

Children and Family Transformation: a Social Resilience Perspective



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- What we're learning from children's perspectives on family change
- Supporting children experiencing family transformation: a social resilience perspective

Changing concepts of family life/family change

- Changing family forms
- New perspectives on childhood
- Young people's perspectives on family and family change

Defining 'family'

"A family is somewhere you are loved, wanted and spend time with and care for you and brought you into the world, important. Families are for love, homes, helping you, understanding problems" (Danielle,13)

(Morrow, 1998)

"No, you can't have a proper family. I don't know what a proper family is. There isn't a right way to have a family. Like, people say, a mum, a dad, a daughter and a baby. But there are very few people who have families like that" (Tara)

(Brannen et al, 2000)

Concepts of 'care'

"I try to talk to my mother, like, if she gets upset, I tell her, like, 'Yeah, well, let's just get it sorted out' and things like that. She sort of perks up a bit, and then I just make her laugh about it" (Claire, 10)

(Butler et al, 2003)

"Because sometimes my Mum speaks about her problems to me. And I understand them. So all parents should ... they should inform the children as well, 'cos otherwise they might not know. They might get a shock. The problem is that parents should understand children as well. And children should understand parents" (Zarina)

(Brannen et al, 2000)

'Ethic of care'

"We've got a relationship where we can tell mum everything. I can go and talk to her and she's, like, close to me" (Quentin, 13)

(Smart et al, 2001)

Risk and resiliency

"I think I've like matured a lot through it. I've had to make decisions for myself and stuff, just made me mature and more understanding of things" (Ceri, 15)

(Butler et al, 2003)

"Before Mum and Dave got married, it used to be much more difficult. We used to get cheaper clothes, we didn't live in as good a house either as now. Yep, we kind of lived in a scruffy house and just didn't get stuff we wanted as much. Things have got a lot better I reckon, a lot. We had a really big party when they got married. It was really good. And Dad's new partner is good, she's nice. She's a lot like Dad which I think is good" (Robert, 12)

(Flowerdew & Neale, 2003)

"Then about the same time, a friend of my Mum's became an alcoholic. She and my Mum had been best friends until Mum had an affair with her husband. But Lynn stayed a really close friend of mine. She died last August and I'm still really upset about that" (Leanne, 14)

(Wade & Smart, 2002)

"Families are for you, so if your mum and dad go to Pakistan ... the other half or the other quarter or something, can, like, look after you" (Tahir, 8)

(Morrow, 1998)

"She could talk to a friend because then she wouldn't tell anyone. Last year I talked to my friend Joanna and she helped me a lot ... she convinced me to tell my teacher... So friends are a lot of help" (Sally, 12)

(Neale & Smart, 2001)

The most important person in my life is my mum. She understands me the most (Asa May, 13)

(Morrow, 1998)

Doing rather than talking

There's nothing children can do [if parents split up]. It's because it's their parents. There's no point getting involved because it might make things worse. (Elise, 10)

So, what's the best thing to do? (Int)

Try and forget what's happened and get on with normal life (Elise)

(Wade & Smart, 2002)

Support from adult professionals

- Incapable of understanding
- Construct own interpretation
- Lack of confidentiality
- Inappropriate intervention
 - trivialise issue
 - over-react

(Williamson & Butler, 1995)

Formal support for children experiencing family change

- Dearth of confidential, directly accessible services for children
- Pros and cons of school-based services
- 'Welfarist' approach to involving children in legal proceedings

What have we learned from children's perspectives?

- Listen to children
- Children are resourceful
- Family change not necessarily negative
- Family change diverse
- Informal social networks crucial
- Formal support inappropriate

Social Resilience

"A social resilience perspective encourages the harnessing of the energy of the child, family, informal helpers and services. It helps to target promising pressure points for change in a child's ecology"

(Gilligan, 2001)

Social Roles

- People play out different social roles
- Multiple role identities helpful
- Which role identities are available for children experiencing family change?
- Important to value social roles

Secure Base

- Physical and emotional ties that support and sustain
- Stability and continuity
- Needs may vary over time

Identity

- Knowing their story
- Shielding children from reality misguided

Self Esteem

- Self esteem need not remain fixed
- Positive self-esteem a valuable buffer

Self Efficacy

- Believing that one's own efforts make a difference
- Self-efficacy enhanced by contributing to decisions
- Personal qualities AND supportive relationships and experiences

Supporting children experiencing family change: promoting social resilience

- Helping children to stay connected
- Promoting involvement in leisure activities
- Child-centred child protection policies
- Life course perspective