

The State of the Evidence on Children's Care Event Guide

*A Better Care Network and CPC Learning Network Symposium
New York University Silver School of Social Work
September 24, 2014, 9am to 4pm*

Introduction

Over the last 30 years there has been a growing understanding of the critical importance of the family and a family environment for children in terms of their development and well-being. This realization is at the core of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* adopted in 1989, and more recently, of the *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* welcomed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2009.¹

A major body of empirical research in psychology, neuroscience, social work, and other disciplines has demonstrated the importance of investing in children's early years to support this critical period of child development.² Findings about the negative impact of emotional deprivation and institutionalization for younger children in Central and Eastern Europe have further reinforced the critical importance of parental care and a family environment.³ As a result, reforms of child protection and alternative care systems for children deprived of parental care, or at risk of being so, have been ongoing in virtually all regions of the world, with a particular focus on moving away from the use of residential care and strengthening the capacity of parents and families to care for their children.⁴

During the same period, the HIV/AIDS pandemic served to focus the attention of policymakers and researchers in the humanitarian aid and development communities on the importance of family care in the context of stresses and emergencies. In many settings, the pandemic had a devastating impact on children's care situations and on their well-being and development. In high-prevalence countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the numbers of parental deaths spiraled upward, leading to high percentages of children being left in the care of extended families or communities, in child-headed households or in the hands of barely functioning alternative care systems, particularly residential care facilities.⁵ As a growing body of evidence was gathered and programmes deployed to respond to the AIDS crisis, it also became clear that other factors beyond parental

¹ UN General Assembly, *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*: resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 24 February 2010, (A/RES/64/142). Available at: <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/docs/Guidelines-English.pdf>

² National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2000) *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, eds. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

³ For a review of the evidence, see for example Williamson, J, & Greenberg, A. (2010). Families, not orphanages. (Better Care Network, working paper). Retrieved from <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/docs/Families%20Not%20Orphanages.pdf>; Browne, K. (2009). The Risk of Harm to Young Children in Institutional Care. Better Care Network and Save the Children Working Paper. Retrieved from http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/docs/The_Risk_of_Harm.pdf; Csaky (2009) Keeping Children Out of harmful institutions, Save the Children UK. Retrieved from <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/details.asp?id=21471&themeID=1003&topicID=1023>

⁴ For documentation of these reforms, go to Better Care Network online Library of Documents at: www.bettercarenetwork.org

⁵ Children on the Brink 2004: A Joint Report of New Orphan Estimates and a Framework for Action UNAIDS, UNICEF and USAID Retrieved at <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/details.asp?id=9519&themeID=1001&topicID=1006> See also UNICEF (2011), Taking Evidence to Impact: Making a Difference for Vulnerable Children Living in a World with HIV and AIDS. Retrieved at http://www.unicef.org/media/files/TAKING_EVIDENCE_TO_IMPACT_FINAL.pdf

death were affecting children's care situations and their well-being outcomes. Research findings in a range of countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, for example, highlighted that while 'orphanhood' was a key indicator of child vulnerability, other factors seemed to play an even greater role in terms of child well-being and development, including household poverty but also gender.⁶ Furthermore a range of mostly qualitative studies has deepened our understanding of the diversity of children's care arrangements and living situations in both emergency and non-emergency contexts, including in countries with low HIV prevalence. In particular, there has been increasing recognition of the critical role informal care plays in a range of contexts, and the need to understand this better to inform social policies and programmes targeted at particularly vulnerable children and their caregivers.⁷

Symposium agenda

The one-day symposium agenda, which will be held at the Silver School of Social Work at New York University, will be the following:

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 8:30am to 9:00am | Registration |
| 9:00am to 9:15am | Overview of the symposium |
| 9:15am to 10:45am | Panel 1 – Measuring trends in families and children's care and living arrangements |
| 10:45am to 11:00am | Break |
| 11:00am to 12:30pm | Panel 2 – Measuring the impact of family strengthening and prevention of separation interventions |
| 12:30pm to 1:30pm | Lunch |
| 1:30pm to 3:00pm | Panel 3 – Measuring situations and outcomes concerning children outside of family care and children in alternative care arrangements |
| 3:00pm to 4:00pm | Discussion about the path forward for additional research |

Objectives of the symposium

Co-convened by the [Better Care Network](#) and the [CPC Learning Network](#), the symposium will bring together a number of leading academics, policy makers and practitioners involved in the development or implementation of key initiatives to better measure issues of children's care at country, regional or international levels. Through presentations of some of the initiatives and discussions about the approaches chosen and remaining challenges, the symposium will provide an important opportunity for collaboration and learning across initiatives. The symposium will help those working to strengthen care for children to develop a more informed and cohesive picture of the research agenda on this critical aspect of children's protection and well-being. Taken

⁶ Campbell, P., Handa, S., Moroni, M., Odongo, S. and Palermo, T. (2010) 'Assessing the "orphan effect" in determining development outcomes for children in 11 eastern and southern African countries', *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, 5: 1, 12 — 32

⁷ Roby, J (2011) Children in Informal Alternative Care. Discussion paper. UNICEF, New York. Retrieved at <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/details.asp?id=25477&themeID=1002&topicID=1013>

together, the symposium's presentations and ensuing discussions will represent some of the most recent learning on children's care issues, and the organizers will hope to collate the symposium's proceedings in a special issue of a relevant academic journal.

The symposium topics will be clustered around three specific areas of issues related to children's care:

- Efforts to measure trends in families and children's care and living arrangements;
- Initiatives to measure the impact of policies and programs to strengthen families and to ensure children's ability to be raised in a family environment; and
- Measurement of situations and outcomes concerning children outside of family care and children in alternative care arrangements.

This symposium is the third in a three-part series organized by the CPC Learning Network entitled "Measuring the Unmeasurable: Building the Evidence Necessary for Effective Child Protection and Family Welfare Policies and Programs." The goal of this series is to create a forum for sharing what researchers are collectively learning about measuring complex topics related to global child protection and social welfare. Emphasis has been placed on encouraging dialogue among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers working domestically and those working on international issues.⁸

Panel 1 – 9:15am to 10:45am

1) Measuring trends in families and children's care and living arrangements

Better understanding the situations of children who are 'care vulnerable', including children at risk of child-family separation, as well as those already outside of family care, has become crucial for all countries seeking to strengthen their responses and systems for children facing a range of care and protection risks. Data on trends on family composition and children's living and care arrangements are routinely used in high income countries to inform policies targeted at particularly vulnerable families, with the clear aim of strengthening parental capacity and addressing risk factors associated with child-family separation and loss of family care.⁹ A number of organizations working to support reforms of child care and protection systems in low and middle income countries have highlighted the potential for more systematic mining of existing household level data sets, particularly from *Demographic and Health Surveys* (DHS) and *Multiple Indicators Cluster Surveys* (MICS), to provide a better picture of the patterns and trends relating to children in households who are not living with a biological parent.¹⁰ Other important initiatives, such as Child Trends' *World Family Map* Project are demonstrating the potential of using internationally comparative data to map trends in family structures, family processes and culture and explore the links between these indicators and certain outcomes of child well-being.¹¹

⁸ The themes of the first two sessions were measuring violence against children and efforts to prevent and reduce violence against children (held in October 2013; videorecording available [here](#)) and measuring issues related to the social service workforce (held in February 2014 in conjunction with the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance; video recordings available [here](#) and [here](#)).

⁹ See for example, OECD Family Database: <http://www.oecd.org/social/soc/oecdfamilydatabase.htm>

¹⁰ See for examples, Family For Every Child and INTRAC (2012) Context for Children and Policy situation paper, Roby (2011) Children in Informal Alternative Care, UNICEF; Child Frontiers (2012) Family support services and alternative care in Sub-Saharan Africa: Background paper; Better Care Network (2013) Analysis of DHS data (Ghana, Liberia, Rwanda, Jordan, Sierra Leone); Save the Children (2013). Save the Children Research Initiative: Understanding and Improving Informal Alternative Care Mechanisms to increase the care and protection of children, with a focus on Kinship care in West Central Africa.

¹¹ Child Trends (2013) World Family Map: Mapping Family Change and Child Well-Being Outcomes <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/details.asp?id=30279&themeID=1001&topicID=1011>

This panel will be moderated by **Mark Canavera**, associate director of the CPC Learning Network. The panelists will be:

- **Mindy Scott**, senior research scientist at Child Trends, speaking about the World Family Map project;
- **Florence Martin**, senior policy and knowledge management adviser at the Better Care Network, speaking about the use of DHS and MICS, including family care indicators; and
- **Mónica Ruiz-Casares**, assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry and at the Centre for Research on Children and Families at McGill University, speaking about a Knowledge Attitudes Practice (KAP) survey in Liberia and a study of informal care in Laos

Panel 2 – 11:00am to 12:30pm

2) Measuring the impact of family strengthening and prevention of separation interventions

Beyond understanding trends in family composition and living arrangements, and how these relate to child well-being outcomes, there is also a growing body of research seeking to measure the impact of interventions targeted at vulnerable families to strengthen their capacity to care for their children, prevent unnecessary separation, and to provide appropriate alternative care when a child's best interest is not to remain in the care of his/her family.

Care reforms have been informed by research that has shown that the vast majority of children in residential care are not placed there because care is genuinely needed or that they are without parental or family care, but rather because their families are facing a range of challenges in their capacity to care, including poverty, lack of access to social services, discrimination and social exclusion, as well as a result of personal or social crises and emergencies.¹² As a result, governments and other stakeholders in these reform processes have recognized that a major focus of this shift away from the use of residential care for children is not simply about reducing the numbers of institutions and removing children from there, but also about establishing better preventive and family support services to reduce child-family separation and stop children going into alternative care in the first place.

Family strengthening interventions through both financial and psycho-social interventions are increasingly being developed and tested in a range of country contexts and situations, including low and middle income countries.¹³ There are important efforts to understand and measure the impact of household level economic strengthening interventions on what works to strengthen the economic capacity of families to withstand shocks and stresses, as well as address the impact of chronic poverty and inequity on their ability to access basic social services, in particular education. Whether through targeted or universal social transfers, the extent to which these interventions effectively act to prevent unnecessary child-family separation, and support children's care in their families has important implications for child and family

¹² Williamson, J. & Greenberg, A. (2010). Families, not orphanages. (Better Care Network, working paper). Retrieved from <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/details.asp?id=23328&themeID=1003&topicID=1023>;

¹³ See for examples, Knerr, W., Gardner, F., Cluver, C. (2014). Improving Positive Parenting Skills and Reducing Harsh and Abusive Parenting in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review. *Prevention Science*, Volume 14, Issue 4, pp 352-363. Retrieved at <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/details.asp?id=32349&themeID=1000&topicID=1000>;

centered social policies.¹⁴ What approaches are being used to measuring the impact of these interventions in a range of contexts, what are we learning and what are the challenges?

This panel will be moderated by **Mary McKay**, director of the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research and professor of social work at New York University (to be confirmed). The panelists will include:

- **Jeannie Annan**, director of research and evaluation at the International Rescue Committee, presenting the results of several evaluations of parenting programs (Liberia, Burundi, Thailand);
- **Deborah Daro**, senior research fellow at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, speaking about effective prevention programs, including home visitation, in the United States; and
- **Andrew Muriuki**, University of Wisconsin researcher, presenting a study on the effectiveness of a community caregiver model in Côte d'Ivoire.

Panel 3 – 1:30pm to 3:00pm

3) *Measuring situations and outcomes concerning children outside of family care and children in alternative care arrangements*

Implementation of international standards for children's care, including the *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, is shaping reforms of care and protection systems across all regions. Under these standards, States have the responsibility to support parents and caregivers in their child-rearing roles but also to oversee and ensure the provision of a range of alternative care options, prioritizing family based ones.¹⁵ How are States measuring up to these responsibilities, and how can progress towards the implementation of these guidelines be assessed and monitored? Data on children in alternative care in low and middle income countries is notoriously poor, with weak information management systems and ineffective regulatory systems, a reality which means that children's placements in alternative care are rarely recorded and a significant proportion of alternative care providers, particularly residential facilities, are unregistered and unknown to and unsupervised by the authorities. In some countries, major efforts are underway to strengthen these systems and support better information and understanding of the numbers and situations of children in alternative care.

A range of actors are working at the global, regional and national levels to support the implementation of international and national standards for children's care and are collaborating to ensure appropriate national level indicators, tools and information management systems are available to gauge progress and encourage learning across countries and regions.¹⁶ An inter-agency working group led by Better Care Network and

¹⁴ See for example Reinsch Sinclair, M., Carmichael, J., Diener, O., Rutherford D. (2013) Why Measuring Child Level Impacts can Help Achieve Lasting Economic Change. USAID, CPC, Women's Refugee Commission, Fhi 360. Retrieved at <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/details.asp?id=32355&themeID=1001&topicID=1008>;
See also Barrientos, A., Byrne, J., Villa, J.M., Peña, P. (2013) Social Transfers and Child Protection, UNICEF. Retrieved at <http://bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/details.asp?id=31561&themeID=1001&topicID=1009>;
Oxford Policy Management (2013) External Evaluation of the BOTAF Foundation's Social Sector Programmes in Kazakhstan. Retrieved at <http://bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/details.asp?id=31562&themeID=1001&topicID=1009>

¹⁵ See for examples, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 7 (the right to know and be cared for by parents), Article 9 (the right not to be separated from parents unless when in the child's best interest), Article 18 (State's duty to support parents in their responsibility to secure children's upbringing) and Article 20 (the State's obligation to protect children deprived of their family environment), among others, and Sections II.A and IV. A. of the Alternative Care Guidelines.

¹⁶ See for examples, Better Care Network and UNICEF (2009) *Manual for the Measurement of Indicators for Children in Formal Care*. Retrieved at <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/FormalCareIndicators.asp>; Cantwell, N.; Davidson, J.; Elsley, S.; Milligan, I.; Quinn, N. (2012). *Moving Forward: Implementing the 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children'*. UK:

Save the Children, supported by the Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children In Scotland (CELCIS), is developing an interactive tool to track and monitor country level implementation of the *Guidelines*. How are these initiatives enabling countries to measure progress, enabling them to review the extent to which their care systems are compliant with international standards, and providing them with effective directions to bridge the gaps identified?

Important initiatives are underway to improve the enumeration of children at risk of separation as well as those who are outside of family care, notably the US Government's *Action Plan on Children in Adversity*. There are significant inter-agency collaborations involving such US Government agencies as USAID and PEPFAR, United Nations agencies such as UNICEF and UNHCR, and civil society organizations and coalitions (such as the Better Care Network, Save the Children, IRC, CPC Network, among many others).¹⁷ New research methodologies and approaches are being developed and tested to support better quantitative as well as qualitative data collection to inform monitoring and evaluation of programmes implemented by both national and international agencies.

John Williamson, Senior Technical Advisor, Displaced Children and Orphans Fund, USAID, will moderate this panel, which will bring together:

- **Fred Wolczyn**, senior research fellow at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, presenting learning about the foster care system in the United States;
- **Lindsay Stark**, assistant professor at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University and director of the CPC Learning Network, sharing learning about efforts to enumerate the number of children outside of family care in Cambodia and the Democratic Republic of Congo; and
- **Joan Townsend**, U.S. Country Director at Retrak, speaking about efforts to measure the wellbeing of street-connected children who are reintegrated.

About BCN and CPC

The **Better Care Network (BCN)** is recognized as the preeminent information hub and global convener to influence action for children without adequate family care. Established in 2003 in recognition of the urgent need for concerted action in this field, BCN is an interagency initiative¹⁸, which addresses the ongoing need for exchange and collaboration by identifying, distilling, and linking essential information with the people who need it. BCN helps agencies identify relevant expertise and engages in evidence-based advocacy. BCN is also helping to shape a global agenda for targeted research to expand and improve the empirical basis for informed action. Its website holds the largest online collection of key research, tools, events and other documentation on issues related to strengthening family care and alternative care, designed to support academics, policymakers and practitioners alike. Its newsletter reaches over 3,500 network members in 152 countries.

Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland. Retrieved at http://bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/details_news.asp?id=30450&themeID=1001&topicID=1007

¹⁷ For example, two inter-agency working groups are currently developing methodologies to estimate the number of children who are separated or outside of family care, in both emergencies and development contexts.

¹⁸ BCN operates under the direction of a Steering Committee that includes the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF) and the Africa Bureau for Sustainable Development of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Save the Children, Family For Every Child, RELAF, and has an Advisory Board of over 40 agencies working at national, regional, and international levels to strengthen family care and ensure the provision of appropriate alternative care for children. For further information see: www.bettercarenetwork.org

The Child Protection in Crisis Learning Network (CPC Learning Network) is an inter-agency, multi-country initiative that seeks to build the evidence base to strengthen and systematize child care and protection. Established in 2008, the CPC Learning Network has established an international network of multi-disciplinary researchers across the global North and South, who have come together with practitioners and policymakers to develop innovative research methods to better measure child protection and care. Since its inception, the CPC Learning Network has worked in over 30 countries, including six priority countries (Colombia, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia). The CPC Learning Network's Secretariat, housed within the Department of Population and Family Health at Columbia University's School of Public Health, operates under the auspices of a global Steering Committee. The CPC Learning Network also operates through thematic task forces that focus on the following issues: measurement and assessment of child protection and care; livelihoods and economic strengthening; strengthening child protection systems through emergency responses; and engaging Southern universities.