

Parenting support and child wellbeing

Parenting support encompasses a range of interventions and aims. Improved co-ordination of providers and clearer objectives can lead to more effective service delivery.

Policy recommendations

- Any service considering parenting support should critically assess the forms of support offered by other services to identify gaps and overlaps, and assess how services can be co-ordinated and data shared. This assessment should include private and voluntary service providers.
- Where children's services are no longer able to provide universal services for parenting support (for instance due to reduced funding), the local council needs to review existing or potential alternative providers, consider the range of services available, and what support would be needed to prevent escalation into targeted family interventions.
- The Common Assessment Framework should be implemented as a mandatory part of processing referrals in parenting support and other relevant services, to ensure a co-ordinated systematic needs assessment.
- Parenting support should be integrated more closely into the wider service provision that addresses other related problems (eg alcohol abuse, child abuse, mental health).
- Providers should work more closely with parents and children, taking their

perceptions and reactions into account when considering a particular service, especially in the early phases of intervention.

About the research

Innovative child welfare policies are being introduced in many European countries, focusing on a 'child-centred social investment strategy' to better safeguard children, improve their potential and promote their wellbeing. Recent parenting-oriented policy interventions are becoming popular in Europe, centred on the so-called 'turn to parenting' – a new focus of science and politics on parental practices, and the welfare state's role in these interventions.

Parenting support encompasses a range of interventions and aims, such as reducing child risk via early intervention, improving children's wellbeing and their relationship with parents, and improving health and educational outcomes for child and parent. With such a broad-ranging and ambitious set of aims, there is a risk that parenting support can be seen as a solution for a range of problems, without being able to deliver on all the expectations.

The study 'Governing 'new social risks': The case of recent child policies in European welfare states' compared parenting-related interventions across four countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK) – exploring variations in how parenting support functions in practice, the factors that are driving interventions, and the consequences in terms of child wellbeing and relationships between parents, children and society.

Key findings

- Parenting support is widespread as a social policy intervention in the four studied countries, but of the four is at its most developed in the UK and least developed in France.
- In the UK the growth in parenting support has been largely driven by low cost (parenting courses) and a good fit with current trends in ideology (the role of the state as enabler; the role of parents, children's wellbeing and family interventions).
- Parenting support is spread not just across providers but also sectors – primarily children's services, education and health – that are typically governed and run separately. This can lead to difficulties in identifying the limits of a particular service and missed opportunities to increase impact through co-operation between sectors.
- The label 'parenting support' conceals provisions that are serving a number of very different purposes and expectations; relating to children, to parents, to the parent-child relationship, or to more than one of these.
- After a decade of increasing public acceptance and widening access to parenting support, cutbacks have reduced open access service and increased targeted family interventions – increasing the risk of stigmatising and undermining parenting support.
- The voices of parents and children are relatively silent in parenting support. Parents and children tend to be treated mainly as service beneficiaries.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION

'Governing 'new social risks': The case of recent child policies in European welfare states' is an international collaboration between researchers in France, Germany, the Netherlands and UK, with Professor Mary Daly at the University of Oxford leading the UK team.

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Web: www.uni-goettingen.de/en/213091.html

FURTHER INFORMATION

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The Open Research Area originated as an agreement between ESRC (UK), ANR (France), DFG (Germany) and NWO (the Netherlands) to strengthen international co-operation in the social sciences through a common call for joint research projects. To date the partners have successfully completed three rounds of the ORA, funding over 40 collaborative proposals.
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