Regional variations in care planning in Northern Ireland: An infringement of the children’s rights

Regional Variations in Care Planning in Northern Ireland: An Infringement of the Children’s Rights

What? = Regional variations re the placements of children taken into care

Why these differences?

This study aimed to explore the reasons behind it. Between Jan 2015 and May 2016, we conducted focus groups with senior managers involved in care planning in each of the 5 HSC Trusts in N.I.

Does it mean?

Based on the study findings, we developed an ecological model of decision-making in care planning.

Regional Practice Factors

- In terms of policy, frameworks, all the participants mentioned permanence and stability, and followed the broad regional policy principles.
- However, practice, structures and Trust guidelines somewhat contrasted.
- With these in Trusts A, B & C supporting adoption to greater degree. For instance, Trust A participants mentioned the existence of a permanence team (which they argued did not exist in the other Trusts), and Trust A participants talked about their permanence policy that instructed them to mention adoption in the children’s first LAC review, as well as their concurrent placements (which they believed did not exist in the other Trusts). In Trust C, participants explored they were in the process of starting concurrent placements, and beginning to recruit concurrent carers.

Diagonal Team Factors

- In terms of social workers, confidence to stand by their assessments in Court, while participants in Trust A & B argued that social workers were confident, participants in Trust C felt that some social workers weren’t confident enough to fight battles such as adoption.
- Participants in different Trusts talked about specific mindsets (as children have to be ‘perfect enough’ to be adopted, in Trust C) in their organization that influenced the type of decision-making focused for particular children.

Global Context Factors

- Participants in most Trusts referred to the difficult relationship they held with the Courts, particularly in terms of losing cases, as well as the need to maintain independence and a place in the use of independent expert assessments.
- Participants also mentioned a range of different socio-economic, cultural factors, particularly when trying to place children (in poverty levels, ethnicity, and sectarian division).

What is the impact?

- It suggests geographic variations in decision-making and care planning, leading to a postcode lottery for children who enter care. This is partly a result of the Trusts’ different mindsets, organisational cultures and practices, their geographical and social realities, and their resources.
- On the basis of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), children should have the same opportunities, and any postcode lottery regarding children’s placements should be considered an infringement of their rights.