

# **Birth Mothers and Recurrent Care Proceedings**

**Life Course Persistent Difficulties and  
Turning Points**

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# Recommended Reading

Open Access:

Rutter, M. (2012) Resilience as a dynamic concept, *Development and Psychopathology* 24: 335–344

[http://psych.colorado.edu/~willcutt/pdfs/Rutter\\_2012.pdf](http://psych.colorado.edu/~willcutt/pdfs/Rutter_2012.pdf)

# A Hopeless Population?

Can this population be helped?

1. Turns on an important question about the reversibility of early childhood adversity
2. Relative influence of early experience and/or immediate context
3. Part that intrinsic maternal characteristics play



# The Coventry Pilot Study


## Qualitative Study (2014)

- Maternal autobiographical accounts of parenthood and compulsory removal of infants/children
- Purposive sampling: 'maximum variation'
- Inclusion criteria: more than one child removed, **sequentially**, on account of child protection concerns
- 26 birth mothers interviewed/total possible population = 82 (more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the population interviewed)

# Outcomes at Interview



15 women had lost  
all their children to  
care/adoption



11 women had  
fulltime care of an  
infant or child

# 1. Early Childhood Experiences

**Question 1:** Does early childhood adversity predicts life course persistent difficulties?

Difficult to identify any significant differences across the sample in terms of early childhood experiences.... **All of the women** described **early childhood adversities** that are associated with life course persistent difficulties

# Adolescence

- 42% of the women have a care history
- The remainder are 'on the edge of care'  
(homeless/transient lifestyle with parent)

Again... tentatively.. Group appear to be more alike than different!

# Profile at First & Second Removal

- ✓ Teenage Parents (85%)
- ✓ Unplanned Pregnancy
- ✓ Unrelated males in household
- ✓ Infants born in swift succession
- ✓ Poverty
- ✓ Poor network support
- ✓ Substance misuse
- ✓ Mental Health Difficulties



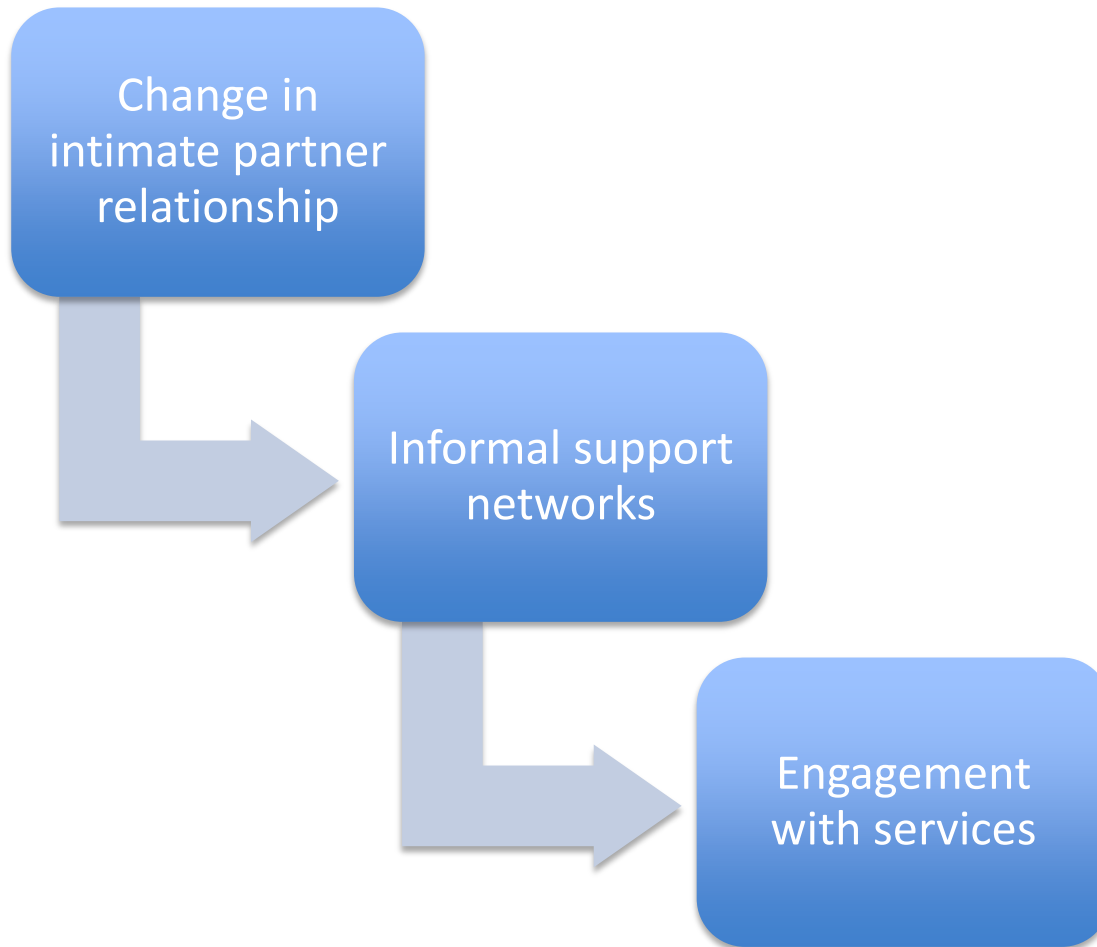
## 2. Immediate Context

**Can changes in immediate context effect a turning point?**

- ✓ Change in intimate partner relationships
- ✓ Accessing mental health therapies
- ✓ Some kind of professional/para-professional advocate/champion

Social Work?

# Immediate Changes in Personal Circumstances (IPR)



# Services

- Access to therapeutic services/mental health services critical
- Some kind of advocate or champion (foster carer; lawyer; Children's Guardian; social worker)
- Mixed evidence as to the effect that social work services had/some mothers effected change *in spite of social work*...in other cases a positive relationship with a social worker appeared instrumental in change

**NB:** Social workers struggling to provide bridging relationships (consistency/availability)

# 3. Maternal Characteristics

- What is the contribution of maternal characteristics?

The three MMMs

- ✓ **Mental Capacity**
- ✓ **Maturation**
- ✓ **Motivation**

# Maternal Characteristics: Mental Capacity!

- 5 of the mothers in the group who **did not** go on to recover their parenting capacity had been assessed as having a learning disability
- Only 1 mother in the 'rehabilitated group' had a learning difficulty – but her case is anomalous.....
- Small sample but **avenue for further systematic enquiry.....**(quantification)

# Maturation

Maturing out of (some) risks

“then and now” accounts

For the rehabilitated group – some of the ‘risk burden’ can be attributed to adolescence

# Motivation

- ✧ Hugely tied up with desire to parent a subsequent infant
- ✧ Sense of connection/obligation to children in care and wider informal network
- ✧ Continuing Identity as a parent

# Resilience as an Acquired Capacity

- Development is best described as following ‘**probabilistic**’ pathways, rather than determined by linear causality
- Change **is possible** at every point in development – but the longer a pathway is followed, the more difficult change becomes
- Some individuals are better able to take advantage of developmental opportunities than others (intrinsic capacity)
- Changes in *immediate* (extrinsic) circumstances critical in promoting change



# Some Conclusions

- ✓ Further work needed to address these three questions – systematic analysis of maternal history on the basis of large, representative sample.
- ✓ So far, lends weight to transactional model of human development
- ✓ Confirms the multi-finality of pathways resulting from adverse childhoods
- ✓ Highlights the difficulty for social work in providing compensatory ‘social scaffolding’ for this vulnerable group of women...

# Final Debate

Birth Spacing:

Broadhurst, K., Harwin, J., Shaw, M., Alrouh, B., Pilling, M., Kershaw, S., Mason, C. (2014) **Is targeted reproductive health care ethically defensible for women who have lost children to the care system?** *Journal of Social Welfare* (forthcoming, online early)

# Knowledge Exchange Network: Tavistock Centre

Feel free to contact our network

Drop an email to:

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Free/low cost events and seminars