

# **“Parent Community Support Study”**

Carol Kavanagh

B A Honours in Social Science

Dublin Business School

2009

## **Abstract**

This study looks at the support needs of a parent in an Irish Community. The study looks at the policies and services that have been developed and implemented to help all types of parents. It tells how these policies affect the participant's lives and also how the services they provide are developed to help make the participants lives more comfortable. This study availed of the qualitative approach using recorded interviews.

The findings in this study has shown that even thought huge developments have been made in the area of support services that people are still confused about services and that depending on where you live it can be hard to access your local services.

The study also shows that peoples own parents play an important part in how they raise their own children and that they are a great influence and a great help to new parents. Findings also showed that the crèche is still the main childcare provider for parents who would like to return to work after the birth of their children

## **Contents Page**

Introduction: Literature Review	1-12
Section 1: Methodology	13-16
Section 2: Results	17-26
Section 3: Discussion	27-38
Appendices: Appendix	38-46
References	47-49

## **Introduction**

The main aim of this Qualitative Research project is to look at parent support needs in Irish Community. The study will also focus on information policies and services developments that are available to all types of patents.

The most important and challenging jobs a parent will ever do is to raise their children to the best of their ability. It is important for parents to be aware of the services and information available to them.

It has become accepted for parents to ask for help and support. Parents who do realise they need help and ask for help are greatly reducing the risk of putting their children at risk.

(Scottish Government: 2008)

Even though parents from time to time will need the support of family services, what needs to be examined is what form of support services should be given and who should provide the services. Parent's services include education, childcare, job skills training, and a full range of health care services and also may other activities that are designed to strengthen families.

The next question is should it be voluntary or ran by the government.

Parent services over the last few years have come from community based health or child care services. Some are from education dept. And others have come about because of a need of services in the local community.

The current study aims to examine;

- What parents know about the support services in their areas?
- How parents view the support services of their local services?
- Do parents think the local services are useful?
- To vitalise the data gathered, examine whether the services in the local area are living up to the needs of parents in the local community.

Over the years there have been many developments in Family Policy in Ireland. There have been developments made in supporting parents and also family support services, by Government. Department of Health, Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. Family policy deals with areas that are specific only to families. Zimmerman. (1992) believes that family policy is “*a perspective for understanding and thinking about policy in relation to families*”. (p3).

When the Irish government develop family policy the aim is to deal with problems that families experience. (Child Care Act, 1991). Family policies are developed in two ways the first is from demographic trends for example non-marital births. The second is from government deciding policies on how they think people should behave. There can be problems with this approach if the state makes assumptions about and sections of society do not then agree with the governments perceptions of the family. Over the last few years family policy has become important to governments because of social and economic changes. Since

Ireland joined the EU there have been many social and economic changes in Ireland. Ireland population has increased to almost one million people. Life expectancy in Ireland has also increased; we now have smaller families and more third level students than ever before. Another area that has also seen a big change is the numbers of women now in the work force we have over 460,000 women in employment. There are eight factors that help government to understand what is happening to the family.

These are;

- Social Capital
- Crime
- Health and Education
- Low Income
- Gender relationships concerns
- Employment concerns
- Demographic trends concerns
- Human rights concerns

(McKeown, 2001, pp. 8-16)

Under the Irish Constitution the family is an extremely important factor in Society. The state guarantees to “*protect the family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of*

*social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the nation and the state” (1937, Article 41).*

The regulations that govern families were drawn from different areas of policy they cover, provision for the family and marriage, parenthood, family property and inheritance. (Family Law Act 1995 & 1996). As a tradition family policy in Ireland has focused more on a family policy in Ireland has focused more on a family’s economic situation rather than wellbeing. Until recently the only intervention that was taken was by the Health Board on behalf of the family was in the case of extreme neglect or abuse. The state’s role as defined by the state was to provide financial support through the Social Welfare System.

Even though the state provides financial support for some families, it can and does cause a direct and indirect effect on the family. It can affect the family through their living standards, life choices and the welfare of families. (Commission on the family, 1998).

Ireland’s current system of collecting gender data is through a system called The Census, but this method of data collecting does have some inadequacies. When the Census surveys are been carried out an individual is deemed to be a member of a family if they share a household with a family, which means parents who are involved in their children’s lives but do not live with them are been excluded. With the current research such as The Child Care Act 1991, The National Anti-Poverty Strategy 1997, The Commission on the Family 1998, that has been carried out with families it has shown the importance of family and strong family relationships for children and adults. The state can but shouldn’t keep the same stance on families.

In the recent years there has been more focus on child protection especially since cases such as the Kilkenny Case. The Kilkenny Case is an Incest Case, it was a horrible brutal inhuman

treatment suffered by a victim over a 16 year period. The young victim suffered physical and sexual abuse by her father. (Seanad Eireann. Volume 137-07 July 1993). The state has to take a stronger and more defined role when supporting families.

It was during the 1990's that there were major developments in the area of family support and family policy. The following are the key pieces of policies and legislative developments that are significant in Irish Family Policy.

The Child Care Act (1991) was a significant step in family policy. The important statement to come from this act was that Family Support Services and Family Policy need to grow from the idea that it is generally better for children to grow up in their own families. Another main aim from this act stated that the Statutory Authorities and Health Boards main focus is to assist and promote parents support services, there now needs to be a named body to support families services and support families in general. The debate is now what exactly Family Support is. Without a clear definition the Health Board is working under different types of support. The United Nations Convention on the rights of the child in 1992 has shown how important it is for the Government to play a role in supporting parents. Article 18 states that

*“State parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions facilities and services for the care of children” (1992).*

What this means is that the government needs to develop appropriate services for the care of children.

The Report that was published on the Commission on the Family (1998) has a major impact for families and state family relation in Ireland. The Commission made the point that family

policy in Ireland was related to the way policies provided for individual family members that are dependent on parts of the family policy. The state is supporting family's life and promoting family wellbeing. They have made six suggestions as to how progress in the effectiveness of family policy principle. The six principles are;

- Principle No. 1: The family provides stability and wellbeing in our society.
- Principle No. 2: The family's function is to care for and nurture all its members.
- Principle No. 3: The family requires continuity and stability.
- Principle No. 4: The family recognises equality and wellbeing.
- Principles No. 5: The family recognises that members of the family have rights, duties and responsibilities.
- Principles No 6: The family recognises that family forms and relationships should be recognised.

Both the Commission on the family (1998) and the Best Health for Children Report (1998) wants parenting education to be included as part of a programme on support parents. Both also believe that the programme should work with specific groups of parents like minority groups and fathers. The report also suggests that both regional and local involvement should be recognised. Where they both differ is that the Best Health for Children wants community based, peer-led programmes, while the commission wants it to be co-ordinated through a system of regional co-ordinators.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (1997) looked at inequalities in employment, training, income inadequacy and also education. They also examined the cycle of disadvantage by looking at inequalities in the labour market, education, tax and social welfare system. NAPS

do not directly deal with family support but look at how the complex system of support that exists for children and families. Also in 1997 the Department of Health issued a document for a Plan for Women's Health. That spoke of the importance and benefits of supporting women through ensuring the wellbeing of both mother and child.

The Parental Act (1995) entitled all fathers of children born on or after June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1996 to paternity leave. It covers flexi-time, job sharing, career/employment break, extended leave and term-time working. What was significant about this act was it focused on how important it was for both genders to participate in parenting.

When the Children's First Report (1999) was published it wanted the Health board community care to establish family support services with relevant services and community organisation. But it wants the focus on families who may be risk of abuse and neglect. What the National Child Care Investment Strategy (1999) wants is to keep children out of residential care.

There have also been recent developments in family policy. The National Children's Strategy was established to direct children's policy over the next ten years. One of the most important points made in this report is

*“Family Oriented: the family generally affords the best environment for raising children and external intervention should be to support and empower families within the community.”* (p.10)

The aim is that parents have access to the services that are being provided for families. This report also wants to make sure that children have financial support and that they are not living in poverty. Also this report states the importance of play in a child's life. It has been noted

that there is a lack of provision for play in Ireland. They recommend a well constructed environment that can provide for the physical and emotional well being of a community.

Under the Planning and Development Act 2000 local authorities are required to provide these facilities.

Another significant policy development that came from this Report was the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (2000-2003). The objective of this Report is to support family life and make sure that families are getting offered choices. Also this Report makes sure that both men and women get equal opportunities for achieve roles in their families.

Even though family policy in Ireland has come from different aspect, there have been two major developments: the Family Affairs Unit 1998 and the Family Support Agency in 2001. The family affairs unit operates within the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. The purpose of this unit is to co-ordinate family policies, pursue the findings of the Commission on the family, undertake research and promote awareness of family issues. (The Commission on the family 1998).

The family support agency is accountable to the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs. It works with government's developments, state agencies and voluntary and community groups. It main responsible are

- Providing a family mediation service.
- Supporting, promoting and developing the provision of marriage and counselling services.

- Support promoting and development the family and community services resource centre programme.
- Acting as a resource for voluntary and community groups.
- Undertaking Research
- Raising awareness about family and parenting issues.

The impact of how a child's parenting can be felt throughout their lifetime. That can be seen through Erikson's Stage Theory (J.W:2005). The type of parenting support programmes that are being currently run, work on the assumption that there is something wrong with the adult or child and that's why they are accessing the services. The traditional programmes have been focused on Intervention, Prevention and Promotion. Interventions work on the assumption that it is going to correct what is wrong with the family. Prevention programmes work on the assumption that they can identify the families that are at risk of experience problems. Promotion programmes aim to develop and enhance parent's capabilities. (Child Care Act 1991). Through programmes such as Springboard, Family Resource Centres for example. They assume that parent's strengths can be promoted and maximised. But these current programmes do acknowledge that parents have individual needs and they now combine prevention and promotion.

From this two models of parent support have been developed;

The first is where parents are present in the family but need to learn to parent more effectively. How they would be supported is through home-visit programmes, parent to parent skills, and family therapy for parents who want to learn problem solving skills. The

focus of these programmes is assisting parents by building on the skills they already have and help them to develop.

The second model is where the parent's ability to parent is disrupted by social conditions such as poverty, lack of personal resources and a lack of social support. The support parents would receive here emerges from a number of multidimensional programmes. These programmes help these parents to deal effectively with their work and family commitments. These programmes work alongside health services and community development projects. The main objective is to help parents avoid situations where their children would be placed at risk. These two models can be used together because parents may need assistance from both models.

Whichever form of support a parent requires there are certain core principles that, if used in the support service, will play a major role in getting parents involved in the services?

1. Responsiveness and Appropriateness: For a programme to work it needs to respect and value the individual needs of parents. When dealing with parents flexibility needs to be a number one priority because the circumstances of a parent can change very rapidly over very short time scale. The activities and support need to base on relevance. Parents will be able to see the importance of their needs and abilities. The programmes also need to take into account diverse family patterns and cultural diversity. (Johnson et al, 1993, Cutting, 1997)
2. Placing parental knowledge and responsibility at the cornerstone of parenting support programmes. When organising the programme it should build on the knowledge and experience parents already have and also realise that parents are effective caregivers despite their backgrounds. One of the most important points about support

programmes is that they should let parents feel in control of their role and not made feel they are then trying to conform to a role in which they don't feel comfortable.

3. Community Empowerment and action: All support services must deal with families as part of a community. This might even help parents get more evolved in their local community. Parents want to be able to choose the type of support they need. (Cutting, 1998).
4. Address the issue of children's rights: when it comes to support programmes for parents children are the main priority in the service. They need to know what is going on and consulted in matters that impact on their lives. (Cutting, 1998)
5. Recognition of permitting life circumstances: in order for parents to fulfil their social or legal obligations they need the support of social and economic factors in order for the programme to be successful. (Cutting, 1998)

For the support service to work they need to be accessible, relevant, empowering and responsive. They need to meet a variety of needs be flexible and responsive in ensuring that families and parents benefit from the services.

Even though family support services are relatively new to Ireland there is a lot of potential if developed right (Cater, 1996). Already there have been positive reports about services. (Mc Keown, 2000; Johnson & Molly, 1998; O'Rourke, 1997). Three main areas have been found that could be a challenge for the development of adequate and efficient support services. The three areas are The Cultural Appropriateness of Support, Gender-Related Issues and Language of Support.

The Cultural Appropriateness of Support has received a lot of attention recently from Irish Family Services Providers. UK parenting programmes have found that there is a need for

culturally appropriate training to meet the wide needs of ethnic groups and cultures. (Smith et al, 1994). Irish parents have sought developments in programmes that are appropriate for the different socio – economic groups that are using the parenting education programmes. But what also needs to be considered is how different ethnic and cultural groups access support services. A study by Grant (1995) discovered that families from minority ethnic backgrounds access family service in a variety of ways. They are reluctant to use programmes that are directed directly at parents, but they were more likely to use the service if it was directed at their children for example health care or education. This means that family support services need to take ethnic and social class difference into account when organising programmes.

The gender issue in support in family support and parenting programmes needs to be addressed. State intervention in parenting can have impact on the shaping and reinforcing of parenting roles amongst women and men. The Irish Constitution grants all mothers the constitutionally protected right to their children and makes no reference to fathers. This means that fathers have relatively weak legal rights when it comes to access or guardianship of their own children unless they go through the courts. Until recent the role of a parent in Irish Policy was focused on the role of the mother. This in turn has raised questions into state intervention in supporting families and parents in terms of the role and rights of fathers and their role in the family. Fathers have become very vocal in parenting and in the debate on how to support parents, children and families. This has consequences in terms of policy and services development in family support. People can no longer think that by meeting the needs of the mother you are meeting the needs of the father as well. Little research has been done in Ireland, in this area. But some has been done in the UK. Grimshaw and McGuire, (1997) found that fathers who did attend the parenting classes felt isolated and considered the content and approach inappropriate to them. Ghate et al (2000) found that some family

centres in the UK do cater well for fathers but that some could not engage with the majority of fathers. Also many of these centres are dominated by female staff which can make men feel uneasy, but also some women questioned men coming because it means they cannot discuss certain issues. (Grimshaw & McGuire, 1998).

The language of support shapes the perception of parents has of support services. Sometimes the terminology used to describe a support programmes can actually deter a parent from using the support services. The people who conduct these services feel that certain words such as class and programmes are stigmatising and negative. (Cutting, 1999). Parents do not think these terms encourage them to access the services or to work with professionals. (Cutting, 1999).

## **Methodology**

According to Burges:

“The ultimate aim of qualitative research is to study situations from the participant’s point of view.” (Burgess, 1984)

### ***Method***

To conduct this interview Qualitative method of research was used for this study. Thematic analysis offers a more accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data. Thematic analysis is widely used analytic method but it is poorly distinguished (Boyatzis, 1998, Roulston, 2001). Thematic analysis is used for identifying, analysing and

reporting patterns within data. One of the major benefits of thematic analysis research tool because the data that can be provided from it is rich and detailed. It has clear guidelines so that when people are using it there are certain steps that have to be done which means anyone can follow the steps and produces a thematic analysis.

This qualitative research was chosen to get an insight into individuals and their experience. Interviews were unstructured; it was seen to be the most beneficial. This allows the participants to tell their stories in their own way. Access for this qualitative study was gained openly. The study explores the views and opinions of parents when it comes to Community Support Programmes in their local area.

### ***Participants***

Four mothers participated in this study. A contact was used to gain access to this sample. People who were not known personally were used in the study. The women who were used are between the ages of twenty one and twenty eight years of age. All of the mothers had children aged between seven months and four years old.

### ***Apparatus/Materials***

The women who participated allowed a tape recorder to be used. It was thought that it would be the most effective in capturing all the material. Before the interviews began a booklet was given to each woman to find out how they felt about some of the issues affecting parents and what type of services they have used.

### ***Interview Design***

It was decided to use interviews as a method for the study. One-to one structured interview was chosen as the most appropriate method to collect data. An interview allows for greater

exploration of the needs parents have. It also gives all parents an equal opportunity to participate in the research study. Interviews were held either at the parent's home or at an agreed public venue. The interview was guided by a booklet that was given to the participants before the interviews began. The booklet was given to gather general information but also to let the participants think about how the community has affected their parenting. Certain questions in the booklet are linked to questions been asked in the interview. This is to allow participants time to think about how they feel about certain areas. (A copy of the questionnaire is included in the Appendix).

### ***Procedure***

The study aimed to look at parent support needs in Irish Community, also focus on information policies and services developments that are available to all types of parents. The study hopes to do this looking at

- What parents know about the support services in their areas?
- How parents view the support services of their local services
- Do parents think the local services are useful
- To vitalise the data gathered and examine whether the services in the local area are living up to the needs of parents in the local community.

This will be done by looking at certain areas. How the participants felt about becoming parent is an important question to the study. This question allows us to see what the participant's biggest concerns were at the time. This area can bring up issues that have not been thought of till now which could lead the study in a different direction than planned. The area around childcare can be a big area for some people. It allows us to see what people's thoughts are on

Formal and Informal childcare. It can give us an insight into why some mothers stay at home and some go back to work. It also can open up the question about how some parents feel they have to go back and the reasons why. Asking people about their own childhood and how they felt about it, gives us an insight into how they hope to run their families and how they make decisions based on what they have learned through watching their parents raise them.

Concerns people have is also a very important area because it lets us see what fears parents are and if they are the same fears we presume they have. If there fears can be helped by certain services that are out there and if living in an Urban or Rural area impacts on the types of services you can access. Asking about certain services allows us to see if the services are out there that people need and want and if they are been used to their full potential. Also asking about certain general and financial support allows us a personal insight into how people feel about those services and if they think they are as readily available and as easy to access as people are lead to think. Conducting the study around these areas will allow this project to gain an insight into what people think and feel about the service in their local area. The area that has been chosen is a small town that has grown rapidly over the last few years. Which means that it could be the perfect town to do this research on to see if the local services have grown to match the growth of the town?

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Ethical Consideration is important point. The parents who were evolved in this study where informed about confidentiality at the start of the study. At the start of the qualitative answer booklet parents were told no names or organisation would be printed in the project, if any sensitive issue came up that the person would be contacted about it and on their permission only would that answer be included. Parents were informed that they could withdraw from the interviews at any time. Parents would be under no pressure to continue the interviews if

they do not feel comfortable. It was explained that the interviews were been done to see what types of services are out there and if parents know about them and what their experiences was like with them.

## ***Results***

The following section of this research project presents the data collected from the interviews that were conducted, and is discussed in the following section.

The first theme that will be discussed in the results section is Concerns that the Participants have about been able to visit the doctor, concern about becoming a parent, sending their children to school, transport and local service and back to work schemes.

***“Three of the biggest concern I have when raising our children is access to a doctor it’s important to me because if my children are sick I would like to think that bringing them to a doctor would just be a natural thing.”***

A visit to the doctor can be of great concern to a mother or father when they don’t have the money to visit a doctor. Participants who do not have a medical card understand the worry

parents have when their child needs to visit the doctor. It can be a very costly and some parents would worry that they could not afford the doctor if their children were sick. A doctor's visit can be very expensive when you include medicine as well.

Participants who are entitled to have the medical card understand how lucky they are, not all parents are can have a medical card and understand how much a trip to the doctor can cost.

***“Some of the major concerns I had when I discovered I was pregnant were, would I be able for parenting, would I be a good mother, can I afford to have one and would she feel loved safe and secure. Another concern was how my parents would take it and also how they would react.”***

From the participants this came across as a major concern. Mothers are afraid when they first discovered they were pregnant even those who were with partners or married. It was clear that these mothers worried if they could cope and make sure they had a safe and secure environment for their own children. It is a common fear once the excitement of been pregnant wears off, mothers start to panic will they know what to do, how will I know if the baby needs to be feed to if they are just tired.

The participants who were without their partners were worried about how their parents would take it. They spent time at the start of the pregnancy worry about how to tell their parents and if they would have their love and more important would their parents be there for them.

***“There are a lot of concerns that you might not even think of till you have to deal with it. School is a big one with there been so many people moving to the town there is so many children and not enough places.”***

School can become a major issue for parents as their child gets older. Where to send your child can be a very big concern for parents. There are questions that need to be asked, where your child goes to school has a lot of factors that need to go with it. If you live in the country transport is going to be a factor how does your child get to school when you have to work, how your child does goes after school. But what has become an even bigger problem is overcrowding of school. Some schools now only take children from surrounding areas which some parents feel in time could lead to waiting list

***“Yes it does affect the way you hear about services. As I said in the question before if you don’t have a car to get in and out of town you miss out on been able to go to your local services to see if anything new is happening. Even if you do have a car having two small children means going to the shops can be a challenge.”***

Transport for parents can be another issue especially for parents who live in a rural area. By living in a rural area a parent can miss out on using local services and also by finding out about new services in the area, even if the parents have a car getting in and out of town can be a battle for a parent with small children.

Parents who work full time can also miss out on local services. Parents by the time they arrive home from work, their local services would be closed for the evening or for the weekend which means a parent needs to take time off work to gain access to a service.

***“Yes I do believe that a greater amount of schemes should be available for parents who want to go back to work. More child friendly workplaces would be very welcomed.”***

Mothers who would like to go back to work have mentioned a few areas that they think would help a parent to get back to work and also give them more confidence that they are doing the right thing. If there were a greater variety of schemes available parents who would like to get back to work and also get a qualification in the meantime as well. If there was more courses for mature students which allowed them to study overtime and not as expensive as they are now. To go back to college can be an extremely expensive investment for some people. If a parent can't afford to make the investment it could mean been stuck in a load paid job.

Parents believe that if work could create more child friendly workplace it could mean making going back to work easier for parents. It could take the pressure of parents as well as taking some financial pressure of them as well.

The second theme that will be discussed is a Parents Own Upbringing and how their own parents play a part in how they are raising their own children.

***“Yes they have they showed me and my brother love, compassion support and are now helping me to one of the most important jobs a women can do, try and be the best mother I can.”***

It became clear during the interviews from the participants that they mirror the way they are parenting their children from the way they were brought up. It came across that their parents had influenced them greatly and what they learned as a child they are now passing onto their own children. Participants understood that they are on one of the biggest learning curves of

their lives but feel that their parents have taught them well by been shown how to love and be compassionate that they will be able to cope.

Participants who are with their partners are trying to find a balance between two different styles of parenting. They both have their own idea about how their child should be reared so this is where communication becomes a big part of the relationship. They need to sit down and discuss what way their own children will be raised.

The third theme that will be discussed is Social Welfare and how it is to understand some of the information at times.

***“Yes I find it really hard sometimes to find out exactly what I am entitled to and to get the proper information to tell me exactly what is what.”***

It was clear to see from the interviews that entitlements can cause a lot of stress. Everyone knows about basic entitlements and that there is financial support, housing list and even medical cards.

But what the majority of complaints were that to find out exactly what you were entitled to could be hard. Some people can be entitled to different things which can make it very confusing. The participants felt that if a booklet was available with the basic information about all entitlements it would make the process of enquiring easier and less time consuming.

Also what the participants found was the process that was involved could at times get complicated. There seems to be a never ending amount of forms that need to be filled in and one mistake could set the whole process back by a few weeks.

The parents who were single parents did mention that at times you felt as if you were in a trap. Some participants found that if they wanted to go back to work the majority of entitlements could be cut off straight away, which left them two choices stay on social welfare or struggle for a while until they got into a better position in work and became more financial stable. This could be the reason why many single parents stayed on social welfare for a long period of time before they go back to work.

The fourth theme that will be discussed is Medical Support for Participants. The following areas will be discussed Scans and Waiting List, Information on Classes and The Public Health Nurse.

***“Waiting to receive my dates for my scan were terrible, the first time I was nearly five months pregnant which I feel personally to long a wait. I just felt that it was to long of a wait I was worried about my child’s health.”***

From the participants that had been interviewed, they all had a long wait to receive their first scan. What was felt from the interview that this was not good enough, that one participant was a few months pregnant before she go the date for her first scan.

They all believe that a scan should be something that happens straight away that having to wait months is unacceptable. They believe by leaving the scan too long could have implication for the child health.

***“The hospital told me about the Antennal classes and also the Public Health Nurse, they gave me the information on when they started and the times.”***

All of the participants received all of their information from the hospital about Antenatal classes, dates for scans and also about the Public Health Nurse. Along with receiving the dates for classes and scans the participants received some information about what the service achieved and what they hoped would be the outcome from attending Antenatal classes.

***“The Public Health Nurse was very nice to me and answered any questions I had about my child”.***

All participants found the service of the Public Health Nurse to be extremely helpful. They found that by visiting and talking to the nurse that many of their fears went away and that all questions they had were answered, even if it was as simple as they were doing things right. They found by talking to a professional they could be put to ease about matters such as breastfeeding. One participant decided to breast feed but at the start was worried that the child might not get enough food. But after a visit with the Health Nurse the mother was more at ease and felt more confident and decided to continue to breast feed.

The fifth theme that will discuss is Childcare and do participants use childcare.

***“Yes I do use childcare. The type of child care I use is a crèche and my child is there all day.”***

The participants that worked expect for two did avail of childcare service. The majority of participants use formal private ran crèche and their child were enrolled in fulltime day care.

They use local crèche in their area and found that their crèche has a nice atmosphere and made them feel comfortable about leaving their child there during the day.

Why the participant decided to use the crèche service was because they knew they could go back to fulltime employment with the knowledge that their child is safe for the day in a caring environment.

Deciding which crèche to use was a tough choice for some. They collected all the information on the crèche in their local area and picked the crèche that meets their needs the most. Once the child was comfortable and happy they know that they have made the right decision.

The sixth theme that will be discussed is Classes and if parents would attend classes and why they would not attend a parenting class.

***“Yes I would like to attend parenting classes. I feel they would be of great benefit to me. I think a parenting class would help me understand the process of how children development.”***

Only a few participants would have been interested in taking part in a parenting class. They believe that the class would be of great benefit to them. It would mean they could meet people who might be going through the same thing as them and it's a great feeling of relief when a parent discovers somebody else how has the same problem as you. It also gives parents a chance to learn more about how their child will develop over the years. But by attending classes parents are taught how best to deal with certain situation in the right manner. This can give parents the feeling that they are doing the best job they can do.

***“No I would not attend a parenting class. I really don’t see the point of them. Why do you not see the point in parenting classes? Some of the points they talk about are good, but a lot of the stuff they talk about does not affect me.”***

The majority of participant did not attend a parenting class and had no intention to do so.

They could not see how a class can benefit them and believe you would only attend a class if there was a problem with your child. They believe that they would not learn much from the classes.

The seventh theme discussed is the area a person lives in, does it affect the way you hear about a service.

***“Well it can affect how you hear about services. I think that if you live in a rural area and not a lot of neighbours you might not hear about new services that have started in your local area”***

All participants believed that living in a rural or urban area does affect how you hear about services in your local area. They believe that if you live in an urban area it is easier to visit services and find out about new services that have started in the area.

They also believe that by living in a rural area it does affect the way you hear about services as well. Unless you listen to local radio and read local papers you would not know about the services. If you don’t have a car it also will affect you hearing about services you can’t go into town during the day when everything is open to learn about services that would be coming to town.

The eight theme that will be discussed is Influence on a parent.

*“The greatest influence on the way I raise my children is my own upbringing I believe that my childhood was a happy childhood and my parents did their best for me and they showed me love and affection and taught me skills to deal with my own family”.*

All participants felt that they had great influences when it comes to parenting. Their own parents are the number one influence. Growing up in a good home showed these parents the best way to run their own houses. If they feel their own upbringing was good they will do their best to recreate the feeling in their own house. It is an important job to teach your children how to love and support and the basic interaction between siblings.

All participants believe also that when your child is born a natural instinct kicks in. A feeling of love and protection comes over you and you feel such a bond with the child. For an unknown reason you know what your child needs and wants are even if you are a bit shaky at the start.

## **Discussion**

This section of the research project is to review the findings and critically examine the study that has been carried out, drawing conclusions based on what has been done and learned. The following is background information on the participants that were involved in the study.

### **Participant Number One**

The first participant is a female and is age 24. The participant is Separated and in full time employment. She has one child and is two years of age and lives in a rural location. She has received her Leaving Cert and 3<sup>rd</sup> Level Diploma. The following is the answers that the participant gave to the question asked in the booklet before the interviews were conducted.

***1. What, from the following list would you consider to be the greatest influence on your parenting skills? (Please use scale 1-5, one been the most influence and two been the second most important influence).***

- Family (Own upbringing, parents etc)
- Natural Instinct (Bond between mother and child)

- Books
- Magazines
- Newspaper

**2. From the following list of child safety issues, have you thought about the following concerns. (Please use scale 1-5, one been the most important issue and two been the second most important issue).**

- Access to a doctor
- Having enough food for you and your child
- Exposure to drugs
- Ability to have a positive relationship with your child.
- Availability of quality childcare
- Media influence.

**3. From the following list, what would you think is the most enjoyable aspect of parenting? (Please use a scale 1-5, one been the most enjoyable and two been the second most enjoyable)**

- Love and affection, received from your child.
- Spending time with your child.
- Seeing your child happy.
- Watching them grow and develop.

**4. In your local area are you aware of the following services that are available. (Could you please indicate with an X beside which ones).**

- Public Health Nurse
- Antenatal Classes

## **Participant Number Two**

The second participant is a female and is 23 years of age. She is single and in full employment. She has one child that is 17 months old and lives in an urban area. This participant has both her leaving cert and other education. The following is the answers that the participant gave to the question asked in the booklet before the interviews were conducted

***1. What, from the following list would you consider to be the greatest influence on your parenting skills? (Please use scale 1-5, one been the most influence and two been the second most important influence).***

- Natural Instinct (Bond between mother and child)
- Family (Own upbringing, parents etc)
- Books
- Magazines
- Newspaper

***2. From the following list of child safety issues, have you thought about the following concerns. (Please use scale 1-5, one been the most important issue and two been the second most important issue).***

- Having enough food for you and your child
- Exposure to drugs
- Ability to have a positive relationship with your child
- Access to a doctor
- Media influence

***3. From the following list, what would you think is the most enjoyable aspect of parenting? (Please use a scale 1-5, one been the most enjoyable and two been the second most enjoyable)***

- Spending time with your child
- Seeing your child happy
- Love and affection, received from your child
- Watching them grow and develop

**4. In your local area are you aware of the following services that are available. (Could you please indicate with an X beside which ones).**

- Public Health Nurse
- Antenatal Classes
- Family or Community Resource Centre.

### **Participant Number Three**

The first participant is a female and is age 28. The participant is married and in part-time employment. She has 2 children and is 4 and 1 age and lives in a rural location. She has received her leaving cert and Degree in Leisure Activity. The following is the answers that the participant gave to the question asked in the booklet before the interviews were conducted.

**1. What, from the following list would you consider to be the greatest influence on your parenting skills? (Please use scale 1-5, one been the most influence and two been the second most important influence).**

- Family (Own upbringing, parents etc)
- Natural Instinct ( Bond between mother and child)
- Books
- Magazines

- Newspaper

**2. From the following list of child safety issues, have you thought about the following concerns. (Please use scale 1-5, one been the most important issue and two been the second most important issue).**

- Access to a doctor
- Having enough food for you and your child
- Exposure to drugs
- Ability to have a positive relationship with your child
- Availability of quality childcare
- Media Influence

**3. From the following list, what would you think is the most enjoyable aspect of parenting? (Please use a scale 1-5, one been the most enjoyable and two been the second most enjoyable)**

- Love and affection, received from your child
- Spending time with your child
- Seeing your child happy
- Watching them grow and develop

**4. In your local area are you aware of the following services that are available. (Could you please indicate with an X beside which ones).**

- Public Health Nurse
- Antenatal Classes
- Home Help
- Home Visits
- Family Therapy

## **Participant Number Four**

The first participant is a female and is age. The participant is 27 and in part-time employment. She has one child and is three years of age and lives in a urban location. She has received her Degree. The following is the answers that the participant gave to the question asked in the booklet before the interviews were conducted.

***1. What, from the following list would you consider to be the greatest influence on your parenting skills? (Please use scale 1-5, one been the most influence and two been the second most important influence)***

- Family (Own upbringing, parents etc)
- Natural Instinct (Bond between mother and child)
- Books
- Magazines
- Newspaper

***2. From the following list of child safety issues, have you thought about the following concerns. (Please use scale 1-5, one been the most important issue and two been the second most important issue).***

- Having enough food for you and your child
- Ability to have a positive relationship with your child
- Access to a doctor
- Availability of quality childcare
- Exposure to drugs

- Media Influence

**3. From the following list, what would you think is the most enjoyable aspect of parenting? (Please use a scale 1-5, one been the most enjoyable and two been the second most enjoyable)**

- Love and affection, received from your child
- Spending time with your child
- Seeing your child happy
- Watching them grow and develop

**4. In your local area are you aware of the following services that are available. (Could you please indicate with an X beside which ones).**

- Public Health Nurse
- Antenatal Classes
- Family or Community Resource Centre.

The results that have been found in the previous section correlate to a point with the literature that has been reviewed in the Introduction for the purpose of this study. The main aims that were set out in the Introduction were met. When the participants asked if their local services were useful and how they view the services, it was clear that there was a mixture of yes and no. The study showed that all participants agreed when it came to waiting to receive dates for scans that all participants were not impressed about how they had to wait to receive the dates for their first scans. They all believed that they should have received their dates much earlier because if anything was to be wrong with their child it could be too late to recognise.

The study showed that participants were happy about the process of receiving all their information about all hospitals appointments and when to visit the Public Health Nurse. It

gave them an idea of what to expect from the information they received about the Antennal Classes and Public Health Nurse.

The study also found that the Public Health Nurse was of great benefit to the participant. The study found the participant believed that by talking to and visiting the nurse made many fears and concerns go away. Any questions participants asked were answered and they could leave the Public Health Nurse with more confidence that they were doing things right. Crèche the study found was still one of the main childcare services that parents avail of. Private ran childcare was used by all expect for two participants. Children are enrolled in full time day care and the crèche does an excellent job of providing a nice atmosphere and makes parents comfortable about leaving their child. The main reason why parents did leave their child was to return to full time education.

Parenting classes the study found are still not been used to their full potential. Only a handful of participants have availed of the parenting classes or would be extremely interested in participating in the class. They believe that the classes would be of great benefit. It would be a chance to meet other parents who could be going through the same thing. It's a chance to see they are doing a good job and also the classes can show what parents are going to expect in the future.

When parents were asked about what they knew about services in their area, the study showed that participants only knew about basic services in their local area and believe that where you lived had an effect on what people knew about services. The study showed that by living rural area it is easier to visit services and also find out about new services that have started. It showed that by living in a rural area means you could be missing out on services unless you had a car and had easy access to town or listen to local radio or read local papers, to be informed about the services that have been developed.

The study also found that services in local areas were living up to the needs of the participants. All participants were extremely happy with the services that they were attending and would be happy to attend more services if they felt they were of benefit to them.

What came from the Introduction through to the Results section were the eight factors that were set out to help the government to understand what is happening with families. The participants mentioned three out of the eight factors in their interviews. Which were Health and Education, Employment concerns and Demographic change. Health was a topic that came up throughout all of the interviews and was itself a big area of concern for all participants. Participants all interacted with health services throughout their pregnancies and also after their pregnancies. Visiting the doctor and waiting list were of concerns that participants named as one of the biggest fears not been able to bring their child to the doctor because they could not afford the visit and also the medicine. This was a big issue for parents, because they felt that it would show they could not provide even the basic needs for their child. All participants had problems with their scans and did not believe the services were meeting its full potential as for parents were weeks waiting on their first date for a scan. But the other services such as Public Health Nurse and Antennal Classes were of great benefit to participants and they really enjoyed the service. Participants found that Antennal classes gave them enough information to know what to expect and tips on how to cope. It can be reassuring going to the classes especially if you don't know anybody who has gone through pregnancies. The Public Health Nurse can be a great saviour to parents, any fears and concerns people have are dealt with in full and parents feel more reassured when they leave.

In the study Education and Demographic change actually were linked together. Where to send your child can be a big concern for parents because there are other factors that will be

affected by the choice you make for example how your child gets to and from the school and also where the child will go after school. How Demographic change links in because towns are now getting bigger with not enough school which means placing a child in a school is going to be a problem. A fear was that waiting list for schools could develop or might not be able to choose the school you want to send your child to.

Employment concerns were a priority for participants. They believed that by been able to work would give them confidence as a parent and would make them a better parent. They believed that by having a variety of schemes available to parents would mean that parents could get better jobs and also more qualifications. They also showed that more friendly workplace could mean that parents would find it easier and take off the pressure financing childcare.

As evident from the study financial support does have a direct and indirect effect on the family. It can affect the welfare of a family. Entitlements dose cause a lot of stress for a family. To find out exactly what you are entitled to be can be very hard. Participants believed that if one booklet could be available with basic information about each service would be of great help. But what can put real pressure on a family is the process and wait people do have to go through to receive their welfare. Also a topic that emerged was that some parents felt that sometimes they felt trapped by receiving welfare. If a parent would like to return to work might not be able to because it would mean a drop in money for parents. They could be better off staying on social welfare.

What the results section found that parents are not taking full advantage of the recommendation from the Commission on the Family and the Best Health for Children

Report. Both reports wanted parents education wants programmes on support to be included. The participants in this study did not take part in father only groups or minority groups; they did however take part in parent's classes and those who do have found the classes to be of great benefit to them. It means that parents do not feel by themselves that they realise there are other parents are going through the same. Parents learn who a child develops which can be of great benefit to parents because it shows them a piece of what to expect. The classes also show parents how to deal with certain situation in the best possible way which means the outcome will be well educated parents.

What this study showed was that participants really do value their parents influence.

Participants do mirror the way they are parenting their children from the way they were brought up. It was clear to see that parents do influence the way we raise our own children and we learn as a child we use when raising our own children. Parents show us how to love and be compassionate and how to cope. The participants are trying to recreate a loving and safe environment. What could cause problems for parents is how they find a balance between what both sets of parents have been taught. This is where communication becomes extremely import in a relationship.

What the study also showed was that when a mother first becomes pregnant it can be a very stressful time for them. Married participants worried about been able to cope as a family could they support their new child. Mother panic because they are afraid they will not know what to do when the child arrives. Single parents have the same worries but on top of it they worry about what way their parents will react to the news. This is one of the biggest concerns for single parents and can cause a lot of stress and upset for single parents. Some mothers can put of telling parents for weeks and even months which is not good for both parent and child.

What came across clear during the results section of this study is that this study might have been too broad of a subject for such a small scale study. What would have been more beneficial to the study would be to concentrate on one area within the community based services would have given more solid result that could have been compared more in detail within the literature.

## **Conclusion**

This study is a small scale study about parents and services in their community, any conclusions can only be tentative. Even though the study is a small scale it does confirm what has been issued in Reports published on this area.

Qualitative methods of research were used for this study. Recorded interviews were essential to this study as for they allowed the participants to tell stories of interacting with services which means their full experience was captured.

The purpose of this study was to

- What parents know about the support services in their areas?
- How parents view the support services of their local services?
- Do parents think the local services are useful?
- To vitalise the data gathered, examine whether the services in the local area are living up to the needs of parents in the local community.

Even though this study is limited it does point out the value of having a good community based services that people can access and are not afraid to use if unheard of before. If a follow up study was to be conducted concentrating on one area within the community based services might be more beneficial.

*Appendices*

**Appendix 1**

**Parent Community Support Study**

A Qualitative written answer booklet

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

DUBLIN BUSINESS SCHOOL

Carol Kavanagh

Dublin Business School

Any queries email: [carolk46@gmail.com](mailto:carolk46@gmail.com)

**Introduction:**

The study which I am conducting is completely confidential. The names of individuals or organisations will not show in the printed project and I will be the only one with access to the completed booklet. If you don't feel comfortable with any of the questions you should feel free to not answer, and if you want to stop at any time you can. Also if at any time after you've completed the booklet you feel uncomfortable with any part of what you answered or have any queries you can contact me. If I feel that there are any sensitive issues in your answers, which perhaps might identify you too easily. I will contact you and check with you as to whether you're comfortable with it being included or not. I will also notify you as to the date that the project is going to be printed, as that would be the last day you would have to voice any concerns.

**General Information**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Are you:** Male      Female      Other

---

**Are you:**      Married/Living with Partner

                 Separated/Divorced

                 Single

                 Other

**Occupation**      Employed Full-Time

                 Employed Part-Time

                 Unemployed

Other

---

**Number of Children:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Age of Children:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you live in an Urban or Rural Community:** \_\_\_\_\_

---

**Education:** Leaving Cert

Degree

Postgrad

3<sup>rd</sup> Level

Other

3<sup>rd</sup> Level Diploma

---

The answer from the following questions will relate to questions that will be asked during the interview.

**1. What, from the following list would you consider to be the greatest influence on your parenting skills?(Please use scale 1-5, one been the most influence and two been the second most important influence)**

- Family (Own upbringing, parents etc) \_\_\_\_\_
- Books \_\_\_\_\_
- Natural Instinct (Bond between mother and child) \_\_\_\_\_
- Magazines \_\_\_\_\_
- Newspaper \_\_\_\_\_

**2. From the following list of child safety issues, have you thought about the following concerns. ( Please use scale 1-5, one been the most important issue and two been the second most important issue)**

- Access to a doctor \_\_\_\_\_
- Having enough food for you and your child \_\_\_\_\_
- Availability of quality childcare \_\_\_\_\_
- Exposure to drugs \_\_\_\_\_
- Media Influence \_\_\_\_\_
- Ability to have a positive relationship with your child \_\_\_\_\_

**3. From the following list, what would you think is the most enjoyable aspect of parenting? (Please use a scale 1-5, one been the most enjoyable and two been the second most enjoyable)**

- Love and affection, received from your child \_\_\_\_\_
- Spending time with your child \_\_\_\_\_
- Seeing your child happy \_\_\_\_\_
- Watching them grow and develop \_\_\_\_\_

**4. In your local area are you aware of the following services that are available.**

**(Could you please indicate with an X beside which ones.)**

- Public Health Nurse \_\_\_\_\_
- Antenatal Classes \_\_\_\_\_
- Home Help \_\_\_\_\_
- Home Visits \_\_\_\_\_
- Family Therapy \_\_\_\_\_
- Family or Community Resource Centre \_\_\_\_\_
- Parenting Classes \_\_\_\_\_

**Interview**

- 1. When you first realised that you were to become a parent, what would of been some of the major concerns you would of had.**
- 2. Do you use childcare? If yes do you use Formal/ Informal childcare. (Formal childcare Creche/ Pre-school Informal childcare Partner/ Family)**
- 3. Would you have an interest in attending parenting classes?**

**If yes why?**

**If no why?**

- 4. Why do you think answer is your greatest influence on your parenting skills?**  
(Relates to question 1 on booklet)
- 5. Do you think your parents have played a part in how you parent your children?**  
**Explain?**
- 6. From the answer you gave in the booklet, what would be the biggest concern and why? (Relates to question 2 booklet)**
- 7. Can you think of any other concerns that are not mentioned? Why do you think there are important?**
- 8. Do you think whether you live in an urban or rural area affects the way you can access services**
- 9. Do think it can affect the way in which you hear about the services.**
- 10. From the answer you gave on the booklet about the most enjoyable aspect of parenting, do you think it is all worth it in the end? (Relates to question 3 on booklet).**
- 11. Have you ever used or encountered the following services?**
  - Childcare
  - Child behaviour
  - Child development
  - Child health and development

- Education
- Schooling for children

**12. Where do you think you would get this information if you needed it?**

**13. Do you think there are barriers to gaining information on certain support areas?**

**14. From your answer in the booklet have you ever used any of the services?**

**15. If yes what was your experience like with them?**

**16. Did you find it easy to access information on them?**

**17. Did you find the service pleasant when using it?**

**18. Did you think it was useful?**

**19. Did you think they answered all the questions you had for them in full?**

**The following question to be asked if the subject is brought up.**

- 1. The following subjects such as housing, waiting list and general support needs for parents**
- 2. What would be your personal view on them?**
- 3. Do you think the process to which you are accessed for each one is a fair process? Why?**
- 4. Do you believe that there should be a greater variety of schemes for parents to go back to work?**

5. **Do you think it is easy to find information about the financial support needs for parents? Is the information you receive easy to understand?**
6. **What type of employment support needs do you think as a parent you would like to see?**

## **References**

- Beliefs in Child Care: Social Work Consensus and lack of Consensus on Issues of Parenting and Decision Making. *Children and Society* volume 13(999) p 179-191  
Bridge Daniel.
- Bayatiz, R.E. 1998: Transforming qualitative information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development Sage
- Best Health for Children Report (1998)
- Crinc, Keith A, Mark T. Greenberg Minor Parenting Stresses with Young Children.
- Child Care Act 1999
- Child Care Act 1990

- Children's First Report 1999
- Child Care and Family Support Services 2005 Review of Adequacy HSE West Clare, Limerick and North Tipperary
- Children 1<sup>st</sup> Parent line. A snapshot of concerns raised in calls to parent line Scotland.
- Child Care and Family Support Services 2005 Review of adequacy HSE West Clare, Limerick and North Tipp
- Consequences of young mother marital histories for children's Cognitive Development.
- Department of Health Document A Plan for Women's Health (1997)
- Early Years and Early Intervention. A joint Scottish Government and COSLA Policy Statements.
- Family Links Steps and Stages. Teoir The National Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their children.
- Family Affairs Unit (1998)
- Family Support Agency in (2001)
- Guidelines for the Welfare and Protection of Children 1999
- HSE South Review of adequacy of child and family services 2005
- Keeping Children Safe. Helping parents and carers choose safe services and activities for children.
- McKeown, 2001 *Family Well being and Family Policy a review of research on benefits and cost.*
- McKeown, K. 2000. *A Guide to what works in Family Support Services for Vulnerable Families.* Dublin: Department of Health and Children.
- The Parental Leave Act 1998

- The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (1997)
- The National Childcare Investment Strategy (1999)
- The National Children's Strategy Planning and Development Act 2000
- The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness 2000
- National Children Strategy 2000
- Parents who listen, protect HSE report
- Poverty, Social Support and Parental Behaviour. Patricia, T. Hashima and Paul R Amato
- Parents Who Listen Protect HSE Report
- Parenting Teenagers Top Ten Tip Ok to Ask Scotland
- Poverty Social Support, and parental behaviour Patricia, T Hashima and Paul R. Amato
- Parenting Teenagers Top Ten Tip Ok To Ask Scotland
- National Children Strategy 2000
- Review of adequacy of services for children and families HSE Dublin Mid Leinster Report.
- Reference the Irish Constitution 1937, Article 41 Commission on the family 1998
- Report of the Commission on the Family (1998)
- Roulsten, K. 2001: Data Analysis and Theorizing as Ideology. Qualitative Research 1, 279-303
- Supporting Parents, Supporting Children: The Final Report of the positive parenting project 1999. Save the Children Scotland
- Seanad Eireann – Volume 137 – 07 July 1993 Kilkenny Incest Case: Statement
- The impact of welfare reform on the parenting role of women in rural communities.

- The Economic and Social Review, Vol 30, No 1 January 1999, pp 21-46. Child Protection Practice. An ungovernable enterprise Helen Buckley.
- United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child