



## “For Every Child, the Right to a Childhood” UNICEF (2019)

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## ***'For every child, the right to a childhood' UNICEF, (2019)***

2019 signals the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, (CRC), (1989). From its inception the CRC was heralded as a “touchstone” for children’s rights, encompassing civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights (Lansdown, 2010). Children were deemed to be rights holders, entitled to protection, suitable provision and capable of making decisions about their own lives. Article 3 of The Convention prioritised the ‘best interests of the child’ as the primary consideration governing all actions concerning children and Article 12 placed obligations on signatory states to assure that the child, who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them. ‘Article 12.2 prescribed that the child’s views not just to be listened to but to be taken account of and acted upon in all decisions affecting the child and this obligation extends to matters of research.

Modern theories of children and childhood strive for a holistic understanding of children and regard them as valuable informants about the wider social world. With this understanding has emerged new responsibilities on the social researcher in eliciting the construction of modern day childhoods in the recognition that concepts of childhood and of abuse have been constructed as products of space and time (James and Prout 1997).

In 2017 UNICEF reported the horrific and terrifying living conditions of millions of children around the world, many of whom were being exposed to poverty and violence and reported, being in a “constant state of fear” (St. Thomas and Johnson, 2007, p. 12). In March 2019 UNICEF highlighted the challenges of full implementation of the CRC and considered the instrument to be widely unknown and not well understood. In 2019 too many children suffer abuse and discrimination, are exploited, or robbed of their childhoods by adverse childhood experiences, UNICEF, (2019). Felitti et al. (1998) defined Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) as traumatic events of childhood, characterised by multiple types of abuse and family dysfunction. ACEs have increasingly become the focus of social research (Coombes and Anderson (2000:)) and the current edition of Child Care in Practice offers five stimulating articles attesting to richness of social inquiry into children’s individual childhoods; their lived experiences of the world (Palmer 2006). The articles also highlight the manner in

which social policy can be influenced by social structures and power relations and shaped by social constructs of citizenship, childhood and parenthood (Simpson and O'Connor 2011).

Each of the papers explores adversities experienced by today's children, either in the context of early childhood discipline, disability, parental incarceration or domestic violence. Each study denotes the breadth of valuable social research designed to provide insight to the exact nature and impact of these experiences along with consideration of appropriately verified interventions and record keeping of historical data, and information, in the context of adoption to inform future service developments and developing theories about childhood and children.

The first article, 'It's Not a Case of "He'll Be Home One Day." The Impact on Families of Sentences of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP)', authored by McConnell and Raikes (2018), illuminates the plight of families affected by Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP). This qualitative study contributes to the growing literature of the adverse childhood experiences associated with parental imprisonment (Loureiro, 2010; Loucks, 2012; Murray and Farrington, 2008). The paper derives rich insights from the children and partners of men serving IPP sentences in English prisons. Through the voices of those affected we learn of the desperate social and emotional impact of living with the uncertainty of indeterminate incarceration and the subjective experiences of stigma, loss and despondency associated with this particular sentence.

The second paper 'Replicability of Effect when Transferring a Supportive Programme for Parents Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence and Their Children from the US to Sweden' is authored by Draxler et al. (2018). As part of a national evaluation of existing support programmes for families exposed to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), it focuses on a small scale feasibility study designed to test the replicability and implementation requirements of an IPV intervention aimed at reducing the psychological impact on children of experiencing IPV (Broberg et al., 2011). The study

provides insight into the problems associated with implementing and adapting interventions across cultures and national boundaries.

The third paper; 'Family discipline practices with infants at six months of age' by Lawrence et al. (2018), utilises a quantitative methods research paradigm to examine family discipline practices with infants in New Zealand. The study provides valuable insights into parenting discipline practices in the context of a plethora of research evidence documenting the enduring negative impact of adverse childhood experiences (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Childhood experiences of stress, including physical abuse have been associated with the onset and the severity of serious psychiatric disorders in adulthood (Carr et al., 2013).

Article four, 'The Changing Landscape of Irish Adoption: An Analysis of Trends (1999–2016) by Palmer and O'Brien (2018), analyses the changing landscape of adoption in Ireland. Through an historical and policy review and consideration of the literature and the data on adoptions over time the article illustrates the impact on adoption trends in Ireland of the shifting social, political and legal contexts governing the relationship between state and family.

The final paper, 'A randomised control trial of parent and child training programmes (versus wait list control) for children with ADHD-type behaviours: A pilot study' by Leckey et al. (2018), describes a mixed methods study, conducted in the Republic of Ireland, which evaluates the combined Incredible Years parent training and child training programmes (PT + CT) in respect of outcomes for children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). ADHD is described as a chronic and debilitating behavioural disorder that emerges in early childhood and is characterised by maladaptively high levels of inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity (Harpin, 2005); it affects approximately 3–9% of children in the UK (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), 2008).

Each of these studies augment our knowledge and understanding of a range of issues affecting children and childhood. More importantly these studies demonstrate the range and sophistication of the research methods used to determine or to test and challenge our knowledge and understanding of children's issues. Leckey et al. contribute to a gap in literature about parenting and child support interventions for ADHD behaviours and specifically add to research on the benefits of a combination of parent- and child-focused interventions outside of the United States. Palmer and O'Brien afford us deep insight into the practice of adoption linked to specific place and time which can only serve to enlighten policy makers and practitioners into the future, particularly in the context of the learning from the long term research emanating from countries who have embraced the adoption of children in public care as a key approach to permanency.. Lawrence et al. provides important insight into both positive and negative parental discipline strategies for very young children which can serve to support appropriate parental guidance and professional advice at critical periods in a child's development. Draxler et al. demonstrate some of the issues pertaining to evidence based practice and the need to pay attention to implementation science in adopting 'what works' in the context of IPV interventions transposed from other countries.. Finally McConnell and Raikes demonstrate the distressing circumstances for families of prisoners imprisoned indeterminately for public protection.

## **Conclusion**

The articles included in this edition of Child Care in Practice provide a timely reminder of the adverse circumstances in which many of our children live. And serve to reinforce the role of social research in foregrounding and addressing their plight. In this way I hope that this edition will help refresh the urgency of full implementation of the CRC and underline the pressing need for research which further illuminates childhood and children and which contributes to an amelioration of the adversities which many suffer. As we approach World Children's Day on 20 November 2019 it is a privilege to contribute to the UNICEF goal 'to accelerate progress on child rights implementation, so that for every child, every right is fulfilled, now and for generations to come.' UNICEF (2019, p1.).

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