 2004),
- Outcomes for children compare favourably with those for children in other types of placement and placement stability for children is more likely (Hunt 2003).
- Placement disruption is also less likely when children are placed with their grandparents (Farmer 2010);
- Kinship care provides continuity of care for children in familial contexts and helps to sustain their cultural identities (Broad 2004).

# Kinship care in the UK

- Estimated to be between 200,000 and 300,000 children in kinship care
  - Formal arrangements are easier to record than informal
- The link between poverty and kinship care is well evidenced (e.g. Hunt 2008; Nandy and Selwyn 2012):
- In 2016:
  - 41% of kinship carers are looking after two or more children
  - 42% say they or their partner had to give up work when they took on the care of children,
  - 34% rely on benefits as their main source of income.
  - 46% of kinship carers say their income is not sufficient to meet the children's needs.

# Farmer & Moyers (2008)

- Principal carers, usually on the maternal side, are more likely than non-related foster carers to experience adversities, such as:
  - Being lone carers;
  - Experiencing financial hardship;
  - Living in over crowded conditions;
  - Experiencing physical ill health and depression
  - 65% had raised stress levels twice that of the general population (FRG 2012)

# Continued...

- Access to financial support is still primarily determined by the legal arrangement rather than need, with only designated foster carers entitled to an allowance.
- 62% of kinship carers say they didn't feel well supported at the time of taking on the care of the children.
- 43% of kinship carers report having been stigmatised, discriminated against or treated rudely or differently, because they are raising a relative's child
- Least formal placements less likely to receive support (FRG, 2012)

# Local contexts

- England: LAs under pressure – spending cuts and looked after numbers increasing
- Lack of services and support for kinship carers
- Few LAs providing good policy guidance (Grandparents Plus, 2015)
- Northern Ireland: Health and Social Care Trusts have to meet Minimum Kinship Care Standards, introduced in 2012, when children are placed in a kinship care arrangement, whereby they clarify the level of service,
- This relates only to looked after children in kinship care (Selwyn et al. 2013)

# Continued...

- There is a rise in the proportion receiving an allowance from their local authority (58% compared to 33%), likely linked to the rise in the use of Special Guardianship Orders (50%, compared to 20% in 2010) as opposed to Child Arrangements Orders (formerly Residence Orders) to formalise kinship care arrangements.
- However, the reduction of the state as a result of political ideology and the broader neo-liberal context and policies that value family competence, is expected to intensify inequalities and to undermine work with families (Featherstone et al. 2012)



# Research Studies

- Evaluation of Family Rights Group advice and advocacy line contacted by kinship carers (2012)
  - Led by Prof. Brid Featherstone, Open University
- Intergenerational Exchange (IGE) (2007 – 2010)
  - Led by Kahryn Hughes and Nick Emmel (University of Leeds)
  - Investigated how grandparents' lives unfold over time, and what mitigates against their efforts to change the lives of their grandchildren
- Men, Poverty and Lifetimes of Care (2014 – present)
  - Dr Anna Tarrant
  - Funded by Leverhulme Trust
  - Secondary analysis of IGE data

# Income and grandparenting practices

- Spectrum of caring practices and time spent caring:
- Normative views of grandparenthood (for those on good income) – ‘leisure/pleasure’,
  - Involving babysitting and occasional care
  - ‘Being there’ but ‘not interfering’ (Mason et al. 2007; 2012)
- In low-income localities, there is evidence of grandparents engaging in ‘rescue and repair’ grandparenting (Hughes & Emmel 2011),
  - Formal and informal kinship care (full-time)
  - Rescue from vulnerability and repair of intergenerational relationships

# Dependency on services

- Intensification of dependence on formal and voluntary service provision (Hughes, 2015)
- Across all studies, evidence that getting help is not an easy process yet can be essential to avoid a slide into intense crisis
- Real sense of frustration and helplessness associated with limited resource and need to fight for resources to meet children's' needs.

# “In bits...”: Inequality in relationships

## Seeking to Care: Dorothy

*“It feels like our great-grandchild has been kidnapped and we’re powerless ...you need someone on your side because social services don’t help you, they don’t give you any reassurance, they were totally negative. It feels as though they steamrollered along. They are not interested in getting the family back together. They openly said they were worried about their jobs and clearly adoption targets are more important than keeping a family together”*

# “In bits...”: Inequality in relationships

Seeking support: (Jane and Sarah, maternal grandmothers)

*“Our Local Authority took advantage of us because we have the first grandchild here but they don’t give us any money to do it. We have had no help from the social worker at all. They couldn’t even get us the funding for a new bed for our grandson – they said they would then they forgot to bring the form. Once we spoke to FRG they told us straight away about the Residence Order. Why hadn’t the social worker told us about this?”*

*“Social services don’t want to know, they just fob you off, we’ve had no help from them...You are put in this position and you have no choice, you’re forced into this situation because it is this or he goes into care and we could not have that happening, so we had no choice.”*

# Theo (age 37)

*I understand how busy they [social services] are, I really do, but from my side you ask them to do something and it just takes them so long to do it, to get you an answer on something, and it's very rare they will return a phone call. To start with we couldn't get hold of a social worker, you leave messages and are texting her and she just wouldn't get back to you,*

*It sounds cruel to **say it's all about money**....I mean you can't, which I have said to the manager, you can't physically provide for children with nothing.*

# Intensifying hardships in austerity

*It's just a hard life and the government's going to make it harder...I mean financially, you know, to look after a child. This is my view. I mean, I think I get tax credits for my [granddaughter]. She isn't my child, if you understand what I mean. This is what I'm saying. If she was plonked in somebody else's house, if you understand what I mean, they get fortunes for them, you know and I think I get about thirty quid a week or something like that, to bring up a thirteen-year-old child. It costs me £95 for her trainers (laughter). Do you understand what I mean?*

Paul, age 51

# Battling for consideration, Sam (age 51)

*I was treated absolutely appalling....I was trying to raise concerns for three months, four months, on a daily basis, and all I got from them – they all pulled together, shut me out, shut everybody out and said ‘get some legal advice’. In the meantime, she’s had the baby...they were having these meetings saying “No, go and get some legal advice. We’ve got somebody lined up for him...they were putting him up for adoption....even though I’m saying I’ll have him.*

*They agreed that I could do an assessment to see if I was good to look after him. During that time, he’s been released from hospital...he’d been out of hospital for three months and it was during a visit I noticed something wrong with him [green stick fractures]. He’s been staying with his mum and brother and, well, his grandma. This is a woman who’d had her children removed.*



# Future directions?

- Research with men who are vulnerable to accusations of abuse
- Internalised violence
- Step-grandparents
- Children with additional needs
- Management of relationships in contact centres
- Lesbian grandmothers
- Grandfathers to children who have been adopted

# In sum...

- The poor relations (Selwyn et al. 2014)
- Kinship carers who are grandparents relatively poor compared to others in the same age cohort
- This is because they take on unanticipated care often for multiple children
- Support not based on needs but on legal status
- Kinship care is about identity as well as relationships
- Kinship carers tend to be women but what about men?