Understanding recurrent care proceedings: Birth mothers, fathers and children, caught in a cycle of repeat public law proceedings

Cardiff University: CASCADE Event
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Acknowledgements and Contact Details

- The Child and Family Court Advisory Service
- Nuffield Foundation
- Dr Bachar Alrouh (Full-time Research Fellow)

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Project Website

Website:
http://www.nursing.manchester.ac.uk/capps/

Twitter:
https://twitter.com/Recurrent_CAPPS
Introduction

- Anecdotal concern about repeat care proceedings in England

- Human and economic costs of repeat losses to care

- What can we learn about birth mothers, fathers and children caught in this cycle?
Establishing National Prevalence

Value of the Cafcass dataset:

- Centrally held – electronic
- 100% Sample: multi jurisdictional
- Can be readily de-identified
- Can be restructured to answer research questions
Observational Window (limitation)

• Reliable data held electronically only available between 2007-2014 (calendar years/fiscal years)
• This window is sufficient to capture recurrence because repeat episodes follow in short succession
• But: will underestimate total number of cases, hence only allows statements of ‘at least’......

NB: Repeat removals – s.20 & private law options
Why start with birth mothers?

- The birth mother is automatically a party within legal proceedings.
- In contrast, birth fathers are not because they may/may not hold PR within the law.
- Risk of missing cases/further underestimating if we ‘start’ with fathers.
- Women also invest their bodies in pregnancy and child-birth differently from men – hence there are gender specific issues in repeat pregnancy and infant removal in particular......

Masson et al. 2008 Care Profiling Study, Bristol University
Removal at Birth

I lost one after birth in hospital on my own with no one around me, and I said “you can’t just take my baby”, and they were like “no, he needs to go into care”. I think they could have done things differently.

You go through a stage of mourning...I feel like I need more therapy now, not because of what I went through [as a child] but because of what I am going through now. You just want to kill yourself to be honest...

But .....I’m absolutely terrified now I’m pregnant with my fourth kid, I am absolutely terrified. Because so far they’ve been saying if you do your therapy you get to keep your kid, and now they’re telling me it depends what your therapist says.. Why do you let me get to a point half way through the pregnancy when I’m five months pregnant and its too late to do anything about it...

Being a Mum was the first thing I felt I’d been proud of in my whole life and they took it away. I was just left and then the depression sets in.
Feasibility Study: identifying the recurrent sample

- **Step 1**: establish the number of care applications in cases completed between 2007-2013
- **Step 2**: identify female respondents who are mothers
- **Step 3**: eliminate cases that do not include a mother and a child
- **Step 4**: calculate the number of applications per mother
- **Step 5**: Divide the sample into recurrent and non-recurrent cases
- **Step 6**: Differentiate between repeat applications that concern the same child/different children
Prevalence 2007-2013

Total Sample

46,094 unique birth mothers in care proceedings

54,135 unique care applications

89,966 children in care applications

RCA Sample (new child)

7,143 unique birth mothers in care proceedings [15%]

15,645 unique care applications [29%]

22,790 children in care applications [25%]
National Averages & Hot Spots

Average recurrence rate (care proceedings) = 29%

Variation –24% - 38%

- Nottingham City: 36%
- Leeds: 37%
- Birmingham: 35%
- Blackpool: 37%
- Portsmouth 38%
Number of care applications

Local Authority

City of London
London-Richmond
London-Kingston-upon-Thames
London-Kensington & Chelsea
London-Harrow
London-Redbridge
London-Merton
London-Sutton
London-Havering
London-Hillingdon
London-Westminster
London-Bexley
London-Wandsworth
London-Bromley
London-Enfield
London-Hounslow
London-Hackney
London-Barnet
London-Waltham Forest
London-Croydon
London-Hammersmith & Fulham
London-Brent
London-Islington
London-Tower Hamlets
London-Camden
London-Newham
London-Barking & Dagenham
London-Ealing
London-Greenwich
London-Lambeth
London-Lewisham
London-Lewisham
London-Haringey
London-Hillingdon

0 100 200 300 400 500 600

487
372
Percentage of applications linked to recurrent mothers

Local Authority

London-Westminster
London-Hillingdon
London-Sutton
London-Merton
London-Brent
London-Hackney
London-Barnet
London-Ealing
London-Lambeth
London-Harrow
London-Wandsworth
London-Hounslow
London-Hammersmith & Fulham
London-Haringey
London-Camden
London-Havering
London-Croydon
London-Newham
London-Islington
London-Bexley
London-Tower Hamlets
London-Bromley
London-Greenwich
London-Kensington & Chelsea
London-Redbridge
London-Barking & Dagenham
London-Waltham Forest
London-Enfield
London-Lewisham
London-Lewisham
London-Southwark

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35%

32% 22%
Percentage of mothers

Age of mother at first care application (years)

RCA
Non-RCA

- 14-17
- 18-19
- 20-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60+
Percentage of applications

Age of youngest child at care application

- Less than 1 month
- 1 to 5 months
- 6 to 11 months
- 1 to 2 years
- 3 to 4 years
- 5 to 9 years
- 10 to 14 years
- 15 to 17 years

- RCA
- Non-RCA
## Median Length of Intervals Between Care Applications (weeks)

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<thead>
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<th>Number of Applications</th>
<th>2+</th>
<th>3+</th>
<th>4+</th>
<th>5+</th>
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<td>7143</td>
<td>1189</td>
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<td>416</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>344</td>
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<td>71</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>457</td>
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<tr>
<td>5th Interval</td>
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<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Typical Cases

• Young woman (50% aged less than 24 years – high percentage of teenagers at first application compared to national picture)

• Pregnant in swift succession and commonly subject to repeat proceedings that concern a single infant
Median length of care applications (weeks)

- **1st applications**
  - RCA: 50 weeks
  - Non RCA: 45 weeks

- **2nd applications**
  - RCA: 30 weeks
  - Non RCA: 25 weeks

- **3rd applications**
  - RCA: 25 weeks
  - Non RCA: 20 weeks

- **4th applications**
  - RCA: 20 weeks
  - Non RCA: 15 weeks

- **5th applications**
  - RCA: 15 weeks
  - Non RCA: 10 weeks

- **6th applications**
  - RCA: 10 weeks
  - Non RCA: 5 weeks
Fathers

Approximately 32% of cases of mothers have no information on fathers.

Just under half the cases are a ‘recurrent couple’ (mother and father appear together in more than one set of care proceedings).

There are recurrent fathers – not linked to recurrent mothers – so this increases the overall prevalence rate (by about 5-7%).

Fathers are also younger men compared to national demographic, but they are older than the mothers.
Implications

Where a negative cycle of recurrent care proceedings remains unchecked, prognosis for recovering parenting capacity is poor because:

- Intervals between LA care applications are typically short
- Care proceedings get shorter over time
- Many recurrent applications concern infants subject to a care application within 12 months after birth

Although 50% of mothers are aged between 14 and 24 at first application, which ought to give mothers significant time to mature – the national pattern is of a ‘decreasing opportunity’ for change once a mother is caught in this cycle.
The Research Going Forward

Full statistical analysis of the national dataset (to include the 2014 cases) Survival Analysis

Geo-coding to establish national distribution of recurrent proceedings/local authority and court area

In-depth review of randomly selected represented sample of case files (completed cases 2013-2014)

In-depth interview work with 50+ mothers in five local authority areas
The Research Going Forward..

Enriching the variables....

What are the challenges/opportunities in terms of data linkage across government departments/agenda setting
Publications

Broadhurst, K., Harwin, Shaw, Alrouh, B. (2014) Family Law:
http://www.familylaw.co.uk/news_and_comment/capturing-the-scale-and-pattern-of-recurrent-care-proceedings-initial-observations-from-a-feasibility-study#.VDGQAxZtdn1