



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Lessons in seeking ethical approval to conduct research with children on a sensitive topic

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Ruth Elliffe, PhD Candidate

School of Social Work and Social Policy

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Presentation Overview

- **Introduction to the study**
- **Seeking ethical approval: applying to a Research Ethics Committee (REC)**
- **Beneficence, consent & age appropriate material**
- **The use of gatekeepers**
- **Considerations beyond gaining approval from the REC**

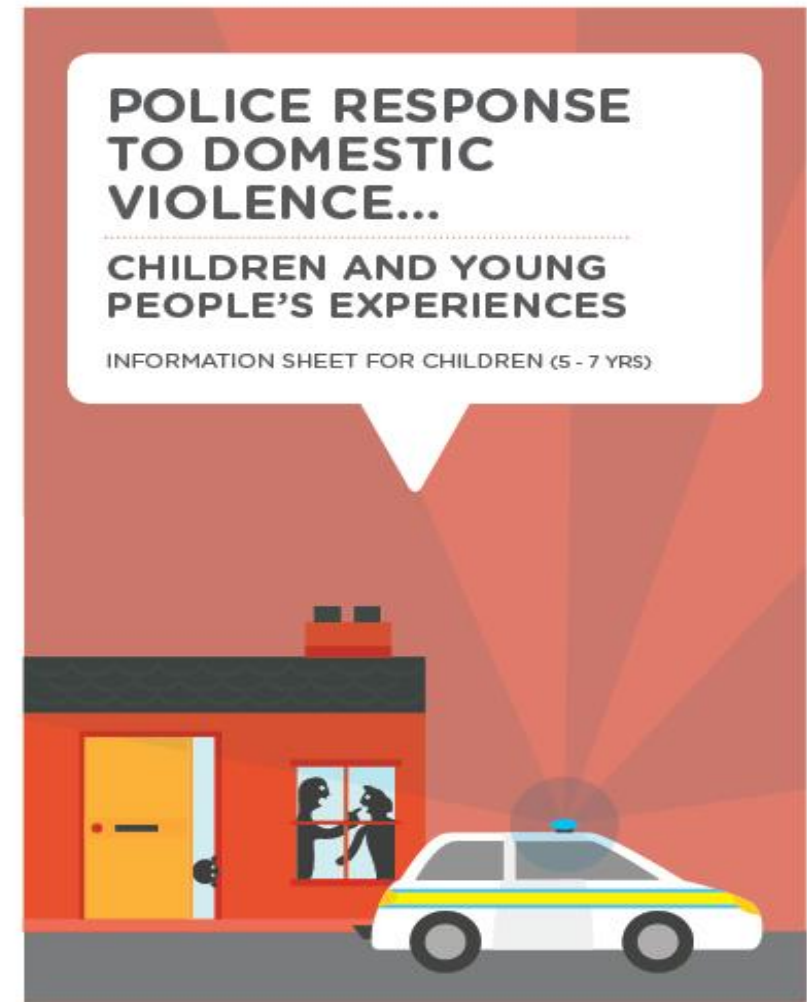
‘Exploring Children and Young People’s Experiences of the Police Response to Domestic Violence: An Irish Case Study’

Research questions

- How do children and young people experience the response of An Garda Siochana to domestic violence from initial call-out to follow-up?
- What does the interaction between An Garda Siochana, social services and families where there is domestic violence look like?
- How can findings from the study contribute to best practice in supporting children who are experiencing domestic violence?

Sample Population

- Children and Young People (5-21yrs) (n=15)
- Mothers (n=10)
- Health and Social Care Professionals (n=10)
- An Garda Siochana (n=10)



Applying to a Research Ethics Committee (REC)

Questions to consider

- ☐ How can I uphold the main ethical principles of *respect, beneficence and justice*?
- ☐ Does my research involve children (under 18 years of age)?
- ☐ Does my research involve people belonging to a vulnerable group?
- ☐ Is there any potential risk to participants & the researcher?
- ☐ How do I go about seeking consent and from whom?
- ☐ How do I protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants?
- ☐ Under what circumstances should I breach confidentiality?

Including Children in Research

“..Research with children should be of sufficient importance, soundness and benefit to warrant their time and contribution; inclusive and respectful of their input and autonomy, using methodology that facilitates their participation; and it should do them no harm, protect their privacy and take account of their vulnerability”

(Cashmore, 2006: 969)

Key Ethical Considerations – Beneficence

- **‘Do no harm’**
- **Risk/benefit assessment (maximum benefit with minimal harm)**
- **Safety of participants is foremost**
- **Must establish what contribution to knowledge you expect to gain from this group**
- **Linked directly to the research aims and objectives**

Overcoming Concerns – Beneficence

Example from study: concern raised for the inclusion of children in the 5-7yrs and 8-12yrs groupings

- **Clearer inclusion/exclusion criteria**
- **Evidence in literature that under 12s are present in DV homes (Fantuzzo et al., 2007; Gjelsvik et al., 2003; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012)**
- **Existing research showing contribution that this age group have already made to the specific topic (Buckley et al., 2006; Hogan & O'Reilly, 2007; Mullender et al., 2002; Overlien & Aas, 2015; Richardson-Foster et al., 2012; Swanston et al., 2014)**
- **Findings indicate that children are indirectly & directly involved in the police response**
- **Linking back directly to the research questions**

Key Ethical Considerations – Seeking Consent For Child's Participation

- **Active consent from caregivers may deny children their right to choose (Carroll-Lind et al., 2006)**
- **Passive consent or active dissent from care-givers may be more in line with Article 12 UNCRC**
- **Seeking Consent – 3 Stages (Carroll-Lind et al., 2006)**
 1. Service providers
 2. Parent
 3. Child
- **Consent from child as an on-going process (Kirk, 2007; Morris et al., 2012)**

Overcoming Concerns – Seeking Consent For Child's Participation

Example from study: Getting active consent from the child's mother is not legally sufficient.

- **Child Care Act, 1991 – Voluntary or Interim Care Order (courts), Full Care Order (Social Worker)**
- **Must seek both parents/guardians consent**
- **By seeking the father's consent are you putting the child at further risk?**
- **Inclusion/exclusion criteria**

'In a situation where a father has joint custody and his consent must be legally sought for the child to participate in the study, the researcher will seek the advice of the gatekeeper. Where a gatekeeper identifies that it would not be in the best interests of a child to seek consent from their father to participate then the child will be excluded from the study'

Key Ethical Considerations: Developing Age Appropriate Material

Information Sheet – Children (5-7yrs)

POLICE RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE...

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES

INFORMATION SHEET FOR CHILDREN (5 - 7 YRS)



WHAT IS THE PROJECT ALL ABOUT?



This project is interested in learning more about what it's like for children and young people when An Garda Síochána call to their house when the grown-ups are arguing.

WHO WANTS TO KNOW?

My name is Ruth and I am a student at Trinity College Dublin. I'm doing this project as part of my PhD studies.

WHAT DOES TAKING PART MEAN?



I will ask you to answer some questions.



I will record us talking so that I can remember everything.



Talking to me will take no longer than 30 minutes and we can take breaks whenever you like.



If you like we can ask your support worker to sit with you while we talk.



You can stop talking at any time and I won't mind.

YOUR CHOICE!

If you decide not to take part, this is absolutely fine as it's your choice to decide and nobody will mind.

Other important stuff for you to know about taking part!

! You can decide at any time to change your mind

! I will write about some of the important things we talk about but you can choose a different name so nobody will know what you have said

! I won't tell anybody else what we talk about unless you tell me something that makes me worry about your safety, but I will talk to you first before I tell anybody else

! If you decide to have your support worker sit in then she will also hear everything that you say to me but just like me she won't tell anyone unless you say something that makes us worry about you but we will both talk to you first before we tell anyone else

! You don't have to answer any question that you don't want to

! Talking to me might bring back some sad memories. You can take a break or stop whenever you like

A good thing about taking part could be that you can tell your story and this might help the grown-ups including An Garda Síochána to learn more about how they can help children to feel and stay safe at home.



Key Ethical Considerations: Developing Age Appropriate Material

Information Sheet – Young Person (13-17yrs)

WHAT IS THE PROJECT ALL ABOUT?

An Garda Síochána are very often the first professional to come in contact with a family who are experiencing domestic violence, perhaps due to a concerned neighbour calling them or a family member themselves who is frightened and does not feel safe in their home.

This project is interested in learning more about the experiences of children and young people in Ireland who have come in contact with An Garda Síochána when they and their mother were at risk from domestic violence.

WHO WANTS TO KNOW?

My name is Ruth, I am doing this research project as part of my PhD degree at Trinity College Dublin.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I DECIDE TO TAKE PART?

I would like to invite you to an interview to talk to you about your views and experiences of contact with the Gardaí especially when you and your mum did not feel safe. I'm also interested in what you think could be done by the Gardaí to help children feel and stay safe at home.

The interview will take about one hour with breaks whenever you need one. If you feel at any point that you would prefer not to continue with the interview then that is okay. I won't mind and there will be no excuse necessary or negative impact for you by stopping. It really is **your** choice.

IS WHAT I TELL YOU PRIVATE?

I will ask your permission to audio-tape the interview or I can take handwritten notes if you prefer. This allows me to give you my full attention during the interview and it also means I won't forget anything you have said to me which is important. If you want me to stop recording at any time I will turn it off. What we talk about during the interview is confidential, this means that I won't tell anybody else what you say unless you tell me something that means you or someone else might get hurt. But, if this does happen then we will discuss between us what will happen next and who else we will need to tell.

If you like we can ask your support worker to sit with you while we talk. They also know that what you say is private so like me they will only tell someone else about the things you say if they are worried for you or someone else's safety, but we will both talk to you first.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO MY INFORMATION?

The information gathered for the project will be written up in a final report for my PhD. I will change the names of all participants so that people who read it will not be able to identify who you are and what you have said. The findings from the research may also be used for training seminars, presentations and other written material.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS TO TAKING PART?

Talking with me might bring back some memories that make you feel sad and you might feel uncomfortable in answering some of the questions. This is okay and you do not have to share anything with me that you are not happy to. We can stop at any time and if you want to finish the interview we can do that too and I or anybody else won't mind.

A benefit to taking part could be that you have a chance to share your story. I hope that this research will help us learn more about the experiences of children and young people who have grown up in a home where there was domestic violence so that we can find better ways to support them when they need it.

DO I HAVE A CHOICE?

Your carer has already said that it's okay for you to talk to me but taking part is your choice! Take some time to think about what being involved might be like for you. You can decide at any time either before, during or after the interview if you are not comfortable and would rather not take part. This is absolutely fine. It's your choice to decide and nobody will mind.



HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

If you are interested in taking part in the project then you can speak to

(Name of referring contact)

(Name of agency)

SUPPORT

Growing up in a home where there is violence and abuse can be very frightening and confusing and those feelings can often stay with a person even after the abusive relationship has ended. Below is a list of useful contacts for young people who might need some support:

Childline

Free phone 1800 66 66 66 open 24 hrs a day

Childline Online

Open 10am - 4am everyday
www.childline.ie and click on 'Chat to us'
on contact Teentext by texting 'Talk' to 50101

Teenline Ireland

Open 7 nights a week: 8pm to 11pm
Phone 1800 833 634 or text 'TEEN' to 50015

Crosscare Teen Counselling

Phone (01) 557 4705

Teen Between

Phone 1800 303 191

Barnardos Teenhelp

www.barnardos.ie/resources-advice/young-people/teen-help/domestic-abuse

Jigsaw

www.headstrong.ie

Spunout

Wednesday: 4pm to 11pm
www.spunout.ie

Developing Age Appropriate Material

Consent Forms

POLICE RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE...

CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES



CONSENT FORM / CHILD (ages 5 - 12 years)



Ruth is a student doing research. I know that she wants to find out more about what it's like for children when the police call to their house when the grown-ups are arguing.



Ruth will record me on a tape recorder so that she doesn't forget anything.



I can stop talking to Ruth or take a break whenever I like and she won't mind.



Ruth said that I can use a different name so nobody will have to know what I said except her.



If I tell Ruth something that makes her worry about me or someone else then she will have to tell another grown up.

If I choose to have my support worker at the interview then they will also hear what I have to say but like Ruth they won't tell anyone else unless I say something that makes them worry for mine or someone else's safety, but they will both speak to me first.



I am happy to talk to Ruth about myself and the time the police came to my house when the grown-ups were arguing.

Ruth will photocopy this for me to keep.

Signed (Child) Date

Signed (Researcher) Date

POLICE RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE...

CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES

CONSENT FORM / CARER (for child's participation)

I
agree that Ruth Elliffe (PhD Student, Trinity College Dublin) may seek my child's permission to participate in this project.

- I have read the information sheet provided and consent form.
- I have had the opportunity to ask Ruth questions about my child(ren)'s participation.
- I understand that everything my child(ren) talks to Ruth about is confidential.
- If my child(ren) tells Ruth something that indicates that he/she might be in danger, Ruth may need to talk to somebody else about this. If this does happen, Ruth will firstly:
 - ✓ Talk to my child(ren) and tell my child(ren) about her concern;
 - ✓ And where appropriate talk to me and let me know what the concern about my child(ren) is.
- I understand that my child(ren)'s names and any other identifying details will be changed in the final report and they will remain anonymous.
- I understand that the information Ruth gathers may also be used for training seminars/presentations and other written material.
- I understand the interview will be audio taped or handwritten.
- I have received a copy of this consent form.
- I can change my mind at any time about my child(ren)'s participation.

Signed (Carer) Date

Signed (Researcher) Date

POLICE RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE...

CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES

CONSENT FORM / YOUNG PERSON (18 - 21 years)

I
agree to talk to Ruth Elliffe (PhD student, Trinity College Dublin) as part of the above named project.

- ★ I have read the information sheet and I have had time to ask questions about the project.
- ★ I understand that everything I talk to Ruth about is confidential and will not be discussed with anybody else.
- ★ I am happy for Ruth to record what we talk about on an audio-tape.
- ★ I understand that Ruth will write about some of the things that I say but that my name will be changed so nobody will be able to tell what I have said.
- ★ I will only talk about what I want to talk about and I don't have to answer any questions that I don't want to.
- ★ If Ruth is told something that indicates that a child might be in danger of harm, she may need to talk to somebody else about this. If this happens such information will be discussed with me before it is discussed with anybody else.
- ★ I can choose to stop talking to Ruth at any time and I know that she will not mind.

Signed (Young Person) Date

Signed (Researcher) Date

The Use of Gatekeepers – helpful or unhelpful?

- **Broad set of gatekeepers (researcher, agency & parent) (Cashmore, 2006)**
- **Parents as ‘Problematic gatekeepers’ (Cater & Overlien, 2014)**
- **Agency gatekeepers helpful for:**
 - Accessing a hard to reach group
 - Ensuring an ethical sampling process
 - Dealing with distress and disclosures

Considerations Beyond Approval from the REC

- Researcher safety & self-care
- Approval from other agencies
 - Tusla Research Agreement
 - Garda Research Protocol
- Ethical considerations are on-going



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Trinity College Dublin

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The University of Dublin

Thank you

Comments & feedback welcome

Email: elliffr@tcd.ie