

**PREVENTION
OR CRISIS
RESPONSE?**

**REFLECTIONS
ON THE
1968
ACT**

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Abstract

The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 provided a framework for the newly formed social work profession and took a social welfare approach to those who needed support. It introduced Section 12 (s.12), which allowed social workers the discretion to use cash assistance in its work with children and adults for use in emergencies, for preventative and for promotional social work; cash assistance was seen as the resource of a comprehensive Social Work Department. The Act envisaged that its provisions, including s.12, would help those on the edge of care and be a protective measure to prevent children being taken into care. The use of cash assistance within social work, however, was not without controversy.

Fifty years on, this small scale study explored the role of financial assistance today from statutory and third sector services through examining the original policy intention of s.12, whether use of cash assistance had changed over time and whether it currently played a role in addressing poverty. The study gathered data through a small scale review of the literature and discussions with practitioners with experience of working in both the statutory and third sectors, and with a small number of parents. In the early years of implementation, cash assistance was primarily used for to help individuals and families pay for their fuel and rent, but today parents are using the support of cash assistance predominantly to buy food to feed their families.

Prevention or Crisis Response? How does social work respond to financial hardship?

'Section 12(1): It shall be the duty of every local authority to promote social welfare by making available advice, guidance and assistance on such a scale as may be appropriate for their area, and in that behalf to make arrangements and to provide or secure the provision of such facilities (including the provision or arranging for the provision of residential and other establishments) as they may consider suitable and adequate, and such assistance may be given to, or in respect of, the persons specified in the next following subsection in kind or in cash, subject to subsections (3) and (4) of this section'.

[Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, s.12]

In 1968, implementation of the Social Work (Scotland) Act reflected the optimism of the times by providing the framework for the new social work profession and a system for dealing with children and young people in need of care and protection or those who commit crimes which took a social welfare approach. Section 12 (s.12) allowed social workers the discretion to use cash assistance in emergencies, for preventative and promotional social work; cash assistance was seen as the resource of a comprehensive Social Work Department (Campbell 1978).

The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 had as one of its aims 'to prevent social distress'. Preventing social distress echoes the current discourse on early intervention and prevention. At the heart of the 1968 Act was the promotion of social welfare and the provision in certain circumstances of cash or kind to individuals in need aged 18 or over (Daniel and Scott 2018). Payments under s.12 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 (and s.22 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995) could be used for a variety of reasons, but one use was as one-off payments to families to avert crisis.

In recent years, organisations including Aberlour and Parenting Across Scotland have become increasingly concerned about the numbers of families affected by extreme poverty. Aberlour has recorded a rise in referrals to its Urgent Assistance Fund on behalf of families who have exhausted the limits of statutory help for essential items such as clothing, children's beds and bedding and kitchen equipment such as fridges and cookers. In addition to referrals to the Urgent Assistance Fund, Aberlour services are receiving urgent requests for additional food parcels and support with electricity and gas.

Kate Morris and colleagues (2018) commented that *'Children and families in poverty are significantly more likely to be the subject of state intervention. The data reveal that poverty has become invisible in practice, in part justified by avoiding stigma but also because of a lack of up-to-date research knowledge and investment by some social workers in an 'underclass' discourse'* (p.364). The authors argue that in light of the evidence that poverty is a contributory factor in the risk of harm, it is vital that all agencies engage with the evidence and in critical reflection about intervening in the context of poverty.

It is in this context that this small exploratory study aims to look at the role of financial assistance from statutory and voluntary services in addressing poverty.

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Methodology

Aims and methods

The aim of this small exploratory study was to examine the role of financial assistance from statutory and third sector services, whether this had changed over time and currently plays a role in addressing poverty.

The overarching research questions were to consider:

- a Has the role of financial assistance to families in need changed over time?
- b What are families' experiences of receiving financial assistance or additional support?

The research set out to gather data through:

- a Small-scale review of published documents relating to Section 12 payments under Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968; and
- b Semi-structured interviews and discussion groups with practitioners and families in relation to the provision of financial assistance and its role in addressing financial insecurity.

The plan was that the messages and themes from the small-scale review would shape the questions to explore with practitioners delivering and families receiving services today.

Small-scale review of literature

The small-scale review of published policy, legislation and practice documents was to focus specifically on the implementation and development of s.12 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. Unlike other reviews of literature, the parameters for this review were broader and spanned 50 years to allow relevant documents to be included since implementation of the 1968 Act.

The initial search terms applied were: cash assistance; s.12; *social work*; *Social Work Scotland Act 1968*; and *local authorities*. Searches were made through databases of peer reviewed journals from a range of disciplines including Applied Sciences; Political Science; Psychology; Social Sciences; and Social Work. This initial search produced little material and so the search parameters were extended to include: *financial support*; *payments for families*; *Children Scotland Act 1995*; *poverty and emergency cash payments*.

Despite extensive searches conducted simultaneously by two members of the research team using the

same research terms, the majority of articles, briefings and government documents presented research that predominantly considered issues such as direct payments, personalisation, local authority support relating to adult social care and disability or offending amongst young people or adults and substance misuse. Similarly there was a wealth of articles relating to changes to social work and the role of social workers over time, the impact of financial restraints and budget cuts on the types and extent of services provided and the impact of poverty. These were only a few publications in relation to s.12 specifically. There were many references to policy documents, Scottish Office publications and national statistical reports, but these reports were either no longer available or could not be sourced within the timeframe of the research.

One key document sourced, however, was a PhD thesis completed by Campbell in 1978 which focused primarily on the origin and implementation of Section 12. As part of Campbell's research, local authority social workers were surveyed on their views on the use of cash assistance and Section 12. Due to the lack of wider published material, the research team took the decision to adapt Campbell's original survey into a semi-structured schedule to use during the interviews and discussion groups as part of this current research. There were two reasons for this: first, although language and terms may have changed during the past 50 years, the focus of the questions was as relevant today as 1978; and second, the doctoral research had been undertaken in 1978, which meant that sufficient time had passed to allow the 1968 Act and use of s.12 to embed in practice; the views in 1978 would reflect practice rather than issues of implementation.

Interviews and discussion group: practitioners

This small study had originally intended to gather views through individual interviews with four practitioners about the use of cash assistance in social work. The research team managed to speak with a total of ten practitioners through four individual interviews and one discussion group. Those interviewed represented three different local authority areas and had a range of managerial and frontline experience in both the statutory and third sectors across criminal justice, adult services and children and families. Experience in practice ranged from newly qualified workers to those with 35 years' experience.

The research team identified two local authority areas

where Aberlour provided services and arranged to speak with staff. The first was a large urban area and the second was a smaller urban area with rural communities within its boundaries. Staff in each area were invited to attend a discussion group. Across the two areas, the research team spoke with a total of eight staff; five were social work qualified of which three had more than 30 years' experience with at least 15 years working in the statutory sector; and three staff had less than ten years' experience and were from a range of backgrounds including education. The research team also identified two social workers from two additional authorities as it was important to ensure the views of those working in the statutory sector were captured.

Interviews and discussion group: parents

It had been planned to hear the views of four parents through individual interviews. Instead the research team managed to speak with three parents: one individual interview; and a small discussion group of two parents. This discussion group was meant to include four parents, but two withdrew on the day due to illness within their families. Those interviewed lived in two local authority areas, had had different childhood experiences and were involved with services for a range of reasons.

Ethical considerations

There were two key considerations. The first was that the involvement of families and practitioners was voluntary. The reasons for the research and what would be included in the final report were carefully explained. It was important that parents did not feel obliged to share their stories and the amount of information shared during discussions was the decision of parents. Parents were supported during and following the discussion both practically in terms of transport and child care, and emotionally if required. The discussions with families were kept broad and the research was sensitive to the balance of gathering sufficient detail to provide a context for the information shared while not being intrusive. The second consideration was that due to the small numbers involved, those who participated are referred to as either practitioner or parent throughout the report to ensure anonymity. No distinctions have been made between local authority area or whether an interview or discussion group.

Limitations

The main limitation to this small-scale scoping exercise was the paucity of the literature in relation to s.12 specifically.

Context

As Daniel and Scott (2018) have noted: *'deserving and undeserving poor are words, which have echoed down the centuries, in determining how we as a society should express our responsibilities to its members.'* (p.3). Throughout the decades our society's attitudes to poverty and the use of financial assistance to support those in poverty range across a wide spectrum; at one end the use of financial support is thought to help those move out of poverty and towards self-sufficiency to become an active economic member of society; but at the other end, there remain concerns that financial support to those in poverty will make them thriftless and dependent (Campbell 1978). This is a crude generalisation of public attitudes, but in working with families it is likely that many practitioners struggle to find the language to discuss poverty and deprivation, may be overwhelmed by existing levels of need or are concerned that discussing links between poverty, child abuse and neglect is stigmatising for families (Morris et al. 2018).

Poverty has existed before, during and after implementation of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, but attitudes towards how families are supported and how poverty is eradicated may have been influenced by the changing political and economic climate since the 1960s. Following two world wars, there had been a growing sense of a national responsibility to people struggling economically and the need for state involvement to mitigate its effects (Campbell 1978) resulting in the expansion of National Insurance and the creation of the National Health Service (Daniel and Scott 2018). By the 1980s, the role of the individual was given greater prominence than that of community (Brodie, Nottingham and Plunkett 2006) and the Government's approach to management of the economy emphasised the interplay of market forces with minimal interference from Government (Daniel and Scott 2018). In some parts of society, there were views that those on benefits or in financial difficulties were there as a result of inappropriate lifestyle choices or a lack of motivation in changing their circumstances.

The reality in 2018 is that almost a quarter of a million children living in Scotland are in poverty with their families facing stark decisions whether to pay rent, heat their home or put food on the table (Congreve and McCormick 2018). The Scottish Parliament has published its commitment to a fair, smart and inclusive Scotland by 2030 (Scottish Government 2016) and state that this is a vision for Scotland *'where everyone can*

feel at home, where fair work helps businesses to thrive and create jobs, where poverty rates are amongst the lowest in Europe, and where there is genuinely equal opportunity for all.' (p.1).

Two challenges to this vision have been the roll-out of the Westminster Government's welfare reform since 2012 including the implementation of Universal Credit, and the as yet unknown impact of the UK leaving the European Union, which is likely to bring economic uncertainty. In 2012, Action for Children, the NSPCC and The Children's Society commissioned a study to consider the impact that welfare reform would have on families (Reed 2012). As part of the work in calculating the number of children and families, Reed identified several characteristics of families who may be affected:

- Worklessness;
- Poor quality or overcrowded housing;
- No parent with academic or vocational qualifications;
- Mental health difficulties;
- Illness/disability of at least one parent;
- Low income; and
- Material deprivation.

(Reed 2012, p.6)

Reed's calculations found that the changes to the tax and benefit systems would disproportionately hit the most vulnerable families. Overall, the negative impact is perversely greater for families with more vulnerabilities, particularly affecting families with four or more vulnerabilities present in their lives. This is supported by other research which identified that the impact of welfare reform, and universal credit in particular, would be uneven and hit the poorest parts of Britain hardest (Beatty and Fothergill 2013; Local Government Association 2013).

Unemployment, parental mental health difficulties and low income are also factors present in the lives of many children experiencing neglect (Daniel, Taylor and Scott 2010). Living with any number of these factors does not mean a child is being neglected, however, the more factors present in a child's life does increase the likelihood of neglect (Bywaters et al. 2016; Nair et al. 2003). Moreover, these families may depend more on public services than other families, and their children are likely to be more affected by cuts to local services (Scott and Daniel 2018).

Morris and colleagues (2018) in the research led by

Professor Bywaters at University of Coventry on child welfare inequalities across the UK considered the relationship between children's material circumstances, and child abuse and neglect. The authors reflect that in the UK and internationally, there were few studies of the influence of socio-economic factors on social work decision making. The research concluded that children and families in poverty are significantly more likely to be the subject of state intervention, but that poverty *'has become invisible in practice, in part justified by avoiding stigma but also because of a lack of up-to-date research knowledge and investment'* (p.364).

Exploratory Findings

Views and experiences of practitioners

The aim of the interview and discussion group was to explore whether the role of financial assistance to families in need has changed over time. The survey developed for Campbell's thesis was adapted to ask the same core questions as forty years previously and explored:

- a Workers' views on the use of cash in social work;
- b Objectives for giving cash to clients;
- c Reasons families needed financial support; and
- d Discussion of the term promotion of social welfare used within the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968.

Workers' views in the use of cash in social work

A key finding of Campbell (1978) was that implementation of s.12 and use of cash assistance in social work was controversial from the outset. There was debate about the use of cash in social work activity and particularly in being clear about *'how to draw boundaries around legitimate social work purposes in providing such assistance and avoid the pressures resulting from deficiencies in other organisations' provisions.*' (p.162) such as the then Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS), which administered the benefits system. Furthermore, *'closely associated with this is the question of whether and to what extent social workers should encourage clients to use the professional administrative and clerical facilities of the Social Work Department either to save, to pay off debts to other organisations or to be taught sound budgeting habits.'* (p.162).

Under Section 12, social workers had powers to provide an emergency service for those clients who were ineligible for Supplementary Benefit (at the time, the main benefit for people on low income which was replaced by Income Support in 1988), but national figures gave no indication of clients' incomes so it was impossible to distinguish between what might have been legitimate social work intervention and what should have been dealt with by the Commission (Campbell 1978). Social Work Managers were keen not to provide the finances or undertake the work of other organisations such as the Commission. Social workers also reported spending a considerable proportion of their time handling enquiries and requests about

financial assistance.

Forty years on, there was much less debate among our small sample of practitioners about the use of cash assistance. One practitioner commented 'Didn't really question about the use of cash in social work but thought it came from a good place as it helped dependent children and vulnerable adults' and another reflected:

'It's a difficult one. I feel that people need a hand up not a hand out... As social workers it should be about support and managing families to enable them to manage their own affairs; but staffing is a problem. There isn't the staff to enable this.'
[Practitioner 2018]

Generally, however, there was an acknowledgement that parents in crisis could not focus on longer term intervention work with social work until the crisis was averted and cash assistance was one resource to help prevent the crisis or a child coming into care.

One possible reason for less debate in 2018 is the time constraints on this exploratory study meant that the amounts of cash assistance provided today are significantly smaller even allowing for historical inflation. As part of Campbell's research, 28 local authorities provided information on expenditure for 1973.¹ For that year, the average payment made using s.12 was £16.70 which equates to around £195 in 2017. This ranged from £3.30 (equal to £34.50 in 2017) to £74.40 (equal to £855 in 2017). In terms of local authority budgets, s.12 payments amounted to less than one percent, and in terms of reach, the number helped per 1,000 population in Scotland was 3.9 families (Campbell 1978). As one practitioner reflected:

'There was always the safety net of section 12... different times now.'
[Practitioner 2018]

Responses from practitioners today suggest that the average amount of cash assistance given to an individual is, on average, £20-£25. Practitioners thought that smaller amounts are available to fewer people though statistics could not be sourced to test these perceptions. The significance of the payments made to families today, however, were great.

¹ Bank of England Inflation calculator [online]. Available at: <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator> [Accessed on 10 November 2018].

Objectives for giving cash to clients

In 1978, Campbell asked the 52 Scottish local authorities whether the use of cash assistance was used as a preventative measure (prevent a child coming into care), for emergencies (fuel and rent) or for promotional purposes (to reduce the emphasis on a crisis orientation and to provide the opportunities for social workers to take a more constructive, active and promotional role). Of the 31 responses, 45% of respondents thought the powers were useful in buying time to practice remedial or rehabilitative social work, 45% thought the powers useful in emergencies, but only 10% thought cash assistance a flexible provision that allowed scope for imaginative promotional social work. Campbell concluded that:

'It is nevertheless apparent that whether or not payments for immediate maintenance are a drain on social workers' resources of time and money, there are very few payments that can be described as imaginative or unconventional in promoting individual social welfare; nor have social workers been greatly successful in widening the scope of the cash assistance powers to cover more than a handful of clients who are not members of families with young children.'

[Campbell 1978, p.128]

In 2018, the time constraints on this exploratory study meant that the ten practitioners reported that the main objective for cash assistance was predominantly in supporting families in crisis or for emergencies. There was little discussion of the use of cash assistance being used to support casework planning and no discussion for use of the monies in promotional social work. Broadly it was to keep children safe, but specifically to support families during difficult times, for example, to fill a gap in benefits while individuals transferred to Universal Credit²; the process from registration to receiving benefits often takes up to five weeks. Workers and parents were acutely aware of the impact of transferring to Universal Credit and that the sanctions or penalties can impact on benefits for up to five years:

'To help people going through difficulties. Every now and then a small amount of help is not awful?. If it becomes a pattern then we would need to look it - the biggest challenge is the poverty of aspiration.'

[Practitioner 2018]

Reasons families needed financial support

In the years following implementation of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, the Scottish Office collected national statistics on the expenditure and use of s.12 cash assistance. By 1973, the expenditure by local authorities under s.12 had increased by almost fourfold on the expenditure one year following the Act, but the three main types of expenditure remained the same: rent, fuel and 'other purposes'.

In Campbell's survey (1978), 33 of 52 authorities provided more detailed information on the use of s.12 cash assistance. Authorities reported that in 1973, rent accounted for 19%, fuel for 42%, immediate maintenance for 18% and other purposes accounted for 21%. The other purposes included clothing, travel expenses, furniture or furniture removals, hire purchase commitments and rent arrears, and aids and adaptations for disability until introduction of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (Scotland) Act 1972. In 1973, the main recipients were families with young children (71%), homeless individuals (6.2%) and old age pensioners accounted (5.1%).

In 2018, the time constraints on this exploratory study meant that it was not possible to survey local authorities, however, while fuel remained a key reason for families requesting financial support, the other reason mentioned by all practitioners was food. Practitioners and parents commented that food and fuel were the two main reasons for the need of extra support today. The provision of food was usually through supervised shopping, tokens, vouchers and food parcels, but there were difficulties with this. First, there was difficulty in getting access to some vouchers such as the Healthy Start vouchers, particularly once a child is born. Second, parents talked of the embarrassment in asking for support or visiting food banks. Families welcomed and appreciated food parcels, but the content of parcels from food banks was dependent on what is donated:

'It is embarrassing to go to the food banks, and the parcels are unpredictable as it depends on what is being donated: this time it was great as it had washing powder. It can be really hard to make a meal from the food.'

[Parent 2018]

2 Figures published in February 2018 state that 88% received full payment within 1 week of the payment due date which rose to 94% within 4 weeks (Department of Work and Pensions 2018). Concern has been reported in the media of the impact of further roll-out that delays will impact on a greater number of claimants (The Guardian 25 January 2018).

There were various challenges for parents feeding families on a limited budget. Certain foods are expensive and some families have a child with specific medical needs which impacts on the food they are able to eat. Another challenge is that even with the help of cash assistance or food vouchers, some families will still buy few fresh vegetables and fruit. The reason was simple. As one mother reported to one of the participating practitioners: *'the cost of trying out other veg and fruit is too expensive, especially if the children don't like it. It's a waste of money and the food goes to waste'* (Practitioner 2018). This parent could not afford to buy any foods the family would not eat as money would be wasted.

Promotion of social welfare used within the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968

In 1978, one response to Campbell's survey to social work was that the *'spirit of the Act had been choked by the letter of the law...'* (Campbell 1978, p.130). Campbell reflected that the optimism of the early years was diminishing and that this was because in practice the cash assistance powers were now considered to be more useful in emergencies as practitioners were uncertain of their legal power in relation to the promotional use of cash assistance and some felt that scarce resources should not be used for unessential purposes when there were more urgent cases of need.

Today, our small group of practitioners described the promotion of social welfare as supporting and allowing families to meet their own needs and care for children without the involvement of child protection or looked after processes. Practitioners reflected that one difficulty is the disconnect between Scottish Government provision in relation to promoting social welfare – such as free Early Learning and Childcare provision – with the uptake of services. Families struggle to access services for a range of reasons including their own lack of knowledge about what is available locally; a lack of confidence to seek out what might be provided locally; travel costs are inhibitive; and parents in crisis sometimes struggle to organise themselves and sustain routines.

Other comments

In addition, to the views shared in response to the specific questions asked, other issues were discussed.

- **Impact of welfare reform:** the impact of transferring to Universal Credit was commented on by both practitioners and parents. The impact was

threefold: first, there was a perception that benefits had reduced and less money was available; second, the transfer process of up to five weeks resulted in many families borrowing money and being in debt until the benefits were available; and the move from weekly to monthly payments had challenged many in managing monthly budgets. This final point came through in all interviews and discussion groups. Many families managed weekly budgets, but struggled to adapt to monthly budgets.

- **Increase in requests for assistance:** those working in the statutory sector stated that they explored all options for securing cash assistance or material goods for the families known to them including the third sector. This was matched by perceptions of those working in the third sector of an increase in requests for assistance. Referrals to Aberlour's Urgent Assistance Fund and to services more generally had increased, particularly in the last 12-18 months. Aberlour has recorded that in first 6 months of this financial year almost 40% more has been given out in cash assistance and 50% more individual grants given to families than the previous year; 14% of grants given out have been to working families (Aberlour unpublished). A notable increase was in the number of external 'cold calls' from practitioners in other settings, e.g. social work, schools, other voluntary organisations.
- **Nature of support:** those working in the statutory sector discussed that s.12 was most often used for buying food. For furniture and other material goods, individuals could make applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund for Crisis Grants or Community Care Grants. For those in the voluntary sector, there were a greater number of requests in relation to families in crisis for the provision of food, clothing for school or a family to attend a funeral, or a Christmas present bag for children.

Views and experiences of parents

The interview and discussion group with parents explored in broad terms the financial difficulties families had experienced. During these discussions, parents were asked to share a little background information on family composition to give some context for their views. The families were asked to share as much or as little information about financial difficulties experienced, the impact of this on their families and what had helped.

Financial circumstances

In the three families which participated in the research, there were between two or three children living within the home, all households were being managed by one parent, all were involved with a range of agencies, all parents were involved in court or legal processes for various reasons and each was continuing to experience financial difficulties.

For one family the move from income support to universal credit had exposed residency difficulties as this parent was born in Europe although one grandparent was British. This parent had moved to Scotland in her late teens and her children were born in Scotland. The impact was significant for this family as until the residency issues were resolved the family was not entitled to benefits. For this family, there was a desperate need for cash assistance to pay for fuel, rent and food.

For two families, affordable child care was an important issue. The three families had little wider family or community support to draw on and did not have networks to provide ad hoc and ongoing child care support when needed; for example, when parents are required to attend court or need to accompany and support their child through hospital admissions. These families did not need social work intervention in terms of child protection or looked after services, but did not have access to money to pay the additional child care costs arising from the other legal and medical processes in which they were involved.

Impact on families

All parents reflected that changes in their financial situation had a major impact on all members of the family. Parents recognised their own heightened levels of stress and anxiety and the impact of this on their ability to cope; managing money was a constant daily pressure for all three parents. It has been acknowledged that the daily struggle of 'getting by' are '*processes of juggling, piecing together and going without.*' (Schietecat, Roets and Vandebroek 2017, p.690).

The impact on their children was also recognised; older young people often isolated themselves from their peers and withdrew from family life and younger children were sad about the loss of shared family activities. This was particularly the case for one family where family outings had been important to the family's sense of cohesion. Various organisations worked with the family

and had supplied tokens for the leisure centres, but the family could not afford the bus fares to go swimming.

Parents also discussed the struggle to budget on a monthly basis.

What had helped

Participating families were involved with a range of agencies and for one family this included third sector organisations, legal aid and social work, which was supporting the family financially. Two families were not currently involved with social work, but had been previously. One parent talked of help from Aberlour to help coordinate with all the agencies they were involved with. Support with processes that often appeared opaque and difficult to penetrate was invaluable, such as court and legal processes and assistance with benefits.

For one family in particular, the financial support from local authority, cash assistance through vouchers for food and activities from the third sector and weekly food parcels were the reasons the parent gave for keeping the family together without her children being looked after and accommodated, however, it was clear this was a daily struggle.

Families also spoke of being dependent on the decisions made by social workers and that changes in staff, absences or leave often impacted on families awaiting decisions, however, small, to be made about their circumstances. Social workers understanding of the consequences of delays on decision-making helped mitigate to some extent the impact of delays on families.

In the absence of assistance provided directly in cash, then practical support was much appreciated through the provision of transport for a child who struggles with public transport or provision of child care:

'I was delayed in court and if it wasn't for the [Aberlour] worker, my child would not have been picked up from school.'
[Parent 2018]

All talked of the impact on mental health and wellbeing and parents talked about importance of having someone to talk with:

'the feeling that a worker cares is so important'
[Parent 2018]

Discussion

This aim of this small exploratory study was to consider two overarching questions: has the role of financial assistance to families in need changed over time through policy and practice guidance?; and what are families' experiences of receiving financial assistance or additional support?

In respect of this first question, it is clear that financial assistance remains crucial to many families and support is sourced and brought together through various routes such as s.12 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 or s.22 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, the Scottish Welfare Fund and third sector organisations. What appears to have changed, however, since the 1968 Act was first implemented is the purpose of cash assistance, the amount of cash assistance that can be awarded and use of cash assistance. Campbell's research shows that in 1978, cash assistance was used in both emergency situations and as part of wider case planning.

In 2018, there was little discussion about the use of cash assistance as a resource for case planning and no discussion in terms of promotional social work activities. Cash assistance in 1970s was being used for a variety of reasons reflecting the varied circumstances of recipients. Today assistance either in cash or kind appears to be used predominantly to heat homes and feed families, and in providing basic clothing. There is some evidence that the amount available to support families is much smaller today than in 1978 and there appears much less debate about the use of cash assistance within social work and its objectives.

In terms of the second question, the research team was only able to speak with three families. These parents were articulate and clear about the impact of financial difficulties on their mental health and wellbeing. Managing finances and thinking about providing a warm home and food was a constant daily pressure for all three parents. There was also a resolve in each parent and determination to care and provide for their children. Asking for help is difficult and embarrassing, but absolutely necessary for families to exist and the families greatly appreciated the support both financially and emotionally from the services and its workers.

Conclusion

This was a small exploratory study, so it is important to consider that emerging findings are limited by the lack of published information available on implementation of s.12 of the 1968 Act and the small number of participants involved. That aside, there were important messages to emerge which could perhaps inform wider discussions on how society should respond to those living in difficult financial circumstances.

Those working in the statutory and third sector today are working with many families who are trying hard to care for and parent their children, and keep their families together in very difficult circumstances. Feeding the children is a constant daily concern for some. In the 1960s and 1970s cash assistance was predominantly for payments towards rent and fuel; the word 'food' was notable by its absence in the limited publications available, but discussed in all interviews and discussions groups with practitioners and parents in 2018. The amount of money available in local authority budgets for s.12 payments was, on average, less than one per cent, but even the smallest amounts paid to individuals were comparatively greater than the amounts available to social workers today.

Practitioners across agencies are acutely aware of the impact of poverty and there are perceptions of growing levels of unmet need and families at the edge or experiencing poverty. While some practitioners today reflected on the principles of the use of cash assistance in social work, they were pragmatic in their practice as the reality of the lives of many families and the temporary relief that cash assistance brought could not be ignored.

The impact of financial difficulties was not on parents alone. Children and young people also experienced its impact. Younger children missed out on the activities that many families take for granted and older children were aware of the differences between them and their peers which often resulted in them withdrawing from friendship groups at a particularly important stage in the development of their social relationships and emotional wellbeing. Families need to work with a combination of agencies and manage the different and sometimes opaque processes to get the right supports in place at the right time.

Families are living in poverty in Scotland today and discussions do not centre around either s.12 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 or s.22 of the Children

(Scotland) Act 1995, nevertheless, cash assistance plays a smaller but perhaps more significant role in the complex picture of provision of support to families. Cash assistance helps parents feed and clothe their children and significantly it helps to support households to live and function as families.

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