

The Prevalence of Resilience Promoting Practices in Childminding Settings in Ireland



Exploring Childminders' Perceptions on and use of Practices associated with Promoting child and family Resilience?

This research brief outlines the study undertaken in 2019, exploring childminders' perspectives on and use of practices associated with promoting resilience in children and families. This brief will outline the approach used to gather the information, the main findings of the study and the recommendations arising from these findings.

Resilience

Resilience has been described as the ability to 'bounce back' in the face of adversity (Luthans, 2002, p.702). According to Best Start (2017), resilient individuals can live happier, healthier, less stressful and more prosperous lives. Resilience applies to individuals, families, and communities (Walsch, 2006). Resilience can be particularly relevant for vulnerable families.



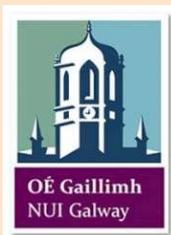
Context and Background

Childminding has long been a customary form of childcare in Ireland and today represents the largest provider of childcare nationally (CRA, 2017). Historically, much of family support provision relied on the Church. However, the last two decades has witnessed an increase in family and early years' policy and investment. Unfortunately, the childminding sector has significantly lagged behind.

The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services Regulations) 2016 defines a 'Childminder' as a person who provides a childminding service' (p.5).

In 2010, the free preschool year was introduced. Despite this milestone, working families were still responsible for the majority of their childcare needs.

Furthermore, childcare in Ireland has been described as the most expensive in Europe (EU Commission, 2016).



This Research Brief was developed by Tracey Muller, Childminder, as part of her BA Degree in Early Childhood Studies & Practice, offered by NUI Galway on a part time blended learning model.

Context and Background Cont

The development of the National Parenting Strategy, Investing in Families (2013) was a milestone for Irish family policy, stressing the significance of parental social relationships and concrete support. A new national practice model for family intervention was introduced; a Meitheal, focusing on early interventions and family strengths (Cassidy *et al.*, 2016). The Affordable Childcare Scheme was launched in 2017, offering universal and means measured childcare subsidies. However, parents using childminders are unable to avail of this scheme, unless the minder is registered with The Child and Family Agency (Tusla). Presently, approximately one percent of childminders are registered. The Early Years Services (2016) Regulations excludes the vast majority of childminders.

Ireland has witnessed significant changes in family size and diversity. Tusla recognise that certain family types may require additional support for instance: lone parents or families experiencing financial disadvantage (Gillen *et al.*, 2013). Research indicates that home-based childcare is the preferred option for disadvantaged families (Forry *et al.*, 2013), with childminders appearing to offer tailored rates (Garrity & McGrath, 2011), practical, concrete and emotional support to parents (Garrity & McGrath, 2011; Ang *et al.*, 2016, Care Inspectorate, 2017). Further, family support through the childminding sector is utilized in other countries (Care inspectorate, 2017).

Modern Irish families often face multiple challenges trying to balance work, childcare, and financial responsibilities. Hence, resilience is a desirable disposition to promote in children and families. The literature suggests that the childminding sector is well placed to promote both child and family resilience (Care inspectorate, 2017). Pathways to Quality: The Working Group on Reforms and Supports for the Childminding Sector and, The First Five Strategy, for Babies, Young Children and their Families was published in 2018. Under this strategy , informed by the report, the childminding sector is expected to be regulated.

Theoretical Background



Ecological theory views the individual child embedded in five interactive and interconnected systems, ranging from the child, their parents, and carers, to the wider socioeconomic climate. All of which, evolve over time and profoundly influence development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ecological theory of family resilience relays the interconnectivity of children, families and their communities. Relationships are therefore fundamental to resilience, acting as a protective factor.

Methodology

The research aim was to explore childminders' perceptions on and use of factors and practices associated with promoting child and family resilience.

The researcher adopted a collective case study approach. Twelve childminders from various locations nationally, were interviewed using semi-structured questions and an interview guide.

Summary of the Main Findings

- The childminders in this study appreciated many factors associated with promoting child resilience and employed resilience promoting practices, although not necessarily always connecting the two.
- Childminders had no prior knowledge of family resilience. However, provided many of the services associated with promoting family resilience. These included concrete and emotional support, parenting advice and building parents social networks.
- Childminders often cared for children from infancy to beyond the primary school years.
- This extended duration of care appeared to promote children's attachments, (vital for resilience) as well as an understanding of the child and therefore individual planning.
- Additionally, this prolonged period promoted the childminder-parent relationship, often referred to as a friendship. This was credited with promoting parental partnerships, understanding of the parent's individual circumstances and tailoring parental supports.
- This extended period of care allowed for the natural progression of caring for siblings and thereby creating mixed-age-groups. These two characteristics were perceived to promote several factors linked to resilience in children, for instance, empathy, self-confidence and esteem, strong sibling-like friendships and a sense of self-identity and belonging.
- Additionally, the mix-age group provided children opportunities to experience the routine of pre-school and school drop-off and collections, which, was found to ease transitions.
- The small mixed-age group was perceived to aid supervision. This coupled with knowing the child's physical abilities well due to the extended period of care, created a less risk-averse climate, where children learnt to navigate controlled risk, boosting their self-efficacy and confidence.
- Childminders were found to be deeply entrenched in their community, which allowed them to promote both child and parental community involvement and build parental social networks.
- Childminding was found to offer a home-like environment, mirroring real life, with one consistent primary caregiver, siblings kept together, mixed-age groups, daily outings within the local community and controlled risk. This ecological approach appears to foster all the factors associated with promoting child and family resilience.
- One unexpected finding was the two registered childminders dissatisfaction with the current inspection system, which was perceived inappropriate for home-based care.

Recommendations

Policy and Practice

- Introduce phased-in, regulation and inspection of the childminding sector, appropriate for home-based care, and where inspectors have childminding experience. Regulation will raise the quality for children and families, provide recognition for the sector, and ensure the childminding sector thrives.
- Roll-out resilience training for childminders nationally, through Childminding Ireland.
- Utilize the childminding sector as an avenue for family support services, such as a community childminding scheme as is done in other countries.

Further Research

- Research exploring the dynamic quality in childminding settings is recommended.
- Research should focus not only on the childminder-child and childminder-parent relationship, but additionally, on the long-term friendships and sibling-like bonds that develop over time amongst the children.
- Research exploring the benefits of mixed-age-groups could have implications for the early years sector. Particularly, since the introduction of the two free preschool years.

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