



Project no. CIT2-CT-2004-505978

WELLCHI NETWORK

The Well-being of children: The impact of changing family forms, working conditions of parents, social policy and legislative measures

COORDINATION ACTION

Priority 7: Citizens and governance in a knowledge-based society

**Deliverable 2:**

**Report on contributions to the Workshop**

***New approaches and perspectives on childhood***

Due date of deliverable: November 2004

Actual submission date: 30<sup>th</sup> November 2004

Start date of the project: 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004

Duration: 36 months

The Centre for Research on Family, Kinship & Childhood, University of Leeds

Revision 1

Project co-funded by the European Commission within the Sixth Framework Programme (2002-2006)		
Dissemination level		
PU	Public	X
PP	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

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**Workshop 1**  
**'New Perspectives on Childhood'**  
**12<sup>TH</sup> & 13<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2004**

Organised by  
The Centre for Research on Family, Kinship & Childhood,  
University of Leeds

## **1. AIMS**

The primary aim of the first Workshop of the Network was to provide the most contemporary overview of the relatively new field of Childhood Studies to create both a baseline for all future activities, and to offer challenging theoretical perspectives to inform future intellectual work. Speakers were invited from the Network Partners but also from amongst international experts who could address the issues of childhood, children's agency, law and policy, and welfare. One important sub theme of the Workshop was the issue of children and divorce or family breakdown as this crucial issue was one of the motivating factors in the original creation of the Wellchi Network.

## **2. THE WORKSHOP**

### **2.1. Setting the agenda**

The first paper was presented by Professor Leena Alanen from the University of Jyvaskyla, Finland. Her paper was entitled 'Theorising Children's Welfare'. Professor Alanen provided an overview of the ways in which the 'new' sociology of childhood has developed and then went on to raise the following questions:

- what we are talking about when we are talking children's welfare, that is: how do we conceptualize children's welfare?
- what alternative notions, frameworks and theories does the social scientific literature on welfare and welfare policy provide us which could be applicable in studying children's welfare?

- what routes of development may lie ahead when we want to go on to develop a sociology of children's welfare?

Professor Alanen's core argument was that not only are children's experiences and perspectives largely ignored in studies of welfare but that in its very conception, the idea of welfare inevitably places children in a position of silent dependency on adults and those charged with securing their welfare. She argued that it is not enough to direct our gaze of concern towards children, but that we also need to reconceptualise both childhood and what we mean by welfare. She set out two objectives for the Network to consider over the next 3 years.

- 1) to identify the missing knowledge on children's welfare in the European context.  
***This is the empirical challenge.***
- 2) To work towards rectifying the under-developed theorization of children's welfare.  
***This is the conceptual challenge.***

## **2.2. Reporting on Empirical Projects**

Following this agenda setting paper the Workshop heard papers which addressed specifically the question of divorce. Some papers introduced new empirical findings, others addressed policy developments, but all raised the significance of new ways of conceptualising childhood in research.

The first of these papers was presented by Professor Kari Moxnes of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim. She reported on a large scale quantitative and qualitative study of divorce that has just been completed in Norway. Her title was 'Divorce: changing the status of children?'. In this presentation Professor Moxnes focused on a number of case studies from her larger study in order to draw attention to how children themselves can identify the problems that arise from their parents behaviour, and in particular from parental conflict. She selected children from middle class families for this presentation in order to highlight the fact that behaviour which can be experienced as damaging to children does not automatically arise from poor economic conditions. She urged the participants to be aware of the material context of children's lives, but also to take cognizance of less tangible matters such as happiness and the psychological burdens that parents can place on children.

Dr Bren Neale from the University of Leeds, UK, presented findings from her follow-up study of children's experiences of post-divorce family life. This was a longitudinal study of 60 children who had been previously interviewed. Dr Neale's emphasis was on the ways in which the 'new' sociology of childhood had shifted understandings of children's situation after divorce away from one based on measuring harm towards one of exploring their experiences, their own coping mechanisms and solutions, and integrating their perspectives into an otherwise 'adultist' view of the situation. She concluded that research in this field must focus on the quality of relationships (rather than for example the quantity in terms of contact hours after divorce).

Dr Gill Highet from the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, Edinburgh, provided an overview of the findings of recent research on children's experiences of their parents' divorces and created a map of intellectual developments in the field. She emphasised the ways in which the standpoint of the child had been very influential in recent work and offered the idea of 'social resilience' as a way forward in conceptualising and drawing together ideas of children's agency with notions of welfare. The welfare focus has tended to ignore the ways in which children themselves 'cope' with difficulties, yet the children-as-agents approach has tended to see children as fully autonomous competent beings. The social resilience model can bridge these two poles by incorporating issues such as material deprivation or disadvantage, yet allowing for the idea that children can develop their own skills to manage their situations.

Dr Helen Stalford from the Department of Law at the University of Liverpool presented a socio-legal perspective and addressed the context of EU legislation on family matters. She focused on measures that were being developed across the EU to deal with the problems of the residency of a child after divorce, and contact between children and separated parents in the context of increasing mobility across Europe. Free movement across the EU means that more couples come from different member states and this poses problems if, on divorce, one parent wishes to return home to work or be with their families of origin. Dr Stalford discussed the Brussels II Convention and how it would impact upon both families and decisions about children after divorce. She drew attention to the fact that this issue is likely to become more problematic in future and that the Convention was little understood and expensive to use.

Dr Morten Blekesaune, from the Norwegian Social Research Institute, Oslo, presented a paper based on a multi-level approach and quantitative methodology entitled 'Single Parents, Adolescents and Depression'. Dr Blekesaune's research was concerned with the problem of depression in this group of young people and his paper traced the resources (income,

education, etc.) that were available at family as well as at community / school level in order to find explanations of the fact that adolescents living with one biological parent experience more depressive symptoms than adolescents living with both biological parents. He also made some comparisons between different family arrangements using statistical techniques to try to identify those factors that gave rise to problems of mental health.

### **2.3. Ethical issues in research with children**

In the Workshop we then turned to address the particularly difficult ethical issues that can arise in carrying out research with children. Dr Ginny Morrow of the London School of Economics, and Dr Jennifer Mason and Ms Becky Tipper from the Centre for Research on Family, Kinship & Childhood at Leeds University, combined to form a Panel to present these issues to the network members. The Panel discussion ranged from the need for researchers to acquire informed consent and the problems inherent in this when researching minor children whose parents' may have a vested interest in the research to the difficulties of integrating a child focussed approach into one's analysis and findings, or where to interview children and whether it is 'safe' to be alone with children. The question was raised of how far children themselves should direct research and to what extent the power relationship between child/adult and researched/researcher could be ameliorated.

### **2.4. Widening the conceptual scope of the Network**

The two final papers in the Workshop brought the members back to the macro level. Many of the studies discussed prior to this had taken qualitative approaches, or were concerned with the micro level of relationships in families. Dr Claude Martin of CNRS in Paris presented a paper entitled 'Putting Children at the Centre of Public Policy'. He pointed out that children were to some extent the focus of state policies (for example child care provision) but he went on to argue that this type of policy was based on the 'investment model' of policy provision. By this he meant that it was possible to mobilise governments to develop policies which affect the lives of children, but only by presenting children as 'things' worth investing for to secure a better future. He suggested that this widely used rationale may actually ignore childhood because it is only interested in moulding children into future useful citizens. This approach does not accept children as 'citizens' now, but waits for them to become adults.

Professor Jens Qvortrup of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim concluded the Workshop with a series of challenging question in the direction started by Dr

Martin. He pointed out that Welfare State research and Childhood Research have both ignored each other and that, in the main, there are few macro level studies of childhood which take forward both the epistemological grounds of the 'new' sociology of childhood, but also the social structural concerns found in macro studies of the Welfare State. He argued that if we start to do this we can see that children are still part of a feudal system and although they benefit from the welfare state, they are not rights holders themselves. He asked whether it is an advantage to children to be part of the family and also pointed to the way in which children, having been excluded from the labour market (at least in the EU), are seen to have no social value. Children, Professor Qvortrup argued, have been defined as a private good and they need to be redefined as a public good. In this way he argued that we need to bring together structural levels of analysis with the more ethnographic research that has typified childhood research to date.

### **3. CONCLUSIONS**

At the conclusion of the Workshop the delegates appreciated the major developments that have occurred in researching children's lives, but were also invited to consider how much further work is needed to mesh together the more ethnographic, qualitative work that has tended to dominate Childhood Studies (in some countries at least) with more structurally focused work which has been so significant in Nordic countries, but also more generally in studies of Welfare States. The Network itself was also challenged because of its own approach towards childhood which may need to be rethought. The Network has used the 'investment' approach to childhood, arguing that research and knowledge is necessary in order to create better citizens in the future. However, a more child focused approach would look at how childhood has been (differentially) constructed by Welfare States and would question the status of children in the present. It was felt that the Network must be reflexive itself about the work that is it doing since academic work itself might be part of the problem of the social exclusion of children because it does not question the agenda of nation state governments, nor of (apparently) benign welfare regimes. As producers of knowledge we need to be aware of our influence on future agendas, even while we acknowledge that such influence may be fairly limited.

Professor Carol Smart  
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## APPENDIX I

### 'New Perspectives on Childhood'

Hosted by



The Centre for Research on Family, Kinship & Childhood,  
University of Leeds

#### Venue:

The Amsterdam Room,  
Radisson SAS Hotel, No1 The Light, The Headrow, Leeds, LS1 8TL

**FRIDAY, 12<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2004**

#### **9.00 Introduction:**

Dr. Lluís Flaquer, Director, Wellchi Network and Institut d'Infància i Món Urbà,  
Barcelona

#### **9.30 Session 1: New Perspectives on Childhood**

Professor Leena Alanen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

*'Theorising Children's Welfare'*

#### **10.30 Coffee**

#### **11.00 Session 2: The Children of Divorce?**



Professor Kari Moxnes, Norwegian University of Science & Technology, Trondheim,  
Norway

*'Divorce: changing the status of children?'*

**12.00 Lunch**

**1.30 Session 3: Children's Transitions and Family Transitions**

Dr Bren Neale, Centre for Research on Family, Kinship & Childhood  
University of Leeds, UK

*'Becoming the Author of Your Own Life: A sociology of young lives after divorce'*

Dr. Gill Highet, CRFR, University of Edinburgh, Scotland

*'Children and Family Transformation'*

**3.00 Tea**

**3.30 Session 4:**

Dr. Helen Stalford, University of Liverpool, England

*'Regulating cross-national divorce, contact and residence in the European Union'*

**4.30 Business Meeting**

**6.00 Close**

## **'New Perspectives on Childhood'**

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The Centre for Research on Family, Kinship & Childhood  
University of Leeds

### **Venue:**

The Amsterdam Room,  
Radisson SAS Hotel, No1 The Light, The Headrow, Leeds, LS1 8TL

**SATURDAY, 13TH NOVEMBER 2004**

**9.00 Coffee available on arrival**

### **9.30 Session 5: Methods and Ethics Panel**

Dr. Ginny Morrow, London School of Economics, UK, Dr. Jennifer Mason, and Ms. Becky Tipper, CFRFKC, University of Leeds, UK

**11.00 Coffee**

### **11.30 Session 7: Children and Policy**

Dr. Claude Martin, CNRS, France

*'Putting Children at the Centre of Public Policy'*

Dr. Morten Blekesaune, Norwegian Social Research (NOVA), Norway.

*'Single Parents, Adolescents and Depression'*

**1.00 Lunch**

**2.00 Session 8:**

Professor Jens Qvortrup, Norwegian University of Science & Technology, Trondheim,  
Norway

*'Children as legitimate claims makers on societal resources'*

**3.00 Tea**

**3.30 Business Meeting**

**6.00 Close**

## APPENDIX II

Attendees	Institution
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### Speakers

Professor Leena Alanen	University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Dr. Morten Blekesaune	Norwegian Social Research (NOVA), Norway
Dr. Gill Highet	CRFR, University of Edinburgh, Scotland
Dr. Jennifer Mason	Director, LSSI, Deputy Director, CFRFKC, University of Leeds, England
Dr. Ginny Morrow	Institute of Education, England
Professor Kari Moxnes	Norwegian University of Science & Technology, Trondheim, Norway
Dr. Bren Neale	CFRFKC, University of Leeds, England
Professor Jens Qvortrup	Norwegian University of Science & Technology, Trondheim, Norway
Dr. Helen Stalford	University of Liverpool, England
Ms. Becky Tipper	CFRFKC, University of Leeds, England

### WELLCHI Members

Dr. Laura Alipranti	National Centre for Social Research, EKKE, Greece
Professor Ulla Bjornberg	Goteborg University, Sweden
Professor Carol Smart	Director, CFRFKC, University of Leeds, UK
Dr. Lluís Flaquer	Director, Wellchi Network, Institut d'Infància i Món Urbà (CIIMU), Spain
Ms. Maria Gomila	Institut d'Infància i Món Urbà (CIIMU), Spain
Professor Lynn Jamieson	CRFR, University of Edinburgh, Scotland
Ms. Andreas Kalbitz	Centre for Globalisation and Governance, University of Hamburg, Germany
Ms. Blanche Le Bihan	Researcher, ENSP, France
Ms. Mavis MacLean	University of Oxford, England

Dr. Claude Martin                      Director of Research, CNRS, France

Ms. Velina Todorova                      Institute for Legal Studies, Bulgaria

### **Invited Guests**

Professor Louise Ackers                      Director, CSLE, School of Law, University of Leeds, England

Mr. Nick Frost                              School of Continuing Education, University of Leeds, England

Dr. Gordon Harold                              School of Psychology, University of Cardiff, Wales

Dr. Brian Heaphy                              CFRFKC, University of Leeds, England

Professor Allison James                              University of Hull, England

Dr. Vanessa May                              LSSI, University of Leeds, England

Ms. Sue Milne                              CRFR, University of Edinburgh, Scotland

Ms. Emma Rawlins                              School of Geography, University of Leeds, England

Ms. Fiona Raitt                              HoD, Department of Law, University of Dundee, Scotland

Ms. Olivia Stevenson                              School of Geography, University of Leeds, England

Professor Gill Valentine                              School of Geography, University of Leeds, England

Professor Fiona Williams                              Director, CAVA, University of Leeds, England