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‘Family support’ as a way of addressing child poverty: a review of the evaluation literature in the UK

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The Institute for Local Governance (ILG) is a research and knowledge exchange partnership comprising the region's Universities, local authorities, police and fire and rescue services, and other public sector agencies. Hosted by Durham University, the purpose is to facilitate and enhance collaboration between the North East's Universities and the public sector by identifying key research and analytical requirements. It is funded on a subscription and research contract basis.

The Institute was established on the premise that there were mutual benefits to be gained by establishing a collaborative research and knowledge partnership between the public sector and higher education institutions focusing on issues surrounding local governance and related delivery activities. It was recognised that there were common interests in the pursuit of research and intelligence in this area of public policy although the outcomes of these endeavours might be used by academic and practitioner communities for different purposes.

The so called 'co-production' process in which academics and practitioners work together is a central theme of the work of the ILG as is the notion that wherever possible academics from the region's Universities should be encouraged to collaborate across institutional and disciplinary boundaries in the delivery of ILG services.



The North East Child Poverty Commission is a stakeholder group made up of representatives from local authorities, other public sector bodies, charities and businesses who are working together to tackle child poverty in the North East. The Commission is keen to raise public and political awareness about the devastating impact that poverty has on children, their experience and enjoyment of childhood and their chances in life as an adult.

The aim of the North East Child Poverty Commission is to *“provide a strong regional voice to raise awareness of the issue of child poverty in the North East and to work collaboratively to tackle the problem.”*

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Introduction

The family has become a key site for policy interventions that aim to tackle child poverty in the UK. Projects that 'support' or 'intervene' in family life are common features of child poverty related documents and discussions at both national and local levels. A number of different models and approaches have been piloted or proposed by different public sector bodies and/or voluntary sector organisations.

This report draws on research that was prepared as part of an international research project reviewing the effectiveness of 'integrated measures' targeted at low-income families with a view to reducing child poverty. The original research, which was commissioned by the Norwegian government, via the Fafo Research Institute in Oslo, included National Reports from four Nordic countries (Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) and the UK.

The UK National Report was prepared by Stephen Crossley¹ and Professor Jonathan Bradshaw, both of the School of Applied Social Sciences at Durham University. The original UK National report has been reviewed, revised and updated in light of the recent UK government launch of a consultation on a new child poverty strategy. It is intended that these changes will make it more relevant and useful to a domestic policy and practice audience in the UK. The report does not examine the effectiveness of the family support projects *per se*, but focuses specifically on what evaluations of these projects tell us about their potential role in reducing child poverty.

The report provides a brief introduction to the child poverty policy context in the UK before discussing some 'family support' models associated with the child poverty agenda in the UK in more detail. The first UK Government child poverty strategy included a chapter on 'Supporting Family Life and Children's Life Chances' and argued that 'A sustainable approach to tackling child poverty needs to address a wide range of factors such as family, home environment, health and education' (DWP 2001 p35). The strategy went on to highlight the importance of local services supporting families in a joined-up way and emphasised the importance of 'supportive positive home environments' through initiative such as supporting relationship services, promoting 'strong parenting' and improving parental skills and qualifications.

The most recent consultation document highlights the importance of 'key family characteristics' which 'make it harder for some poor families to work their way out of poverty' (DWP 2014a p12) or which 'make it harder for some poor children to do well at school' (*ibid* p14). The accompanying evidence review focuses entirely on '13 family and child characteristics identified by a preliminary informal evidence review as most important' (DWP 2014b p5) in escaping poverty now and/or in the future.

The family support programmes that are reviewed have all been linked to or developed within the child poverty policy in the UK. In each case, evaluations of the projects have been reviewed to understand the extent to which they have been successful, or otherwise, in tackling child poverty.

A short summary and discussion of the findings concludes the report.

¹ Stephen Crossley previously worked for the North East Child Poverty Commission and was based at the Institute for Local Governance.

Background

The UK Government has made a legally binding commitment to ‘eradicate’ child poverty in the UK by 2020. This commitment was made via the introduction of the Child Poverty Act in April 2010. Child Poverty is currently defined by the Child Poverty Act using four separate measures. These are:

- **Relative low income:** The proportion of children living in households where income is less than 60 per cent of median household income, BHC (the target is less than 10 per cent by 2020/21).
- **Absolute low income:** The proportion of children living in households where income is less than 60 per cent of median household income, BHC in 2010/11 adjusted for prices (the target is less than 5 per cent by 2020/21).
- **Combined low income and material deprivation:** The proportion of children who are in material deprivation and live in households where income is less than 70 per cent of median household income, BHC (the target is less than 5 per cent by 2020/21).
- **Persistent poverty:** The proportion of children living in households where income is less than 60 per cent of median household income, BHC, for at least three out of the last four years.

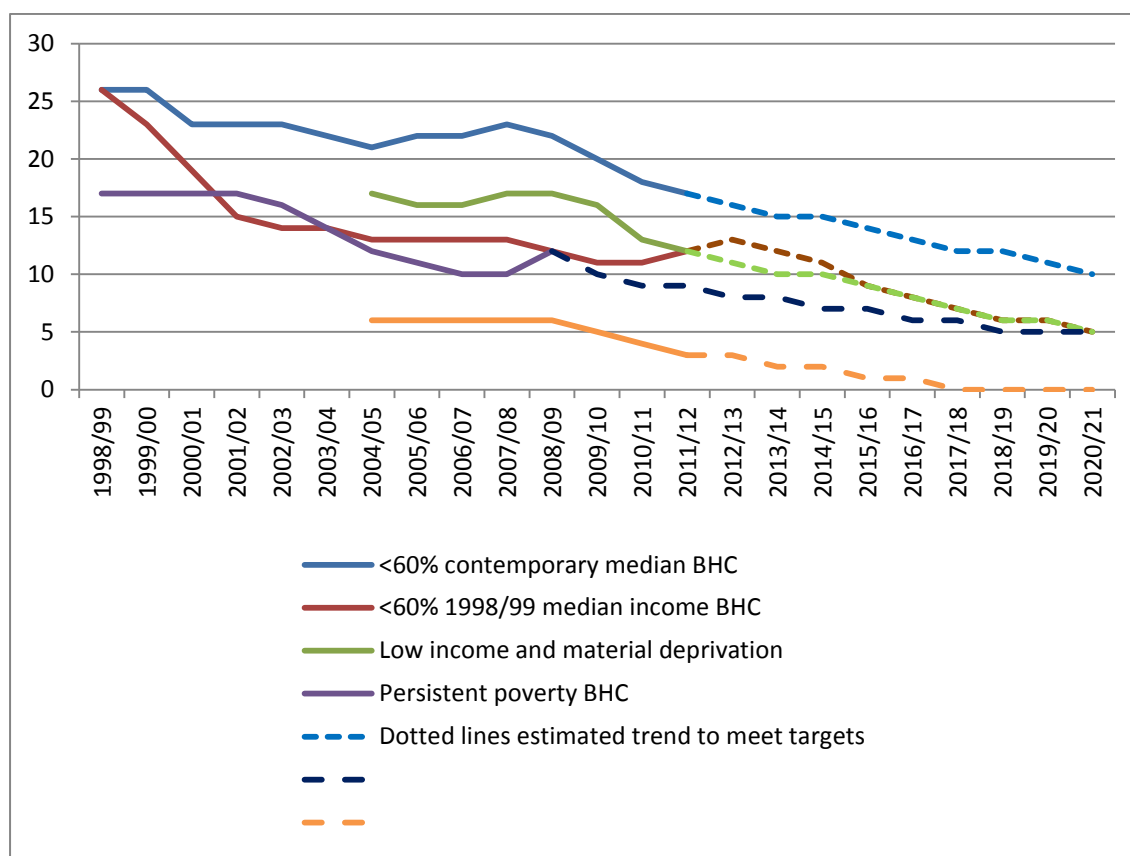
(HBAI 2013 p86)

The first of these figures (‘relative income’) is generally used and reported as the ‘headline’ indicator. The most up to date official statistics suggest that the national child poverty rate using the relative income measure is 17% (HBAI 2013 p102), equivalent to around 2.3 million children (*ibid* p104) in the UK. This figure is before housing costs (BHC) are taken into consideration. The figure after housing costs are taken into consideration (AHC) is 27%, approximately 3.5 million children.

Certain groups within the population are at greater risk of poverty than others. Children are at greater risk of living in poverty than working-age adults and pensioners in the UK. Other groups that are more likely to live in poverty include children from certain ethnic backgrounds (especially Pakistani and Bangladeshi families) (*ibid* p114), households with one or more disabled member (p93), households headed by lone parents (p92), workless households (p91) and families with three or more children (p93).

Figure 1, overleaf, highlights child poverty trends for the four measures of child poverty in the UK. The orange line relates to ‘Severe low income and material deprivation’, a fifth measure of child poverty included in the government’s child poverty strategy but not included in the Child Poverty Act.

Figure 1. Trends in child poverty in the UK



Source: Bradshaw and Bennett (2013)

Government response

As a result of the Child Poverty Act which became law in April 2010, governments in the UK have had to consider child poverty over the last five years. The Act requires the government to produce a UK child poverty strategy (the first of which was published in April 2011) and to establish an independent 'Child Poverty Commission' to oversee the government's progress on child poverty. The Act also requires local authorities to carry out a 'Child Poverty Needs Assessment' and to produce a local 'Child Poverty Strategy' for their area and a number of local authorities have set up local child poverty commissions to raise the awareness of the issue. There has also been a government consultation on a new measure of child poverty.

The first UK Government child poverty strategy was launched in April 2011 and was called 'A new approach to child poverty: tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming families lives' (DWP 2011). This 'new' approach sought to distance itself from the previous governments approach which was portrayed as being primarily about 'cash transfers' as a way of tackling poverty. The need for austerity measures, 'welfare dependency' and insufficient progress towards meeting the goal of eradicating poverty were highlighted as the reasons for this 'new' direction, which focused on work as the best route out of poverty. However, the previous Labour government's approach also focused on 'making work pay', as well as providing support to families with children and investing in children in the longer term (Dickens 2011 R9).

The current UK Government strategy places the emphasis on individuals and families who should 'work themselves out of poverty' and rewarding those who 'do the right thing, who take a full-time job' (DWP 2011 p3). The role of parents in supporting their children is also emphasized and in a chapter called 'Supporting family life and children's life chances' it is argued that 'What is needed is a much wider culture change towards recognising the importance of parenting.'(p38). This focus is emphasized by the statement that a 'core element' of the strategy includes 'turning around' the lives of the 120,000 families suffering 'multiple problems', despite these families representing a very small number of the total families living in or at risk of poverty. New ways of delivering and financing local services are also covered in the UK strategy, which was strongly criticized for a lack of new initiatives to tackle poverty and for not setting out *how* child poverty numbers would fall, and by *when* (CPAG 2011).

The independent child poverty commission was launched in 2012 as the 'Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission' following amendments under the Welfare Reform Act (2012). The addition of 'social mobility' to the responsibilities of the commission reflected the publication of a government strategy on improving social mobility in 2011 and the statement by Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, that "improving social mobility is the principal goal of the Coalition Government's social policy." (Cabinet Office 2011 p3)

The 'State of the Nation 2013' report by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission concluded that current levels of activity to reduce poverty and improve social mobility were not sufficient to combat the economic and fiscal 'headwinds' that the UK faces at the present time. The report states that "we are deeply concerned that a decade or more of reductions in child poverty could be coming to an end" (SMCPC 2013 p4).

The 'new' approach to tackling child poverty recently included a Government consultation on 'better measures of child poverty', which argues that measuring child poverty 'simply by income' (DWP 2013a p3) did not 'reflect the reality' of growing up in poverty in the UK. Iain Duncan Smith, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions wrote

***We need to think differently about child poverty.** It cannot be right that experiences so vital to childhood, like seeing a parent go out to work or growing up in a stable family, are not reflected in our understanding of child poverty. Only through a better representation of the reality of children's lives will we truly know how many children are in poverty in the UK.*
(DWP 2013a p1 - original emphasis)

The consultation itself was strongly criticised by a number of organisations and academics with one response arguing that the document was 'of very poor quality' and that

*"the main defect with the consultation document is that it is conceptually completely inept and confused in that it fails to recognise the fundamental distinction between **measures** of poverty and the **characteristics** of poor children and the **associations** and the **consequences** of poverty"* (PSE 2013 p2 – original emphases)

As well as income measures, which the government state they remain fully committed to, other potential measures for discussion in the consultation included: living in a workless household; living in a family with problem debt; living in poor housing or a troubled area; living in an unstable family

environment; attending a failing school; having parents without the skills they need to get on; and/or having parents who are in poor health.

The issue of in-work poverty, which accounts for around 66% of children living in poverty in the UK is largely ignored in both the child poverty strategy and the consultation. Within the wider welfare reforms taking place in the UK there exists the potential to extend conditionality within the welfare system to those who are in low-paid, part-time work. The intention is to 'encourage' individuals earning below a certain income threshold to work more hours or look for new or additional jobs to take them above the threshold, thereby reducing 'dependency' on the state.

In February 2014, the UK government launched a consultation for a new child poverty strategy (DWP 2014a) and also published an accompanying evidence review which focused exclusively on the 'key factors that make it harder for some families to get out of poverty and the key factors that make some poor children more likely to become poor adults' (DWP 2014b p5). The evidence review explicitly states that it does not consider issues such as the 'macroeconomic context, in terms of the number and quality of available jobs or the returns to qualifications', 'the impact of the institutional framework (e.g. the current educational system)' or 'the interaction between the benefits system and incentives to work' (*ibid* p12).

Policy direction & implementation

The previous Labour government in the UK did not produce an explicit child poverty strategy and this has led to them being accused of tackling poverty 'by stealth' (Stewart 2012 p12), although a target of halving child poverty by 2010 did exist. Few of their policies were therefore explicitly about tackling child poverty and, instead, many were part of wider programmes of work aimed at neighbourhood renewal and fostering social inclusion. However, the record of the previous government in tackling poverty has been examined closely since the change of government and a number of studies highlight the role of increases in government benefits in the reduction of child poverty.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) suggest that without tax and benefit reforms, child poverty would have increased by 900,000 children in the UK (IFS 2010 p30). The IFS argue that

"direct tax and benefit policy has a very strong influence on this measure of child poverty. It plays an important role in explaining at least three things: the large overall reduction in child poverty since 1998–99; the striking slowdown in progress towards the child poverty targets between 2004–05 and 2007–08; and some of the variation in child poverty trends between different groups of children." (p53)

The role of work has also been important and child poverty fell fastest in regions of the UK which saw parental employment increase the most (IFS 2010 p54). However, it has also been argued that work alone was not enough to lift people out of poverty and it was the combination of work and welfare reforms that saw child poverty fall. The increase of children growing up in poverty whilst living in working households and the relatively small impact of work in tackling child poverty suggests that the sorts of jobs that people living in poverty were moving into, were often not the kinds of jobs which provided an income sufficient to life families out of poverty. Temporary, low-

paid, low-skilled and often part-time jobs are a major obstacle to tackling child poverty in the UK (Shildrick *et al* 2012)

Dickens has used a 'decomposition methodology' to separate out the different elements of Labour's approach to tackling child poverty and again found that the "change in government benefits has been the big factor pushing down child poverty" (Dickens 2011 R15).

The role of longer term measures such as the introduction and subsequent expansion of a national Sure Start programme and the provision of free childcare to all 3 and 4 year olds has also been noted although it is difficult to estimate their impact thus far (Joyce & Sibieta 2013). It has also been recognised that a focus on families and pensioners has seen the issue of poverty amongst working age adults without children go largely unchecked. Joyce & Sibieta have suggested that this groups'

"continued decline in relative fortunes under Labour is largely a reflection of the fact that they were not favoured by tax and benefit reforms, which were the main mechanism by which Labour achieved its anti-poverty objectives" (2013 p200)

It is not yet possible to offer a verdict on the approach of the current UK government to tackling child poverty. The government strategy states that the introduction of Universal Credit (the key plank of the coalition's welfare reforms) will see 350,000 children moved out of poverty. However, the implementation of Universal Credit is the subject of some controversy at the present time and it appears unlikely that it will achieve the coverage initially envisaged in the given timescale. There are a number of other welfare reforms including the freezing of child benefit, the uprating of benefits by a different price index, the introduction of a 'spare room subsidy' (also known as the 'bedroom tax') for social housing tenants, new 'Work Capability Assessments' for people on certain disability benefits and an overall benefit 'cap' which look likely to reduce incomes for many people already living in or at risk of poverty. The IFS suggested in a report published in 2013 that

"relative child poverty is projected to increase by 6.0ppts between 2010–11 and 2020–21, reversing all of the reductions between 2000–01 and 2010–11. In 2020–21, child poverty is projected to be 23.5% and 27.2% using the relative and absolute low-income measures respectively, compared to targets of 10% and 5%. This translates to increases across the decade of 1.1 million in the number of children in poverty according to the relative low-income measure, and 1.4 million in the number of children in poverty according to the absolute low-income measure" (IFS 2013 pp2-3)

The report goes on to argue that it is the tax and benefit reforms introduced by the coalition government since April 2010 that is driving these projected increases.

As well as an explicit concern with tackling child poverty, the last government also adopted a 'think family' or 'whole family' approach (Morris *et al* 2008) to addressing a wide range of issues relating to children and young people such as educational underachievement and anti-social behaviour. These approaches encouraged practitioners and local policy-makers to work with the whole family when attempting to address the behaviour or outcomes of individuals within the family. A number of family support models were identified as being important elements of the effort to end child poverty. Some of these programmes are discussed in the next section.

'Family Support' programmes

Successive UK governments have identified 'family support' style programmes as key to helping to tackle child poverty. These programmes sought to address 'problematic' behaviours or perceived disadvantages within families. The diverse issues addressed by these programmes include Anti-Social Behaviour, young motherhood, literacy and numeracy and worklessness, with many of the programmes looking to work with families with multiple 'problems' or 'disadvantages'. The previous government used a number of centrally designed and locally delivered programmes to tackle child poverty and the current government have continued with some of these programmes whilst also developing their own approach.

The family support programmes that are reviewed have all been explicitly linked to or mentioned within the child poverty strategy in the UK. Two of the programmes (Child Poverty Pilots and Local Innovation Pilots) were linked to the development of the first child poverty strategy in the 2008 document *Ending Child poverty: everybody's business* (CPU 2008) and the remaining four programmes were all mentioned in the first UK government child poverty strategy (DWP 2011). Two programmes (Sure Start & Family Intervention Projects) were mentioned in both documents.

In all but one case, evaluations of the projects have been reviewed to understand the extent to which they have been successful, or otherwise, in tackling child poverty and associated issues. The most recently developed project – the *Troubled Families Programme* – has not been evaluated to date although findings are expected to be published by the end of 2014 and the government have been publishing progress information on a quarterly basis, following the establishment of the programme.

The programmes - considered in a broadly chronological order - in this section are:

- Sure Start Local Programmes
- Family Intervention Projects
- Child Poverty Pilots
- Local Authority Innovation Pilots
- Family Nurse Partnerships
- Troubled Families Programme

Two programmes (Local Authority Innovation Pilots and Child Poverty Pilots) were time-limited pilot projects and have not had initial funding continued by the current government. The remaining four programmes are still currently in operation, albeit in slightly different forms and with different target groups in some cases.

Other 'family support' style models exist, such as those used in the Parenting Early Intervention Projects (see Lindsay *et al* 2011) and have been delivered and, in some cases, evaluated in the UK. However, these approaches have been excluded where they have not been explicitly linked with the government's child poverty strategies. Similarly where evaluations of programmes do not exist, as is the case with Multisystemic Therapy in the UK, these approaches have also been excluded from this review. The focus of the report is what the evaluations of 'family support' programmes are able to tell us about their effectiveness as a tool for tackling child poverty.

Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs)

Summary - Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) aimed to support young children and their families by integrating early education, childcare, healthcare and family support services in disadvantaged areas. The programmes aimed to improve the health and well-being of families and young children, so that the children would have greater opportunities to do well at school and later in life.

Initially, families with pre-school children living in disadvantaged areas were the identified 'target group' for Sure Start programmes. This remit was then extended to all families with pre-school children. Nationally, millions of families will have participated in events, activities or classes organised by Sure Start programme and centres.

The SSLPs evolved into Sure Start Centres, which featured strongly in the design of the Child Poverty Pilots (see p12) and the governments' first child poverty strategy suggests that Sure Start should be 'targeting services at the most vulnerable families, and on the particular needs of their communities whilst maintaining a network of centres accessible to all families' (DWP 2011 p55). The strategy also notes that the funding for centres have been 'maintained' (*Ibid* p44) and that there will be 'more health visitors for Sure Start Children's Centres' (*Ibid* p63). The consultation on a new child poverty strategy does not mention Sure Start once and the term 'children's centres' is only mentioned in relation to the distribution of free books (DWP 2014a p38). Neither of the terms 'Sure Start' or 'children's centres' features in the accompanying evidence review (DWP 2014a).

Evaluation - Sure Starts have been subject to a number of different national evaluations, examining different areas of its work and impact. This section focuses primarily on the two most recently published elements of the evaluation – the impact of SSLPs on seven years olds and their families and an economic perspective of the work of SSLPs. A wide range of methods have been used to evaluate Sure Start programmes and centres. However, a number of different methodological issues have limited the ability of research reports to afford strong causal links between the Sure Start programmes and outcomes for children and families.

Results - The most recent national Sure Start evaluation published, which explores the impact on seven year olds and their families (NESS 2012), notes that mothers in SSLP area engaged in less harsh discipline and provided a more stimulating home learning environment for their children. In two other areas, positive effects were found for sub-populations: providing a less chaotic home environment for boys (not significant for girls) and; having better life satisfaction (lone parent and workless households only). Some evidence also suggests that some mothers in SSLP areas indicated a greater improvement in the home learning environment, a greater decrease in harsh discipline and greater improvement in life satisfaction than mothers in comparable non-SSLP areas.

A report providing an economic perspective on SSLPs (Meadows 2011) suggested that these programmes cost around £1300 per eligible child per year at 2009-10 prices and had delivered economic benefits of between £279 and £557 per eligible child by the time they had reached the age of five, primarily as a result of parents living in SSLP areas moving into paid work more quickly than parents in comparison areas. One potential source of negative economic impact identified related to mothers living in SSLP areas who reported higher rates of depression. None of the evaluations of Sure Start programmes have looked specifically at the issue of child poverty.

Family Intervention Projects (FIPs)

Summary – Family Intervention Projects (sometimes called Intensive Family Support Projects) involve intensive support from a single worker with a family identified as having multiple disadvantages or as being ‘troubled’ or ‘problematic’ in some way, usually through criminal and/or anti-social behaviour. FIPs are viewed as different to traditional multi-agency approaches to supporting families as they are reliant on an individual worker coordinating the work of different organisations and working directly with the family. Whilst the focus of FIPs has usually been on reducing crime and/or ASB, they were mentioned in the first government child poverty strategy and the previous government included Child Poverty FIPs as part of the Child Poverty Pilots (see page 13)

The target group is families that lead ‘chaotic lives’ and/or those who suffer from multiple disadvantages. Measures and indicators of success for FIPs are more likely to be around reduced anti-social behaviour, sustained housing tenancies and broader child related outcomes than about more direct measures of child poverty. The first ‘wave’ of FIPs worked with around 690 families between February and October 2007 this number has grown to a cumulative total of 10,747 by March 2012. The current use of FIPs and similar approaches extends to the 120,000 ‘troubled families’ highlighted above. Family Intervention Projects are not mentioned in either the consultation document (DWP 2014a) or the accompanying evidence review (DWP 2014b). The Troubled Families Programme (see p16), which builds on the FIP model, is mentioned in the consultation document for a new child poverty strategy.

Evaluations – A number of evaluations on FIPs have been carried out (see, for example, Nixon *et al* 2008, White *et al* 2008, Lloyd *et al* 2011). Much of this research draws on management information drawn from a monitoring system established by NatCen in 2007. Smaller scale qualitative work has also been carried out by individual, local FIPs. It is widely accepted that the evidence base is weakened as a result of no control groups, the lack of ‘independence’ of many of the evaluations and the relatively large amount of qualitative, case study type data which is heavily reliant on case worker perceptions. Separate health related (Boddy *et al* 2012) and ASB related (NCSR 2009) research projects have also been carried out.

Results - Results from national and local evaluations tend to suggest that families in FIPs have displayed considerable improvements in a number of areas such as crime, ASB, risk of eviction and one national evaluation notes that “outcomes for children and young people were also reported to have improved” (White *et al* 2008 p2). Evaluations have also tended to note the positive responses from families involved and the ‘cost-effectiveness’ of FIPs when compared with multiple agencies working with families exhibiting similar ‘problems’.

However, the most recent government evaluation relating to FIPs notes that whilst there is clear evidence that FIPs help to reduce crime and ASB, the evidence that FIPs could help reduce education and employment problems amongst families is not statistically significant. The authors also note that there is

*limited evidence that ASB FIPs generate better outcomes than other non-FIP interventions on family functioning or health issues, although FIPs do appear to be at least as effective as these alternatives (Lloyd *et al* 2011 p7).*

Child Poverty Pilots

Summary – In *Ending Child Poverty: everybody's business*, a strategy paper produced by the Child Poverty Unit, the government set out the need for localised approaches and delivery methods that accompanied national programmes. The report introduced the idea of Child Poverty Pilots and argued that

The Government needs to begin now, working with stakeholders, to develop a strategy for the next decade to reach the 2020 goal. In preparation for the strategy, the Government will undertake further research and establish new pilots and approaches that will inform and shape future policy (CPU, 2008, p.61).

A suite of nine Child Poverty Pilot programmes operated across England from 2008 until around 2011 with over a third of all local authorities involved in the delivery of the initiatives. The programme involved a wide variety of approaches including projects on: childcare affordability; child development grants; Family Intervention Projects (see p12); co-ordinated support for separating parents; Local Authority Innovation Pilots (see p14); HMRC outreach in children's centres; work focused services in children's centres; 'school gates' employment support; and supported housing for teenage parents.

As a result of the large number of projects that were operated and the different approaches taken to engaging participants, no detailed information about the total number of families and/or children involved in the projects is available.

Evaluation - An 'Interim Synthesis Report' was produced in 2011 (Evans & Gardiner 2011) which brings together lessons learnt from early implementation issues and early qualitative experience from providers and participants. A 'Final Synthesis Report' was never published.

The different approaches and aims of the pilots meant that a wide range of methodologies were used to evaluate the individual projects. However, the interim report focused on three broad areas: pilot participants, developing tailored, innovative and localized solutions and early outcomes, experiences and perceptions of pilot users.

Results - The evaluation was never completed but the interim synthesis report suggests that softer outcomes such as increased confidence and increased engagement with services were positive for a number of participants. The improved co-ordination amongst local partners working together on the pilots was also welcomed by participants. The interim synthesis report notes that its findings are based on small scale, locally-led initiatives, without any suitable comparison groups and so the evidence base was not particularly robust or well developed.

Local Authority Innovation Pilots (LAIPs)

Summary - The local authority child poverty innovation pilot (LAIP) was established by the government's Child Poverty Unit (CPU) in 2009 and ended in March 2011. The largest of a suite of pilot programmes (see p 13), the Innovation Pilot was established to trial locally appropriate and innovative approaches to provide local and national learning, whilst addressing at least one of the following themes:

- Increasing parental employment;
- Raising family income, including through the improved take up of tax credits and benefit, including local authority administered benefits;
- Narrowing the outcome gap between children in low income families and their peers;
- Promoting economic regeneration focused on families and tackling deprivation at a community wide level; and,
- Building the capacity of communities to tackle poverty.

The LAIPs aimed to work with 'Families and children living in poverty' with no other specific criteria identified, although different projects often worked with different groups such as lone parents, or workless households within this broad target group. No information is available on the number of families that took part in the LAIPs as the projects differed in their target groups, aims and approaches and therefore families participated in different ways.

Evaluation - the LAIPs were part of a national evaluation programme involving three 'synthesis reports' and a final evaluation. The evaluation was structured to provide a local evaluation to each of the ten unique local authority programmes, with the synthesis evaluation for CPU. A scoping exercise was undertaken to develop an evaluation plan for the local areas. This stage explored data protection issues and helped to develop local monitoring frameworks and a Common Outcomes Set which could be used to inform the national evaluation. The national evaluation comprised a number of different methods including: Monitoring and Outcome Data Analysis; Local Area Mapping; Qualitative fieldwork; and Cost-effectiveness Analysis

Results - The final report of the national evaluation does not describe the effectiveness or otherwise of the LAIPs in tackling child poverty in great detail. Individual LAIPs are described rather than analysed and, at a national level, the focus is primarily on 'learning' from the pilots. Therefore, more attention is paid to 'process' outcomes and 'clear messages of effective practice' (Mason *et al* 2011 p5) from the delivery of the pilots themselves rather than the outcomes for children and families. It is noted that there was a high 'demand' for the pilot projects, due, in part, to a perceived 'lack of broad and responsive provision' (*ibid* p4) for families. Learning linked to the government child poverty strategy theme of 'Supporting family life and children's life chances' highlights that parents can often 'lack confidence in provision' and that 'services therefore need to take a range of approaches to targeting and engaging parents' (*ibid* p5). Despite the Child Poverty Unit contributing £9.2 million towards the LAIPs, the final synthesis report suggests caution is exercised in interpreting the findings due to substantial methodological issues. Indeed, it states that

Gaps in output and outcome data for some pilots and some activities made it impossible to undertake a full analysis of the costs of outputs and outcomes delivered (Ibid p86).

Family Nurse Partnerships (FNPs)

Summary - The Family Nurse Partnership programme was originally developed in the USA, where it is called the Family Nurse Partnership. It is an 'evidence-based' nurse home visiting programme which is offered to first-time young mothers early in their pregnancy and the programme has the potential to continue until the child is 24 months old. There are according to a report by the Department of Health, three main aims: 'to improve maternal and child pregnancy outcomes, to improve child health and developmental outcomes, and to improve parent's economic self-sufficiency' (Barnes *et al* 2011 p13). The FNP programme is mentioned in the first government child poverty strategy where it is claimed that (DWP 2011 p38)

The family nurses build supportive relationships with families and guide first-time teenage parents so that they adopt healthier lifestyles for themselves and their babies, provide good care for their babies and plan their futures, helping them to overcome adverse life experiences" (DWP 2011 p38)

The FNPs follow a similar design to the FIPs by allocating a single worker to a family to offer intensive support and through strong supportive relationships between worker and client. Approximately 6000 families had participated in the FNP to January 2011, with a government programme to double this to 12,000 families by 2015. The only mention of the FNP model in the publications relating to a new government child poverty strategy is in an Annex on 'Vulnerable Groups', where a commitment is made to expand 'the Family Nurse Partnership programme to 16,000 places by 2015 to help support young first time parents' in a section detailing support for teenage parents. The FNP model does not feature in the evidence review accompanying the consultation.

Evaluation - The FNP was evaluated by a team of researchers from Birkbeck, University of London on behalf of the Department of Health (DoH) and the original Nurse Family Partnership was extensively evaluated in the USA. The DoH evaluation included interrogation of the FNP database, telephone interviews with clients and leavers of the programme, interviews with nurses and supervisors (who were also asked to keep detailed diaries for two weeks of the programme) and an in-depth study of the FNP in four locations.

Results - The DoH report (Barnes *et al* 2011) highlights a number of positive features of the FNP. Good use of birth control amongst participants was noted and educational qualifications and employment uptake were also positive findings, albeit on a small scale. Practitioners were positive about the parenting capacity of participating parents, who they believed were 'empowered and confident'. Outcomes for children suggest that they are generally making the development progress and displaying the types of behaviours associated with other children of similar ages. The report makes clear that:

The outcomes described cannot definitely be interpreted as resulting from the delivery of FNP since there are no comparable data for such a unique group in terms of their age and being first-time parents. Definitive answers will come from the RCT that is underway. (p10)

Despite one of the three 'main aims' of the FNP being 'to improve parent's economic self-sufficiency' (Barnes *et al* 2011 p13) no information is collected for this area. The word 'poverty' does not feature once in the 130 page document.

The Troubled Families Programme (TFP)

Summary - The Troubled Families Programme was established in the aftermath of the 2011 riots in English towns and cities. The aim of the programme is to 'turn round' the lives of the 120,000 most troubled and 'troublesome' families in the UK, by the end of the current Parliament in May 2015. Troubled families are defined nationally as those who commit crime and/or anti-social behaviour, whose children are not attending school, and where at least one adult is on out of work benefits. If a family meets all three of these criteria they are classified as a 'troubled family', although the figure of 120,000 originally came from research looking at the extent of multiple disadvantages and not 'problematic behaviours' (see Levitas 2012). Local authorities, who are tasked with implementing the programme can use 'local filter criteria' if a family meets two out of the three criteria. The TFP operates on a Payment-by-Results basis where local authorities 'claim' payments from central government once they have achieved certain milestones relating to the family's behaviour and/or labour market participation. The programme was voted the 'top government policy in a poll of local authority chief executive officers' in 2013 (DWP 2013b).

Turning round the lives of 120,000 families in England with 'multiple problems' was 'a core element' (DWP 2011 p39) of the first government child poverty strategy. The TFP is mentioned three times in the consultation for a new strategy on child poverty. Each time it is in the context of supporting families into work and 'increasing work expectations – e.g. 'help for families with multiple problems through the Troubled Families programme and increasing work expectations to ensure those who can work, do' (DWP 2014a p12). Despite the work with 'troubled families' being a 'core element' of the first child poverty strategy, the alleviation of poverty is not part of the Payment-by-Results framework and the word 'poverty' barely features in the government documents relating to the TFP.

Evaluation – an evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme has been commissioned but has not yet reported any findings. Initial findings are expected before the end of 2014. The Department for Communities and Local Government have published a report pulling together evidence and 'good practice' in working with families similar to 'troubled families', largely drawing on evaluations carried out on Family Intervention Projects. The lack of evaluation has not prevented Eric Pickles, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government who has also stated that 'it is a huge achievement to have turned so many around in such a short space of time' (DWP 2013c).

Results – local authorities have produced two sets of figures in relation to the numbers of families they are working with and have 'turned round'. The latest figures available, relating to local authority information at the end of September 2013 show that, of just over 22,000 families who had met the criteria for being 'turned round', only 1,430 (6.5%) had achieved the 'continuous employment' criteria. The scale of in-work poverty and underemployment in the UK today suggests that many of the families that have successfully found continuous employment will not have escaped poverty. Ruth Levitas has recently highlighted that in classifying this data as 'not official statistics', the data 'have not been assessed by *and are not subject to* the scrutiny of UKSA' (Levitas 2014 p5 original emphasis).

A DWP statistical release on job starts in the TFP states that as the analysis 'does not consider what would have happened in the absence of the Troubled Families programme. As such *employment starts observed cannot be directly attributed to interventions received through the Troubled Families programme*' (DWP 2014c p4 emphasis added).

Summary

The governmental emphasis on work as the best route out of poverty has ensured that the primary focus of poverty related policies in the UK has been on the role of paid employment, with parents going to work or looking for work or training, whilst children are at school or in some form of childcare. A number of policies or reforms have rewarded or incentivised this behaviour including the Child Tax Credits (CTCs) Working Family Tax Credits (WFTCs).

The provision of free nursery places to three and four year old children and the subsequent extension of this to the most disadvantaged 40% of two year olds, along with increased support and expectations for lone mothers looking to work or return to work are other examples of policies where the primary focus is on promoting, altering or improving the *economic* behaviour of parents, as opposed to their *parenting* behaviour, despite the latter also being a key part of the government's child poverty strategy. These reforms formed part of the previous governments approach to tackling poverty and there is strong evidence that they did a lot of the work in reducing child poverty under the previous government.

The focus on 'improving children's life chances' and 'supporting families' has led to the development of a number of schemes aimed at improving family life for those families and children living in poverty. The programmes which have been linked to the government child poverty strategy and have been evaluated have been discussed in this report. As well as being very different in many respects, the programmes also share a number of similarities. They tend to have the *improvement of parenting* as their main goal, implicitly locating the quality of parenting as a potential cause of poverty. Improvements or progression in other aspects of a parent's life, such as employment related skills or qualifications, are not as prominent.

Most of the programmes, many of which can demonstrate some encouraging findings, have benefitted from being funded centrally (and therefore also enjoying strong political support) but delivered locally. The programmes, however, also share some of the same shortcomings. Few of the projects explicitly sought to directly improve the material circumstances of families living in poverty in the short-term *as well as* improving the family/social circumstances. Some of the interventions have been primarily designed to address issues other than child poverty, such as perceived anti-social behaviour, poor 'outcomes' for children or young parenthood, for example. Whilst these issues can occur across the income spectrum, it can be acknowledged that there are some overlaps between these issues and risk factors associated with child poverty. It is, however, worth noting that the participation of families in some of the projects has been under threat of sanctions and often when they have reached 'crisis' point.

A number of the approaches have also been criticised in the UK for promoting the idea that behavioural issues and disadvantage can be resolved by focusing on issues *within* the family or by changing parenting practices and capacity. Family Intervention Projects were initially called Intensive Family Support Projects before central government 'rolled them out' nationally. The change in language suggests that not all aspects of these programmes are supportive and that it is issues *within* the family that require intervention. Where these programmes have attempted to support or encourage parents to (re)enter work, the results are unconvincing, at least in the short-term, suggesting that the family may not be the most appropriate site for interventions to tackle worklessness.

The evaluations of the programmes all suffer from the lack of robust long-term longitudinal studies or control groups that could help to measure – and perhaps explain - some of the outcomes the programmes aimed to achieve. Similarly, all of the programmes have suffered, to some extent, from the change in political direction following the election of a new government in the UK in 2010. One final evaluation was never published and it is unclear how some of the positive findings from some of the pilot programmes have been built upon or developed.

The ‘new’ approach to child poverty in the UK prioritises the role of work in lifting children out of poverty and the consultation on ‘better measures’ of child poverty include a number of individual (or parental) behaviours which might be *linked with* poverty, but are not known to be major *causes* of poverty. Statements in the government’s child poverty strategy around ‘supporting positive home environments’ and an appreciation of the role of good quality, stable housing have arguably not been translated directly into policy. The scale of new initiatives is also very small and potentially insignificant in comparison with the pace and scale of wider welfare reforms and cuts to public sector services taking place in the UK at the present time. Programmes to support families, including most of those discussed here, are very noticeable by their absence from both the government’s consultation document and the accompanying evidence review published in February 2014.

The evaluations considered here, then, do not offer any evidence that ‘family support’ programmes similar to those discussed should be key tools in the effort to eradicate child poverty, especially in comparison to the much stronger evidence around some of the benefit reforms enacted under the previous government. This is not to deny the importance of family support projects or services that help children and families more generally. Many families require the support of different agencies and government departments at different time in their lives and some families require more intensive support over a longer period than others. But this support, the evidence suggests, should not be viewed as an important way of tackling child poverty.

As well as the lack of evidence for any improvements in child poverty (or associated risks) as a result of the projects, the number of families requiring intensive support or suffering from multiple disadvantages at any one time is relatively small in comparison with the numbers of children living in poverty. The majority of families living in poverty, for example, do not commit crime or anti-social behaviour, are not headed by parents with problematic drug or alcohol use and do not exhibit ‘cultures of worklessness’. They therefore do not generally require ‘intervention’ in the ways proposed by some of the family support projects identified.

Intervening to address ‘problematic’ behaviours or family issues in the name of tackling child poverty pre-supposes that these issues are *causes* of poverty, despite a lack of evidence to suggest this is the case. In 1959, in response to the Younghusband report into the training of social workers, Barbara Wootton suggested that we looked at things differently:

Until we have abolished mental and physical illness, poverty and overcrowding, as well as such human frailties as jealousy and self-assertiveness, many of the problems presented [to social workers] are frankly insoluble. But they can often be alleviated, and most of them, it is worth noting, would be a lot more tolerable if those afflicted with them had a lot more money (Wootton 1959 p252).

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