

OUTCOMES AND QUALITY OF SOCIAL CARE SERVICES FOR CARERS

PSSRU

Outline of a research project funded by Kent County Council and the Department of Health

Ann Netten, Jacquetta Holder and Nick Smith

P69/August 2007

BACKGROUND

A large number of people, an estimated 5.2 million people in 2001, provide unpaid care to support family, friends and neighbours. Government policy has increasingly recognized the role that informal carers play in helping vulnerable people live in the community. However, the national data that is collected about carers, and services to carers, remains relatively limited. Social care services for carers include:

- breaks (including day care at home or residential care for the cared for person)
- information and advice, and
- other services that support the carer in their caring role and help them to maintain their own health and well-being.

Kent County Council (KCC) plans to conduct a survey to establish how carers feel about social care services and support, with a view to being able to monitor whether their policies improve life for carers over time.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the outcomes and quality of social care services and support for carers. Much of the research that has looked at, or included, carers has focused on the effects of caring on people's lives. Looking at carers' outcomes from services is a relatively new area of focus, both nationally and locally. It is important to be able to identify the benefits of support and services for carers, and to develop methods for assessing outcomes.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The overarching aim of the project is to explore the outcomes and quality of social care services and support for carers, and to identify the context factors that influence quality. The main objectives of the research are to:

- Identify the types of social care services and support currently experienced by carers
- Identify what carers want from services and support, especially the ways in which they might make a difference to their lives
- Explore what good quality services and support for carers should be like
- Consider the differences and similarities among carers as a group (to inform the sampling and design of future surveys)
- Develop questions for a self-completion questionnaire that reflects carers' experiences of caring and support in that process.

METHOD

The first exploratory stage of the study will focus on identifying carers' needs, wants and views of quality and support for carers. It will include:

- a literature review
- group interviews with carers, and
- interviews with key stakeholders.

We plan to involve adult carers, young carers and children (of secondary school age) who are carers.

In the second stage of the study, findings from this exploratory work will be used to develop survey questions about carers' experiences of services. The questionnaire design process will include a series of cognitive interviews with carers to test and improve the wording and objectives of the questions. The survey will draw on an approach to measuring quality and outcomes developed by the PSSRU in relation to older people, younger adults with physical and sensory impairments, and users of equipment services.

The research team will consult a Steering Group, including carers and representatives from carer support organisations, about the research aims, study design, composition of focus groups, informed consent, and how best to support carer involvement and participation in the study.

TIMETABLE AND OUTPUTS

The research findings will be used to design a survey of carers' experience of services and support for use by Kent County Council. Participation in the study will help to make sure that this carers survey draws on and reflects carers' experiences and views.

The focus group and stakeholder interviews and literature review will be carried out in autumn of 2007. The questionnaire design and testing phase will start in January. The findings on carers' needs and outcomes, based on the focus group and stakeholder interviews, will be reported to Kent County Council and the Department of Health in Summer 2008. Any article(s) for peer review journals and presentations at conferences would be based on these reports. A summary of the findings will be made publicly available on the PSSRU website and sent to research participants.

RESEARCH TEAM

Ann Netten – tel. 01227 823644; email A.P.Netten@kent.ac.uk
Jacquetta (Ketta) Holder – tel. 01227 827587; email J.M.Holder@kent.ac.uk
Nick Smith – tel. 01227 827552; email N.J.Smith@kent.ac.uk

If you are interested in the type of work the research unit is involved in and the results of our previous work please visit our website at www.pssru.ac.uk

The **PERSONAL SOCIAL SERVICES RESEARCH UNIT** undertakes social and health care research, supported mainly by the Department of Health, and focusing particularly on policy research and analysis of equity and efficiency in community care, long-term care and related areas — including services for elderly people, people with mental health problems and children in care. Views expressed in PSSRU publications do not necessarily reflect those of funding organisations. The PSSRU was established at the University of Kent at Canterbury in 1974, and from 1996 it has operated from three branches:

University of Kent, Cornwallis Building, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7NF
London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London, WC2A 2AE
University of Manchester, First Floor, Dover Street Building, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL

The PSSRU Bulletin is available free from the librarian at Kent (01227 827773; email pssru_library@kent.ac.uk) and on the PSSRU website.