



Kinship Care: factsheet

About Families

About Families supports voluntary and statutory sector organisations to develop their services to meet the changing needs of parents and families, including those with disabilities. The project is a partnership between the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, Parenting across Scotland and Capability Scotland.

About Families produces accessible evidence reports on a range of parenting topics which are shared with voluntary and public sector organisations to help inform how they deliver services. Through sharing evidence, key stakeholders are invited to generate ideas for how services could be developed to support parents and families more effectively. *About Families* then supports organisations to involve their service users in planning, implementing and evaluating these service developments.

To complement evidence briefings produced by About Families, this factsheet distils some key information, trends and statistics relating to kinship care. It begins by giving facts and figures for the UK as a whole and goes on to focus on Scotland specifically.

What is kinship care?

Kinship care is where a child or young person goes to live full-time with a relative or friend in either a formal care arrangement (where the child's legal status is 'looked after' by the local authority) or an informal care arrangement (where the legal status of the child is 'non-looked after' by the local authority). The child's status as 'looked after' or 'non-looked after' is determined by how the kinship care arrangement came about.

'Looked after' or formal kinship care is where a child or young person lives with a family friend or relative because:

- The child is subject to a supervision requirement under section 70 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- There is a permanence order under Part 2 of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007
- The child is accommodated with the carer by the local authority under Section 25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995



'Non-looked after' or informal kinship care is where a child or young person lives with a family friend or relative because:

- An informal arrangement has been made by the family itself
- The child is subject to a residence order under section 11 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

These children are not 'looked after' by the local authority. Note, even though kinship carers who care for children under a residence order have gone through a formal court process, these arrangements are still classed as an informal kinship care because the children are not 'looked after' by the local authority. It is believed that the majority of kinship arrangements are of an informal nature and although the exact size of this population is still unknown, the Scottish Government is currently using an estimate of 17,000 children¹.

Issues reported by kinship carers

It has been estimated that there may be between 200,000 and 300,000 children living in kinship care in the UK, comprising 1.7 to 2.5% of the whole UK child population². This is higher than other estimates as it includes children in temporary arrangements and children living with family friends as well as family members (Nandy et al, 2011).

Grandparents Plus³ and The Family Rights Group⁴ polled their members in England and Wales and discovered that:

- 1 in 3 kinship carers are not receiving child benefit (Grandparents Plus, 2009);
- 3 out of 4 kinship carers experience severe financial hardship (The Family Rights Group);
- between 35% (Family Rights Group) and 60% (Grandparents Plus) of kinship carers left their job, reduced their hours at work or took early retirement to raise the children;
- 1 in 4 kinship carers are lone carers (The Family Rights Group);
- 1 in 3 kinship carers live in overcrowded conditions (The Family Rights Group);
- 3 out of 10 kinship carers have a chronic illness or disability (The Family Rights Group);

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) collected data from kinship carers accessing support via their dedicated Kinship Care Helpline or in person at local CAB offices. They found the following issues for kinship carers seeking advice in Scotland (Dryburgh, 2010):

- the majority of kinship carers were aged between 45 and 59;
- almost three quarters of kinship carers were grandparents of the children;
- one third of kinship carers were caring for more than one child;
- children in kinship care are significantly younger than children looked after in other settings; 75% are under the age of 12 compared to 56% of all looked after children;
- the proportion of looked after children in Scotland that are cared for by kinship carers ranges from 12% to 33% across Scottish local authorities;
- access to and level of allowances was a major concern of kinship carers. Weekly payments across Scottish local authorities ranged from £23 to £148 for a child aged 0-4 years;

¹ http://www.slideshare.net/Mentor_UK/scottish-government (Accessed 7 November 2011)

² http://www.frg.org.uk/kinship_care_alliance_campaign.html (Accessed 4 October 2011)

³ <http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/> (Accessed 7 November 2011)

⁴ <http://www.frg.org.uk/involving-families/family-and-friends-carers> (Accessed 7 November 2011)

Kinship Care Allowance

By 2011 all kinship carers of children who are formally looked after should receive an allowance from their local authority. However, one of the main issues for kinship carers in Scotland is eligibility for Kinship Care Allowance as there is no standardisation of payments across local authorities, which creates something of a postcode lottery. Those who are officially 'looked after' by the local authority and are known to be in a formal kinship care situation are eligible for financial support. However, some local authorities use means testing, while others also pay for 'comparable needs' and/or 'Residence Allowances' for those who are 'non-looked after'. Some kinship carers are not clear about the legal status of the child in their care. Of callers and visitors to Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS), 19% were unsure of the status of the child (Dryburgh, 2010).

Boundaries within and between formal and informal kinship care are not clear-cut and children's statuses may be subject to change which may lead to uncertainty and insecurity in entitlement and access to benefits and allowances.

Trends and statistics

The following trends and statistics on formal and informal kinship care in the UK are taken from a report from Bristol University (Nandy et al., 2011) which uses 2001 census data – this is extremely useful as it shows higher incidence of informal kinship caring than other estimates and gives us some demographic information about kinship carers. Figures pertaining to Scotland are taken from the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) (Kidner 2008) and data collected by Citizens Advice Scotland (Dryburgh 2010).



Definitions of kinship care used in the data: The team at Bristol University defines 'formal' kinship care as those children who have a legal 'looked after' status and are living with kinship carers, and 'informal' kinship care as those who have a legal 'non-looked after' status and are living with kinship carers. The majority of Nandy's census data is reported at the kinship care level comprising both formal and informal kinship care.

Statistics from 2001 on **formal and informal kinship care in the UK** (Nandy et al., 2011) show that:

- 143,367 children in England, 15,433 children in Scotland, 9,200 children in Wales, and 5,200 children in Northern Ireland were estimated to be living in **formal and informal kinship care combined**. This gave a UK wide total of 173,200 children;
- 136,497 children in England, 14,453 children in Scotland, 8,580 children in Wales, and 4,666 children in Northern Ireland were estimated to be living in **informal kinship care**. This gave a UK wide total of 164,196 children;
- The Bristol report (Nandy et al, 2011) gives greater detail on UK-wide kinship care arrangements which are not given in this factsheet.

Figures for **formal and informal kinship care in Scotland:**

- In March 2009, 2,990 children and young people were formally looked after in kinship care arrangements in Scotland. The best estimate for informal kinship care was 10,454, making an estimated total of 13,444 children in formal and informal kinship care (Dryburgh, 2010; Kidner, 2008). However, recent analysis of 2001 census data would indicate that this number is an underestimate;
- Analysis of census data estimates that in 2001 15,433 children in Scotland were living in kinship care, excluding those living with family friends (Nandy et al., 2011). This is 15% higher than the *more recent* (2009) estimate cited above;

Trends and statistics on **formal and informal kinship care in Scotland** in 2001 (Nandy et al., 2011) show that:

- 94% of all kinship arose through informal arrangements (14,453 children in informal compared to 980 children in formal kinship care);
- the highest prevalence rates of formal and informal kinship care were within Glasgow city, with 24 in every 1000 children living with relatives, and Inverclyde, with 27 per 1000 children living with relatives;

Relationship profile of formal and informal kinship carers in Scotland:

- 44% were grandparents;
- 39% were siblings;
- 17% were other relative carers.

Age of the child in formal and informal kinship care in Scotland in 2001:

- age 0-4: 1 in 111 children in informal kinship care in Scotland;
- age 5-9: 1 in 77 children in informal kinship care in Scotland;
- age 10-14: 1 in 71 children in informal kinship care in Scotland;
- age 15-17: 1 in 59 children in informal kinship care in Scotland;
- all ages: 1 in 77 children in informal kinship care in Scotland.

Age of the carer in formal and informal kinship care in Scotland in 2001:

- the average age of sibling carers in Scotland in 2001 was 32 years;
- the average age of grandparent carers in Scotland in 2001 was 57 years;
- almost 1 in 5 (23%) of grandparent carers was aged 65 or over;
- the average age of female other relative carers in Scotland in 2001 was 31 years;

Ethnicity of the child in formal and informal kinship care in Scotland in 2001:

- 2% of children in 2001 were from non-white ethnicities, yet accounted for 5% of children in kinship care;
- 30% of non-white boys in Scotland aged 0 to 4 years were living with relatives. This is in contrast to England where it is mainly minority ethnic teenagers that live with relatives;

Relationship of the kinship carer to the child in formal and informal care in Scotland in 2001:

- 54% of children were living with grandparents;
- 31% of children were living with siblings;
- 15% of children were living with other relatives;

Poverty in formal and informal kinship care arrangements in Scotland in 2001:

- 50% of sibling carers, 49% of grandparent carers and 47% of other relative carers were living in the lowest 20% income bracket;
- two thirds (67%) of children living in kinship care in Scotland lived in households in the poorest 40% of areas;
- using a Child Deprivation Index (CPI) developed by Danny Dorling (Dorling et al., 2007), over three quarters (76%) of Scottish children in kinship care experienced two or more deprivations compared to around 38% of children in the general child population of Scotland;
- 1 in every 25 children living in Scottish workless households was living with a kinship carer.

Grandparent carers in formal and informal kinship care arrangements in Scotland in 2001:

- 44% of kinship carers in Scotland were grandparents;
- the average age of grandparent carers was 57 years;
- 23% of grandparent carers were aged 65 years or older;
- grandparent carers mainly cared for one child;
- 9% of grandparent carers were living in overcrowded conditions;
- 80% of grandmother kinship carers were single (or lone carers)
- 11% of grandfather carers were single (or lone carers);
- 68% of grandmother carers reported a limiting long-term illness compared to 28% of grandfather carers;

Sibling carers in formal and informal kinship care arrangements in Scotland in 2001:

- 39% of kinship carers in Scotland were sibling carers;
- the average age of sibling carers was 32 years;
- 21% of sibling carers were aged under 25 years old;
- sibling carers mainly cared for two children;
- female sibling carers most often looked after children less than five years of age;
- 21% of sibling carers were living in overcrowded conditions;
- 90% of female sibling carers were single (or lone carers);
- 50% of male sibling carers were single (or lone carers);
- 40% of male sibling carers reported a limiting long-term illness compared to 18% of female sibling carers;

The main reasons for children entering kinship care

As none of the data citing reasons for children entering kinship care are representative of the kinship care population, it is not possible to get an accurate breakdown of reasons by proportion. However, the reasons given were consistent across the literature (Dryburgh, 2010; Kidner, 2008; Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006; JRF, 2001) and were:

- Neglect/abuse linked to drug and/or alcohol misuse of parents;
- Neglect/abuse not linked to drug and/or alcohol misuse;
- Child protection issues (for example, violence/abuse in family);
- Death of parent;
- Imprisonment;
- Mental health of parent; and
- The young person's problems/difficult behaviour (for example, offending/substance misuse).
- Drugs and alcohol misuse by parents was the most widely cited reason for children requiring care, the incidence of which was said to be increasing.



Advantages and disadvantages of kinship care

Under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, there is the principle that children should live with family where possible. However, it is important that the best interest of the child, rather than a preference for a particular type of care, takes precedence when considering care placements (Kidner, 2008). Optimally, it has been reported that 'kinship care can remove children from adversity while minimising disruption' and can even provide 'a context for promoting resilience' (Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006: 38). The table below summarises some of the advantages and disadvantages of kinship care (Kidner, 2008; Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006: 38):

Advantages	Disadvantages
It can provide children with stability	Financial hardship
It provides children with warm and loving relationships	Overcrowding
It reinforces continuities for children in their families and communities	Ill-health of carers
It reinforces children's sense of identity and self-esteem	Sudden lack of freedom for carers
It results in fewer placements for children	Less thorough assessment and lack of support from child welfare services
It maintains links with parents	Less stringent monitoring by child welfare services
	Carers coping with behavioural difficulties of young people
	Relationships between carers, children and parents can be problematic
	It may be that carers are part of the disadvantaged circumstances affecting the child and his/her family

Research cited in Aldgate & McIntosh (2006) states that outcomes for children in kinship care are better in almost every respect than for those in foster care and that the placements are better and more stable.

Gaps in the evidence and concluding points

One of the gaps in the evidence, and one that accounts for some of the disparity in informal kinship care population estimates, is that little is known about who is being brought up by kinship carers who are friends rather than family members, although it is thought that this population is small (Dryburgh, 2010).

One of the surprising results from the Bristol study is the number of sibling kinship carers (39%). This is higher than any previous estimates and is an area worthy of further study, especially given the younger age profile of this type of kinship carer, their gender (mainly female), and the fact that they are generally caring for more children than older kinship carers. These households are very likely to be living in poverty and deprivation which will have implications for the care of the children (Nandy et al., 2011: 97).

It is expected that carers may be affected by their own ill-health/disability, especially as the majority of kinship carers are grandparents. However little is known of the exact extent of ill health and disability among kinship carers and what their support needs may be. There is also the potential risk that children in kinship care may become young carers themselves by having to look after the people who were originally supposed to be looking after them.

Kinship carers can be thrust into extremely stressful situations due to the circumstances that have led to the care arrangements. They too are trying to cope with the impact of the adult child's substance misuse, neglect, imprisonment or even death, and often struggle to manage contact arrangements with the child's parent/s.

In addition to their own ill-health/disability, kinship carers report having unmet needs due to the ill-health/disability of the children they care for. Some children are reported as having social, emotional and behavioural problems stemming from the previous experiences which may include parental substance misuse, chaotic lifestyles, bereavement and/or imprisonment. An extreme example is children exhibiting violent behaviours towards their kinship carer. CAS emphasises that the needs of kinship carers of non-looked after children are often the same as the needs of kinship carers of looked after children (Dryburgh, 2010: 5).

A gap in the research knowledge is the impact of two or more adverse circumstances, e.g. parental substance misuse leading to imprisonment and/or death. Experiencing more than one adverse event may have a cumulative negative impact on the child, and on the carer, who may have lost a son or daughter.



The financial situation of kinship carers was previously believed to be poor given that the circumstances in which children require kinship care are usually associated with poverty and deprivation. However, research by Nandy et al (2011) highlights the extreme levels of deprivation experienced by many kinship carers and informal carers may have less knowledge about or access to local authority payments. Added to this, unknown numbers of kinship carers, currently thought to be between 35% and 60% of carers in the UK, are obliged to give up their jobs or reduce their hours to care for their young relatives.

Appendix

i) About the data

The data used by Nandy et al (2011) at Bristol University was taken from the 2001 census (but reported on in 2011) and is the most factually accurate on the population profile of formal and informal kinship carers. The 2001 census data found a higher incidence of informal kinship care in Scotland than was estimated for 2009 (14,453 compared to 10,454 children). If the circumstances that lead to the need for children to be looked after have been increasing, it is reasonable to suggest that the number of children in informal kinship care in 2011 is even higher than either of these figures. It is hoped that the Bristol researchers will repeat their analyses with the 2011 census data. Although 2001 census data sheds much light on the profile and demographics of kinship carers, it only provides a snapshot of one point in time and does not tell us much about the reasons for children being in kinship here, how long they had been there or why they were living with relatives (Nandy et al., 2011; 119).

The data collected by CAS was a consequence of kinship carers accessing the telephone helpline of the Citizens Advice Bureaux or visiting their offices, therefore the demographic statistics of this population in this particular dataset may not be representative of kinship carers more widely. For example, 76% of kinship carer callers to the CAS were aged between 45 and 64 years (Dryburgh, 2010). Rather than indicate the age of the kinship carer population, this could be a stronger indicator that older kinship carers are more likely to access services and support. The data from CAS and the review by Aldgate & McIntosh (2006) includes rich details on the issues and experiences of kinship carers and the children they care for.

ii) References

- Aldgate, Jane & McIntosh, Miranda (2006), Looking after the family: a study of children looked after in Kinship care in Scotland,
- Dorling, D., Wheeler, B., Shaw, M. & Mitchell, R. (2007), Counting the 21st century children of Britain: the extent of advantage and disadvantage, 21st century society: Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences, 2, 173-189., Cited in Nandy, S., Selwyn, J., Farmer, E., and Vaisey, P. (2011) Spotlight on kinship care: using census microdata to examine the extent and nature of kinship care in the UK at the turn of the 20th century, Bristol
- Dryburgh, K. (2010) Relative Value: The experiences of kinship carers using the Scottish CAB service, Citizens Advice Scotland: Edinburgh
- Farmer and Moyes (2008) Kinship Care: fostering effective family and friends placements, cited in Dryburgh, K. (2010)
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- Scottish Government (2011) Guidance on the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 and the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007

Appendix continued

Websites accessed:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/262356/0078450.pdf>

http://www.povertytruthcommission.org/uploads/doc_16391814042011_Kinship_Care_Observations_and_Recommendations.pdf

<http://www.lookedafterchildrenscotland.org.uk/safeandnurtured/fostering/kinshipcare.asp>

<http://www.eukinshipcarers.eu/2010/04/30/heather-talks-about-kinship-care-in-scotland/>

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<http://www.dartington.org/research-in-practice/research-in-practice-whats-new-february-2009?m=1&y=2011&calid=calendar>

<http://www.children1st.org.uk/news/326/childrens-minister-launches-new-national-service>

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Children/TrendLookedAfter>

<http://www.buttleuk.org/>

<http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/>

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/resourcesforprofessionals/looked_after_children_statistics_wda79691.html

<http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/reports-and-publications>

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/kith-and-kin-kinship-care-vulnerable-young-people>

<http://illegal.org.uk/index.cgi?board=jkl&action=display&thread=2287>

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