

**FAMILY LINKS: KINSHIP CARE *AND*
FAMILY CONTACT RESEARCH PROJECT:
RESULTS OF THE CAREGIVER SURVEY**



**MEREDITH KIRALY AND CATHY HUMPHREYS
UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
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Kinship care



Kinship care moves a child to a more stable part of their own family (Brown et al., 2002 p.70)

Brown, S., Cohon, D., & Wheeler, R. (2002). African American Extended Families and Kinship Care: How relevant is the foster care model for kinship care? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 24(1/2), 53-77.



Kinship care



I never thought it as a form of care. I just thought I was going to stay with Nana or Grandad for this long time and that's it. It didn't seem weird or strange to me anyway... I still went to the same school, the same sort of things. Still had that same sense of stability, constancy. It was just a different location that you lived, a different person you lived with. (Sam)





Today's presentation



RESULTS OF THE SURVEY - ISSUES AND CONCERNS

EMERGENT ISSUES

THE WAY FORWARD

Aim of the research project



- To explore the nature of family contact in kinship care.
- To explore what support arrangements may be conducive to better experiences for children.

What have we done?



2010

- Survey of kinship carers (430 replies)
- Focus groups and interviews with carers, children & young people, parents, and support staff.

2011-2012

- Literature review
- Reports 1, 2 and 3; two opinion pieces
- Report 4; two journal articles published.

2013

- Three journal articles in train
- Two new projects commencing
- One new project in planning (subject to acquiring funding).



The Survey: The caregivers



- Over 85% were women.
- 60% were over fifty; 26% over sixty; 6% over seventy.
- 40% were single; 37% caring for children without adult help.
- 61% were grandparents, mostly maternal.



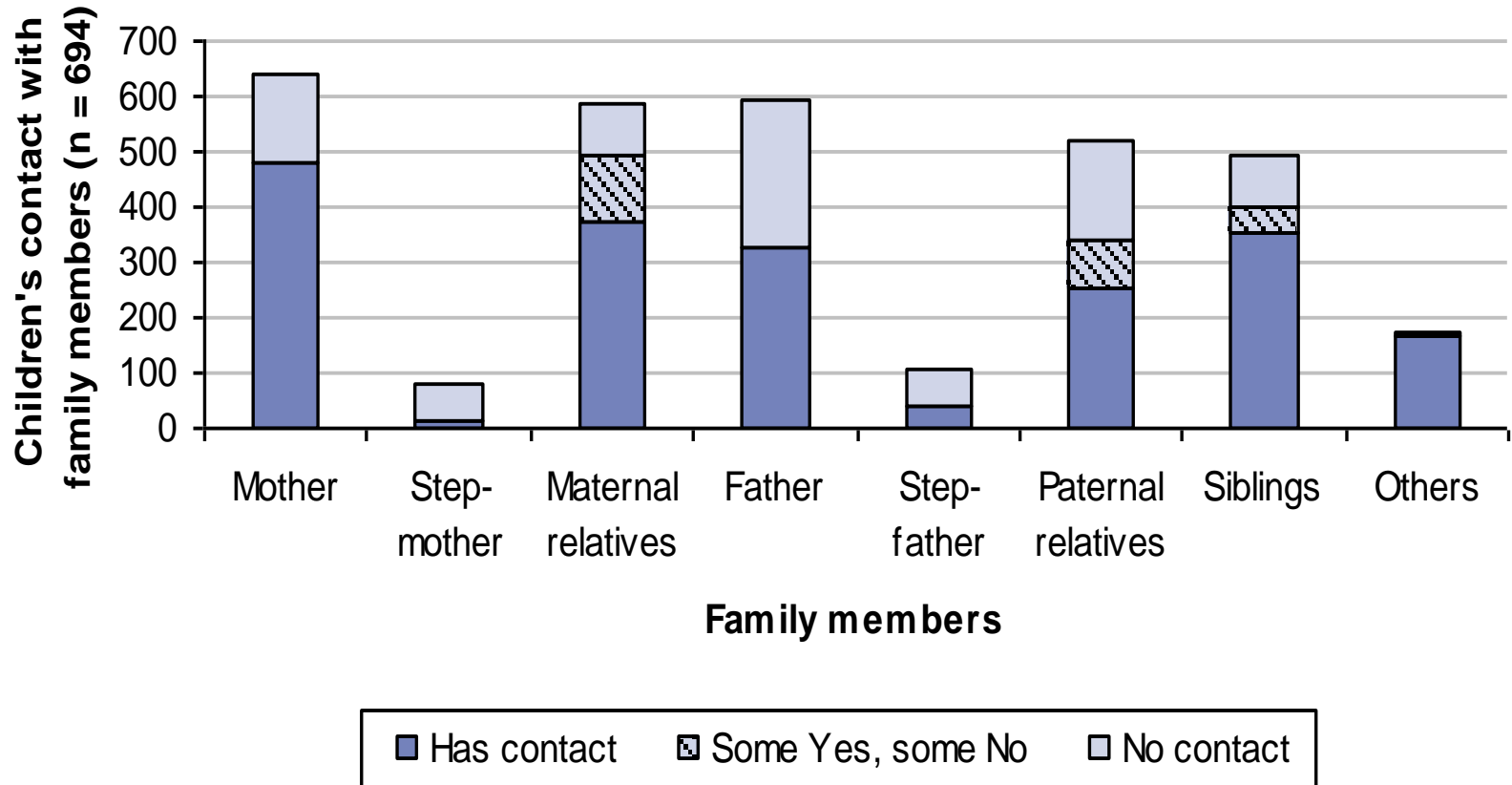
The Survey: The children



- 41% of households had two or more kinship children.
- 42% of the children had been with their carer for 3 or more years.
- A fairly even spread of ages.



Who do the children have contact with?



How is contact with Mum and Dad going?



Parents' visits – wellbeing of children



MOTHER

- Going well for 47% of children in contact.
- *Caregivers' views - clearly in children's best interests for 51% of children.*

FATHER

- Going well for 63% of children in contact.
- *Caregivers' views - clearly in children's best interests for 58% of children.*

In children's best interests?



Clearly Yes

- Both boys love and miss their Mum
- Visits go well, he loves his daughter. Feels he has failed them as he abuses drugs. He feels they are in the best environment.

??

- Child was stressed and upset before and after each visit.
- Child goes into anxiety attacks. Vomiting, not eating until back home here.
- Children not allowed to talk about their time with Dad but are disrupted and anxious when they return

Parents' visits – safety



MOTHER

- Safety problems at times for 34% of children in contact.
- *Threat to placement for 11% of these children.*

FATHER

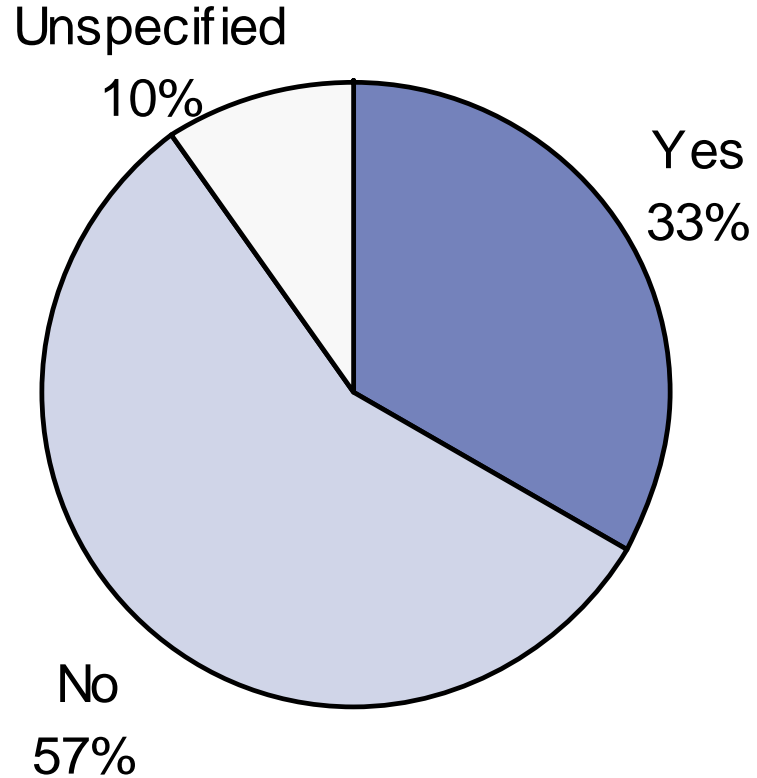
- Safety problems at times for 27% of children in contact.
- *Threat to placement for 7% of these children.*

Are visits safe? – not always



- Drugs and syringes in house. Questionable people coming and going. Drunk, self harm.
- Their physical safety was not compromised, but mentally, by her threat to suicide or get people to snatch the younger girl or beat us up. Upset the girls awfully.
- Father threaten to kill children, police were called, tired to smother eldest grandson.
- Physically she once tried to stab child but not in my presence.

Are you
required to
supervise
contact
visits?



Supervision of contact visits

Is this difficult for you?



- I prefer their access to be at my home. Everyone is more at ease without being watched over or timed.
- Parents are aware of the rules. Sometimes I have refused access as they have been drug-affected.
- It is not difficult for us but it is difficult for the mother I think.
- Speaking up can lead to conflict and difficulties between my daughter and me. I feel caught in the middle a lot.
- Sometimes it is extremely difficult if mother is drug-affected.
- We refuse to supervise because of putting ourselves at risk.

Forced parental contact

- Family contact just can't be forced.
- The 15-year-old should not be forced to see her mother if she does not want to.
- It is very distressing that the court has forced this relationship on these two young children. They had forgotten him. He is on the sexual offenders list.



Aboriginal children – family & cultural connection



Cultural connection?



- Most children living with their Aboriginal family were connected with their culture.
- But... two-thirds were with non-Aboriginal family. Only half of these children were connected to their culture.
- Half the non-Aboriginal carers did know about the Cultural Support Plans, and had little support with cultural connection.



Cultural connection?



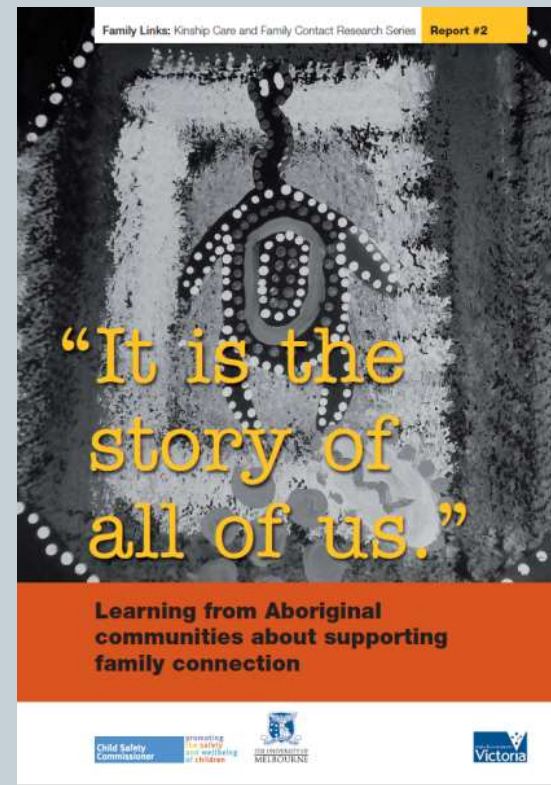
- They know who they are and are encouraged in cultural perspectives (Aboriginal carer)
- We get no support at all. We make sure the children keep in contact with family and culture. We go to a lot of effort to make sure they know who they are. What Plan? (Aboriginal carer)
- It is sad that a child does not have photos of grandparents, aunties, uncles, or know extended family members. (Aboriginal carer)

Cultural connection?

Caregivers' comments

- The child knows nothing – any teaching would benefit.
- Would love the children to learn and know their culture as they do mine!

Family Links Report Number 2



Children, parents, caregivers and prisons



The prison experience



- At least 9% of the children had had parents in prison.
- Over half of these children seemed to be having contact with imprisoned parents (more with mothers than fathers).
- Mostly very unhappy experiences; children often under duress to visit.



Visiting parents in prison



- Child does not know or wish to see father, but [support service] is pushing her to see him causing him to have problems.
- Court order causes lots of stress and even vomiting as reaction to seeing him.
- Not in his best interests. My grandson has to bend and stretch out to be searched then the officers have a laugh about it.





CONNECTIONS

Keeping in touch...



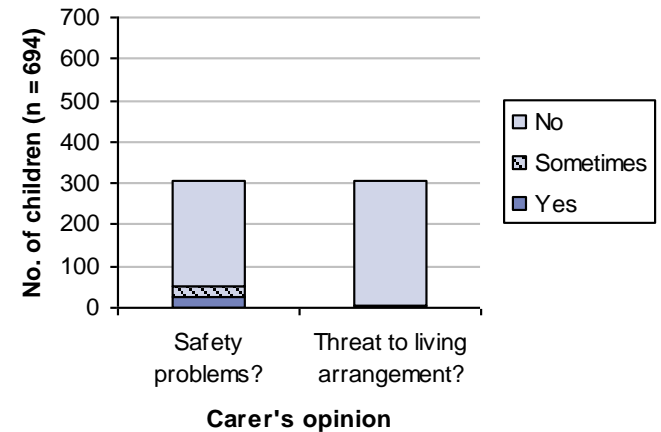
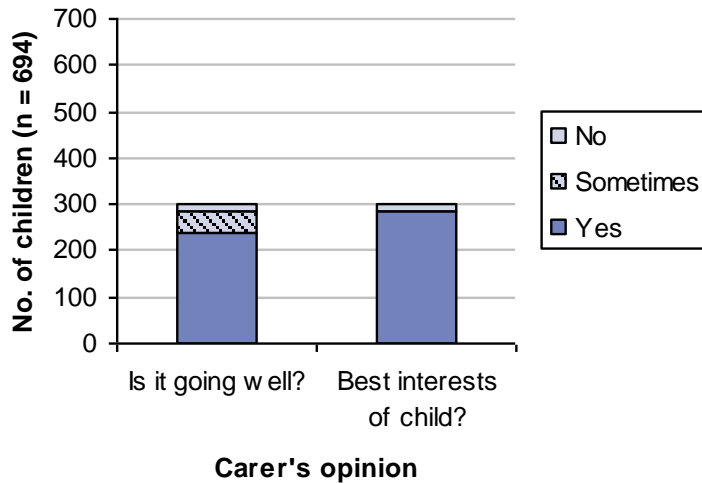
Mother and father

- The child needs to keep the bond with Mum.
- Every child only has one mother even if they can't live with them.
- Important for them to know their father cares.

Everybody else

- The children share a unique bond.
- They must know who family is...in a safe environment.
- Family needs family.

Sisters and brothers – keeping in touch?

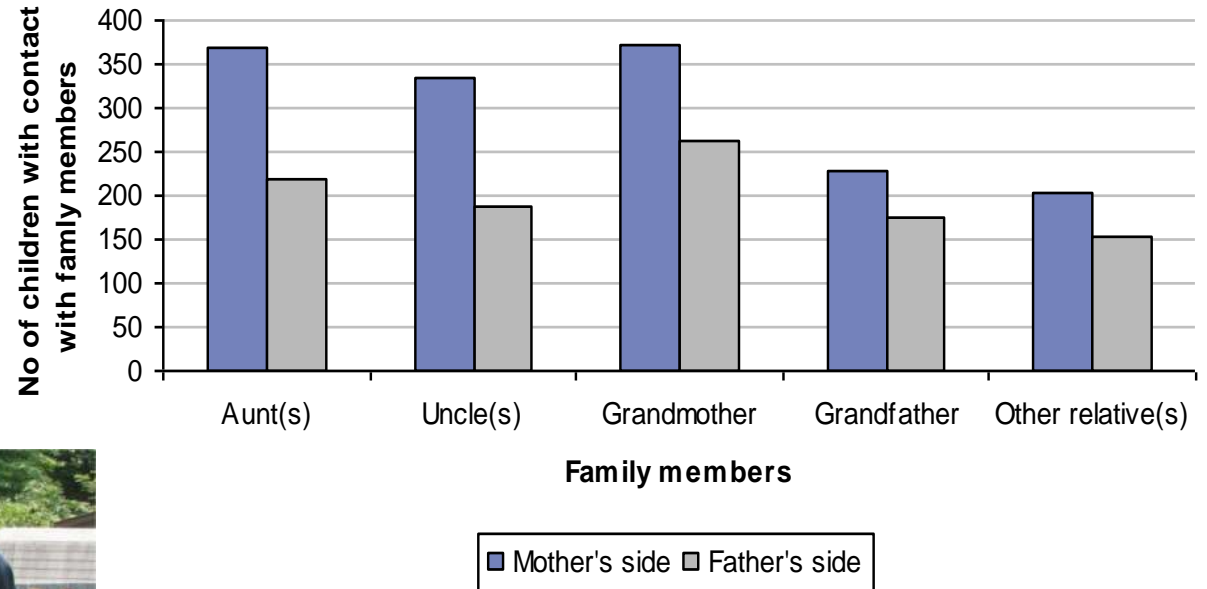


Sisters and brothers

- They get so excited to see each other.
- Children love visiting each other, occasionally confusion among the younger ones but generally love it.
- Normal disagreements with young people.
- Child often asks to see her sister and brother but it's impossible to arrange.
- I had to find out contact details to all siblings and extended family. Information was not forwarded to me.

Family connections - The full catastrophe

We live very close to mother's side of family so we bump into aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, sister from time to time.



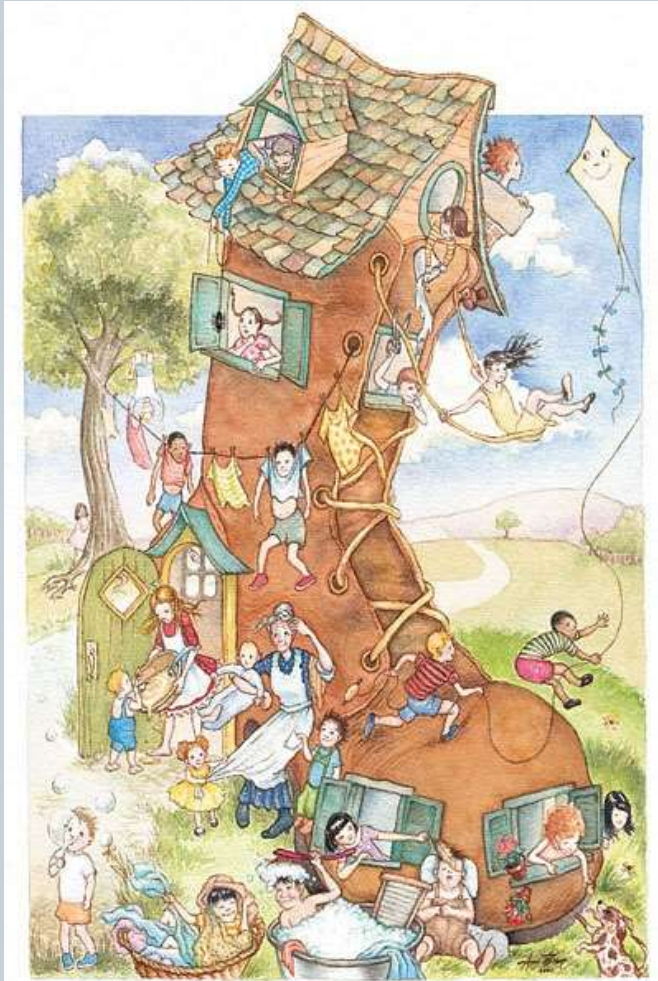
Mother had a large extended family...my grandson is in contact with them through me.

The other story



Isn't it wonderful to see families looking after *their own*? A cost/benefit analysis suggests even greater savings could be possible if....

Unmet support needs of carers



We are nine, living in a three-bedroom house – I sleep in the garage with two children. That's the thanks we get!
(Non-Aboriginal carer of Aboriginal children)

The commitment



Family needs family. And if their mother can't be there, well then I'm there. I will not let strangers bring up my grandchildren. So until they are all grown up, I will care for my 'grannies'. They keep me young and fit at heart.

Unmet needs of kinship families



- We become parents again, it puts a bit on husband and wife relationships. I know several families where the marital relationship has broken down.
- It is a really underfunded and misunderstood initiative, there is little support for carers and the children's needs....there is far more to the kinship program than just contact!! It is a great initiative and should be supported and understood.

Unmet support needs of carers



We have found it very hard and lots of hard work the second time around, and financially draining. Great kids at the end of it, it will be worth it. Just love them so much.

PS, Would not blame anyone for not wanting to do it.

THE WAY FORWARD (1)



- Pay more attention to children's wellbeing in contact with parents (not just physical safety).
- Listen to the feelings (spoken and unspoken) of children and young people.
- Provide support for children's contact with mothers and fathers.
- Provide support to parents after children are removed.

THE WAY FORWARD (2)



- Promote contact with sisters and brothers.
- Promote children's contact with the wider family.
- Resource kinship care adequately.

The research reports



All available here today!



Other recent kinship care surveys



- 2009 Worrall, J. New Zealand: *A view over time*: 205 responses
- 2009 Yardley et al. *Kinship Care in NSW Finding a way forward* 154 responses
- 2011 Wellard, S. UK Grandparents Plus: *Too Old To Care?* 255 responses
- 2011 Grandparents Victoria survey
- 2012 Aziz et al. Family Rights Group (FRG) *The largest UK survey* 493 responses.
- 2012 Roth et al. UK FRG *Managing family contact in kinship care*: 92 responses
- 2012 Kiraly and Humphreys *Family Links*: 430 responses
- 2013 (forthcoming) SPRC NSW *Survey of grandparent carers*: 335 responses

Our further aim is to do a comparison study.





Comments? Questions?

Further information from Meredith Kiraly
mkiraly@unimelb.edu.au 0400-913659

I never
thought it
as a form
of care
(Sam)...

