

**Separation and Reunification of Looked after Children with their birth  
families in the United Kingdom**

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### List of Abbreviations

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| BAAF     | British Association for Adoption and Fostering                               |
| CASP     | Critical Appraisal Skills Programme  |
| CCAT     | Crowe Critical Appraisal Tool  |
| CI       | Confidence Interval  |
| DfE      | Department for Education   |
| IPA      | Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis                                     |
| IWM      | Internal Working Model   |
| JRF      | Joseph Rowntree Foundation   |
| LA       | Local Authority  |
| LAC      | Looked after children  |
| NI       | Northern Ireland   |
| NICE     | The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence                        |
| NSPCC    | National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children                   |
| Ofsted   | The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills        |
| PRISMA   | Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses           |
| PRISMA-P | Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses Protocols |
| UK       | United Kingdom   |

## Thesis Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to provide an understanding of separation and reunification of looked after children with their birth families following a period of local authority care. Children are taken into care for a variety of reasons and at different rates across the country. In March 2016, there were 70,440 looked after children in England which represents 60 children per 10,000 of the population. As the majority of looked after children are placed in foster care they are often separated from their birth families, including siblings. By placing children in care local authorities aim to protect children from further harm and the goal is often reunification with families wherever possible. However, evidence from reunification studies suggests that this may be the least successful permanence option. A review of the literature regarding reunification of looked after children with their birth families in the UK was conducted and eight articles were identified, critically appraised and synthesised. Two analytic themes centred on lack of guidance and risks associated with return. The majority of looked after children who returned home experienced failed returns and re-entered local authority care. This review highlighted the lack of research exploring children's perspectives on their experience of being in care. In response to this gap in the literature, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to explore the experience of looked after children placed in care who had siblings who remained in the family home. This analysis resulted in the following themes: self-concept, family dynamics and survival strategies. These findings are important for understanding the impact of separation on individuals and their relationships with others. The themes are considered in relation to psychological theory, implications and directions for future research are discussed. A reflective commentary described the experience of completing this thesis with emphasis on attachment theory.

**Paper 1: Literature Review**

**Reunification of looked after children with their birth parents in the  
United Kingdom: A literature review and thematic synthesis**

**Target Journal:** Child and Family Social Work (Author guidelines can be found in Appendix L)

## Abstract

**Background:** Reunification is the most common route to permanency for looked after children in the UK (Department for Education, 2016).

Previous research, mainly American studies, suggests numerous factors that contribute to successful reunification outcomes. However, given the differences in social care and government policy generalisability to the UK is limited.

**Objective:** To develop a greater understanding of current literature concerned with the reunification of looked after children with their birth parents in the UK.

**Methods:** A systematic search of the literature sought published, peer-reviewed studies conducted between 2005 and 2017 exploring reunification practice in the UK. Studies were critically appraised and thematically synthesised according to the Thomas and Harding (2008) approach.

**Results:** Eight articles met eligibility criteria. Descriptive themes were: support, case management, oscillation, parenting and reoccurrence of abuse. Analytic themes were lack of guidance and risks associated with return.

**Conclusions:** A pattern of oscillation between home and care was common for many looked after children and findings indicated that remaining in care produced relatively better outcomes. Difficulties arise when comparing studies on reunification as they often vary in methodology. Further research is needed to explore in detail the perspectives of those involved, specifically the children themselves. Studying reunification from a strengths and resiliency perspective would also be beneficial.

**Keywords:** looked after children, birth parents, reunification, United Kingdom

## Introduction

The Children Act 1989 was introduced to reform and clarify the existing body of law, it is a unifying piece of legislation which deals with the welfare of children. The act concerns the provision of local authority (LA) services for children and families. It specifies how LAs should carry out their responsibilities in relation to care planning, placement and case review for looked after children (LAC) with a primary duty to safeguard and promote their welfare (Department for Education [DfE], 2015a). A key principle of the 1989 Act is that children are best looked after by their birth families which is reflected in the concept of parental responsibility and the LA duty to return LAC to their families unless this is not in their interests. This principle led to an emphasis on reunification of LAC with their birth parents within social work policy and practice within the UK. However, despite reunification being a key area of practice there has been limited research focussed throughout on this topic and the impact on children's stability and wellbeing within the UK since the Act was introduced.

The current reunification policy drivers for England are outlined within the Improving Permanence for Looked after Children Data Pack (DfE, 2013) and Working Together to Safeguard Children (DfE, 2015b). The DfE (2016) recorded 70,440 LAC on 31 March 2016 an increase of 5% compared to 2012. There were 31,710 children who ceased to be looked after in 2016 with 10,880 (34%) returning home to their parents or relatives, which made this the most common outcome for LAC in England. However, there is growing evidence that reunification is the least successful permanence option (Biehal, 2007; Kimberlin *et al.*, 2009; Thoburn, 2009). Given the number of children currently in care and the likelihood that many will return home to their families it is of paramount importance that those working within this area understand the current research context.

The following definition of reunification was provided by the DfE in 2013:

A child is recorded as returning home from an episode of care if he or she ceases to be looked after by returning to live with parents or

another person who has parental responsibility. This includes a child who returns to live with their adoptive parents but does not include a child who becomes the subject of an adoption order for the first time, or a child who becomes the subject of a residence or special guardianship order. (DfE, 2013, p.27)

This definition does not include children whose looked after status did not cease immediately upon return home from care (i.e., those who remained on a care order, DfE, 2015a). For the purpose of this review, reunification is defined as a child returning to a parent(s) whom the child was living with when removed or when the child is returned to another parent.

Reunification of children with adoptive parents will not be considered in this review.

Since the introduction of the Children Act 1989 the threshold criteria for children coming into care were raised and consequently children became less likely to be admitted for less serious reasons, such as due to short-term family crises. Child abuse scandals are often used as vehicles for bringing about major policy changes, for example Every Child Matters (ECM) following the death of Victoria Climbié and The Conservative Party's claims of 'broken society' following the case of Baby P. During the 1990s – 2008 child protection policy was focussed on keeping families together through prevention and family support. Every Child Matters was introduced to improve outcomes for all children and narrow the gap between those who did well and those who did not. However, significant changes in policy were introduced by the Conservative-led Coalition Government in 2010. Conservative's argued that the previous Labour government's focus on keeping families together was prioritised to the detriment of children's development. The emphasis now is on early separation of children and timely placement for adoption (DfE, 2011). Working Together to Safeguard Children (DfE, 2015b) was reduced in length from 399 to 95 pages and there was no reference to the ECM. These policies are being delivered alongside austerity measures that have hit those in need most (Browne, 2012). Researchers suggest that the

nature and scale of child maltreatment in the UK is much greater than we are prepared to admit, with prevalence rates estimated at ten times greater than the number of cases ever referred (Parton, 2014). There is a need for the policy of 'no delay' in decision making and permanency planning to be balanced against promoting each child's right to be cared for by their parents wherever possible (Murphy & Fairtlough, 2015).

Research evidence suggests that achieving timely reunification while preventing re-entry into LA care can have many benefits. Firstly, research suggests LAC do less well in school than their peers whereas children raised in a stable family environment can thrive (Jones-Harden, 2004). Researchers have found that family stability can have positive effects on children's health (Craigie *et al.*, 2012), academic achievement (Carlson & Corocran, 2001), social skills and emotional functioning (Jones-Harden, 2004).

Secondly, successful reunification may prevent multiple out-of-home placements which will lead to greater stability and child wellbeing. Social stress theory (George, 1993) suggests that changes in family structure are usually accompanied by changes in socioeconomic factors. This leads to increased stress on families which then affects a parent's capacity and can subsequently lead to adverse child wellbeing (George, 1989). For children who experience multiple changes over a short period of time the stress is cumulative and they are at greater risk for negative outcomes than children who experience a single stressor or no stressors at all (Rutter, 1983).

Finally, there are many cost benefits for LAs and Government by reducing the number of LAC. In the 2013-14 financial year £2.5bn was spent supporting children in foster and residential care (Zayed & Harker, 2015). The number of children in care is at its highest level for 20 years which is attributed to a rapid rise in the number of children placed in care following the 'Baby P' case in 2007 (National Audit Office, 2014). By achieving successful reunification LAs can avoid the costs of placement breakdown and subsequent placement costs, the estimated cost of failed returns is £300 million per year (National Audit Office, 2014). Children in care are also more likely to experience difficulties later in life which can have a wider systemic impact and lead to further costs for LAs. Thus,

investing more in pre-return support may be costlier in the short term however in the long-term savings could be achieved through more successful reunifications (DfE, 2013).

Previous research in this area, largely conducted in America, has focussed on the factors associated with reunification outcomes. Several variables have been identified as predicting successful reunification outcomes: age of child, parental factors (such as drug misuse or mental health difficulties), length of placement, number of placements, reasons for placement, child characteristics, level of family contact whilst in care and number of previous care episodes (Thoburn, 2009). The danger of oscillation between home and care is highlighted throughout this reunification literature. Boddy *et al.* (2008) found over 40% of children who re-entered care after a period of reunification had three or more previous periods in the care system. This creates further instability and insecurity for children. Often young children who have had many periods in care have inadequate attachment relationships (Rees, 2006). Ward *et al.* (2006) reported over 25% of children in their sample had experienced at least three moves prior to their first birthday, which is potentially four or more carers in the first year of life. Early attachment is crucial and inadequacy can have a profound, wide-ranging and lifelong impact (Thompson, 2008) and lead to intergenerational transmission of insecurity (de Wolff & van Ijzendoorn, 1997).

### **Rationale for this Review**

There are no known systematic reviews on LAC and reunification (which may be due to the stringent requirements of a systematic review). The purpose of a systematic review is to summarise the evidence on a particular topic accurately and reliably, make judgements about the evidence and suggest recommendations (Liberati *et al.*, 2009). Systematic reviews often focus on the effectiveness of specified interventions, however, LAC and their families often receive a multiplicity of services concurrently that do not meet the rigorous requirements of a systematic review (Brandon & Thoburn, 2008).

To date research on reunification has largely been conducted in America. Due to the differences in statutory care and government policy between countries direct comparison is not possible. The introduction of the Children Act 1989 led to a greater emphasis on reunification of LAC with their birth families. Following this there has been an increase in the number of studies from the UK focussed on reunification however this area remains under-researched. A review completed by Biehal in 2006 focussed on British and American studies, however the majority of included studies were American thus limiting generalisability. This current article reviews the literature from 2005 onwards (to follow on from the Biehal review which included UK studies up until this date) to present an independent up-to-date picture. The review focusses on peer-reviewed articles to ensure quality and therefore books, government reports and other grey literature are not included.

### **Research Question**

What is known about reunification of looked after children with their birth parents in the UK?

### **Terminology**

Throughout this review the terms reunification and return home from care are used interchangeably. The term children has been used to refer to all children and young people. Looked after children are defined within the Children Act 1989 as: a child who has been looked after by a LA for more than 24 hours or placed in the care of a LA by virtue of a care order.

### **Aim**

This systematised literature review aims to provide an overview of the contemporary research literature concerned with children being looked after by the LA and then reunified with birth parents.

## Methodology

A review protocol was developed following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis – Protocol (PRISMA-P: Moher *et al.*, 2015) guidelines before commencing the review (see Appendix A). The review adhered to the original protocol throughout.

### Search Strategy

An initial unlimited search of the Cochrane Library, the PROSPERO international register for prospective systematic reviews and Google was conducted to establish whether existing systematic reviews had been published on this topic. No systematic reviews were found.

### Scoping Searches

Scoping searches were undertaken to explore the topic area. The scoping search yielded a review focussed on reunification by Biehal (2006). This review focused on studies from the USA (1973 – 2005) and the UK (1999 – 2005) and was published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The search terms and eligibility criteria were informed by consultations with NHS and University librarians and by consideration of the evidence presented by Biehal (2006). Eligibility criteria is outlined in Table 1.

### Search Method

A systematic search of the literature was undertaken. Online searches were conducted using the following databases: PsychINFO, PsycARTICLES, CINAHL, MEDLINE, ASSIA, Web of Science and Social Care Online (Appendix B). The following keywords were used: (Child\* OR teen\* OR adolescent OR “young pe\*”) AND (“foster care” OR “foster child\*” OR “foster parent\*” OR “out of home care” OR residen\* OR institution\* OR “child\* in care” OR “looked after child\*” OR “care leav\*”) AND (Famil\* OR “family unit”) AND (Reunion OR reunify\* OR restor\* OR

“return home” OR reintegration OR transition). Thesaurus and Medical Subject Headings terms such as ‘foster care’, ‘family’ and ‘reunification’ were also used in each database where applicable. Limiters were set for: peer-reviewed articles, English Language and articles published from January 2005 (See Appendix A for search strategy). The search strategy and eligibility criteria were independently assessed by a second independent reviewer.

The main author conducted the searches. References were exported to an excel spreadsheet where duplicates were removed. Articles were screened separately by the main author and an independent reviewer first by title, then by abstract. Cohen’s  $k$  was run to determine inter-rater agreement between the main author and independent reviewer, there was an almost perfect agreement ( $k = 1.0, p = .001$ ). Articles were then screened by full-text, Cohen’s  $k$  was again calculated and there was substantial agreement ( $k = .62, p = 0.035$ ). One study could not be agreed upon and in this case consultation with a third reviewer was sought. Citation searches of all eligible articles using Web of Science and a hand search of the content and references from the eligible articles was conducted to maximise the scope of literature considered. Three additional articles were found which met eligibility criteria. The PRISMA diagram (Figure 1) illustrates the search strategy.

### **Publication Bias**

To minimise publication bias an additional search of grey literature was conducted. The British Library EThOS Database was searched for any unpublished studies. No eligible studies were found. Government databases and charitable organisations (NSPCC, JRF and Who Cares?) were also searched to identify reports that may not be returned by database searches or primary studies that may not be indexed (Newman *et al.*, 2005). This search did yield reports on reunification however, these findings were reported as research articles which had already been identified in the database searches. This review included only peer-reviewed studies to improve the quality and validity of the findings.

Table 1

*Eligibility Criteria for Inclusion in Review*

| <b>Criteria</b>                    | <b>Inclusion</b>   | <b>Exclusion</b>   |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Population</b>                  | Looked after children  | Care leavers - although there are similar issues for those leaving care to live with friends and family when ageing out of care the reasons for going home are rather different and this is a topic in its own right |
| <b>Study Design</b>                | Peer reviewed research articles using either quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods of data collection   | Essays and other expressions of expert opinion, grey literature (to ensure quality non-peer reviewed literature was excluded) or studies that focus on hypothetical scenarios (i.e. do not use real world data)      |
| <b>Dimensions of studies</b>       | Studies where the primary aim or objective of the study was to explore family reunification in LAC   | Studies which explore reunification post adoption, studies that focus on reunification in extended kinship care  |
| <b>Geographical Coverage Dates</b> | Studies which included participants from the UK<br>Studies published between January 2005 and December 2016 (when the search was conducted). January 2005 was selected to follow on from a previous review published in 2006 (Biehal, 2006) which included UK studies up until this date |  |
| <b>Language</b>                    | English  |  |

**Data Extraction**

A data extraction form was developed by the main author, informed by previous reviews within this area (Biehal, 2006) and in consultation with supervisors (Appendix C). The form was piloted on the first study by the main author and the independent reviewer. Data extraction was then undertaken for the remaining studies by the main author. The following data were extracted from each study; author, year, aims, data collection and analysis, sample, follow-up period, funding, main findings, ethics, bias, strengths and limitations. Where data were missing from studies the author was contacted for further information and clarification to improve

the quality of the review. A log of such correspondence is provided in Appendix D.

### **Quality Assessment**

Eligible articles fell under three types of study design; quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. Therefore, to assess the quality of each study three quality checklists were used.

Firstly, to assess the quality of quantitative studies the Crowe Critical Appraisal Tool (CCAT, 2013) was used (Appendix E). This tool was chosen as it has good construct validity and inter-rater reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74 (Crowe & Sheppard, 2011). The tool is divided into eight categories and 22 items. Categories are scored on a 6-point scale from 0 – 5. The total score across all categories is then calculated with the highest score possible being 40. The higher the score the higher the quality of the study. Domain scores and percentages can be found in Appendix F. As the CCAT was the most commonly used quality tool, it was piloted with an independent reviewer on the first paper to ensure consistency of appraisal. There was substantial inter-rater agreement. The remaining four quantitative articles were then appraised by the main author.

Secondly, the qualitative study was appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist for qualitative studies (Appendix G). This tool is divided into ten questions, each question is scored 0 – 2 which allows a total credibility score to be calculated (See Appendix H for scores).

Finally, to assess the quality of the mixed methods studies the Evaluative Tool for Mixed Method Studies (Long, 2005) was used (Appendix I). This tool was developed from evaluation tools for quantitative and qualitative studies and draws on appropriate questions from both. The tool is divided into five categories, with thirteen sections. Ten of these sections were scored 0 – 2. It was not deemed necessary to allocate a score to the 'bibliographic details', 'purpose' or 'key findings' sections in terms of assessing quality (scores shown in Appendix J).

Due to the paucity of peer-reviewed UK reunification research all peer-reviewed articles that met eligibility criteria were included. Thus, the quality appraisal was used to provide an indication of the quality of studies rather than for thresholds for inclusion.

## **Data Synthesis**

A thematic synthesis was conducted following the approach outlined by Thomas and Harden (2008). The findings of each study were recorded within data extraction forms. Coding was conducted iteratively by the main author, followed by the development of descriptive themes and generation of analytical themes which 'go beyond' the primary studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Coding and themes were refined and verified through discussions with the other authors. Themes were only considered if they were supported by at least three articles.

## **Results**

### **Search Results**

The database search yielded 1,551 references (after duplicates were removed). There were 1,425 articles excluded at title screen and 121 removed following abstract or full text screen. The main author and independent reviewer agreed eight articles were eligible for inclusion in this review, five were quantitative, one qualitative and two mixed methods articles. Figure 1 illustrates the screening process.

### **Study Characteristics**

The main characteristics of studies included in the review are shown in Table 2 below. The eight articles described a total of six different studies. Three articles (Lutman & Farmer, 2012; Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013; Farmer, 2012) report findings from the same longitudinal study exploring return stability (Farmer *et al.*, 2011) and present different variations on the same outcome variables.

## Overview of Methodological Quality of the Research

**Study Design.** Two studies were prospective longitudinal designs (Brandon & Thoburn, 2008; Lutman & Farmer, 2012; Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013; Farmer, 2012). Three studies were retrospective longitudinal designs (Broadhurst & Pendleton, 2007; Murphy & Fairtlough, 2015; Biehal *et al.* 2015). One study followed a qualitative approach, the specific design was unreported (Malet *et al.*, 2009).

Follow up periods for the longitudinal studies ranged from two years (Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013; Farmer, 2012; Murphy & Fairtlough, 2015) to eight years (Brandon & Thoburn, 2008). Four of the longitudinal studies did not use a control group for comparison (Broadhurst & Pendleton, 2007; Brandon & Thoburn, 2008; Lutman & Farmer, 2012; Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013; Farmer, 2012; Murphy & Fairtlough, 2015). One study compared reunified LAC with a group of LAC who remained in care (Biehal *et al.*, 2015).

Five studies completed case file reviews (Broadhurst & Pendleton, 2007; Brandon & Thoburn, 2008; Lutman & Farmer, 2012; Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013; Farmer, 2012; Murphy & Fairtlough, 2015; Biehal *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, four studies conducted qualitative interviews (Broadhurst & Pendleton, 2007; Brandon & Thoburn, 2008; Lutman & Farmer, 2012; Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013; Farmer, 2012; Biehal *et al.*, 2015). However, only two of these studies reported the findings of these interviews (Broadhurst & Pendleton, 2007; Brandon & Thoburn, 2008). One study conducted only qualitative interviews (Malet *et al.*, 2009).

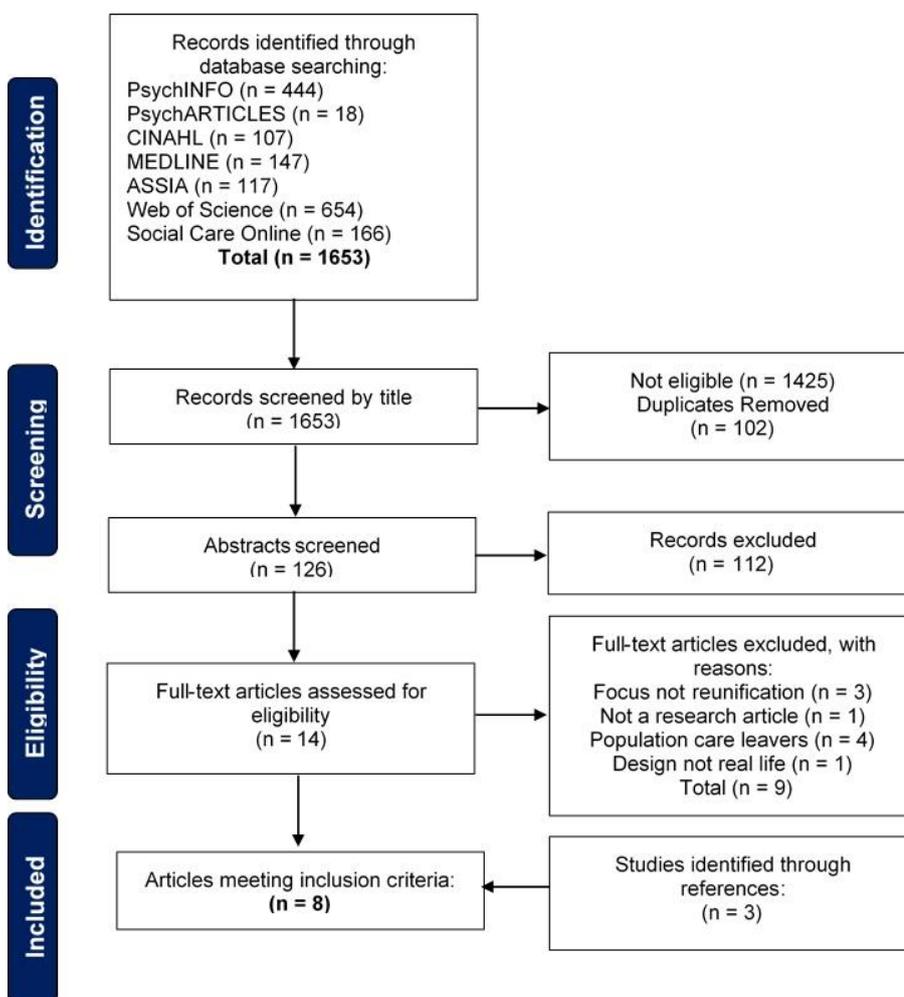


Figure 1. Flow diagram demonstrating screening process following PRISMA guidelines (Moher *et al.*, 2009)

**Sample Characteristics.** Sample sizes ranged from eight (Malet *et al.*, 2009) to 180 (Farmer, 2012). Five studies were from England (Broadhurst & Pendleton, 2007; Brandon & Thoburn, 2008; Lutman & Farmer, 2012; Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013; Farmer, 2012; Murphy & Fairtlough; Biehal *et al.*, 2015) and one from Northern Ireland (Malet *et al.*, 2009). Three articles limited their sample to children accommodated due to abuse or neglect (Lutman & Farmer, 2012; Murphy & Fairtlough, 2015; Biehal *et al.*, 2015). All studies used samples recruited from local authorities.

Table 2

*Overview of studies included in review*

| Study                               | Funding                  | Sample  | Methodology                                    | Follow Up | Analysis   | Key Findings  | Limitations   | Clinical & Practice Implications  | Quality Appraisal        |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--|-----------|--|---|---|---|--------------------------|
| <b>Lutman &amp; Farmer (2012)</b>   | Department for Education | n = 138 neglected children drawn from seven local authorities in England  | Prospective Longitudinal –<br>Case file review | 5 years   | Chi-square<br>ANOVA<br>CHAID                               | Half the reunifications had broken down after two years.<br><br>59% of children had been neglected or abused after reunification.<br><br>Children over age six at increased risk of placement instability after their reunifications ended.<br><br>Rates of stability varied widely by local authority. | Case file data limited due to inconsistency of reporting.<br><br>Case file social workers construction of events.<br><br>Small sample size.   | Need for early intervention, an authoritative approach to case management and a more proactive approach to safeguarding.<br><br>Need for strategies to ensure maltreatment is not normalised.<br><br>Parents may require specialist help to make sufficient changes.                                    | CCAT <sup>a</sup><br>45% |
| <b>Farmer &amp; Wijedasa (2013)</b> | Department for Education | n = 129 looked after children drawn from six local authorities in England | Prospective Longitudinal –<br>Case file review | 2 years   | Logistical regression<br>Fisher's exact test<br>Chi-square | 47% of reunifications had disrupted after two years.<br><br>Previous physical abuse and previous failed reunifications associated with reunification breakdown.<br><br>Reunification breakdown rates varied widely by local authority.  | Case file data limited due to inconsistency of reporting.<br><br>Case file social workers construction of events.<br><br>Small sample size.<br><br>Large confidence intervals<br>Interview data unreported. | Need to work with parents to achieve a shared understanding about what needs to change over what timescales before return is possible.<br><br>Need to develop clearer practice advice and policies to guide reunification practice.<br><br>Need for 'refocus' of attention onto reunification practice. | CCAT<br>35%              |
| <b>Farmer (2012)</b>                | Department for Education | n = 180 looked after children drawn from six local authorities in England | Prospective Longitudinal –<br>Case file review | 2 years   | Logistical regression                                      | Two-thirds of children experienced one or more failed reunifications.<br><br>Preparation, appropriate services, purposeful social work practice and foster care   | Case file data limited due to inconsistency of reporting.<br><br>Case file social workers construction of events.   | Need to ensure that reviews pick up patterns of oscillation so more decisive intervention can be considered.<br><br>Need for focussed work with young people with behavioural   | CCAT<br>40%              |

## SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

| Study                                 | Funding                  | Sample  | Methodology                                      | Follow Up                     | Analysis                  | Key Findings  | Limitations   | Clinical & Practice Implications  | Quality Appraisal |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|
|                                       |                          |   |  |                               |                           | <p>assistance with reunion contributed to return stability.</p> <p>Many children returned to continuing parental difficulties.</p>  | <p>Small sample size.</p> <p>Interview data unreported.</p> <p>Article alternated between reporting percentages and fractions which is confusing for the reader.</p> <p>Results of the regression analysis unreported, reader directed to an earlier paper.</p> | <p>and emotional difficulties who enter care and with their parents.</p> <p>More involvement by foster carers and residential workers in preparing children and providing post-reunification support.</p> <p>Need for training for social workers in the recognition of, assessment and associated harm of substance misuse to children.</p> <p>Need for authorities to develop clearer policies and practice advice for reunification of all children.</p> |                   |
| <b>Murphy &amp; Fairtlough (2015)</b> | Unreported               | n = 42 looked after children accommodated due to abuse or neglect drawn from one local authority in England | Retrospective Longitudinal –<br>Case file review | 2 years                       | Exploratory data analysis | <p>Successful reunification is associated with: children being young in age, have short, stable care experiences and have consistent family contact prior to return.</p> <p>Assessment and planning prior to reunification were inconsistent.</p> | <p>Case file data limited due to inconsistency of reporting.</p> <p>Case file social workers construction of events.</p> <p>Small sample size.</p> <p>Sample drawn from one local authority.</p>  | <p>Implementation of a looked after children's multi-agency panel responsible for approving all reunifications and ensuring consistent decision making.</p> <p>Further research required to identify how culturally specific support services can be used to support reunification.</p> <p>Need to strengthen the use of foster-carers within reunification practice.</p>   | CCAT<br>73%       |
| <b>Biehal et al. (2015)</b>           | Department for Education | n = 149 maltreated looked after children drawn  | Retrospective Longitudinal –                     | 3 – 6 years (average 4 years) | Logistical regression     | The two key predictors of reunification were assessments that parental problems had improved and  | Case file data limited due to inconsistency of reporting.   | Need for careful monitoring during early months post-reunification to identify and  | CCAT<br>65%       |

## SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

| Study                                    | Funding                                  | Sample  | Methodology                              | Follow Up | Analysis         | Key Findings   | Limitations  | Clinical & Practice Implications   | Quality Appraisal         |
|--|--|---|--|-----------|------------------|--|--|--|---------------------------|
|  |  | from seven local authorities in England<br><br>n = 68 children reunified<br><br>n = 81 remained in care   | Case file review                         |           |                  | that risk to the child were not unacceptably high.<br><br>35% re-entered care within 6 months and 63% re-entered at some point during the four year follow up period due to recurring abuse or neglect.<br><br>Outcomes especially poor for neglected children who were reunified.<br><br>Decision making varied considerably between local authorities. | Case file social workers construction of events.<br><br>Lack of representativeness of the sample.<br><br>Follow-up period varied considerably. | respond to any emerging difficulties.<br><br>Further investigation of the policy levers available to local authorities is needed if we are to make children's opportunities to achieve a permanent placement more equitable.<br><br>Sharper assessments prior to reunification and monitoring and support post return are needed to ensure decisions for return are based on clear evidence of change. |                           |
| <b>Malet et al. (2009)</b>               | Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland | n = 8 birth parents of 9 children who returned home from a population of (N = 81) children who returned home, from a cohort (N = 374) of children under the age of 5 years in care in Northern Ireland on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2000 | Qualitative – Specific design unreported | N/A       | Unreported       | Parents and their children experiencing multiple difficulties and struggled to cope after the children had returned home.<br><br>Social services support was inconsistent and insufficient both pre and post reunification.<br><br>Care proceedings experienced as extremely stressful. Parents not given sufficient information.                        | Sample size is limited as is the population from which the sample is drawn.<br><br>No information on how the data were analysed.               | Need for differing levels and kinds of assessment, monitoring and support to be set up to address the needs of families.   | CASP <sup>b</sup><br>60%  |
| <b>Broadhurst &amp; Pendleton (2007)</b> | Local Authority                          | Stage 1 n = 13 families with 19 looked after children   | Retrospective Longitudinal –             | N/A       | Content analysis | <b>Case File Findings</b><br>No single factor contributed to the application and making of a care order.   | Case file data limited due to inconsistency of reporting.  | The judicial system may be failing to make use of the full range or care orders available under the Children Act 1989.   | ETMMS <sup>c</sup><br>65% |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

| Study                               | Funding  | Sample  | Methodology  | Follow Up | Analysis   | Key Findings   | Limitations   | Clinical & Practice Implications   | Quality Appraisal |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|-----------|------------|--|---|--|-------------------|
|                                     |  | Stage 2 n = 7 families with 12 looked after children<br><br>Sample drawn from one local authority in England  | Stage 1: Case file review<br><br>Stage 2: Qualitative interviews                                   |           |            | <b>Interview Findings</b><br>Case workers believed if children returned home on s.31, care orders would ensure the continuation of safeguarding services.<br><br>Families encouraged to take lead in discharging care orders but lacked the skills and knowledge to do so.   | Case file social workers construction of events.<br><br>Findings refer to correlations but statistics are unreported.   | Practice needs to more closely consider the point at which a care order should cease and to identify obstacles that impact on the discharge of orders.<br><br>A performance target related to discharge of care orders for children in placements at home is needed. |                   |
| <b>Brandon &amp; Thoburn (2008)</b> | National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children | n = 77 looked after children drawn from four* local authorities in England<br><br>*Original NSPCC report states only three local authorities provided data at follow up | Prospective Longitudinal –<br><br>Stage 1: Case file review<br><br>Stage 2: Qualitative interviews | 8 years   | Unreported | 14 children returned to live at home and were still at home at follow up, 8 experienced re-abuse or neglect. Two were found to be experiencing maltreatment at all three follow up points despite being on the child protection register.<br><br>10 children who returned home within 1 year and then left again had not subsequently returned. Most of these children had multiple moves and disrupted care. All these children received long-term services. All experienced re-abuse or neglect. | More information available on those involved with social services for longer, less information on closed cases with successful outcomes. Less successful cases overrepresented in sample.<br><br>Case file data limited due to inconsistency of reporting. Case file social workers construction of events.<br><br>Inconsistencies and lack of information regarding methodology. | Need for social workers to provide a consistent, responsive and sensitive service knowing when preventative work or attempts at reunification are not going to secure the child's wellbeing.   | ETMMS<br>45%      |

<sup>a</sup> Crowe Critical Appraisal Tool (CCAT)  
<sup>b</sup> Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP)  
<sup>c</sup> Evaluative Tool for Mixed Method Studies (ETMMS)

**Data Analysis.** The analytical approaches applied in these studies included Chi-square (Lutman & Farmer, 2012; Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013), ANOVA (Lutman & Farmer, 2012), regression (Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013; Farmer, 2012; Biehal *et al.*, 2015), exploratory data analysis (Murphy & Fairtlough, 2015) and content analysis (Broadhurst & Pendleton, 2007). Two studies did not report the methods of data analysis (Brandon & Thoburn, 2008; Malet *et al.*, 2009). In studies using regression, the purpose was to identify variables that significantly predicted successful reunification.

**Outcomes of Reunification.** Successful reunification was largely defined within the studies as a child remaining at home with their reunified family throughout and at the end of the follow up period. Figures reported for re-entry into care varied from 47% (Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013) to 63% (Biehal *et al.*, 2015). Studies that recruited their sample from more than one LA identified wide variation regarding rates of stability between LAs (Brandon & Thoburn, 2008; Lutman & Farmer, 2012; Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013; Farmer, 2012; Murphy & Fairtlough; Biehal *et al.*, 2015).

Evidence of the recurrence of neglect and abuse was identified in four studies (Brandon & Thoburn, 2008; Lutman & Farmer, 2012; Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013; Farmer, 2012; Murphy & Fairtlough, 2015; Biehal *et al.*, 2015). Issues regarding sampling criteria make it difficult to draw conclusions on the evidence of re-abuse.

**Funding.** Sources of funding were declared by four studies (Brandon & Thoburn, 2008; Malet *et al.*, 2009; Lutman & Farmer, 2012; Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013; Farmer, 2012; Biehal *et al.*, 2015). Three of these were funded by government departments (Malet *et al.*, 2009; Lutman & Farmer, 2012; Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013; Farmer, 2012; Biehal *et al.*, 2015). One was funded by the NSPCC.

### **Quality Appraisal**

Articles were appraised according to the reporting of information. As different appraisal tools were used according to the methodology of

each study it would be futile to compare appraisal scores, however, the overall quality of studies was mixed. Reporting of the following was generally clear: statement of aims, recruitment strategies were appropriate to aims of the research, statement and discussion of findings. There was a consistent lack of explanation and/or justification regarding methodology, particularly sampling and data collection and analysis. In both quantitative and qualitative studies data analysis and interpretation lacked transparency and were not explained in sufficient detail to allow for replication. All studies had limited reporting of underlying theoretical perspectives. All studies were limited by small sample sizes. Consideration of ethical issues and bias was not met by all studies but there was no indication that unethical conduct had occurred. It is more likely that this was due to a lack of reporting. Reporting of funding was also an issue. Readers have a right to know who funded a research project as well as the role of funders within the research (Graf *et al.*, 2007). There is a potential conflict of interest where government departments are funding and designing the scope of research into services that they also commission. This conflict was not addressed within the included studies.

The articles by Farmer and colleagues (Lutman & Farmer, 2012; Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013; Farmer, 2012) lacked transparency. It is only on reading each article in full that it becomes apparent each article reported findings from the same data source which had been published elsewhere. In keeping with best practice guidelines on publication ethics readers have the right to know whether research has been published previously. The scientific literature can also be skewed by redundant publications (Graf *et al.*, 2007). There is insufficient information within each of these articles from the primary data source to allow for replication of this study.

The articles by Farmer and colleagues share similar limitations and at times mislead the reader. Firstly, there is a lack of information and justification regarding the population, sample, sampling method, sample size calculation, eligibility criteria and rationale for follow up period. Farmer and Wijedasa (2013) repeatedly refer to their sample as 180 LAC however, only 129 LAC were included in the full analysis. Secondly, the

articles described interviews which were conducted and include these as part of the aims of the research but the interview findings are unreported. Finally, each article refers to regression analyses which were undertaken. The reporting of these results is poor. Information such as a power calculation and the amount of variance accounted for by significant predictor variables is omitted. The confidence intervals (CI) were also large, for example where Lutman and Farmer (2012) reported factors predicting stability the CI for the local authority variable was 2.58 – 39.18. Farmer (2012) identifies regression as a means of data analysis within the methodology, however, the results of this regression are not reported within this article and instead the reader is directed to Farmer and Wijedasa (2013) for a full discussion of these results. The conclusions of Farmer (2012) did not address the study but instead referred to the findings of Lutman and Farmer (2012). Therefore, the articles by Farmer and colleagues were considered of poor quality due to the inconsistent, misleading and limited reporting of information within the articles.

## **Thematic Synthesis**

### **Descriptive Themes (Results of Individual Studies)**

The synthesis of results identified five descriptive themes. These were: support, case management, oscillation, parenting and recurrence of abuse (See Appendix K for further extracts illustrating descriptive themes).

**Support.** Studies often reported that support from other agencies during reunification led to more successful reunifications. However, support received from LA services was variable. Studies that reported interview data with parents found aftercare support from social services was insufficient. Others reported that initial social work support promoted positive change. Gaps in support available were also identified.

“when another agency such as a health visitor or voluntary organisation had helped to supervise the children during reunification, the returns were four times more likely to be

stable than when this was not the case” (Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013, p.13)

**Case management.** Assessment, planning, preparation and decision-making were reported extensively in the literature. Researchers commented that these areas of case management were inconsistent and related to unstable outcomes. Parents reported that they did not feel sufficiently involved in these aspects which left them feeling disempowered.

“assessment, planning and decision making regarding reunification happened inconsistently” (Murphy & Fairclough, 2015, p.2272)

**Oscillation.** The process of moving back and forth between LA care and home was consistently highlighted as risk for reunification breakdown.

“two-thirds of the children in the study had experienced one or more failed returns... social workers and children commented on the severe negative impact on children of oscillating” (Farmer, 2012, p.12)

**Parenting.** Several issues regarding parenting were highlighted by researchers, these included aspects of poor parenting prior to reunification, recurrence of parental difficulties post reunification and parental engagement.

“on occasions, cases were (temporarily) closed, even though there were still concerns about the children’s welfare, because of the instability of workers to engage the parents” (Brandon & Thoburn, 2008, p.372)

**Recurrence of abuse.** Recurrence of abuse or neglect was a common theme throughout the studies. In some cases, this led to re-entry into care and in others children remained at home despite concerns.

“there was evidence of the recurrence of neglect and of physical, emotional and sexual abuse” (Biehal *et al.*, 2015, p.112)

### **Analytic Themes (Synthesis of Results)**

The descriptive themes were analysed further to construct analytic themes which ‘go beyond’ the original findings (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The analytic themes constructed were: lack of guidance and risks associated with return.

**Lack of guidance.** Each of the different areas of case management and the support systems in place for children and families were all characterised by inconsistency. Variation was found according to how children had been accommodated, for example, children on voluntary arrangements received less support once they returned home. Inconsistency was apparent both within and between LAs and was identified by parents and social workers. This meant the number of children who returned home varied by LA. This inconsistency creates a permanence lottery whereby a child’s future rests on the area within which they live. This is illustrated by Biehal *et al.* (2015, p. 111):

Children’s chances of returning home, remaining in care or being adopted were strongly influenced by where they lived, even when account was taken of their characteristics and reasons for entry into care.

This inconsistency may be the result of several factors including; the size of the care population, the provision of local services and the LA approach to reunification. However, underpinning this is a lack of concrete policy guidance and consistent practice. The inconsistent interpretation of

guidance on reunification highlights weakness within the system which also impacts on the provision of support. Social workers are required to rely on their own experience and discretion to compensate for the lack of guidance.

***Risks associated with return.*** Studies explored factors which predicted reunification stability and outcomes of reunification. Once children had returned home the LA factors described above had less influence, instead the success of a return was largely dependent on parental and environmental factors. The LA failed to take into account the extra stress on a fragile family system of having children there and moreover children who have experienced being taken away and living in another context. Despite reunification being the most common route from which children leave care there were significant risks consistently identified. The most concerning of these risks were patterns of re-entry into care and oscillation and re-abuse. Therefore, more support rather than less is needed for families with reunified children and this support should be tailored to the family's needs rather than based on availability.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this review was to examine what is known about reunification of LAC with their birth parents within the UK. A review of the literature was conducted identifying eight articles which met eligibility criteria. The quality of included studies was mixed and the reporting of methodology was particularly poor. Therefore, these results should be treated with caution. The findings from these studies revealed that between 47 and 63% of LAC who returned home experienced failed returns and re-entered LA care. The following factors were identified within the articles as predictors of return stability prior to children returning home: child's age, change in family membership, foster carer involvement with reunifications, improved parental difficulties and adequate family preparation and support from social services.

Previous British studies have reported between 37 and 52% of children reunified re-entered care and a third of reunification experiences

were of poor quality (Packman & Hall, 1998; Sinclair *et al.*, 2005; Sinclair *et al.*, 2006; Farmer, 2006). The figures for re-entry reported in this review show that this percentage has increased from 52% (Packman & Hall, 1998) to 63% (Biehal *et al.*, 2015). Reasons for re-entry varied but factors included re-abuse or neglect and poor parenting. Failed reunifications can have serious implications for children in terms of their long-term stability. Lutman and Farmer (2012) reported that the number of different placements children experienced after reunifications ranged between one and thirty.

As in previous studies a pattern of oscillation between home and care was identified which appears to be the case for many children. Farmer (2012) highlighted a particular case where one child endured thirteen return breakdowns by the age of sixteen. Children such as these are likely to develop negative expectations of adults and may transfer these expectations into new environments (e.g. foster families). These children may also find it hard to establish trusting relationships (Schofield & Beek, 2014). This oscillation is not only the physical movement back and forth but there is also an emotional shift between loss and restoration time and time again. Attachment theory identifies how children's relationships with adults are crucial to their trust of other people, their understanding of relationships and their beliefs about themselves (Simmonds, 2004). The process of care proceedings, family contact and periods of foster care are very disruptive for children (Schofield *et al.*, 2007). Returning home even after a short period in care is also rarely simple (Bullock *et al.*, 1993). Attachment security is also important during adolescence. Securely attached adolescents are less likely to engage in substance use, risky sexual behaviour and have fewer mental health problems (Moretti & Peled, 2004). Thus, more consideration needs to be given to the number of failed returns young people have experienced when planning for permanency. Much more tailored support is needed to facilitate successful reunification, while although costlier in the short-term there are likely to be greater financial gains in the long-term.

There is a need to look to key stakeholders, commissioners and policy makers to examine current policies and procedures. Brandon *et al.* (2008) referred to the "start again syndrome" where workers coped with

the overwhelming information about families and the subsequent feelings of helplessness in many difficult, long-term cases by putting aside their knowledge of the families' past and focussing throughout on the present. Given that previous failed returns are related to reunification breakdown (Farmer *et al.*, 2011) questions must be asked as to how many failed returns should young people undergo? While focussing on strengths in the present may be good practice, research cautions that this is not effective when working with families with multiple entrenched problems (Brandon *et al.*, 2008). Biehal *et al.* (2015) concluded that when children who return home are compared to those who remain in care, remaining in care produced relatively better outcomes. Thus, although reunification may be the most desirable outcome for many children and families this practice in the long-term, may be doing more harm than good. Social care workers need to be supported through the use of clinical supervision and consultation with other professionals, such as Clinical Psychologists, to identify examples of the start again syndrome and to explore helpful coping strategies when managing difficult long-term cases.

Unlike previous studies the timing of reunification was not discussed within the included articles. Previous research has reported that the longer a child is in care, the lower the likelihood of reunification, commonly referred to as the 'leaving care curve' (Rowe *et al.*, 1989). It is often reported that once a child has been looked after for more than a year, the likelihood of them returning home decreases (DfE, 2013; Sinclair, *et al.*, 2007). However, Biehal (2007) and Stein (2009) challenged this widely-accepted misconception and cautioned against this view. Biehal suggested that the 'leaving care curve' represents a correlation not causality.

The reviewed articles do not refer to any factors that differentiate one child from being reunified from another who remained in LA care with regard to child characteristics. Child's age was often considered as a variable in studies. However, Biehal *et al.* (2015), who compared reunified children with those who remained in care found no significant differences between the groups in terms of: age, sex, type of abuse or parental problems. The only significant difference was that children who had a learning disability were more likely to remain in care. It may be that in

those cases families were unable to accept their child's impairment or were incapable of supporting them appropriately (Argent, 1996) and thus social care staff were more cautious when planning for permanency. There appears to be a lack of transparency regarding decision making in terms of who returns and who does not. Parental and LA factors were the most significant predictors of reunification success, thus highlighting the inconsistent nature of practice and lack of reunification guidance to follow.

Looked after children experience poorer physical health outcomes, higher rates of learning difficulties, inferior educational outcomes and increased vulnerability to mental health difficulties compared to other children (Crawford, 2006). The interaction of problems which precipitated entry to care with the experience of being looked after results in a complex interaction of past and present experiences (Golding, 2010). Exposure to psychological trauma and emotional deprivation may prevent against the development of a secure attachment style. These factors combined with oscillation between home and care, feelings of loss provoked by separation from birth family and adjustment to new care arrangements may contribute to increasing vulnerability to developing mental health difficulties (Golding, 2010). It is unclear whether mental health difficulties are a contributing factor in placement disruption or an outcome of multiple placements (McNicholls *et al.*, 2011). Given the vulnerability it is recommended that more detailed pre-emptive assessments of emotional wellbeing and mental health should be conducted at time of entry to care (DeJong, 2010) and prior to reunification.

## **Limitations**

Although the reviewed articles produced consistent findings, the following factors should be taken into account before drawing conclusions. Evidence linking outcomes for children returning home from care is weak, which to an extent is inevitable given the large number of environmental, child and parental variables. However, this is compounded by the poor quality of the research conducted in this area as highlighted by this review. It is difficult to compare studies on reunification as they often vary in methodology. Firstly, terminology is inconsistent with terms such as

“foster care”, “out of home care” and “looked-after children” used to describe children placed in LA care. These terms are not always used to describe the same population. Reunification is also defined differently as is successful reunification. Secondly, the studies have different follow-up periods ranging from two (Farmer, 2012; Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013; Murphy & Fairclough, 2015) to eight years (Brandon & Thoburn, 2008). Comparing results across studies with different follow-up periods can be difficult as it involves comparing events that occur within different time spans. This difficulty is compounded when some studies (Brandon & Thoburn, 2008; Biehal *et al.*, 2015) follow up children for varying periods of time. Thirdly, of the six studies, five conducted some form of case file review. This method is limited in that there is inconsistency in terms of what is recorded in some files but not in others and case files by definition are the social worker’s construction of events. While the limitations of this method are acknowledged by each of the researchers this was still the most common form of data collection. Finally, methods of data analysis were also varied. Some studies conducted regression analyses, some used chi-squared tests while others did not report any sophisticated statistical analysis and appeared purely descriptive.

The articles did not discuss bias sufficiently or with any depth. For example, conflicts of interest regarding funding were not addressed. Three of the six studies were funded by government bodies (DfE, Public Health Agency NI), one by the host LA, one by a charity (NSPCC) and funding was not declared for the final study which was a dissertation, one could assume this was funded by a university. Where government bodies have funded research, they act as both commissioners of research and service providers. They are responsible for funding the research and defining the scope while also being responsible for delivering the services that are being researched. No statements were made with respect to objectivity or independence by the authors of these studies. Without acknowledgement of potential conflict of interest, the reader’s understanding and appraisal of the evidence may be compromised.

There is considerable variation in how the studies have investigated reunification and therefore the degree to which they can be directly compared is compromised. Many of the samples are small LA samples

with limited details on the individual characteristics of children, it is therefore difficult to generalise the findings. It is also worth noting that there were no studies identified from Scotland or Wales. A major limitation in all articles was a lack of sufficient detail in key areas to allow for replication. Methodology is one of the most important parts of a research article, without adequate information it is impossible for another researcher to follow the same procedures. Replication is a critical standard for social sciences. Insufficient information on how data were collected and analysed makes even the most carefully conducted research unscientific.

### **Research Recommendations**

Further research should attempt to overcome the limitations outlined in this review. The most prominent method of data collection in the included studies was case file review but this method is heavily reliant on the quality of data within the files and a lot of information is lost in translation from events to recording. Although some studies supplemented the case review with interviews, good quality qualitative data is lacking in this area. To further understand the experience of reunification, improve the quality of the literature in this area and inform reunification practice the perspectives of those involved, particularly the children themselves, needs to be reported. Previous studies have found that when children are interviewed the majority were ambivalent about reunification and have concerns regarding the likelihood that reunification would be successful (Farmer *et al.*, 2008). Following a period in care parents are likely to observe a change in their child's behaviour upon return and they may need help in understanding this behaviour as a lack of understanding may contribute to breakdown. It is important to understand from a child and parental perspective whether they have been prepared and supported prior to and following reunification. Children who are placed in care often suffer separation and loss and for older children (especially if siblings remain at home) a sense of rejection, which distinguishes them from other children in need (Thoburn, 2009). The lack of children's voices within the literature is identified as a gap in the evidence base regarding reunification practice within the UK. If

researchers are to continue to use the method of case file review, larger sample sizes with appropriate statistical analysis are needed to investigate the process of decision making and to identify local variation. Appropriate reporting and transparency needs to be improved in this area and consideration should be given to utilising reporting standards during the design stage to improve the quality of research.

Articles within this review highlighted the difference in profile of 'today's' care population compared to the populations examined in earlier studies as a driver for further research (Broadhurst & Pendleton, 2007). Earlier English research was conducted prior to the introduction of the Children Act 1989. Since the act the trend has been for younger children to enter care, increasingly for reasons of abuse or neglect, and to remain longer (Biehal, 2007). However, the same could be said for the papers included in this review where findings are drawn from samples that in most cases are over ten-years-old. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter became readily available in 2006 and there are currently a variety of social networking sites that children can access. The impact of social media should not be underestimated with regards to looked after children's relationships with significant others and the implications for permanence work with families. It could be argued that the context in which children experience care currently is very different to that of children from earlier studies, and thus further research with new samples is needed to investigate the impact of the experience of care from a child perspective and to present a contemporary picture.

### **Implications for Practice**

The articles within this review identified that attachment difficulties are associated with return breakdown. Recommendations also suggested the need for focussed work with young people with behavioural and emotional difficulties. Clinical Psychologists could play an important role in addressing this need either, through direct work with children and/or families to address the loss of attachment and identity following a period in care, or through consultation to social workers or social care teams. A need for greater understanding of the impact of neglect on children's

outcomes and strategies to ensure maltreatment is not being normalised was also highlighted. These needs can be addressed via multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working whereby the findings can inform consultation and formulation from Clinical Psychologists to social care staff. These needs can also be addressed via contributions to existing training or the development of new training packages focussed on increasing knowledge around the psychological impact of separation and reunification, particularly when thinking about decision making.

There are huge variations in the numbers of children who return home by LA. Between 2009 and 2012 “the proportion of all children who ceased to be looked after ranged from 9% to 60% between LA” (DfE, 2013, p.32). Several factors including the size of the care populations, local service provision and the LA approach to supporting reunification may impact on decision making and outcomes of reunification (DfE, 2013). The need for national clear, consistent organisational and practice guidance was highlighted by all studies included in this review. As quoted earlier, failed reunifications cost an estimated £300 million a year, however, it is estimated that the annual cost of providing support and services to meet the needs of LAC returning to their families from care is £56 million (National Audit Office, 2014). Therefore, there are clear financial incentives for the government and stakeholders to revisit reunification policy and practice.

In response to this need the NSPCC in partnership with the University of Bristol have developed a Practice Framework which is an evidence-informed risk assessment and planning document for use by LAs. Early evaluations of this framework have found that it was welcomed by practitioners and managers (Farmer & Patsios, 2016). However, it is yet to be seen if this will be implemented nationally. It is also worth noting that the affiliation between Professor Farmer and the University of Bristol leads to questions regarding the reliability and how independent the evaluations of this Practice Framework are. The DfE (2015) recommends that LAs need to develop their own approaches based on existing research evidence.

The participation of children and young people could be crucial in developing reunification policy and practice guidelines. Children can play

a vital role in the planning and delivery of services (Wright *et al.*, 2006). Identified barriers to participation include; lack of staff, resources, motivation or time within an organisation to involve young people and a lack of awareness of the benefits to be gained. However, organisations need to create a culture of including young people in service development as part of a whole systems approach rather than just recruiting them for specific events to ensure change is effected. Creating a culture of shared decision making is beneficial to both young people and adults. Young people would not only be able to influence decisions about their care but also educate themselves about the care system and their general situation, thereby empowering themselves more generally for future action (Hart, 1992). Examples of meaningful participation can be drawn from the Children and Young People's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (CYP IAPT) MyAPT initiative, which actively involves children in the decisions, processes and establishment of psychological services for children and young people. Young people are taking part in consultation events about what young people want from mental health services, assisting with staff recruitment and attending CAMHS steering group meetings (MyAPT, 2017).

## Conclusions

This review aimed to establish what is known about reunification of LAC with their birth parents within the UK. Findings revealed that the majority of LAC who returned home experienced failed returns and re-entered LA care, which is consistent with previous findings. There were issues regarding the incomplete reporting of methodology, however, studies produced consistent findings. A need for better decision making, effective assessment and support both pre-and post-reunification for children and families was identified. The research literature on reunification within the UK and in other countries tends to focus on risks and deficits. Families represented within the care system often face severe socioeconomic challenges yet they also have resources, knowledge and skills to deal with these adversities. The strengths approach and studying reunification from a resiliency perspective could be utilised to identify and gain a better understanding of the factors that enable families to thrive and stay together.

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## **Paper 1: List of Appendices**

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**Appendix A – Review Protocol**

|                     |                             |   |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>1</b>            | <b>Title</b>                | Reunification of looked after children with their birth parents in the United Kingdom: A literature review and thematic synthesis   |
| <b>2</b>            | <b>Registration</b>         | <b>NA</b>   |
| <b>3</b>            | <b>Authors</b>              | Lyndsey Carlson, Trainee Clinical Psychologist, Universities of Staffordshire and Keele (main author)<br><br>Professor Helen Dent, Staffordshire University (Academic Supervisor)<br><br>Dr Stephanie Hutton, North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust (Clinical Supervisor)   |
|                     | <b>Independent Reviewer</b> | Dr Joanne Murray, Central Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (Clinical Psychologist)  |
| <b>4</b>            | <b>Amendments</b>           | N/A   |
| <b>5</b>            | <b>Support</b>              | This review will be undertaken as part of the main author's Doctorate in Clinical Psychology and supervision will be offered by the affiliated universities (Staffordshire University and Keele University) and the employing Trust (North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust)<br><br>No financial support was provided for this review  |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b> |                             |   |
| <b>6</b>            | <b>Rationale</b>            | Children are taken into the care of the local authority for a variety of reasons and at different rates across the country (Department for Education, 2013). Following the introduction of the Children Act 1989 there was an emphasis on supporting families to prevent the need for children to spend lengthy periods in care (Biehal, 2006). Family reunification refers to the return home of looked after children to their family of origin. Following the introduction of the Children Act there was a surge in studies focussing on reunification. However, unlike in the USA there has been no known systematic review within the UK which brings together the findings from these studies.<br><br>This review aims to establish the current body of literature from the UK which focusses on reunification. |
| <b>7</b>            | <b>Objectives</b>           | To conduct a systematic search of the literature and retrieve studies which focus on reunification of looked after children with their birth parents.<br><br>Once these studies have been retrieved the studies will be filtered and screened by geographic location. Only those from the UK will be eligible for inclusion in the review.<br><br>To critically appraise and assess the quality of the selected studies.  |

|                |                             |  |
|----------------|-----------------------------|--|
|                |                             | To provide discussion and discuss the clinical implications of reunification of looked after children with their birth parents within the UK.  |
| <b>METHODS</b> |                             |  |
| <b>8</b>       | <b>Eligibility Criteria</b> | <p><b><u>Inclusion Criteria</u></b><br/> <b>Dates:</b> Studies published between January 2005 and December 2016 (when the search will be conducted) January 2005 was selected as a previous review was conducted (Biehal, 2006) which included UK studies up until this date<br/> <b>Geographical Coverage:</b> Studies which included participants from the UK<br/> <b>Population of interest:</b> Looked after children<br/> <b>Dimensions of studies:</b> Studies where the primary aim or objective of the study was to explore family reunification in LAC<br/> <b>Study Design:</b> Peer reviewed research articles using either quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods of data collection.<br/> <b>Language:</b> English</p> <p><b><u>Exclusion Criteria</u></b><br/> <b>Dimensions of studies:</b> studies which explore reunification post adoption, studies that focus on reunification in extended kinship care<br/> <b>Population:</b> care leavers although there are similar issues for those leaving care to live with friends and family, this is a topic in its own right<br/> <b>Study Design:</b> essays and other expressions of expert opinion, grey literature – to ensure quality non-peer reviewed literature was excluded</p> |
| <b>9</b>       | <b>Information Sources</b>  | <p>Prior to commencing scoping searches the following databases were searched to ensure that a previous or current review was not underway:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cochrane Library</li> <li>• PROSPERO</li> </ul> <p>The following information sources will be searched by the main author between September 2016 and December 2016:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PsychINFO</li> <li>• PsycARTICLES</li> <li>• CINAHL</li> <li>• MEDLINE</li> <li>• ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts)</li> <li>• Web of Science</li> <li>• Social Care Online</li> </ul> <p>To determine whether any papers have been overlooked the following information sources will be searched between September 2016 and December 2016:</p>   |

|    |  |  |
|----|--|--|
|    |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Google Scholar</li> <li>• Hand searches of the content and reference list of all eligible papers</li> <li>• Citation searches via Web of Science of all eligible papers</li> </ul>  |
| 10 | <b>Search strategy</b>   | <p>Search strategy for: PsychINFO, CINAHL, MEDLINE, PsycARTICLES, ASSIA and Web of Science</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Child* OR teen* OR adolescent OR “young pe**” – Free Text Search</li> <li>2. Foster Care – Thesaurus Search</li> <li>3. “foster care” OR “foster child*” OR “foster parent*” OR “out of home care” OR residen* OR institution* OR “child* in care” OR “looked after child*” OR “care leav*” – Free Text Search</li> <li>4. (2 OR 3)</li> <li>5. Family – Thesaurus Search</li> <li>6. Famil* OR “family unit” – Free Text Search</li> <li>7. (5 OR 6)</li> <li>8. Reunification – Thesaurus Search</li> <li>9. Reunion OR reunify* OR restor* OR “return home” OR reintegration OR transition – Free Text Search</li> <li>10. (8 OR 9)</li> <li>11. (1 AND 4 AND 7 AND 10)</li> <li>12. Limiters: English language and peer-reviewed studies</li> </ol> <p>Free text, MeSH and thesaurus terms will be used</p> <p>Search strategy and eligibility criteria will be independently assessed by an independent reviewer</p> |
| 11 | <b>Study Records</b><br><br><i>Data Management</i><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><i>Selection Process</i> | <p>A database will be created in Microsoft Excel which will store the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of studies identified from the search strategy, no. of studies identified by title, no. of studies identified by abstract, number of studies identified by full-text</li> <li>• Titles of studies identified by title, titles of studies identified by abstract, title of studies identified by full-text</li> <li>• Reasons for exclusion will also be recorded</li> </ul> <p>Searches will be stored in each individual database</p> <p>Mendeley Reference Management Software will be used to collate references identified to read by abstract and delete duplicates</p> <p>Retrieved references will be screened against the inclusion and exclusion criteria by the main author and titles selected.</p>  |

|    |                                    |  |
|----|------------------------------------|--|
|    |                                    | <p>References will then be screened separately by title by the main author and independent reviewer. Titles which clearly do not meet the inclusion criteria will be excluded.</p> <p>The remaining references will then be screened by abstract/full text by each of the reviewers separately. Reasons for exclusion at each stage will be recorded. Inter-rated reliability between the reviewers will be established using the Kappa statistic. Disagreements will be resolved through discussion/consensus. If this is not possible, the academic supervisor will be consulted.</p> <p>Articles considered eligible by either reviewer will be screened by full-text to ensure eligibility by the main author.</p> <p>The reference list from all eligible articles will be screened to establish whether there have been any articles that were overlooked in the search. Any potential overlooked articles will be screened by abstract (or full-text where required).</p> |
| 12 | <b>Data Items</b>                  | Given that the aim of the review is to bring together what is known about family reunification, it is not anticipated that the eligible studies will present relevant data items. However, where data items are reported in eligible studies, a narrative summary will be provided.  |
| 13 | <b>Outcomes and prioritisation</b> | Any outcome of reunification of children in care with their birth parents (e.g. re-entry into care, psychological, health, interpersonal outcomes or the experience of these)  |
| 14 | <b>Plan for minimising bias</b>    | <p><b>Publication Bias:</b> unpublished evidence will be searched in the form of Google Scholar, government databases and charitable organisations in the field such as: NSPCC, The Who Cares Trust and BAAF. Any eligible articles will be screened and compared with the other peer-reviewed studies. These information sources may be used within the introduction and background sections of the review.</p> <p>The quality appraisal of included studies will include an assessment of bias.</p> <p>Independent assessment of search terms and independent screening of titles and abstracts will be used as a means of minimising researcher bias.</p>   |
| 15 | <b>Data Synthesis</b>              | A data extraction form will be developed and piloted by the main author and discussed with the academic supervisor. The data extraction form will then be used to ensure reliable extraction of relevant data from each study. Data will be extracted by the main author only and recorded in a data extraction table.   |

|           |                           |   |
|-----------|---------------------------|---|
| <b>16</b> | <b>Meta-bias(es)</b>      | A discussion of meta-bias (e.g. publication bias across studies, selective reporting within studies) will be included in the final article  |
| <b>17</b> | <b>Quality assessment</b> | The main author will undertake quality assessment of eligible articles.<br><br>The following appraisal tools will be used to assess the quality of each study:<br><br>Quantitative studies: Crow Critical Appraisal Tool (CCAT) – Crowe (2013)<br>Qualitative studies: Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP)<br>Mixed Method Studies: Evaluation Tool for Mixed Method Studies - Long (2005) |

**Appendix B – Databases Searched**

| Database  | Host / Interface  | Date of Search | Access via:      |
|---|---|----------------|------------------|
| <b>Scoping Search</b>                               |   |                |                  |
| Cochrane Library                                    | <a href="http://www.cochranelibrary.com/">http://www.cochranelibrary.com/</a>                   | 27/11/2016     | NA               |
| PROSPERO  | <a href="https://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPERO/">https://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPERO/</a>         | 27/11/2016     | NA               |
| Google  | <a href="https://www.google.co.uk/">https://www.google.co.uk/</a>                               | 27/11/2016     | NA               |
| <b>Main Search</b>                                  |   |                |                  |
| PsycINFO  | EBSCO Host  | 20/12/2016     | Keele University |
| PsycARTICLES  | EBSCO Host  | 20/12/2016     | Keele University |
| CINAHL  | EBSCO Host  | 20/12/2016     | Keele University |
| MEDLINE   | EBSCO Host  | 20/12/2016     | Keele University |
| ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts) | ProQuest  | 21/12/2016     | Keele University |
| Web of Science Core Collection                      | Thomson Reuters   | 21/12/2016     | Keele University |
| Social Care Online                                  | <a href="http://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/">http://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/</a> | 22/12/2016     | NA               |
| <b>Grey Literature Search</b>                       |   |                |                  |
| Google Scholar                                      | <a href="https://scholar.google.co.uk/">https://scholar.google.co.uk/</a>                       | 23/12/2016     | NA               |
| NSPCC   | <a href="https://www.nspcc.org.uk/">NSPCC.org.uk/</a>   | 23/12/2016     | NA               |
| The Joseph Rowntree Foundation                      | <a href="https://www.jrf.org.uk/">https://www.jrf.org.uk/</a>                                   | 23/12/2016     | NA               |

**Appendix C – Data Extraction Form**

| <b>Study Details</b>                       |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Study Title</b>                         |  |
| <b>Study Authors</b>                       |  |
| <b>Year of Publication</b>                 |  |
| <b>Journal</b>                             |  |
| <b>Funding</b>                             |  |
| <b>Study Design</b>                        |  |
| <b>Study Aims</b>                          |  |
| <b>Research Questions</b>                  |  |
| <b>Setting</b>                             |  |
| <b>Sample</b>                              |  |
| <b>How were participants selected</b>      |  |
| <b>Eligibility Criteria</b>                |  |
| <b>Nature of Study</b>                     |  |
| <b>Duration</b>                            |  |
| <b>Method of data collection</b>           |  |
| <b>Type of Analysis</b>                    |  |
| <b>Results</b>                             |  |
| <b>Descriptive</b>                         |  |
| <b>Main Findings</b>                       |  |
| <b>Strengths</b>                           |  |
| <b>Limitations</b>                         |  |
| <b>Recommendations for future research</b> |  |
| <b>Implications for Practice</b>           |  |
| <b>Ethics</b>                              |  |
| <b>Bias</b>                                |  |
| <b>Comments</b>                            |  |
|  |  |

## Appendix D – Log of Email Correspondence

Re: Reunification Articles

E R Farmer <E.R.Farmer@bristol.ac.uk>

Mon 09/01/2017 10:11

**To:** CARLSON Lyndsey <c026531e@student.staffs.ac.uk>;

Dear Lyndsey

The interview material is set out in the book which reports the whole study which is-

Elaine Farmer, Wendy Sturgess, Teresa O'Neill and Dinithi Wijedasa (2011) *Achieving Successful Returns from Care: What makes reunification work?*, London, BAAF. [now Coram/BAAF]

There aren't any other articles directly about that study.

You might also be interested to know about our most recent work on reunification. With the NSPCC we have produced a Practice Framework for reunification practice which can be obtained free from our website [see below my signature] and it has lots of relevant research in it. Fairly shortly I'll be putting my literature review on this topic on the same website

Best wishes

Elaine

Elaine Farmer

Professor of Child and Family Studies

School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, 8 Priory Road, Bristol BS8 1TZ UK

[e.r.farmer@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:e.r.farmer@bristol.ac.uk)

Please note I work three days a week

Recent Publications

Farmer E and Patsios D.(2016) *Evaluation Report on Implementing the Reunification Practice Framework*, Bristol, University of Bristol

Wilkins M. and Farmer E. (2015) *Reunification: An Evidence-Informed Framework for Return Home Practice*, London, NSPCC. Both available on-line at

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/research/projects/completed/2016/returninghome/>

Farmer E. and Dance C. (2015) 'Family Finding and Matching in Adoption: What Helps to Make a Good Match?', *British Journal of Social Work*. First online DOI 10.1093/bjsw/bcv003

Farmer E. and Lutman E. (2014) 'Working effectively with neglected children and their families – what needs to change?' *Child Abuse Review, Special Edition on Neglect*, Vol. 23, pp. 262–273.

Farmer E. (2014) 'Improving Reunification Practice: Pathways Home, Progress and Outcomes for Children Returning from Care to Their Parents', *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 44 (2), pp.348–366.

On 6 January 2017 at 18:40, CARLSON Lyndsey  
<[c026531e@student.staffs.ac.uk](mailto:c026531e@student.staffs.ac.uk)> wrote:

Dear Professor Farmer,

I have recently read two of your published articles on reunification of LAC (see below). Both articles refer to interviews that were undertaken with a sub-sample of participants and state that the findings from these interviews will be reported in a separate article. Could you tell me has this article been published and if so do you have the reference please?

Kind Regards

Lyndsey Carlson

Farmer, E., & Wijedasa, D. (2013). The reunification of looked after children with their parents: What contributes to return stability?. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43(8), 1611-1629.

Farmer, E. (2014). Improving reunification practice: Pathways home, progress and outcomes for children returning from care to their parents. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(2), 348-366.

**Lyndsey Carlson MBPsS**  
**Trainee Clinical Psychologist**  
**Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (DClinPsy)**  
**Faculty of Health Sciences**  
**Staffordshire University & Keele University**

## Appendix E – Crowe Critical Appraisal Tool (2013)

Appraise research on the merits of the research design used, not against other research designs.

| Category<br>Item                                | Item descriptors<br><input type="checkbox"/> Present; <input type="checkbox"/> Absent; <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable  | Description<br>[Important information for each item] | Score<br>[0–5]      |
|---|---|--|---------------------|
| <b>1. Preliminaries</b>                         |   |  |                     |
| Title   | 1. Includes study aims <input type="checkbox"/> and design <input type="checkbox"/>   |  |                     |
| Abstract<br>(assess last)                       | 1. Key information <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Balanced <input type="checkbox"/> and informative <input type="checkbox"/>  |  |                     |
| Text<br>(assess last)                           | 1. Sufficient detail others could reproduce <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Clear/concise writing <input type="checkbox"/> ; table(s) <input type="checkbox"/> ; diagram(s) <input type="checkbox"/> ; figure(s) <input type="checkbox"/>  |  |                     |
|   |   |  | Preliminaries [5]   |
| <b>2. Introduction</b>                          |   |  |                     |
| Background                                      | 1. Summary of current knowledge <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Specific problem(s) addressed <input type="checkbox"/> and reason(s) for addressing <input type="checkbox"/>   |  |                     |
| Objective                                       | 1. Primary objective(s), hypothesis(es), or aim(s) <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Secondary question(s) <input type="checkbox"/>  |  |                     |
| Is it worth continuing?                         |   |  | Introduction [5]    |
| <b>3. Design</b>                                |   |  |                     |
| Research design                                 | 1. Research design(s) chosen <input type="checkbox"/> and why <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Suitability of research design(s) <input type="checkbox"/>   |  |                     |
| Intervention,<br>Treatment, Exposure            | 1. Intervention(s)/treatment(s)/exposure(s) chosen <input type="checkbox"/> and why <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Precise details of the intervention(s)/treatment(s)/exposure(s) <input type="checkbox"/> for each group <input type="checkbox"/><br>3. Intervention(s)/treatment(s)/exposure(s) valid <input type="checkbox"/> and reliable <input type="checkbox"/>   |  |                     |
| Outcome, Output,<br>Predictor, Measure          | 1. Outcome(s)/output(s)/predictor(s)/measure(s) chosen <input type="checkbox"/> and why <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Clearly define outcome(s)/output(s)/predictor(s)/measure(s) <input type="checkbox"/><br>3. Outcome(s)/output(s)/predictor(s)/measure(s) valid <input type="checkbox"/> and reliable <input type="checkbox"/>   |  |                     |
| Bias, etc                                       | 1. Potential bias <input type="checkbox"/> ; confounding variables <input type="checkbox"/> ; effect modifiers <input type="checkbox"/> ; interactions <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Sequence generation <input type="checkbox"/> ; group allocation <input type="checkbox"/> ; group balance <input type="checkbox"/> ; and by whom <input type="checkbox"/><br>3. Equivalent treatment of participants/cases/groups <input type="checkbox"/>   |  |                     |
| Is it worth continuing?                         |   |  | Design [5]          |
| <b>4. Sampling</b>                              |   |  |                     |
| Sampling method                                 | 1. Sampling method(s) chosen <input type="checkbox"/> and why <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Suitability of sampling method <input type="checkbox"/>  |  |                     |
| Sample size                                     | 1. Sample size <input type="checkbox"/> ; how chosen <input type="checkbox"/> ; and why <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Suitability of sample size <input type="checkbox"/>  |  |                     |
| Sampling protocol                               | 1. Target/actual/sample population(s): description <input type="checkbox"/> and suitability <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Participants/cases/groups: inclusion <input type="checkbox"/> and exclusion <input type="checkbox"/> criteria<br>3. Recruitment of participants/cases/groups <input type="checkbox"/>  |  |                     |
| Is it worth continuing?                         |   |  | Sampling [5]        |
| <b>5. Data collection</b>                       |   |  |                     |
| Collection method                               | 1. Collection method(s) chosen <input type="checkbox"/> and why <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Suitability of collection method(s) <input type="checkbox"/>   |  |                     |
| Collection protocol                             | 1. Include date(s) <input type="checkbox"/> ; location(s) <input type="checkbox"/> ; setting(s) <input type="checkbox"/> ; personnel <input type="checkbox"/> ; materials <input type="checkbox"/> ; processes <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Method(s) to ensure/enhance quality of measurement/instrumentation <input type="checkbox"/><br>3. Manage non-participation <input type="checkbox"/> ; withdrawal <input type="checkbox"/> ; incomplete/lost data <input type="checkbox"/> |  |                     |
| Is it worth continuing?                         |   |  | Data collection [5] |
| <b>6. Ethical matters</b>                       |   |  |                     |
| Participant ethics                              | 1. Informed consent <input type="checkbox"/> ; equity <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Privacy <input type="checkbox"/> ; confidentiality/anonymity <input type="checkbox"/>  |  |                     |
| Researcher ethics                               | 1. Ethical approval <input type="checkbox"/> ; funding <input type="checkbox"/> ; conflict(s) of interest <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Subjectivities <input type="checkbox"/> ; relationship(s) with participants/cases <input type="checkbox"/>   |  |                     |
| Is it worth continuing?                         |   |  | Ethical matters [5] |
| <b>7. Results</b>                               |   |  |                     |
| Analysis, Integration,<br>Interpretation method | 1. A.I.I. method(s) for primary outcome(s)/output(s)/predictor(s) chosen <input type="checkbox"/> and why <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Additional A.I.I. methods (e.g. subgroup analysis) chosen <input type="checkbox"/> and why <input type="checkbox"/><br>3. Suitability of analysis/integration/interpretation method(s) <input type="checkbox"/>  |  |                     |
| Essential analysis                              | 1. Flow of participants/cases/groups through each stage of research <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Demographic and other characteristics of participants/cases/groups <input type="checkbox"/><br>3. Analyse raw data <input type="checkbox"/> ; response rate <input type="checkbox"/> ; non-participation/withdrawal/incomplete/lost data <input type="checkbox"/>  |  |                     |
| Outcome, Output,<br>Predictor analysis          | 1. Summary of results <input type="checkbox"/> and precision <input type="checkbox"/> for each outcome/output/predictor/measure<br>2. Consideration of benefits/harms <input type="checkbox"/> ; unexpected results <input type="checkbox"/> ; problems/failures <input type="checkbox"/><br>3. Description of outlying data (e.g. diverse cases, adverse effects, minor themes) <input type="checkbox"/>   |  |                     |
|   |   |  | Results [5]         |
| <b>8. Discussion</b>                            |   |  |                     |
| Interpretation                                  | 1. Interpretation of results in the context of current evidence <input type="checkbox"/> and objectives <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Draw inferences consistent with the strength of the data <input type="checkbox"/><br>3. Consideration of alternative explanations for observed results <input type="checkbox"/><br>4. Account for bias <input type="checkbox"/> ; confounding/effect modifiers/interactions/imprecision <input type="checkbox"/>                                 |  |                     |
| Generalisation                                  | 1. Consideration of overall practical usefulness of the study <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Description of generalisability (external validity) of the study <input type="checkbox"/>  |  |                     |
| Concluding remarks                              | 1. Highlight study's particular strengths <input type="checkbox"/><br>2. Suggest steps that may improve future results (e.g. limitations) <input type="checkbox"/><br>3. Suggest further studies <input type="checkbox"/>   |  |                     |
|   |   |  | Discussion [5]      |
| <b>9. Total</b>                                 |   |  |                     |
| Total score                                     | 1. Add all scores for categories 1–8  |  |                     |
|   |   |  | Total [40]          |

**Appendix F – Quality Appraisal Results for Quantitative Studies**

Quality Appraisal Results for Quantitative Studies – Crowe Critical Appraisal Tool (2013)

| <b>Category</b>    | <b>Farmer (2014)</b> | <b>Farmer &amp; Wijedasa (2013)</b> | <b>Lutman &amp; Farmer (2012)</b> | <b>Murphy &amp; Fairtlough (2015)</b> | <b>Biehal, Sinclair &amp; Wade (2015)</b> |
|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Preliminaries   | 2                    | 2                                   | 2                                 | 3                                     | 4   |
| 2. Introduction    | 3                    | 2                                   | 1                                 | 5                                     | 4   |
| 3. Design          | 1                    | 1                                   | 2                                 | 3                                     | 3   |
| 4. Sampling        | 3                    | 2                                   | 2                                 | 4                                     | 4   |
| 5. Data collection | 2                    | 2                                   | 2                                 | 4                                     | 3   |
| 6. Ethical matters | 3                    | 1                                   | 1                                 | 4                                     | 1   |
| 7. Results         | 2                    | 3                                   | 3                                 | 3                                     | 3   |
| 8. Discussion      | 2                    | 2                                   | 3                                 | 3                                     | 4   |
| 9. Total Score     | 18                   | 15                                  | 16                                | 29                                    | 26  |
| Combined Total %   | 45%                  | 35%                                 | 40%                               | 73%                                   | 65%                                       |

**Appendix G – Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP)**

| No. | Questions   | Supporting Evidence |
|-----|---|---------------------|
| 1   | <p><b>Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?</b></p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can't tell <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><b>HINT: Consider</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what was the goal of the research?</li> <li>• Why it was thought important?</li> <li>• Its relevance</li> </ul>   |                     |
| 2   | <p><b>Is qualitative methodology appropriate?</b></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can't tell <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><b>HINT: Consider</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants</li> <li>• Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal?</li> </ul> |                     |
| 3   | <p><b>Was there research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?</b></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can't tell <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><b>HINT: Consider</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)?</li> </ul>  |                     |
| 4   | <p><b>Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?</b></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>   |                     |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
|   | <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can't tell <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><b>HINT: Consider</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if the researcher has explained how the participants were selected</li> <li>• if they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study</li> <li>• if there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)</li> </ul>   |  |
| 5 | <p><b>Was there data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?</b></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can't tell <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><b>HINT: Consider</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if the setting for data collection was justified</li> <li>• if it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)</li> <li>• if the researcher has justified the methods chosen</li> <li>• if the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, I'd there an indication of how interviews were conducted or did they use a topic guide)?</li> <li>• if methods were modified during the study. if so has the researcher explained how and why?</li> <li>• if the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc)</li> <li>• if the researcher has discussed saturation of data</li> </ul> |  |
| 6 | <p><b>Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?</b></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can't tell <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><b>HINT: Consider</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) formulation of the research questions</li> <li>b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location</li> </ol> </li> </ul>  |  |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design</li> </ul>   |  |
| 7 | <p><b>Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?</b></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can't tell <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><b>HINT: Consider</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained</li> <li>• if the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)</li> <li>• if approval has been sought from the ethics committee</li> </ul>  |  |
| 8 | <p><b>Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?</b></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can't tell <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><b>HINT: Consider</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process</li> <li>• If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data?</li> <li>• Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process</li> <li>• If sufficient data are presented to support the findings</li> <li>• To what extent contradictory data are taken into account</li> <li>• Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation</li> </ul> |  |
| 9 | <p><b>Is there a clear statement of findings?</b></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>   |  |

|                  |   |  |
|------------------|---|--|
|                  | <p>Can't tell <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><b>HINT: Consider</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the findings are explicit</li> <li>• If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researchers arguments</li> <li>• If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)</li> <li>• If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question</li> </ul>   |  |
| <p><b>10</b></p> | <p><b>How valuable is the research?</b></p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Can't tell <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><b>HINT: Consider</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy?, or relevant research-based literature?</li> <li>• If they identify new areas where research is necessary</li> <li>• If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used</li> </ul> |  |

**Appendix H - Quality Appraisal Results for Qualitative Studies**

Quality Appraisal Results for Qualitative Studies – Critical Appraisal Skills Programme Qualitative Research Checklist (2013)

| <b>Category</b>                           | <b>Malet et al. (2009)</b> |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1. Clear statement of aims                | 2                          |
| 2. Is qualitative methodology appropriate | 2                          |
| 3. Research design appropriate to aims    | 1                          |
| 4. Recruitment strategy appropriate       | 2                          |
| 5. Data collection                        | 1                          |
| 6. Role of the researcher                 | 0                          |
| 7. Ethical issues                         | 0                          |
| 8. Data analysis – rigour                 | 1                          |
| 9. Clear statement of findings            | 1                          |
| 10. Valuable research                     | 2                          |
| <b>Total Score</b>                        | <b>12/20 (60%)</b>         |

Key: 2 = Criteria completely met, 1 = Criteria partially met, 0 = Criteria not met

**Appendix I - Evaluative Tool for Mixed Method Studies (Long, 2005)**

| <b>Review Area</b>   | <b>Key Questions</b> |
|--|----------------------|
| <b>(1) STUDY EVALUATIVE OVERVIEW</b>                                   |                      |
| Bibliographic Details  |                      |
| Purpose  |                      |
| Key Findings   |                      |
| Evaluative Summary   |                      |
| <b>(2) STUDY AND CONTEXT (SETTING, SAMPLE AND OUTCOME MEASUREMENT)</b> |                      |
| The study  |                      |
| Context I: Setting   |                      |
| Context II: Sample   |                      |
| Context III: Outcome Measurement                                       |                      |
| <b>(3) ETHICS</b>  |                      |
| Ethics   |                      |
| <b>(4) GROUP COMPARABILITY</b>   |                      |
| Comparable Groups  |                      |
| <b>(5) QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS</b>                    |                      |
| Data Collection Methods  |                      |
| Data Analysis  |                      |
| Researcher's Potential Bias  |                      |
| <b>(6) POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS</b>                            |                      |
| Implications   |                      |
| <b>(7) OTHER COMMENTS</b>  |                      |
| Other comments   |                      |
| Reviewer   |                      |

**Appendix J – Quality Appraisal Results for Mixed Method Studies**

Quality Appraisal Results for Mixed Method Studies – Evaluative Tool for Mixed Method Studies (Long, 2005)

| <b>Category</b>            | <b>Brandon &amp; Thoburn (2008)</b> | <b>Broadhurst &amp; Pendleton (2007)</b> |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Evaluative Summary         | 2                                   | 2  |
| The study                  | 2                                   | 2  |
| Context I: Setting         | 1                                   | 2  |
| Context II: Sample         | 0                                   | 1  |
| Context III: Outcomes      | 1                                   | 2  |
| Ethics                     | 0                                   | 1  |
| Data collection methods    | 1                                   | 1  |
| Data analysis              | 1                                   | 1  |
| Researchers Potential Bias | 0                                   | 0  |
| Implications               | 1                                   | 1  |
| <b>Total Score</b>         | <b>9/20 (45%)</b>                   | <b>13/20 (65%)</b>                       |

Key: 2 = Criteria completely met, 1 = Criteria partially met, 0 = Criteria not met

**Appendix K – Descriptive Theme Extracts**

| <b>Theme</b>           | <b>Quotes</b>  |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>Support</b>         | <p>“when another agency such as a health visitor or voluntary organisation had helped to supervise the children during reunification, the returns were four times more likely to be stable than when this was not the case” (Farmer &amp; Wijedasa, 2013)</p> <p>“almost one-fifth of families received a combination of therapeutic, practical and financial support” (Murphy &amp; Fairclough, 2015)</p> <p>“from the parents accounts it was very clear, that in large part, families were receiving standardised support, organised according to the LAC requirements, rather than an individualised and responsive service” (Broadhurst &amp; Pendelton, 2007)</p> <p>“a number of parents interviewed felt they had received insufficient support from social services” (Malet et al., 2009)</p> <p>“when there had be referrals but not service for children (suggesting unmet need for help), there were more return breakdowns” (Farmer &amp; Wijedasa, 2013)</p>   |
| <b>Case management</b> | <p>“patterns of assessment and planning varied between local authorities” (Biehal et al., 2015)</p> <p>“a range of factors relating to case management were significantly related to unstable outcomes. There had more often been a lack of clear focus on problem areas, decisions not followed through and cases closed when serious problems were still evident (Luntman &amp; Farmer, 2012)</p> <p>“assessment, planning and decision making regarding reunification happened inconsistently”; “no clear expectations regarding who should decide when a child could return and on what basis”; “in 20 percent of cases, there was no evidence of either the parents or child being consulted about the reunification” (Murphy &amp; Fairclough, 2015).</p> <p>“some parents felt that they were not given enough information to be properly involved in the decision-making process” (Malet et al., 2009)</p> <p>“parents clearly felt dis-empowered in terms of discharging care orders... parents expressed confusion about whom, or how care orders should be discharged” (Broadhurst &amp; Pendelton, 2007)</p> |
| <b>Oscillation</b>     | <p>“two-thirds of the children in the study had experienced one or more failed returns”; “social workers and children... commented on the severe negative impact on children of oscillating” (Farmer, 2012)</p> <p>“example of an ‘oscillating’ case where the child comes in and out of care, partly due to poor planning” (Murphy &amp; Fairclough, 2015)</p>  |
| <b>Parenting</b>       | <p>“on occasions, cases were (temporarily) closed, even though there were still concerns about the children’s welfare, because of the instability of workers to engage the parents” (Brandon &amp; Thoburn, 2008)</p> <p>“when parents were ambivalent about the Child’s return, the original concerns arose again... the likelihood of return breakdown increased” (Farmer &amp; Wijedasa, 2013)</p>  |

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
|                              | <p>“parental problems caused most return disruptions” (Farmer, 2012)</p> <p>“they [children] came from homes marked by multiple parental problems”; “concerns were also noted regarding the re-emergence of parental drug or alcohol problems, parents’ failure to comply with treatment programmes and the reintroduction of violent partners into the household” (Biehal et al., 2015)</p> |
| <b>Reoccurrence of abuse</b> | <p>“over half the children who were restored home suffered one or more further episodes of neglect or abuse” (Brandon &amp; Thoburn, 2008)</p> <p>“59 percent of the children had been abused or neglected after reunification” (Lutman &amp; Farmer, 2012)</p> <p>“there was evidence of the recurrence of neglect and of physical, emotional and sexual abuse” (Biehal et al., 2015)</p>   |

## Appendix L – Journal Guidelines

### Child and Family Social Work

#### Author Guidelines

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The journal to which you are submitting your manuscript employs a plagiarism detection system. By submitting your manuscript to this journal you accept that your manuscript may be screened for plagiarism against previously published works.

#### 3.1. Getting Started

##### 1. GENERAL

*Child & Family Social Work* provides a forum where researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and managers in the field exchange knowledge, increase understanding and develop notions of good practice. In its promotion of research and practice, which is both disciplined and articulate, the Journal is dedicated to advancing the wellbeing and welfare of children and their families throughout the world.

*Child & Family Social Work* publishes original and distinguished contributions on matters of research, theory, policy and practice in the field of social work with children and their families. The Journal gives international definition to the discipline and practice of child and family social work.

Please read the instructions below carefully for details on the submission of manuscripts, the journal's requirements and standards as well as information concerning the procedure after a manuscript has been accepted for publication in *Child & Family Social Work*. Authors are encouraged to visit [Author Services](#) for further information on the preparation and submission of articles and figures.

##### 2. ETHICAL GUIDELINES

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##### 2.1. Authorship and Acknowledgements

**Authorship:** Authors submitting a paper do so on the understanding that the manuscript has been read and approved by all authors and that all authors agree to the submission of the manuscript to the Journal. ALL named authors must have made an active contribution to the conception and design and/or analysis and interpretation of the data and/or the drafting of the paper and ALL must have critically reviewed its content and have approved the final version submitted for publication. Participation solely in the acquisition of funding or the collection of data does not justify authorship.

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It is a requirement that all authors have been accredited as appropriate upon submission of the manuscript. Contributors who do not qualify as authors should be mentioned under Acknowledgements.

**Acknowledgements:** Under Acknowledgements please specify contributors to the article other than the authors accredited. Please also include specifications of the source of funding for the study and any potential conflict of interests if appropriate. Suppliers of materials should be named and their location (town, state/county, country) included.

## **2.2. Ethical Approvals**

Experimental Subjects: experimentation involving human subjects will only be published if such research has been conducted in full accordance with ethical principles, including the [World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki](#) (version 2002) and the additional requirements, if any, of the country where the research has been carried out. Manuscripts must be accompanied by a statement that the experiments were undertaken with the understanding and written consent of each subject and according to the above mentioned principles. A statement regarding the fact that the study has been independently reviewed and approved by an ethical board should also be included. Editors reserve the right to reject papers if there are doubts as to whether appropriate procedures have been used.

## **2.3. Appeal of Decision**

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Complete instructions for submitting a paper are available online and below.

#### **4.1. Getting Started**

Launch your web browser (supported browsers include Internet Explorer 6 or higher, Netscape 7.0, 7.1, or 7.2, Safari 1.2.4, or Firefox 1.0.4) and go to the journal's online Submission Site: <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/cfsw>.

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  - Enter your institution and address information as appropriate, and then click 'Next.'
  - Enter a user ID and password of your choice (we recommend using your e-mail address as your user ID), and then select your area of expertise. Click 'Finish'.
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- Log-in and select 'Author Center'

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- After you have logged in, click the 'Submit a Manuscript' link in the menu bar.
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- Buchanan, A. (1997) The Dolphin Project: the impact of the Children Act. In: *Participation and Empowerment in Child Protection* (eds C. Cloke & M. Davies), pp. 120-139. John Wiley, Chichester.
- Packman, J. & Jordan, W. (1991) The Children Act: looking forward, looking back. *British Journal of Social Work*, **21**, 315-327.

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**Paper 2: Empirical Paper**

**What About the Others? A qualitative exploration of being placed into care whilst having siblings who remain in the family home.**

**Target Journal:** British Journal of Social Work (Author guidelines can be found in Appendix N)

## **Abstract**

Children are placed in care for a variety of reasons and at different rates across the country. Research focussing on why siblings are separated when entering care and the outcomes of such separation is still a relatively under-researched topic. Much less is known about children placed in care who have siblings who remain in the family home. To understand how looked after children make sense of this form of separation, the experiences of eight adult care leavers from across England were explored. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and the transcripts analysed according to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis methodology. Three superordinate themes emerged: self-concept, family dynamics and survival strategies. Consideration of how these factors interact and implications for clinical practice and future research are discussed in relation to existing theory and research. While significant efforts are being made to increase the knowledge and evidence base regarding separation of siblings through local authority care, there is still a great deal to be learned.

**Keywords:** Looked After Children, Siblings, Separation, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Attachment Theory

## Introduction

There are a number of children in the UK whose parents are incapable or unwilling to care for them, these children are often placed under the care of the local authority (LA) and are known as children in care or looked after children (LAC, Children Act 1989). There were 70,440 LAC in England on 31 March 2016 an increase of 5% compared to 2012 (The Department for Education [DfE], 2016). The majority of children are placed in care because of abuse or neglect. At the end of March 2016, 60% of children were looked after for this reason (DfE, 2016), this proportion has remained consistent since 2009 (National Audit Office, 2014). By placing children in care, LAs aim to protect children from further harm, improve outcomes for them and address their basic need for good parenting (Association of Directors of Children's Services, 2012).

Seventy-four percent of LAC (51,850) in England were cared for in foster placements as of March 2016 (DfE, 2016). In order to thrive, LAC require a secure base, stability and continuity (Mitchell *et al.*, 2010). Research shows that having multiple placements reduces opportunities for children to develop secure attachments (Munro & Hardy, 2006), therefore placement stability is desirable as it provides children with the opportunity to form stable attachments. Looked after children also need reliable contact with their own family, where possible and appropriate, which is reflected in policy and practice guidance (Children Act 1989; Children and Young Persons Act, 2008; Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations, 2010; NICE, 2010) and has been identified as a human right for children (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Thus, when siblings are placed in care, deciding whether to place them together or separately is of critical importance.

A recent survey of LAC by Ofsted found 63% had siblings who were also in care and 71% of those had been separated and did not share a placement with their sibling(s) (Ofsted, 2014). This is consistent with an earlier British study which found 80% of foster children had siblings living elsewhere including at home and in care (Rushton *et al.*, 2001). Sibling relationships are a powerful influence on child development (Buist *et al.*, 2013). The role of early attachments to siblings is critical and the loss

children experience when important relationships are disrupted can lead to an impaired ability to form attachments with others over time (Shlonsky *et al.*, 2005; Thompson, 2008; Whiteman *et al.*, 2011). Siblings form unique relationships particularly during times of parental vulnerability or absence (East, 2010). Secure attachment to an older sibling can reduce the impact of adverse circumstances for younger children (Sanders, 2004) and may contribute to a more positive internal working model of the self and others (Whelan, 2003). McCormick (2009) found that as adults, LAC who had greater contact with their siblings reported higher feelings of social support, higher self-esteem and stronger current relationships with their siblings. Sibling relationships can provide a permanent, unconditional, relationship that is ascribed rather than earned which can validate a child's sense of worthiness (Cicirelli, 1995).

Research indicates that placing siblings together can result in more stable placements and better outcomes for LAC (Hegar, 2005). Siblings can provide support and reassurance for each other and a sense of emotional continuity when everything else is changing (Kosonen, 1994; Shlonsky *et al.*, 2005). Wojciak *et al.* (2013) found that positive sibling relationships were protective and mediated the effect of trauma and development of depression, anxiety and withdrawal. Keeping siblings together is also associated with a higher likelihood of reunification with family of origin (Webster *et al.*, 2005). However, this is often overlooked when separating siblings.

The benefits of separating siblings are less clearly defined within the literature, however, it is acknowledged that there may be situations when it is not in the best interests to place siblings together. Children who are removed from their family home and placed in care often experience trauma and disruption to their sense of safety and security. While the Children Act advises that siblings should be placed together "so long as reasonable, practical and consistent with their welfare" (Children Act, 1989) this is rarely a simple task. Issues arise when children are placed into care years apart or have never lived together or where siblings have conflicting and complex needs that cannot be met in one placement. Together or Apart (Lord & Borthwick, 2008) identified conditions which may indicate that siblings should be placed separately. These include;

intense rivalry and jealousy, exploitation or chronic scapegoating of one child by the others, maintaining unhelpful hierarchical positions, highly sexualised behaviour or extreme behaviours which may re-traumatise each other (Lord & Borthwick, 2008). Thus, the level of developmental trauma and potential impact on child development needs to be considered carefully when making decisions about sibling placements. When siblings cannot be placed together, maintaining reasonable levels of contact is essential to ensure attachments are maintained.

The adoption of roles within the family system may be of critical importance for maltreated siblings in order to aid survival. Irish (1964) stated that sibling relationships serve many important functions such as providing role models and socialising children. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) proposed that children are seen as embedded within dyadic microsystems, in family mesosystems, in institutional and social exosystems that exist within broader cultural and environmental macrosystems. The sibling subsystem plays an important role during changes in family structure (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and cohesion can have protective effects. Research indicates that during family transitions siblings help each other to adjust (Hegar, 2005).

Several studies have reported that keeping siblings together is what young people state they would like (Hepinstall *et al.*, 2001; Selwyn *et al.*, 2010). Morgan (2009) found that 86% of all children in care thought it important to keep siblings together in care. The nature and importance of sibling relationships vary for individuals, depending on their own circumstances and developmental stage. However, sibling relationships are likely to be the longest in a person's lifetime and membership of a sibling group is a unique part of the identity of an individual which can promote a sense of belonging and wellbeing (NICE, 2010). Having a shared history can help identity development, self-esteem and socio-genealogical connectedness (Owusu-Bempah, 2010).

It is only in the past twenty years that researchers have begun to explore sibling separations through being placed in care and the consequences of this. However, research until this point has focussed primarily on the separation of siblings through different care placements or adoption. Statistics are not recorded on the number of LAC who have

siblings who remained at home, although Moyers *et al.* (2006) found two-thirds of their sample of adolescents in foster care had siblings who lived with one or both of their parents. The research regarding separation is largely descriptive and focuses on the outcomes of sibling placements (Hegar, 2005). The views and experiences of children placed in care whose siblings remain at home are neglected. There are a limited number of studies that ask care leavers to reflect on their experiences via qualitative interviews (Holland & Crowley, 2012). The qualitative studies that do exist (Snow, 2008; Unrau *et al.*, 2008; Samuels, 2009; Gaskell, 2010) find that there are shared experiences throughout the looked after population. Therefore, there is a need for greater understanding of how separations are experienced by care leavers to inform practice and policy guidelines on this issue.

### **Research Aims**

The aims of this study were to:

- Explore adults' perspectives on having been placed in care whilst having sibling(s) who remain in the family home.
- Understand the psychological impact of being separated.
- Understand how siblings navigate and perceive their relationships in the context of separation and the impact of this in adult life.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do adults make sense of being separated from their siblings?
2. What impact does this separation have on themselves and their relationships?

## **Methodology**

### **Ethics**

Ethical approval was sought and gained from Staffordshire University Ethics Committee Board (Appendix A). Informed consent was

obtained from all participants. Numerous measures were taken to ensure the wellbeing of participants, including ensuring, as far as possible, that each participant understood the research and interview process. The researcher tried to make the interviews as relaxed as possible and to facilitate rapport and address the power imbalance between participants and the researcher. At the end of each interview participants were given a debrief sheet, checked how they were feeling and asked about the interview experience.

Six of the eight participants agreed to have their interview filmed. The purpose of this was to produce a short film about this research to disseminate to a wider audience once the research is complete. As a consequence of videoing interviews anonymity was compromised. This was explained prior to gaining consent and detailed on the participant information sheet. The implications of this were also discussed verbally with participants prior to interview. Participants were not obliged to participate in filmed interviews; audio recording only was also available. Visual material will not be included in data analysis. Visual material is for dissemination purposes only.

## **Recruitment**

The research was promoted via social networking sites linked with charities that support care leavers (i.e. Twitter; Appendix B). A flyer (Appendix C) was posted online asking potential participants to contact the researcher if they would like to take part in the study. Those who responded provided an email address and were sent a participant information sheet (Appendix D).

A homogenous group of participants as required for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith *et al.*, 2009) was sought through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria consisted of adults aged twenty-one and over and no longer considered 'in care'. Participants must have been considered 'looked after' by the LA under a voluntary care order (Section 20; of the Children Act, 1989) or under a full care order (Section 31; Children Act, 1989) for a period of at least one month before the age of eighteen. Participants when placed in care must have had a

sibling(s) who remained within the family home with at least one birth parent for a period of at least one month. Due to the differences in social care practices and procedures that occur in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland only those placed in LA care in England were included. Individuals placed in kinship care were excluded as close contact with parents and siblings may have been maintained. As qualitative research relies heavily on language there was a concern that the richness and meaning of language may be lost if using an interpreter therefore those who were non-English speaking were also excluded. Recruitment took place between June 2016 and November 2016.

## Participants

A purposive sample, whereby selection is based on criteria relevant to the research question (Willig, 2001), of eight participants was included in this study. Participants' mean age was 33.75 (range: 21- 44 years). Participant demographic information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

### *Participant Demographic Information*

|                                | 1               | 2       | 3        | 4       | 5       | 6       | 7       | 8       |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|---------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>Pseudonym</b>               | David           | Rachel  | Eloise   | Sarah   | Allison | Jürgen  | Alice   | Gina    |
| <b>Age</b>                     | 30              | 36      | 36       | 22      | 36      | 26      | 40      | 44      |
| <b>Sex</b>                     | Male            | Female  | Female   | Female  | Female  | Male    | Female  | Female  |
| <b>Age when placed in care</b> | 13              | 14      | 4        | 13 & 16 | 13      | 11      | 13      | 4 & 11  |
| <b>Length of time in care</b>  | 5 years         | 4 years | 15 years | 2 years | 4 years | 7 years | 5 years | 9 years |
| <b>Number of siblings</b>      | 4               | 2       | 2        | 5       | 2       | 7       | 2       | 1       |
| <b>Sibling position</b>        | Second Youngest | Oldest  | Oldest   | Oldest  | Middle  | Middle  | Oldest  | Oldest  |
| <b>Number of children</b>      | 0               | 0       | 2        | 0       | 3       | 0       | 1       | 4       |

## Procedure

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews in accordance with Smith *et al.* (2009). Six interviews were conducted face-to-face and two via the telephone (a convenient location could not be mutually agreed). The interview schedule was developed through discussion with the research team which included; a Professor of Clinical Psychology and a Clinical Psychologist, both with substantial knowledge and expertise in working with LAC (Appendix E). A mutually agreed date, time and location was arranged for interviews to be conducted. All participants were required to provide verbal and written informed consent (Appendix F). A questionnaire was used to ascertain demographic information prior to the interview (Appendix G). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Interviews lasted between 53 and 89 minutes. Interviews were anonymised on transcription and participants selected their own pseudonyms. Participants were given a debrief sheet (Appendix H) detailing sources of advice and support services in case participation evoked distress.

## Analysis

Transcripts were analysed according to IPA methodology outlined by Smith *et al.* (2009). Each transcript was treated individually with ideas that emerged from previous transcripts bracketed while analysing the next. Firstly, the transcript was read several times and the audio-recording was listened to alongside the transcript. The researcher's initial thoughts were noted. Secondly, transcripts were subjected to line-by-line coding; descriptive (content), linguistic (language) and conceptual (interpretation) comments were noted (Appendix I). Thirdly, the transcript was re-read to identify emerging themes which summarised the participant's words and the researcher's initial interpretations. Finally, emergent themes were typed into a chronological list (Appendix J), examined for patterns and organised into clusters of subthemes and super-ordinate themes (Appendix K). After each of the transcripts had been analysed, as described, the researcher looked for connections across participants

(Appendix L). Themes that were not well supported or well represented in the data were not included in the final master theme table. IPA interpretation involves a two-stage process known as the double hermeneutic, that is 'the participants are trying to make sense of their world and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world' (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 53). This highlights the dual role of the researcher within IPA.

### **Analysis Credibility**

To enhance the reliability and validity of data analysis the research was conducted in accordance with established guidelines for carrying out qualitative research (Turpin *et al.*, 1997; Smith *et al.*, 2009). A data audit trail was kept to ensure transparency regarding interpretations made and to allow for a clear trajectory to be seen between emerging themes and primary source material. Cross-validation, through presentation of material at a specialist IPA group, was conducted to prompt discussion and avoid individual researcher bias.

### **Ontological, Epistemological Position and Reflexivity**

Qualitative research is concerned with how people experience events, attribute meaning to these events and make sense of the world (Willig, 2008). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was selected as this is a relatively unexplored area of research and IPA allowed for an in-depth exploration of the individual perspectives of the participants. Larkin *et al.* (2006) believe that a strength of IPA is that it is open to a number of epistemological positions.

This research was conducted from a contextual constructionist position which assumes that all "knowledge is context specific and influenced by the perspective of the perceiver" (Lyons & Coyle, 2016 p. 368). Larkin *et al.* (2006) argue that researchers can attempt to understand individual points of view but this understanding will always be related to a particular person, in a particular context, at a particular time. Thus, research findings are dependent on the context in which the data is

gathered and analysed (Madill *et al.*, 2000). The researcher's epistemological position is related to their ontological position and therefore this should also be clarified. The researcher adopted a critical realist position which recognises that knowledge cannot be achieved with certainty but rather that data needs to be interpreted to further our understanding of the underlying structures (Willig, 2013).

Within qualitative research it is acknowledged that researchers should disclose their own values and assumptions as their view of the world influences the way in which results are presented (Willig, 2013). To maintain reflexivity the researcher kept a reflective diary. Notes were made regarding coding, interpretations and to enable insight into times where interpretation may have been influenced by experience. The researcher was mindful of their previous work with LAC in health and social care settings, which made them aware of the wide range of implications separation can have on young people and the uncertainty this can instil.

## Results

The analysis aimed to describe participants' experiences of separation. The data yielded three superordinate and thirteen subordinate themes (Table 2). Each theme will be described in turn and substantiated with the use of quotes from the transcripts.

### Superordinate Theme 1: Self Concept

This superordinate theme involved aspects of the participant's experiences that related to their development of self-concept. It includes how participants think about, evaluate and perceive themselves in regard to their experiences with others and the world and how their self-concept has developed over time.

***Self as unworthy.*** When participants described their early experiences of home and parenting they described themselves as unworthy and undeserving of; love, attention, time, achievement; beliefs

that were internalised and resulted in low self-esteem and low self-worth. This formed a core part of their identity and the way they viewed themselves during childhood.

*“I just felt like a failure like a total let down to everybody an I was just nothing I was rubbish erm I would never amount to anything... I remember when I was chosen to be an angel in the Christmas nativity play... I totally couldn't believe it because I was nothing who'd want me to be an angel” Gina (Line: 389)*

*“being a care leaver I used to hide that because I was worried I didn't want people to know erm I felt a deep sense of shame actually for it and I never really articulated it I always felt lesser in society... I felt like... almost that I was unworthy.” Jürgen (Line: 848-856)*

Table 2

*Superordinate and sub-ordinate Themes*

| <b>Super-ordinate Themes</b>  | <b>Sub-ordinate Themes</b>     | <b>Themes present in participant(s)</b> |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>1. Self-concept</b>        | a) Self as unworthy            | 1, 5, 6, 7, 8                           |
|                               | b) The world is unsafe         | All                                     |
|                               | c) Self as different           | All                                     |
|                               | d) The world can be safe       | 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8                     |
|                               | e) Self as resilient           | 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8                     |
| <b>2. Family dynamics</b>     | a) Maternal deprivation        | All                                     |
|                               | b) Responsibility for siblings | 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8                        |
|                               | c) Leaving others behind       | 1, 2, 4, 6, 7                           |
|                               | d) Making a choice             | 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8                     |
| <b>3. Survival strategies</b> | a) Pretending vs. Rebellious   | 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8                        |
|                               | b) Cutting off                 | 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7                        |
|                               | c) It is what it is            | 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8                     |
|                               | d) It was for the best         | 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8                        |

**The world is unsafe.** Participants lived in states of uncertainty and ambiguity in the family home and for some during their time in care. The experience of inconsistent and unreliable parenting meant that all participants viewed the world as uncertain and ultimately unsafe during childhood.

*“you know the phrase out of the frying pan and into the fire I flip that around actually and I say out of the fire which was an unsustainable erm form of abuse and living where actually my life was probably in danger quite often to a frying pan where it was a more sustainable type of abuse and situation that I was living in” Jürgen (Line: 281)*

The participants' lack of confidence and trust in others and the world around them resulted in feelings of helplessness and powerlessness as they were unable to effect change in their lives and many aspects of childhood naivety were lost.

*“if I hadn't been privy to a lot of the badness that was going on all the violence... then feeling like it was my responsibility to make them things right if I hadn't been exposed to that I'd have been a little bit more oblivious to how bad the world could be” Rachel (Line: 385)*

**Self as different.** As a result of their experiences of care and separation, participants developed an internal model of themselves as different to others, this sense of difference was central to their self-concept. Participants applied this belief about difference not only to their peers but also to their siblings which resulted in feelings of anger and resentment.

*“I didn't like being IDd as a kid in care which is what I was... I hated being different to everybody else hated being erm hated being singled out as you know the kid in care” Alice (Line: 393-400)*

The view of the self as different was pervasive, this stemmed from the experience of separation but persisted due to the lack of shared environment and living with siblings and resulted in participants questioning their sense of belonging in the world.

*“I didn’t belong anywhere...I ended up sitting on the toilet floor crying me eyes out... I wanna go home but I don’t know where home is” Rachel (Line: 414)*

*“you are different and you’ll remain different for the rest of your life” David (Line: 196)*

**The world can be safe.** Despite earlier experiences of the world being unsafe and that others could not be trusted, participants over time developed a new-found sense of safety based on corrective experiences.

*“I felt loved you know I felt reassured... I had that love warmth and that home that really that I hadn’t had when I was younger” Eloise (Line: 239)*

*“I felt secure safe in care it’s the first time in my life I felt safe... I just felt relieved of it and then I never ever wanted to go home again” Allison (Line: 222, 233)*

However, not all participants had positive experiences of care and for those participants the sense of safety was derived from later positive romantic relationships. Earlier unmet needs for love and acceptance were achieved in new relationships:

*“that relationship cemented my security that even if the family wasn’t necessarily my own, there were places in families that could be carved out for me and gave me a sense of fitting in somewhere and belonging” Alice (Line: 584)*

*“all you want is for someone to accept you for who you are and love you regardless of your crap and not leave me and he [husband] won’t leave me I know he won’t and that’s all I’ve ever wanted” Gina (Line: 669)*

**Self as resilient.** Participants described their own drive to take the initiative when looking after themselves, due to the belief that others could not be trusted. Two participants described themselves as “fighters” (Jürgen & Gina). There was a sense of satisfaction, determination and resilience about how their lives played out.

*“I’m very happy with who I am... everything that’s ever happened to me has built me up to be exactly who I am today I’m quite a resilient little f\*\*\*\*r.” David (Line: 538)*

*“yeah I weren’t cared for and I was alone... but that made me battle you’ve just got to battle you’ve got to get on and build your own life” Allison (Line: 689)*

Engaging in education was crucial for some participants in developing their sense of purpose. An inner sense of determination perhaps driven by a desire to prove their own worth to those who neglected them encouraged participants to achieve their goals:

*“I was well into my GCSEs and I knew that I just had to keep my head down, otherwise I was gonna be one of those looked after children who didn’t get any GCSEs and I wasn’t gonna be one of them” Alice (Line: 298)*

*“at university I was rubbing shoulders with people that had gone to private school... I was achieving the same as them I was beating them to get part time jobs I was doing more for society in terms of volunteering... it was reassuring actually and it made me realise I am as*

*academic I contribute equally or more to society” Jürgen  
(Line: 865)*

Participants who were parents were resolute in their determination not to replicate the patterns of their upbringing regarding their own parenting style. Participants recognised their own unmet needs and articulated how they corrected those experiences as illustrated by Allison:

*“you just show your kids love, because that’s where coldness comes from and it could affect your kids and repeat but for me it’s done the opposite I don’t want me kids to feel like I did unworthy, me kids are my life” Allison  
(Line: 799)*

## **Super-ordinate Theme 2: Family Dynamics**

This super-ordinate theme involved the patterns of relating that were played out between participants and their family members. Earlier experiences of maternal deprivation and responsibility for siblings are contrasted with current beliefs about the family system in the here and now.

**Maternal Deprivation.** All participants described difficulties in their early childhood experience of their mother. No participant experienced a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with their mother. Instead some participants experienced mothers who were abusive and this was described very clinically:

*“my mum was very abusive physically, mentally, emotionally any kind of abuse you want to put on that”  
David (Line: 8)*

*“I was blamed for me mum being ill I was blamed for me mums bipolar I was blamed for when she used to try and commit suicide” Gina (Line: 100)*

Other participants experienced their mothers as absent. This absence was often internalised by the participant as them being unwanted or unworthy and was crucial in terms of their self-concept:

*“The life kind of got sucked out of her as my dad got worse and worse and more and more unbearable so she turned to alcohol and she started to become less of a person.”  
Jürgen (Line: 145)*

*“I recognise now that my relationship with that mum figure has always been weaker than the relationship with the male... I don’t know if it’s because of what happened with my mum and that relationship, because there was no attachment, there was no bond with me and my mum I wasn’t wanted” Eloise (Line: 562)*

**Responsibility for siblings.** The majority of participants described having a parental responsibility for their younger siblings which is likely to have been due to their status as the oldest sibling within the family home.

*“me ma would like ask ask for a lot of help off me to look, look after help look after him when he was a baby and that so I felt a bit like his ma his second mum in a way” Rachel (Line: 156)*

*“we didn’t have a normal sibling relationship we have more of a mother child relationship when my mum decides she’s gonna stay in bed for days on end and thinks you can do the washing you can look after the kids” Sarah (Line: 144)*

Participants took on the role of parent in order for routines and life to continue. This role wasn’t perceived as optional as illustrated by Jürgen who described a sense of duty to his siblings:

*“the parental role that I felt with my brothers did feel very normal erm it it felt like I had no choice but to take that on”  
Jürgen (Line: 179)*

Responsibility was not just about practicalities but also about protecting and ensuring their siblings' safety even if that came at the participant's expense:

*“more than anything that I wanted them to feel safe and by me not feeling safe that meant they could... so there was a sense of tolerating stuff that was happening to me in order to ensure that those experiences weren't felt by my brother and sister” Alice (Line: 228)*

Alice also described the impact of that role being taken away when her place in the family was lost and a sense of being replaceable:

*“there's a thing that comes with being the oldest and being the most responsible and having to set an example which can be a massive chore at times but actually when it's taken away from you, you really miss it so there's a sense of loss that goes with that place in the family” Alice (Line: 545)*

**Leaving others behind.** When making sense of their experiences, participants reflected that it was not the separation from siblings that was challenging but rather the leaving of siblings behind in the family home.

*“I didn't want to be separated well it was not so much the separation it was the fact that I was leaving them at my mum's... it was the fact that I was leaving them in that situation and I knew what was going on in the house”  
Sarah (Line: 384)*

*“I hated leaving my brother and sister I hated the fact that they’d had to stay in the family home and I was really, really distressed about what their experiences might be now I wasn’t there to protect them” Alice (Line: 387)*

This perceived leaving of siblings behind triggered feelings of guilt, self-blame and responsibility. There was a sense that participants were not doing their job and they were letting their siblings down:

*“at first I felt guilty like it was all my fault I felt like they would blame me which maybe they still do blame me but, as I got older and more confident in the reasons why things happened [pause] I felt guilty that I feel more guilty now that they were left than I did at the time” Rachel (Line: 426-433)*

**Making a choice.** As participants reflected on their family dynamics a pattern became clear whereby the siblings who remained at home were placed in the position of having to choose between parental or sibling contact. This was a pattern that developed over time often after the participants had left the care system.

*“like me mum and me sister can only have a relationship with one of us at a time they haven’t they haven’t worked it out I have” Gina (Line: 541)*

*“part of his [brother] contract for having contact with her [mum] he wasn’t allowed to have contact with me and my sister erm and that carried on even into his and like I say he’s in his mid-thirties now” Alice (Line: 181)*

### **Superordinate Theme 3: Survival Strategies**

This superordinate theme described the coping strategies that participants found effective before being placed in care such as pretending

or rebelling, and the strategies they use in the present such as cutting off to reflect and process their experiences.

***Pretending vs. Rebelling.*** Participants were split in terms of participants who managed their difficulties and experiences at the time by pretending things at home were functional, and those who rebelled as they did not know any other way to manage their difficulties or get their needs met. For participants who pretended, it appeared that they denied what was happening to them to avoid any distressing feelings about their experience:

*“when I was in care and I was always always grateful it was always better even though it wasn’t perfect or great I just felt grateful and happy enough I was able to survive”  
Jürgen (Line: 926)*

Participants who rebelled appeared more in tune with their emotions but unable to contain them. There was also a sense that their behaviour was misunderstood as deliberately causing trouble rather than trying to get their needs met.

*“It went on as long as it did and got to the point where it was me who had to basically rebel in order to get certain people involved erm was wrong” Rachel (Line: 534)*

*“when they put me in foster care... I didn’t know how to be in a family unit probably brought back memories that I shouldn’t have been there should have been at home so yeah rebelled didn’t like it” Allison (Line: 359)*

*“I had all these feelings which is why I was rebelling anyway feelings of rejection feelings me mum didn’t love me feelings of having to be perfect and having this pressure on me that if I didn’t conform I was going into care” Gina (Line: 322)*

**Cutting off.** A method of coping which developed over time was cutting off contact with family members. Participants were no longer able to tolerate the distress brought about by family members and learnt that, unlike when they were younger, as an adult they do not have to.

*“he’s the one with the drug problem and I’ve just gone right okay I’m not talking to you now and stopped talking to him for a year” Sarah (Line: 138)*

*“I’ve had to sort of lock my brother off because my brother will keep raising things every so often will create an argument... as far as I’m concerned I can’t have that contact” Eloise (Line: 737)*

This method of coping also ensured that the participant did not have to manage the difficult emotions connected to the contact, these could be avoided or suppressed. Cutting off was seen as necessary for self-preservation:

*“I feel I’ve been cut throat with some siblings as well when I said they’re not good to stay in touch with I suppose that’s my coping mechanism erm but also just being aware that I can’t save everyone and lots of my family members they need saving or they need support which I don’t have the ability to offer” Jürgen (Line: 1075)*

**It is what it is (Alice).** “It is what it is” a common term used throughout Alice’s interview and by other participants described a method of cognitive processing in which the participants minimised their experience and ‘technically accepted’ what happened:

*“there’s a sense of loss as your place in the family home is replaced by somebody else because my sister became the eldest one erm by default so that was harmful without*

*a doubt I think to my identity but I don't know what other options there were and it kind of becomes where it it was what it was and it is what it is" Alice (Line 549)*

By stating it is what it is participants were able to deny their experience to an extent and the emotion attached to it as it was too painful, and this enabled them to function in the present.

*"I'd like to say it gets better but I don't really think it does [laughing] I don't know no not really I don't really know it is what it is and it's gonna be that way" Sarah (Line: 778)*

***It was for the best.*** In order to cope with their past experience in the here and now participants were able to process what happened and conclude that there were valid reasons for them being placed in care. This constructive way of thinking enabled them to rationalise and make sense of it.

*"I didn't have difficulty understanding why I was in care or understanding my experiences" "whilst I'd had quite a lot of support and relationships ripped out there I'd been given some that were so much better and stronger it was a good trade" David (Lines: 255 & 409)*

Being able to rationalise their experience also meant participants were able to acknowledge, that even when their care experience was negative, their experience was still preferable to being in the family home and they were better off than their siblings:

*"[I feel] a little bit rubbisher [sic] on them because [crying] they didn't have the opportunity to become themselves because they were there for longer... I'm so different to them [siblings] because they never saw another side to how you can be" Rachel (Line: 436)*

*“when I first went into care I thought they were lucky being allowed to stay at home that actually they’d got the better end of the deal... that I was being punished but actually over time I have recognised that them staying at home was really harmful to both of them... and it remained harmful for those two children who weren’t then protected after I left” Alice (Line: 626)*

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the experience of children who were placed in care and had siblings who remained in the family home. Three superordinate themes were identified; *Self Concept, Family Dynamics and Survival Strategies* which all interact in a complex way to enable the individual to process their experience and maintain functional relationships with others. The literature regarding separation of siblings in the looked after population is a growing area, however, the sibling relationship remains one of the most neglected relationships in psychological research (Buist *et al.*, 2013). This is the first known study to exclusively explore the experience of separation of siblings through one being placed in care and the others not. This study is therefore able to contribute and extend existing knowledge of separation and siblings through care.

One subtheme that reflected this unique experience of separation was *‘leaving others behind’*. Participants described how it was not separation which was difficult but rather the leaving of siblings ‘behind’ in the family home. Whiting and Lee (2003) reported that many children separated from their siblings felt dismayed. Maltreated children whose siblings remain with their biological family report a considerable amount of guilt and distress (Herrick & Piccus, 2005) which is consistent with the experiences of participants from this study. Harrison (1999) reported that LAC felt they had moved in to an undeserved safer life while their siblings remained at home experiencing abuse. Participants in this study described a drive to protect and care for their siblings in the absence of parental care, prior to separation, which involved taking on the role of

parent for younger siblings. The loss of a caregiving role after being placed in care was particularly difficult for some participants who viewed that role as part of their self-identity. This is consistent with Kaplan *et al's* (1993) assertion that when a child has a caring role this provides a "sense of responsibility, a clear self-concept and enhanced self-esteem" (p. 137). Participants reflected on their feelings of sadness and guilt associated with being separated from their siblings which impacted on how they interacted with them and ultimately the quality of their relationship. Although there are parallels with the themes that emerged from this research and other forms of sibling separation, what is different about this unique experience of separation is the leaving or abandonment of siblings and how this is processed and managed by the participants.

Another novel subtheme was '*making a choice*' which referred to siblings having to make a choice between having parental or sibling contact. It was not possible to maintain contact with both parties as this was perceived by participants as too difficult. Choosing between parents and siblings was a pivotal point in many sibling relationships. When a choice was not made, this resulted in the survival strategy of 'cutting off'. Participants were largely unable to maintain contact with siblings who did not choose them and this resulted in ceasing contact to preserve their functioning in the present. This theme is consistent with earlier research focussed on children's perspectives which found that the majority of children do want family contact and that this does not diminish over time (Atwool, 2013). The desire for contact with siblings despite periods of separation highlights the importance of sibling attachments beyond childhood.

Holding the belief that being placed in care without their siblings was a punishment, and that they were therefore responsible for the separation was held by some but not all participants and was not substantiated sufficiently to be a subtheme in its own right. Aspects of this can be seen throughout each of the superordinate themes. These beliefs were associated particularly with the subtheme of 'leaving others behind' and were often accompanied by intense feelings of guilt and shame. Self-blame is consistent with previous findings that abused children readily blame themselves as doing so allows them to maintain the experience of

attachment to the caregiver (Briere, 1992). Family therapy theories provide insight into how changes in family dynamics are perceived and responded to by the family unit. Family myths can consist of attributions of particular roles to family members, for example the 'black sheep', accompanied by expectations supported by family stories which go unchallenged. Participants within this study violated the 'ideal family image' (Byng-Hall, 1973) by bringing "shame on the family name" (David, 340) and breaking the 'happy family' myth. A new myth needed to be created in which participants were cast as villains as illustrated by one participant "they [siblings] were told that I'd told a really big lie that I was bad because I'd told a really big lie that was like really damaging for the family" (Alice, 415). Participants felt outcast as their behaviour challenged the family's beliefs and threatened its survival which could not be tolerated. How participants coped with these feelings varied, some were unable to tolerate their emotions and acted out, others focussed on education. However, despite holding these beliefs and feelings historically, in the present participants were able to make sense of the separation as 'it was for the best'. Feelings of guilt did persist for some, for other participants guilt was replaced by sadness for their siblings who remained at home and missed the opportunity for a different life.

The belief that 'it was for the best' was even held by participants who had negative care experiences. Thus, participants were able to find positive meaning in their negative early experiences. Several studies have shown that deriving positive meanings from negative life events is associated with greater emotional well-being and life satisfaction (King *et al.*, 2000; King & Raspin, 2004; Pals, 2006). This subtheme 'it was for the best' may be explained by McAdams's (2006) conception of the redemptive self, which suggests that adults who score higher on self-report measures of generativity tend to see their own lives as narratives of redemption. Redemptive narratives create a sense of meaning in people's lives which promotes a caring and productive adult life (McAdams, 2006). Participants were able to make sense of being placed in care and separated from their siblings as they believed that care brought a sense of safety. However, participants expressed a concern that this understanding was not shared by their siblings who remained at home,

and were anxious that they were blamed for the separation. Siblings who are placed in care together are often not split emotionally in this way and instead share a care experience in which they can co-create meaning through stories they tell each other. It is possible that children placed in care with their siblings are less likely to see the benefits of care and the safety provided. By concluding 'it was for the best', participants were less likely to fantasise about reunification or to idealise the family home.

Attachment theory underpins each of the superordinate themes which emerged from this study, particularly the concept of internal working models (IWM). Research within the looked after population suggests IWM are often shaped by adverse factors such as; maternal depression, domestic violence, bereavement, experience of abuse or neglect which combine to threaten or challenge healthy development (Dent & Cameron, 2003). These templates however are 'working' models and thus new experiences may confirm or challenge beliefs and expectations. Sroufe (1997) used the analogy of a tree to describe a transactional model of developmental pathways with each person starting from the roots, making their way through the trunk and along different branches that lead to different outcomes.

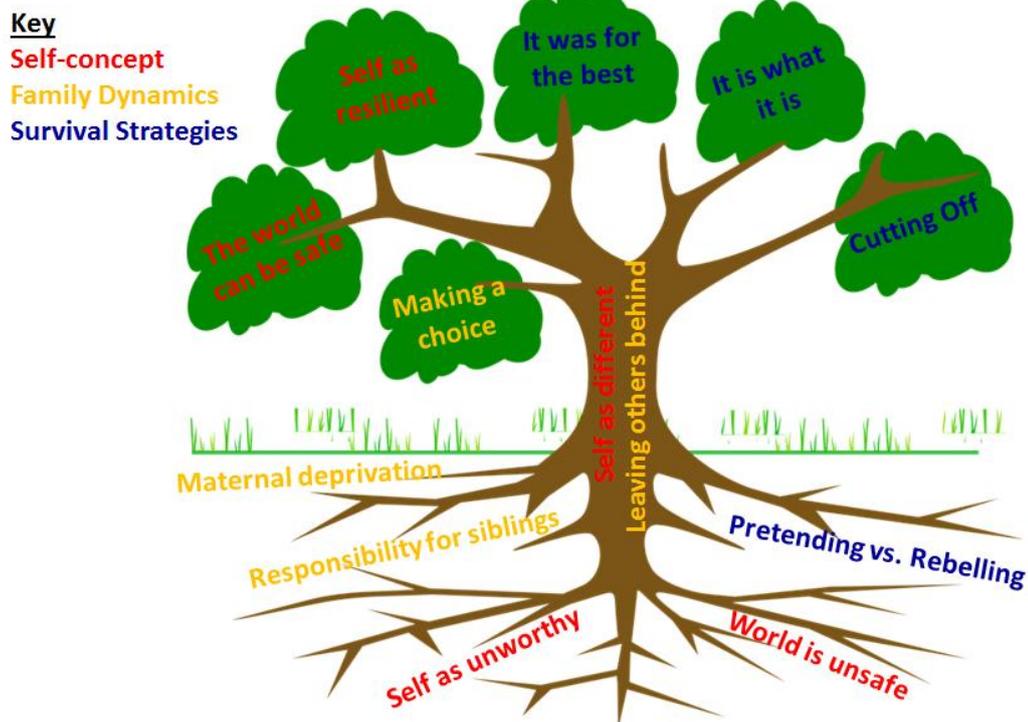


Figure 1: Tree diagram illustrating growth of themes over time

A similar analogy was used to illustrate the themes identified within this study (Figure 1). The tree illustrates how participants' self-concept, family dynamics and survival strategies are formed in their roots and founded on early experiences. Over time their self-concept for example, is able to grow and shift to the point that they are able to hold a view of the world as safe and the self as resilient in present.

Participants' ability to cope with their experiences, historically and in the present, appeared to be underpinned by defence mechanisms (Freud, 1936). Many participants within this study employed minimisation (Cramer, 2008) whereby they avoided dealing with the negative emotions associated with their experiences by reducing the importance and impact of the events that gave rise to these emotions. Intellectualisation (Cramer, 2000) was another defence mechanism which allowed participants to analyse their experiences in a way that did not provoke anxiety. This defence is often employed by individuals who wanted to grow up quickly because early life experiences made them feel it was unsafe to be small, needy or controlled by their emotions (Burgo, 2012). Winnicott (1954) suggested that children use "mental functioning" or intellectualisation to make up for the failures of mothering. Intellectualisation and minimisation defences enabled participants to reflect on their experience in the absence of any painful emotions such as guilt for siblings left behind or anger towards their parents. The unconscious use of these defence mechanisms helps to preserve one's self-esteem. Experiences are minimised cognitively and behaviourally those who cause distress are 'cut off'. These strategies help participants achieve some sense of safety or security both internally and externally.

Another identified coping method was radical acceptance often associated with Dialectical Behaviour Therapy. Linehan (1993) believed that once you radically accept a difficult situation you let go of the struggle. For the participants within this study, the themes of *It is what it is* and *It was for the best* appeared to capture the essence of radical acceptance. These themes reflect the unique experience of separation that participants experienced compared to other children, who were not separated from siblings whilst in care. Participants' ability to reflect and process their experiences and reach a point of radical acceptance facilitated the growth

of their self-concept and their enhanced view of themselves as *determined* rather than *unworthy*. It is this ability to radically accept their experience based on their comparison with siblings at home that differentiates the experience of this population of care leavers from those who were placed with their siblings.

### **Originality of the Research**

This study is the first to highlight the experience of individuals placed in care who had siblings who remained in the family home. There is a growing body of research focussed on siblings who are separated when placed in care, however, the participants in this study remain a hidden population.

Previous research highlights the benefits of keeping siblings together as it provides children with a greater sense of stability, reassurance, safety and emotional continuity (Hegar, 2005; Shlonsky *et al.*, 2005; Wojciak *et al.*, 2013). The group of care leavers within this study were denied these benefits due to the manner of their separation. The lack of previous research in this area highlights the need for awareness and education at a systemic and societal level and it is essential that the views and experiences of LAC and care leavers are heard. Several participants described their involvement with various children in care organisations and charities which could be one avenue for raising awareness of separation of siblings through siblings remaining in the family home. As six participants consented to having their interview filmed excerpts of these interviews will be edited together to produce a short film to highlight the issues raised by the research. It is also hoped that this film will be more accessible to the target population of LAC and will highlight these issues to service providers and commissioners.

### **Clinical and Practice Implications**

Looked after children and care leavers are often required to make sense of difficult and uncontrollable life events in the absence of skills and guidance for doing so. Children placed in care without their siblings have

even less support. This research has highlighted the importance of siblings in relation to self-concept, identity formation and future attachments. It also illustrates the complexity of cognitive and emotional processing responses to sibling separation and the subsequent coping mechanisms that persist beyond the time of the experience. There is a role for Clinical Psychologists in providing early intervention to such children. Lengthy waiting times for CAMHS can often prevent children receiving timely support (Blower *et al.*, 2004) and services are typically only accessed at crisis point. Clinical Psychologists are in a position to offer consultation and formulation work via multi-disciplinary or multi-agency working with social care staff to increase their psychological thinking around children who have been separated from their siblings.

Research evidence suggests that being able to make sense of experience, particularly for traumatic events is important for emotional wellbeing (Richman, 2006; Park *et al.*, 2008) and this is central to many therapeutic interventions, specifically trauma-focussed therapies (Park & Ai, 2006). Many participants within this study developed defensive strategies to manage their responses to their difficult experiences. There is evidence to suggest that children's maladaptive responses to abuse or neglect may be factors in increased levels of emotional and behavioural problems (Woolgar, 2013). Clinical Psychologists working in CAMHS or social care services promoting emotional regulation for LAC would therefore be of great benefit. Increased emotional regulation could also be promoted through the use of adapted DBT skills groups for children and adolescents facilitated by Clinical Psychologists. Many participants also viewed themselves as different compared to their peers. These findings highlight the long-term impact of this unique form of sibling separation. Understanding how these individuals think about themselves, the world and others can be critical for Clinical Psychologists working individually with LAC across the lifespan. There is also a role for Clinical Psychologists in developing a theoretical framework collaboratively with social care colleagues to inform health and social care providers about how best to manage separations of this kind and how to respond to LAC experiences of loss and trauma following such separations. This could be

incorporated into current local and national guidance on separating siblings and staff training.

### **Methodological Considerations**

Yardley's (2000) elements of good qualitative research were applied to evaluate and demonstrate the validity of this research.

**Sensitivity to Context** – Existing research was considered during the development and completion of this research. Participants were recruited from across England to offer a fairer opportunity to participate in the research.

**Commitment and Rigour** – The sample was purposively selected and homogenous. Extracts of all eight transcripts were discussed with supervisors and verified during a special interest IPA group.

**Transparency and Coherence** – A detailed account and images of the research process was provided to demonstrate transparency. Extracts from each participant are used to demonstrate depth and breadth of analysis.

**Impact and Importance** – The clinical and practice implications of this research are discussed alongside recommendations for future research. The findings from this research will be used to produce a short film to present at national children in care conferences with the support of participants. It is envisaged that the use of film will enable the dissemination of these important findings to a much wider audience and have direct meaning and relevance to the participants themselves.

### **Limitations**

The nature of qualitative research and IPA research means that only a small sample of participants is required as the purpose is not to generalise findings (Willig, 2013). The participants within this study were predominantly white and female. Although there is no obvious bias due to these characteristics a more representative sample would have been preferable.

As participants were recruited via social media it is possible that the selection is biased and findings are not representative of the experiences of the larger looked after population. This method of recruitment may also have limited the sample to those with computer and internet access or those who actively use social media. As the sample was purposive there was an increased risk that those who chose to participate may have had particularly positive or negative experiences and were more willing to talk about their experiences. Therefore, participants may have had a greater understanding of themselves and higher levels of resilience. Participants were recruited from various locations across England and thus the experience is not specific to one location or local authority patch.

One limitation of using a retrospective design is that, as participants are asked to reflect on past experience there is a risk that individual and societal experiences in the present will influence how their experience is retold (Holland & Crowley, 2012). The IPA analysis therefore attempted to understand how participants made, or are making sense of their experiences at the time and in the present to enable functioning.

### **Future Research**

This research has identified that the child protection system was successful in identifying children at risk, however, the system failed to adequately safeguard all children involved. Siblings who remained at home of children placed in care according to participants remained in emotionally and physically abusive environments. Six of the eight participants sought help and asked to be removed from their family environment. When their siblings were interviewed by social services and said they were okay they remained at home. The home environment was judged to be unsafe for those placed in care but not for siblings who remained, why is this the case? It is critical that every child is properly protected from harm and there should be no room for complacency. The Munro Report (Munro, 2011) a review of child protection systems in England recommended several changes to procedures and practice however, the Department for Education has failed to implement significant changes and there remains huge disparities between LAs. Social workers

values often based around supporting families to stay together where possible are coming under increasing pressure from Government priorities such as the current focus on more timely decision making and increasing the number of adoptions. Children's social services in England have experienced increases of 29% in children subject to a child protection plan and 9% in looked after children (DfE, 2016). At the same time 377 children's centres were closed between 2010 and 2016 (Walker, 2017). Children's services are being placed under unprecedented financial and operational pressures due to government austerity measures. The extent of the impact of austerity on child protection is unknown and many more children may be at risk, not least of all siblings of children who have already been placed in care. Referrals will be judged on a case-by-case basis however, this research highlights that this form of sibling separation is not a rare phenomenon. Local authorities do not currently record incidents of children being placed in care whose siblings remain in the family home. Further research is required to establish the true extent of this issue. This could take the form of a national survey of all children in care to ascertain if they have siblings and where those siblings are living, distributed to children's social care teams. This would allow researchers to quickly determine the scale of the issue which would then inform how this can be addressed in practice.

This was an exploratory study and while findings are informative it is worth noting that the average age of participants was 33 years. Given participants age they were often reflecting on events that took place approximately 15 years earlier and questions could be raised regarding the reliability and validity of memory. Further research should attempt to overcome the limitations of the recruitment strategy outlined in this article. It is recommended that a younger, more diverse sample is sought. The scope of this original research could be expanded to capture more members of this population. This could be achieved through recruiting participants through social care, in particular leaving care services in order to further enhance knowledge in this area which can then be used to inform practice. It is also important to understand how and why sibling separation of this nature occurs from the perspectives of those making such decisions and the wider systems around LAC. Further qualitative

research in the form of interviews or focus groups with social care staff would further enhance our knowledge of this phenomenon. Such knowledge together with the findings of this research could shape future practice in this area and inform a theoretical framework for health and social care providers regarding how to plan for and manage this form of sibling separation.

## Conclusions

This qualitative study explored how looked after children made sense of being separated from their siblings who remained in their family home. Eight care leavers were interviewed and interview data analysed according to IPA methodology. Three superordinate themes were identified: self-concept, family dynamics and survival strategies. These results highlight the important role of siblings for children in care. They also highlight the complexity of cognitive and emotional processing responses to sibling separation and the subsequent coping mechanisms that persist beyond the time of the experience. Children's social services are facing unprecedented financial and operational pressures due to government austerity measures alongside a policy drive towards more timely decision making and increasing the number of adoptions. This creates a tension between meeting targets but also adhering to the values of keeping families together. The scale of siblings being separated through one being placed in care whilst others remain in the family home is unknown. Further quantitative research is needed to establish the extent of this issue which can then be used to inform future practice and training within children's services to ensure that siblings are getting the best care and support available based on current research evidence. Sibling relationships are likely to be the longest in a person's lifetime. They therefore need to be supported and valued across the workforce, from frontline staff to commissioners, to ensure that these bonds are not broken.

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## **Paper 2: List of Appendices**

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## Appendix A – Ethical Approval



Faculty of Health Sciences

### ETHICAL APPROVAL FEEDBACK

|                     |                        |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| Researcher name:    | Lyndsey Carlson        |
| Title of Study:     | What about the others? |
| Award Pathway:      | DClinPsy               |
| Status of approval: | Amendment approved     |

Thank you for your correspondence requesting approval of a minor amendment to your application.

Your amended application is approved. We wish you well with your research.

#### Action now needed:

Your amendment has now been approved by the Faculty's Ethics Panel.

You should note that any divergence from the approved procedures and research method will invalidate any insurance and liability cover from the University. You should, therefore, notify the Panel in writing of any significant divergence from this approved proposal.

You should arrange to meet with your supervisor for support during the process of completing your study and writing your dissertation.

When your study is complete, please send the ethics committee an end of study report. A template can be found on the ethics BlackBoard site

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr Peter Kevern'.

Signed: Dr Peter Kevern  
Chair of the Faculty of Health Sciences Ethics Panel

Date: 8/3/16

## Appendix B – Social Media Posts



## Appendix C – Research Flyers



**Are you a care leaver?  
Do you have siblings?  
When you were placed in care, did one or more siblings remain at home?**

If so would you consider taking part in some research to find out more about the impact of one sibling being in care when other siblings were not?

You just need to be aged 21+, living in England and when you were in care one or more siblings were not

For more information please contact Lyndsey:  
[c026531e@student.staffs.ac.uk](mailto:c026531e@student.staffs.ac.uk)



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## Appendix D – Participant Information Sheet



### Participant Information Sheet

**Title: What about the others? A qualitative exploration of being taken into care and having siblings who remain in the family home.**

**Lyndsey Carlson, Faculty of Health Sciences**

#### **Introduction**

This is a study exploring the impact on you and your family relationships of being a child taken into care while siblings remained in the home of at least one birth parent. If you are interested in taking part, please read on.

#### **Purpose of the Research**

You are invited to take part in this research which is being undertaken as part of my Doctorate in Clinical Psychology. Research has shown that it is important to keep brothers and sisters together, but sometimes one child is placed in care and his or her brother(s) and/or sister(s) stay in the family home. We want to understand the experience of going into care when your brother(s) and/or sister(s) stay in the family home.

#### **Why am I asked to take part?**

You are invited to take part if you meet the criteria please read below carefully:

#### ***Inclusion criteria***

- Aged 21+
- Before the age of 18 you were considered 'looked after' by the Local Authority under a voluntary care order (section 20 of the Children's Act, 1989) or under a full care order (section 31 of the Children's Act, 1989) for a period of at least one month
- When placed in care of the Local Authority you had a sibling(s) who remained at home with at least one parent for a period of at least one month
- When you were placed in care you were living in England

#### ***Exclusion criteria***

- Individuals who were placed in kinship care as close contact with siblings may have been maintained
- Being non-English speaking, due to qualitative research relying heavily on language, there is a concern that the richness and meaning of language may be lost if using an interpreter

### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to participate you will be given this information sheet to keep and then asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are free to withdraw any time during the interview and up to three weeks following your interview without giving a reason. If you do choose to withdraw you can contact me on the email address provided below to do so and you will need your unique identifier provided at the time of the interview. If you are interested in taking part I will answer any questions you may have.

### **What does taking part involve?**

After completing the consent form you will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview which will last approximately 45 to 80 minutes. You will be contacted by email to arrange a convenient time for this. During the interview you will be asked to recount your experience of being placed in care whilst your siblings remained at home focussing on; known reasons for this and the short and long term effects of this on your sibling and parental or other relationships. Interviews will be audio recorded. Following your interview you will be asked to choose a false name which will then be used to identify you. You will be asked to remember this name.

You will be given the option to have your interview filmed. If you consent to this, the filmed interview along with other filmed interviews will be made into a short film which will be used for presentation purposes at professional conferences. You will be given a false name in the film but your anonymity will be compromised due to the visual material and people will be able to identify you. Choosing to have your interview filmed is completely **optional** and you will not be discriminated in any way if you opt not to do this.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

There may not be any direct benefits to you. However it is hoped that this research will help us to understand the impact of separating children when placed in care and inform future guidance and practice in this area.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

Participating will take an amount of your time, but this can be planned to suit your commitments. It is also possible that completing the interview may upset you by bringing back some memories of difficult things that happened in the past. If this is the case you can stop the interview at any time. You may also want to talk to and seek further support by talking to the **Samaritans (08457 90 90 90)** or to **your GP** or to the **Mental Health Helpline (0300 5000 927)**.

### **Further Information**

Electronic data will be stored in a password protected files. This information will be kept for ten years in keeping with university guidelines, but will be destroyed after this time. The interview will be audio recorded, and quotes from this may be used in the final report and presentation, as such confidentiality cannot be ensured, however, you will not be personally identified, a false name will be used

and other identifiable information anonymised. At the end of the project I will prepare a report of what I have found, which will be submitted as my doctoral thesis. A lay summary of the findings will be sent to you, if you wish. This may also be presented at a national conference and published in a journal. If you would like this or any other information about the project or to withdraw then please contact me at the address below.

This research is supervised by **Professor Helen Dent** and **Dr Stephanie Hutton**. In order to ensure the quality of the research they will have access to your transcribed interview but your anonymity will be protected. External examiners may also have access to your anonymised transcript for the purposes of audit and governance.

***Contact details removed for submission***

## Appendix E – Interview Schedule

### Semi-structured Interview Schedule

#### Scene Setting

I'd like to start by getting a little bit of a picture about your family... I thought one way to do that would be to draw a genogram would this be ok?

#### Child's life before separation

**1. Can you tell me about your journey of leaving the family home?**

*Prompts: How old were you? Who was living at home at the time? What was going on at the time?*

**2. Thinking back to before being placed in care, can you describe your relationships with your family?**

**3. Could you define what a sibling relationship is to you?**

**4. What was the nature of your relationships with your siblings?**

*Prompt: did they teach you things? Did you play together?*

#### Child's life during separation

**5. Can you tell me about your experience of being in care?**

*Prompts: Was there anything you enjoyed? Was there anything you disliked?*

**6. At the time how did you make sense of being separated from your siblings?**

*Prompts: Had social services been involved previously? Why do you think you were placed in care at that time?*

**7. How did you maintain contact with your family while you were in care?**

*Prompts: Face-to-face, phone text? How often did you see them? How did you experience contact?*

**8. What was the impact on your relationship with your family?**

*Prompt: Parents? Siblings? How would you have liked things to be / how would you have liked things to be different?*

**9. How did being placed in care impact on your sense of identity and belonging?**

**10. Has the way you think about your siblings and the separation changed over time?**

*Prompt: In what way?*

**Child's life after separation**

**11. Can you tell me about your current family relationships?**

**12. How do you think this experience influences your relationship with them?**

**Closing**

**13. Now as an adult how do you make sense of the decision making that took place at the time regarding being separated?**

**14. Do you have any advice for children and siblings who are currently in this situation?**

## Appendix F – Consent Form



### Consent Form

**Title: What about the others? A qualitative exploration of being taken into care whilst having siblings who remain in the family home.**

**Lyndsey Carlson, Faculty of Health Sciences**

*Please tick*

I have read the participant information sheet, had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the project, I am satisfied with the answers to my questions and I have received enough information about this project.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project without giving a reason at any point during the interview and up to three weeks following my interview

I understand that data will be anonymised and I agree to extracts from my contributions being used in the subsequent report. I understand that my anonymised information will be used in an article that will be submitted for publication

I understand that if my interview was filmed the footage will be made into a short film and be presented at professional conferences, I will be given a false name in the film but I will be identifiable

I understand that my information (e.g. demographics, audio/video recordings, transcripts etc.) will be held for 10 years and then destroyed

I understand that there are limits to confidentiality and that this cannot be guaranteed if information is disclosed regarding any potential harm to myself and/or others. I also understand that information sent via the internet (e.g. twitter or Facebook) is less secure and therefore confidentiality cannot be guaranteed for this method of communication.

I would like to participate in this study and I consent to my interview being audio recorded

I would like to participate in this study and I consent to my interview being filmed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant                      Date                      Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email address

## Appendix G – Pre-Interview Questionnaire



### What about the others? A qualitative exploration of being placed in care whilst having siblings who remain in the family home

#### Pre-Interview Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to provide demographic information which may not be covered during the interview which can be used to describe the sample when writing up the research.

**Age**

**Sex**

**No. of siblings**

**Age of siblings**

**Age when placed in care**

**Were you placed in care in your local area?**

Yes

No

***If no, how far was your placement from your family home?***

**When placed in care did you need to change schools?**

Yes

No

***If yes, how many times?***

**How many placements did you have?**

**Did your siblings ever go into care? Please provide details**

**What were your contact arrangements whilst in care?**

**Where you reunited with your siblings? Please provide details**

**Did you return to your family home?**

Yes

No

***If yes, for how long?***

**Do you have any children?**

Yes

No

**If yes, please provide details**

## Appendix H – Participant Debrief Sheet



### What about the others? A qualitative exploration of being placed in care whilst having siblings who remain in the family home

#### Emotional Support Services for Care Leavers

Care leaver services offer a range of support for young people who have left local authority care. If you are experiencing mental health difficulties or there have been any issues raised by this interview there are lots of different ways you can look after your mental health and find support. See below for a list of services that can provide advice and support to you.

#### Care Leavers Service

##### **Care Leavers' Association**

<http://www.careleavers.com/>

##### **Catch22**

<http://www.catch-22.org.uk/offers/looked-after-children-and-care-leavers/>

##### **Rees Foundation**

<http://www.reesfoundation.org/>

##### **Barnardo's**

[http://www.barnardos.org.uk/get\\_involved/campaign/care-leavers.htm](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/get_involved/campaign/care-leavers.htm)

##### **Action for Children**

[www.actionforchildren.org.uk](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk)

#### Mental Health Services

##### **The Samaritans**

This service operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year for people who want to talk in confidence. Call them on 08457 90 90 90

##### **CALM**

CALM is the Campaign Against Living Miserably, for men aged 15-35

[www.calmzone.net](http://www.calmzone.net)

##### **Depression Alliance**

Charity for sufferers of depression. Has a network of self-help groups

[www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)

##### **Mental Health Foundation**

Provides information and support for anyone with mental health problems or learning disabilities

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

##### **Mind**

Promotes the views of people with mental health problems. Call them on 0300 123 3393

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

## Appendix I – Example of Line-by-Line Coding

### Example: Rachel

| Interviewee: Rachael Green<br>minutes | Date of interview: 21/06/2016   | Interview length: 73              | Descriptive | Linguistic                        | Conceptual | Emergent Themes |
|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|------------|-----------------|
| 55                                    | Interviewer: Lindsey Carlson  | Date of transcription: 02/07/2016 |             |                                   |            |                 |
| 56                                    | Interview Number: 2   |                                   |             |                                   |            |                 |
| 57                                    | where I felt like running away again and being in a foreign country because I           |                                   |             | maturity                          |            |                 |
| 58                                    | knew then I'd have no sort of familiarity with the area and stuff like that and I       |                                   |             | demonstrates morality             |            |                 |
| 59                                    | could have ended up anywhere. so I didn't want to put myself in that                    |                                   |             |                                   |            |                 |
| 60                                    | situation so I was glad in a way that one I hadn't spoil their holiday and two          |                                   |             | didn't want to cause upset!       |            |                 |
| 61                                    | that I hadn't been forced to go. and three that I was away from them you                |                                   |             | disruption on holiday             |            |                 |
| 62                                    | know that, that I had that time to just breath sort of thing, but erm it was a          |                                   |             | care a relief                     |            | care provided   |
| 63                                    | little bit... of an unusual situation that [laughs] that they still went, but it wasn't |                                   |             | laughs - defensive?               |            | safety          |
| 64                                    | that I wanted them to stay I didn't want any type of, because I was refusing to         |                                   |             |                                   |            |                 |
| 65                                    | go I didn't want them not to go so, social services were forced really, building        |                                   |             |                                   |            |                 |
| 66                                    | up to that they were just trying to make a bad situation good while I was still         |                                   |             |                                   |            |                 |
| 67                                    | in the home but erm then when it was put, put to them like that they were               |                                   |             |                                   |            |                 |
| 68                                    | going on holiday and I was refusing to go they sort of had to move on it so-            |                                   |             | Social Services forced to act     |            |                 |
| 69                                    | <b>Interviewer:</b> thinking back to before being placed in care, you talked a little   |                                   |             |                                   |            |                 |
| 70                                    | bit about what was going on can you describe the relationships that you had             |                                   |             |                                   |            |                 |
| 71                                    | with members of your family?  |                                   |             |                                   |            |                 |
| 72                                    | <b>Participant:</b> I suppose our Tray was more, sorry yeah me sister she was           |                                   |             |                                   |            |                 |
| 73                                    | more sort of distant leading up to me going into care because she was,                  |                                   |             |                                   |            |                 |
| 74                                    | wasn't very happy with the situation that, the situations that were happening           |                                   |             | Sister unhappy with situation at  |            | Blamed by       |
| 75                                    | in the house so it was to a certain extent she was distancing herself from me           |                                   |             | home                              |            | others          |
| 76                                    | so that she didn't sort of get the same treatment erm but then she would, she           |                                   |             | sister distanced herself          |            |                 |
| 77                                    | was never the one who was privy to all of the information that I was years              |                                   |             |                                   |            |                 |
| 78                                    | before that so. Whereas my mum would confide in me about the problems                   |                                   |             | Sister didn't have the same       |            | Parents not     |
| 79                                    | that she had with me dad and how up, how unhappy she was and how she                    |                                   |             | experience - didn't have to sleep |            | parenting       |
| 80                                    | didn't know what to do and that sort of, that was burdened on me. Tracey                |                                   |             | parent not parenting              |            |                 |
| 81                                    | was oblivious to anything like that because she was younger and you know                |                                   |             | younger siblings protected        |            |                 |

| Interviewee: Rachael Green<br>minutes | Date of interview: 21/06/2016  | Interview length: 73              | Descriptive | Linguistic | Conceptual | Emergent Themes |
|---------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|-----------------|
| 109                                   | Interviewer: Lindsey Carlson   | Date of transcription: 02/07/2016 |             |            |            |                 |
| 110                                   | Interview Number: 2  |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 111                                   | the people you wanna [sic] hang round with is your parents, I mean             |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 112                                   | grandparents. And me dads mum had passed and me dads dad had                   |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 113                                   | definitely passed because as I say he was only, me dad was only nine when      |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 114                                   | his dad passed so I didn't know him. So no not really.                         |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 115                                   | <b>Interviewer:</b> Could you define what a sibling relationship is to you?    |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 116                                   | <b>Participant:</b> What?  |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 117                                   | <b>Interviewer:</b> What that term means to you?                               |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 118                                   | <b>Participant:</b> A sibling relationship [pause] what, what, what you, like  |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 119                                   | somebody who you- what, like what do you mean sort of a relationship as in     |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 120                                   | what it should be like? Erm don't know- could be anything couldn't it. I have  |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 121                                   | very different relationships with our Tracey and our John I suppose because    |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 122                                   | there was less of a gap between me sister and me than there was me             |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 123                                   | brother and me- me and our, me and me brother were more politer to each        |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 124                                   | other I suppose because there was that age gap and maybe because he            |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 125                                   | was, he's a boy. Whereas me and our Tray just battled when we were kids        |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 126                                   | because we were so close age so, but then when she needed me I was             |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 127                                   | there and she used that to her fullest as in, you know if she needed           |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 128                                   | protecting or anything like that then she was me sister so it didn't matter    |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 129                                   | whether she was right or wrong. So yeah somebody who you, who can be           |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 130                                   | your best friends and your worst enemy all in one day. Who should be able      |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 131                                   | to confide in you and you them. [pause] but who'll probably- yeah someone      |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 132                                   | who like, as you get older as well will always be there but not necessarily as |                                   |             |            |            |                 |
| 133                                   | much as you want or they want really.  |                                   |             |            |            |                 |

**Appendix J – Example of Chronological List of Emergent Themes****Example - Rachel**

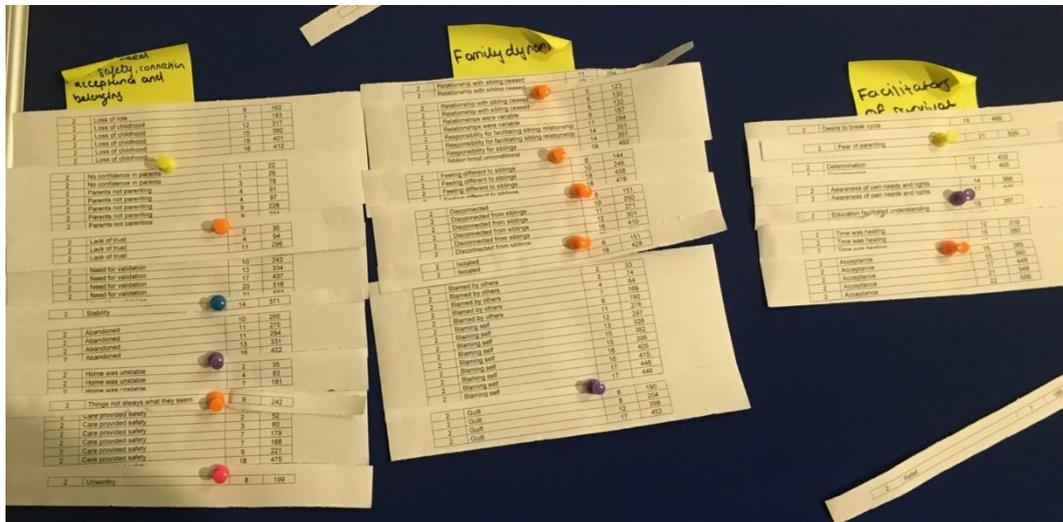
| <b>Participant No.</b> | <b>Theme</b>   | <b>Page</b> | <b>Line</b> |
|------------------------|--|-------------|-------------|
| 2                      | Care provided safety                                 | 1           | 14          |
| 2                      | No confidence in parents                             | 1           | 22          |
| 2                      | No confidence in parents                             | 1           | 26          |
| 2                      | Lack of trust  | 2           | 30          |
| 2                      | Blamed by others                                     | 2           | 33          |
| 2                      | Home was unstable                                    | 2           | 35          |
| 2                      | Care provided safety                                 | 2           | 52          |
| 2                      | Care provided safety                                 | 3           | 60          |
| 2                      | Blamed by others                                     | 3           | 74          |
| 2                      | Parents not parenting                                | 3           | 78          |
| 2                      | Home was unstable                                    | 4           | 83          |
| 2                      | Blamed by others                                     | 4           | 84          |
| 2                      | Parents not parenting                                | 4           | 91          |
| 2                      | Lack of trust  | 4           | 94          |
| 2                      | Parents not parenting                                | 4           | 97          |
| 2                      | Relationship with sibling ceased                     | 5           | 123         |
| 2                      | Relationship with sibling ceased                     | 5           | 130         |
| 2                      | Relationships were variable                          | 5           | 132         |
| 2                      | Feeling different to siblings                        | 6           | 144         |
| 2                      | Disconnected   | 6           | 151         |
| 2                      | Isolated   | 6           | 151         |
| 2                      | Relationships were variable                          | 6           | 157         |
| 2                      | Loss of role   | 6           | 162         |
| 2                      | Blamed by others                                     | 7           | 169         |
| 2                      | Care provided safety                                 | 7           | 179         |
| 2                      | Home was unstable                                    | 7           | 181         |
| 2                      | Loss of childhood                                    | 7           | 183         |
| 2                      | Care provided safety                                 | 7           | 188         |
| 2                      | Relief   | 7           | 188         |
| 2                      | Blamed by others                                     | 8           | 190         |
| 2                      | Guilt  | 8           | 190         |
| 2                      | Unworthy   | 8           | 199         |
| 2                      | Guilt  | 8           | 204         |
| 2                      | Care provided safety                                 | 9           | 221         |
| 2                      | Parents not parenting                                | 9           | 228         |
| 2                      | Parents not parenting                                | 9           | 231         |
| 2                      | Things not always what they seem                     | 9           | 242         |
| 2                      | Need for validation                                  | 10          | 243         |
| 2                      | Feeling different to siblings                        | 10          | 248         |
| 2                      | Disconnected from siblings                           | 10          | 250         |
| 2                      | Abandoned  | 10          | 265         |
| 2                      | Disconnected from siblings                           | 11          | 271         |
| 2                      | Abandoned  | 11          | 275         |
| 2                      | Blaming self   | 11          | 278         |
| 2                      | Responsibility for facilitating sibling relationship | 11          | 284         |

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|   |  |    |     |
|---|--|----|-----|
| 2 | Abandoned  | 11 | 294 |
| 2 | Lack of trust  | 11 | 296 |
| 2 | Blaming self   | 12 | 297 |
| 2 | Guilt  | 12 | 299 |
| 2 | Disconnected from siblings                           | 12 | 301 |
| 2 | Loss of childhood                                    | 12 | 317 |
| 2 | Time was healing                                     | 12 | 319 |
| 2 | Blaming self   | 13 | 326 |
| 2 | Abandoned  | 13 | 331 |
| 2 | Need for validation                                  | 13 | 334 |
| 2 | Responsibility for facilitating sibling relationship | 14 | 351 |
| 2 | Responsibility for siblings                          | 14 | 361 |
| 2 | Awareness of own needs and rights                    | 14 | 366 |
| 2 | Stability  | 14 | 371 |
| 2 | Time was healing                                     | 15 | 380 |
| 2 | Blaming self   | 15 | 382 |
| 2 | Acceptance   | 15 | 385 |
| 2 | Education facilitated understanding                  | 15 | 387 |
| 2 | Acceptance   | 15 | 390 |
| 2 | Loss of childhood                                    | 15 | 392 |
| 2 | Time was healing                                     | 15 | 395 |
| 2 | Blaming self   | 15 | 396 |
| 2 | Loss of childhood                                    | 15 | 401 |
| 2 | Blaming self   | 16 | 405 |
| 2 | Disconnected from siblings                           | 16 | 410 |
| 2 | Loss of childhood                                    | 16 | 412 |
| 2 | Blaming self   | 16 | 415 |
| 2 | Abandoned  | 16 | 422 |
| 2 | Isolated   | 16 | 428 |
| 2 | Determination  | 17 | 435 |
| 2 | Need for validation                                  | 17 | 437 |
| 2 | Blaming self   | 17 | 446 |
| 2 | Blaming self   | 17 | 446 |
| 2 | Acceptance   | 17 | 448 |
| 2 | Awareness of own needs and rights                    | 17 | 449 |
| 2 | Guilt  | 17 | 452 |
| 2 | Blaming self   | 17 | 456 |
| 2 | Feeling different to siblings                        | 18 | 458 |
| 2 | Determination  | 18 | 465 |
| 2 | Desire to break cycle                                | 18 | 466 |
| 2 | Care provided safety                                 | 18 | 475 |
| 2 | Feeling different to siblings                        | 18 | 478 |
| 2 | Sibling bond unconditional                           | 19 | 492 |
| 2 | Need for validation                                  | 20 | 516 |
| 2 | Fear of parenting                                    | 21 | 539 |
| 2 | Acceptance   | 21 | 548 |
| 2 | Need for validation                                  | 21 | 563 |
| 2 | Acceptance   | 22 | 566 |
| 2 | Disconnected from siblings                           | 22 | 576 |

## Appendix K – Development of patterns between emergent themes

### Example: Rachel









## Appendix M - Integrative Analysis Table

| SELF CONCEPT                                |                                 |                      |  |
|---|---------------------------------|----------------------|--|
| Participants                                | Sub-ordinate Themes             | Cross-References     | Indicative Quotations  |
| David<br>Allison<br>Jürgen<br>Alice<br>Gina | 1. a) Sense of self as unworthy | <u>David</u><br>275  | “that’s, that’s very difficult to come to terms with that you don’t feel loved”  |
|   |                                 | 283                  | “he made me feel like a problem”   |
|   |                                 | 577                  | “I don’t know how you make sense of a parent only abusing two of her four children I don’t try to make sense of that actually”   |
|   |                                 | <u>Allison</u><br>64 | “me brothers didn’t get hit as much... me mum played on me I think because I was the girl so I was the one who got the wigged and the more hiding me older brother used to try and stand up for me but she didn’t raise a finger to them ever it was only ever me” |
|   |                                 | 789                  | “my kids as brothers and sisters get told they stick together look after each other no matter what love and care for each other that’s what I give them so they’re not like me I didn’t know”  |
|   |                                 | 793                  | “I tell my kids every that I love them because that just... there’s no harm in telling your kids that you love them and I think that comes from me mum never telling me she loves me she’s never said that”  |
|   |                                 | <u>Jürgen</u><br>95  | “we started to get threats he wanted us back I think he saw us as tools to get back to our mum because he was obsessed with our mum I don’t think he ever really cared about us”   |
|   |                                 | 126                  | “my relationship was erm always uncertain you never knew how he was going to react and there was never a closeness”  |
|   |                                 | 296                  | “I had a lot of bullying a lot of sense of err lack of worthiness throughout”  |
|   |                                 | 308                  |  |

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|  |  |                     |  |
|--|--|---------------------|--|
|  |  | 459                 | “those same foster carers who had physically abused me emotionally neglected me across the placement erm essentially told me that I was no longer any worth to them and err they were no longer interested because the financial incentives of having me there err were no longer”   |
|  |  | 853                 | “the carers we were living with had their own children who they treated a lot better so I didn’t enjoy seeing that all the time and having that reinforced and being made to feel secondary in society”<br><br>“I always felt like sometimes we had stats shoved down our throat you know young people, this much is spent on young people in care etc. etc. and I felt like that was almost insulting and almost that I was unworthy so that impacted on my identity because I felt that erm I was a bit of a drain on society” |
|  |  | <u>Alice</u><br>261 | “I ended up in I ended up in a long-term foster placement but probably they couldn’t wait to get rid of me when I was eighteen and I was difficult... we would climb out of windows and escape but nobody would report us missing”   |
|  |  | 339                 | “nobody went to parent’s evenings, apart from occasionally my mother would volunteer to go because I had some sporadic contact with her”   |
|  |  | <u>Gina</u><br>52   | “she [sister] was the apple of me mums eye and I always remember being the one that was pushed out”  |
|  |  | 286                 | “it was in my file that I was significantly he rejected child and me mum would be given stuff at Christmas because she couldn’t afford stuff she would be given toys for us to give for Christmas and me sister would get them and I get kinda the leftovers”  |
|  |  | 324                 | “she was gonna push me away erm I needed reassurance I needed all I wanted was someone to love me and I would constantly try out peoples patience because I would I then learned to push people as far as I could to see if they walked away an I’d push an push an push and obviously a lot of people do walk away when they can’t handle yeah when your that needy erm but I remember just feeling that everybody just hated me the whole world hated me”  |
|  |  | 389                 |  |

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|            |                           |                     |  |
|------------|---------------------------|---------------------|--|
|            |                           | 445                 | “just felt like a failure like a total let down to everybody an I was just nothing I was rubbish erm I would never amount to anything erm you know I remember even going back to when I was four I was chosen to be an angel in the Christmas nativity play an I I remember how I felt when they said my name I was an angel an I said me you want me to be an angel an I totally couldn't believe it because I was nothing who'd want me to be an angel and that carried on when I was older I'd never do anything because I was just I was just in care and I wasn't wanted” |
|            |                           | 784                 | “I grew up thinking it was me it was my fault I was wrong in my head I was like trying to justify everything well me mum's not listening to me or very confused well why is me mum doing this”   |
|            |                           |                     | “why was my sisters room decorated and mine wasn't that's cos she knew she was going to put me into care she didn't need to decorate my room”  |
| <b>All</b> | 1. b) The world is unsafe | <u>David</u><br>254 | “the way we were being looked after wasn't appropriate for children”   |
|            |                           | <u>Rachel</u><br>18 | “me mum and dad had quite a volatile relationship they were fighting all the time and me and me brother and sister and me mum would be running away from me dad going and staying in my mum's mates because me dad wouldn't leave”   |
|            |                           | 26                  | “I didn't have any confidence in them as parents due to feeling like I was probably equal to them”   |
|            |                           | 205                 | “it was bad in it was bad in the house when it came to sort of emotional abuse and physical abuse”   |
|            |                           | 385                 | “if I hadn't been sort of privy to a lot of the badness that was going on all the violence that I saw all the arguing all the stuff me mum used to tell me from an early age and then feeling like it was my responsibility to make them things right if I hadn't been exposed to that I'd have been a little but more oblivious to how bad the world could be”  |
|            |                           | <u>Eloise</u><br>7  | “my mum and dad were together erm there was a lot of DV I think my dad was taking drugs and stuff like that”   |
|            |                           | 11                  | “the man my mum then got with had tried to strangle me”  |

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|  |                |     |   |
|--|----------------|-----|---|
|  |                | 583 | "my mum's partner bounced me around the room and tried to kill me... I think if I'd have stayed there he'd have probably killed me and obviously that was his intention when he strangled me"   |
|  |                | 686 | "he [step-father] got away with what he did and he just went on to have more kids and a family there was never any consequences for his actions for me he got away with it"   |
|  | <u>Sarah</u>   | 81  | "I just believed what she said but then when I found out she'd made me lie for a year for a man that basically killed his ex-girlfriend but never got done for it I thought about things a little bit differently"  |
|  |                | 131 | "he [dad] was very violent when he was with my mum and he wasn't a very nice person but then he wasn't a very nice person at the weekend when he went out and got bladdered"  |
|  | <u>Allison</u> | 36  | "me mums way or no way and then she kicked off and you were in the middle of it and it was more that it was me do you know what I mean"   |
|  |                | 72  | "I was scared at that age still nerves didn't wanna be round her so I didn't"   |
|  |                | 81  | "me mum just me mum anything she could have been having a bad day and then you get it take out on you and then you'd get ragged or something"   |
|  | <u>Jürgen</u>  | 9   | "my mum turned to alcoholism when we were quite young and at the beginning of the breakdown of her relationship with my dad because he was so physically and emotionally neglectful and abusive so she turned to alcoholism"  |
|  |                | 23  | "we moved in with our dad and finally lost touch with our mum so we're living with our dad he was getting worse and worse and more and more physically and emotionally abusive it got to the point where on my eleventh birthday we were still with my second eldest sister and two younger brothers that she said we need to go somewhere anywhere we just need to go" |
|  |                | 55  | "I remember worrying constantly and fearing for my life... I just remember the uncertainty"   |
|  |                | 75  |   |

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|            |   |                      |  |
|------------|---|----------------------|--|
|            |   | 281                  | “I was very scared of care my sisters both of my older sisters had kind of sent the fear of god into me about going into care... all of us knew that it was a possibility but we always felt it was a bad thing it would lead to a bad experience”   |
|            |   | 719                  | “you know the phrase out of the frying pan and into the fire I flip that around actually and I say out of the fire which was an unsustainable erm form of abuse and living where actually my life was probably in danger quite often to a frying pan where it was a more sustainable type of abuse and situation that I was living in”   |
|            |   | <u>Alice</u><br>26   | “I feel passionately that the system now for many care leavers erm actually exacerbates their neglect and it repeats the experiences of their younger lives leading to poor outcomes”  |
|            |   | 217                  | “aside from the fact that I was being sexually abused in it erm it was it just unhappy and erm we were, we went through periods where we were really poor real like significant poverty and other times where we, were my mum seemed to spend money like it was going out of fashion so there was lots of ups and downs in the family it just wasn’t, it never felt very stable didn’t feel safe at all” |
|            |   | <u>Gina</u><br>35    | “it felt like there was always an undercurrent of something going on in the household... that we were always waiting for I don’t know somebody to get the belt cracked on their backside as they walked up the stairs or for something some minor transgression”   |
|            |   |                      | “I say it was about six months the first time erm and then we would be back at home for say a year and then we would go back into care again it was literally in out in out it was constant”   |
| <b>All</b> | 1. c) Pervasive view of self as different | <u>David</u><br>196  | “you are different and you’ll remain different for the rest of your life”  |
|            |   | 619                  | “you’re different and you know you’re different you’re very much a different”  |
|            |   | <u>Rachel</u><br>414 | “I didn’t belong anywhere...I ended up sitting on the toilet floor crying me eyes out and one of the staff asked me what was the matter and I said I wanna go home but I don’t know where home is”   |
|            |   | <u>Eloise</u>        |  |

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|  |  |                      |   |
|--|--|----------------------|---|
|  |  | 205                  | “me and my brother would argue over the years and then they’d say you’re not my real sister and just things like that would then stay with me”  |
|  |  | 331                  | “people knew like I always knew they weren’t my real mum and dad and I always knew I was in care”   |
|  |  | 559                  | “I always remember being told you can do it you’re very intelligent you’re very bright but I found that they boys were just naturally intelligent and bright I had really work hard and I wasn’t what she thought I was”  |
|  |  | <u>Sarah</u><br>567  | “I think it’s hard to know where you fit in the worlds in the sense of like you’re not part of this family”   |
|  |  | 570                  | “then it’s like one thing you know your foster carers can give you permission to do but then another thing mums gotta give you permission to do and it’s kind of who do you answer to”  |
|  |  | 574                  | “you get pulled in all these different directions of and you don’t really know where you fit and and everything’s temporary when you’re in care”  |
|  |  | 587                  | “trying to sort all this chaotic being in care stuff out its really hard to maintain a normal life in a sense of you never know which area you’re going to live in”   |
|  |  | <u>Allison</u><br>24 | “you feel like the odd one do you know what I mean she [mum] weren’t strict with the lads she was strict with me”   |
|  |  | <u>Jürgen</u><br>660 | “there was always a sense of erm us and them erm whether it would be us and the foster carers and their family because of the way they treated us as others or different or whether it was us and our older sisters either even who kind of disappeared for a number of years or whether it was us and our wider family who decided not to battle to see us or for whatever reason” |
|  |  | 696                  | “head of that care unit sat me down and said Jürgen you’re a bit different to the other people here and I said yeah I know that I wish it wasn’t the case but I know”   |
|  |  | 821                  |   |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

|  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
|  |  | 847   | <p>"I didn't really feel a sense of belonging at all I never felt a sense of belonging to a care leavers group I didn't feel like I belonged in that foster family"</p> <p>"in terms of my sense of identity being in care was probably quite tough for that erm being a care leaver I used to hide that because I was worried I didn't want people to know erm I felt a deep sense of shame actually for it and I never really articulated it unless it was err a big deal for me to open up to someone erm I always felt lesser in society I always felt like a bit of a Slumdog is the word I would use"</p>  |
|  |  | <p><u>Alice</u><br/>344</p> <p>393</p> <p>399</p> <p>475</p> <p>562</p> | <p>"she would occasionally volunteer to go to parents evening which was excruciatingly difficult because everybody at school all my teaching staff and everybody knew because they just do don't they that I was looked after"</p> <p>"I didn't like being IDd as a kid in care which is what I was because even though they say that nobody talks about it in schools and ohh you don't fight and you don't find out everybody talked about it, everybody knew what had happened"</p> <p>"I hated being different to everybody else hated being erm hated being singled out as you know the kid in care"</p> <p>"it was not normal it didn't feel normal I didn't live there anymore it was just a reminder that I wasn't allowed to live there anymore"</p> <p>"I don't know that I had a sense of belonging at all actually I think that I, I never then felt part of the family again because and it was clear that I wasn't part of the family"</p> |
|  |  | <p><u>Gina</u><br/>330</p> <p>343</p> <p>380</p>                        | <p>"I didn't have any friends erm I was just a number that's the way somebody else described it as well in one of the first early homes your socks were numbered and you were a number your clothes were in a cubicle with a number you weren't a child you were just a number"</p> <p>"you still knew you were a kid in care and you'd done something wrong and that's why you were there and you still had to deal with things like bullying"</p>  |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

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|  |  |                      | “what I didn’t like we had to have meetings, reviews annual reviews meetings they were horrendous erm because I felt like a guinea pig in a cage and you’d all come to view me like an animal in a cage and they sat there and there’d be erm me key worker me mum would be invited someone from school would probably be invited social worker and the boss from the home and they’d all sit round and discuss me like I wasn’t even there” |
| <b>David</b><br><b>Rachel</b><br><b>Eloise</b><br><b>Allison</b><br><b>Jürgen</b><br><b>Alice</b><br><b>Gina</b> | 1. d) The world can be safe  | <u>David</u><br>408  | “they [foster carers] did just gave me a normal life that were great”  |
|  |  | 483                  | “but it was strange to see how a normal family operated and it was really quite strange to see how people just should be and I got that I was lucky to get that because now I understand that”   |
|  |  | <u>Rachel</u> 221    | “comparing it [care] to home it was paradise”  |
|  |  | <u>Eloise</u><br>152 | “I grew up there and there was four foster brothers... I saw them as brothers being younger from what I know do you know I was really happy and everything there wasn’t an issue I just seemed to settle into that family”   |
|  |  | 329                  | “I felt loved you know I felt reassured erm I did feel for a number of years that that was my mum and dad and those were my brothers... I had that love warmth and that home that really that I hadn’t had when I was younger”   |
|  |  | <u>Allison</u><br>60 | “once I’d been there [children’s home] I didn’t want to go back [to family home] I felt secure, safe I felt safe there I dunno happier I mean got up in the morning and felt happier not stressed”   |
|  |  | 222-233              | “I felt secure safe in care it’s the first time in my life I felt safe... the first night I woke up I never forget that feeling that I just felt relieved of it and then I never ever wanted to go home again”   |
|  |  | 388                  | “I enjoyed most about being in care was probably the security of not being at home and feeling secure knowing that I could be safe dunno happier than I was”   |
| <u>Jürgen</u><br>395   | “I think education for me was going to school spending time with friends erm erm class playing sports learning it was a mixture of escapism and I felt a sense of safety.” |                      |  |
|  |  | 408                  |  |

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|  |                             |                      | “the teachers when I was growing up primary and secondary school at any stage were just unreal and they offered me that safety”   |
|  |                             | <u>Alice</u><br>31   | “in some ways I think probably me going into care saved me from further deterioration in like my emotional safety as a teenager”  |
|  |                             | 569                  | “I think that my identity is more secure as I've got older than it's ever been and I think that's probably true for lots of people but as I have, as I've got older and I've had a daughter of my own and I'm settled in a long-term safe secure loving adult relationship”   |
|  |                             | 584                  | “that relationship cemented my security that even if the family wasn't necessarily my own there were other places, there were places in families that could be carved out for me and gave me a sense of fitting in somewhere and belonging”   |
|  |                             | <u>Gina</u><br>665   | “me husband now we've been married ten years we've been together thirteen years we've known each other twenty odd years erm and that's quite solid and I've found what I was always looking for because he puts up with my crap he's... he won't leave me and that's all I wanted [crying] all you want is for someone to accept you for who you are and love you regardless of your crap and not leave me and he won't leave me I know he won't and that's all I've ever wanted an that right now here I am now is where I've always wanted to be the end” |
| <b>David<br/>Rachel<br/>Eloise<br/>Allison<br/>Jürgen<br/>Alice<br/>Gina</b> | 1. e) The self as resilient | <u>David</u><br>538  | “I'm very happy with who I am and the thing that everything that's ever happened to me has built me up to be exactly who I am today I'm quite a resilient little fucker”  |
|  |                             | 568                  | “I'm really quite proud of who I am actually”   |
|  |                             | 600                  | “I like who I am I like my journey I like my experiences because I have a voice”  |
|  |                             | <u>Rachel</u><br>434 | “the only thing that I had that got me through that was more me drive to make sure I didn't end up on the dole, pregnant, in prison or without any type of lead, I always had to have something to be going for... I could potentially make something out of myself and therefore wouldn't end up being what everybody else expected me to be”  |
|  |                             | 516                  |   |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

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|  |  |                       | "I was never gonna be controlled, I was never gonna be somebody who was scared of who I was with"   |
|  |  | <u>Eloise</u><br>508  | "I didn't need anybody I didn't want anybody"   |
|  |  | 668                   | "I think a lot of the way I am now is the fact that I went back into education and I think that's taught me a lot about myself and to understand myself as well"  |
|  |  | <u>Allison</u><br>689 | "at Christmas I really felt like it's not right you've got a family and yeah I weren't cared for but you have one and you're alone but that made me battle you've just got to battle you've got to get on and build your own life"  |
|  |  | <u>Jürgen</u><br>266  | "I put my kind of I put all our fight that we had to survive and live through the system and be okay despite the challenges we had down to the relationship I had with my siblings that was vital"  |
|  |  | 337                   | "my time in care was really unsettling, not ideal but throughout I always had that fighter instinct and belief that I was better than what I had when I was much younger"   |
|  |  | 380                   | "whether it was when I was living without my sisters you know who were looking after us whether they had gone away or my mum wasn't there or my dad wasn't there and it was me looking after my brothers I took a lot of pride in going to school it would have, it was very easy we had really bad attendance in those years that whoever was looking after us was kind of in and out It was very easy to not go to school but I didn't enjoy that... it was erm escapism actually it was escapism from the reality of what I was going through" |
|  |  | 865-874               | "at university I was rubbing shoulders with people that had gone to private school and erm had loads of money spent on them and yet I was achieving the same as them I was beating them to get part time jobs I was doing more for society in terms of volunteering and giving back to the world... it was reassuring actually and it made me realise I am as academic I contribute equally or more to society and erm actually I can achieve just as well if not better in the working world"  |
|  |  | 876                   | "I'm gonna contribute to society about things that I'm passionate about and enjoy and erm that being in care it was only then that I realised being in care wasn't really my fault as well"   |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

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|  |  | 938                 | "I never really felt a sense of worth and I had to process that and it took me years to do that erm and these are things which even though I've turned out okay I think I've turned out pretty well actually"   |
|  |  | <u>Alice</u><br>298 | "I was well into my GCSEs and I knew that I just had to keep my head down and not move again because otherwise I was gonna be one of those looked after children who didn't get any GCSEs and I wasn't gonna be one of them"  |
|  |  | 319                 | "school was the only thing while everything else was absolute chaos including my life outside of school, school wasn't so I wanted to get my head down and I had, had at that point a career plan so... I was determined that I was going to finish my GCSEs and go on and do A Levels" |
|  |  | <u>Gina</u><br>594  | "as I've grown older I've learnt to become a fighter and that's who I am I'm a fighter and very forgiving I believe again I know I keep repeating myself turning negatives into positives it has made me who I am now"  |
|  |  | 624                 | "I knew I needed stability and I wasn't gonna get it from anybody accept myself and I had to make me own life erm so that affected me massively"  |

| FAMILY DYNAMICS |                            |                   |   |
|-----------------|----------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Participants    | Sub-ordinate Themes        | Cross-References  | Indicative Quotations   |
| All             | 2. a) Maternal deprivation | <u>David</u><br>8 | "my mum was very abusive physically, mentally, emotionally any kind of abuse you want to put on that"   |
|                 |                            | 52                | "just regularly quite physically abusive erm she would hit me for pretty much anything really erm she once gave me a good old beating with a bat because I didn't want to go and do my work experience at NASA" |
|                 |                            | 581               |   |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

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|  |  |                       | "I think she wasn't well I think she probably still isn't very well which is unfortunate but I was a fairly normal kid I didn't do much to ask for this sadly she just wasn't... I don't think she should have ever had children"  |
|  |  | <u>Rachel</u><br>21   | "I was sort of used by my mum as her confidant somebody who she could tell how she was feeling to and stuff"   |
|  |  | <u>Eloise</u><br>487  | "the way he'd [brother] treat my mum and the way I saw it is that you two have been raised by my mum my mum wanted you two"  |
|  |  | 562                   | "I recognise now that my relationship with that mum figure whether it was my auntie in the first home and my foster mum has always been weaker than the relationship with the male... I don't know if what happened with my mum and that relationship because there was no attachment there was no bond with me and my mum I wasn't wanted is why that affected my female caring relationship" |
|  |  | <u>Sarah</u><br>106   | "my mum wasn't all that interested in her kids but it wasn't a bad relationship it only went bad when I realised that what went on in our house wasn't normal"   |
|  |  | <u>Allison</u><br>459 | "I lived with me auntie but she brought me back and that's the bit I can't condone or understand how you wanted me there but you treated me the way you treated me like you didn't want me she didn't want me"   |
|  |  | 468                   | "if someone was gonna give your child a better opportunity and you didn't have the time or any love for that child then why not just let them be with that person"   |
|  |  | 639                   | "I don't condone her the way she is with her kids she wasn't there she wasn't warm and I'll never understand that even me being a parent but that's me mum's issues"   |
|  |  | 652                   | "the bond never came back with me mum because there was no bond at the beginning anyway there was nothing"   |
|  |  | <u>Jürgen</u><br>59   | "I thought it was inevitable that maybe my mum would come back into the picture as a healthy fine person but that never materialised erm so yeah it was a tough time"  |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

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|  |  | 145               | “the life kind of got sucked out of her as my dad got worse and worse and more and more unbearable so she turned to alcohol and she started to become less of a person”   |
|  |  | 377               | “my mum taught me how to read and write early and she was in a better place and I really valued that time with her it wasn’t too frequent err it didn’t happen too happen but I really enjoyed that and that was that stayed as my thing err throughout”  |
|  |  | 551               | “when we were in care we had no face to face contact with my mum err when we went into care at that point it had probably been about eight or nine months since we had last seen her”   |
|  |  | 557               | “we had a few letters from her err in the first year but then the letters stopped... the first letter explained how she was looking forward to seeing us again soon she will sort out a house she will, she was saving up you know it was all this optimism err which essentially was nonsense because none of it was happening and it’s a shame really looking back its quite a horrible letter to read” |
|  |  | 1069              | “I’m very aware that the last I knew of her fifteen years ago she was an alcoholic and maybe dabbling in drugs and whatever else she was doing so imagine fifteen years more of that if she’s still alive I’ve come to terms with the idea that she might not be but if she still is alive how damaged might she be and how damaging might she be on my life and my hopes for my future”                  |
|  |  | <u>Alice</u><br>6 | “I was removed from the family home me mum didn’t believe that it had happened and so erm she stayed with him and is still with him now”  |
|  |  | <u>Gina</u><br>54 | “when I was very little I picked up on that erm I was very very needy and very erm what’s the word demanding me mum always said I was quite demanding erm [clear throat] and I always remember her saying things about me sister like she had a lovely little bum and a lovely little voice and this that and the other and I always used to kinda feel quite left out and quite pushed out by that”      |
|  |  | 72                | “me mum constantly blamed me for everything she blamed me for being in hospital she blamed me for being ill she used to threaten me with going into care up until that point me and me sister had always been together”   |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

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|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------|---|
|  |                                   | 100                  | “I was getting the blame for everything and I was blamed for me mum being ill I was blamed for me mums bipolar I was blamed for her she used to try and commit suicide erm she would barricade herself in her room erm it was like it was all my fault and she used to say to me erm I need you to be really good I need you to behave you’re a big girl you know blah blah erm if you want to stay at home you know and that that threat or that that erm pressure was constantly on me” |
|  |                                   | 246                  | “we had no role models erm you know we had a very messed up mum and that was our main role figure you know that’s who you learn from”   |
|  |                                   | 258                  | “maybe me mum just didn’t know how to be a parent cos she lost her mum when she was really young I don’t know cos she was ill I don’t know we were just left to it a lot half of the time”  |
|  |                                   | 404                  | “I wasn’t wanted simple as I I couldn’t be controlled me sister could she did as she was told I didn’t I was a rebel which turned in to the very thing I been accused of all those years”   |
| <b>Rachel<br/>Eloise<br/>Sarah<br/>Allison<br/>Jürgen<br/>Alice<br/>Gina</b> | 2. b) Responsibility for siblings | <u>Rachel</u><br>128 | “when she needed me I was there... she was me sister so it didn’t matter whether she was right or wrong”  |
|  |                                   | 156                  | “me ma would like ask ask for a lot of help off me to look, look after help look after him when he was a baby and that so I felt a bit like his ma his second mum in a way because there was a lot a lot of time there spent looking after him”   |
|  |                                   | 325                  | “it was always me sort of contacting them rather than the other way round”  |
|  |                                   | 361                  | “right through me twenties I was very much attempting to involve me brother with stuff I was doing”   |
|  |                                   | <u>Eloise</u><br>706 | “when I was working I’d go and pick her up from primary school and go and drop her back at my mums because I wanted to... I wanted to try and get to know my sister I think really the relationship me and my sister have got we’ve sort of done ourselves”   |
|  |                                   | <u>Sarah</u>         |   |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

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|  |  | 144                  | “we didn’t have a normal sibling relationship we have more of a mother child relationship when my mum decides she’s gonna stay in bed for days on end and thinks you can do the washing you can look after the kids”   |
|  |  | 155                  | “[brother] like he is actually young enough to be my child but so are my dad’s kids and... I don’t feel like their mother whereas I feel more like [brother’s] mother”   |
|  |  | 184                  | “basically me following my mother and mopping up the mess basically the person that they phone when something goes wrong... in the past more of obviously the basic stuff like feeding them, bathing them that kind of stuff”  |
|  |  | <u>Jürgen</u><br>170 | “at times there were points were I was in charge of the house even though I was eight, nine, ten years old I was in charge of the house and in charge of them so I was in charge of cooking providing for them doing the shopping doing the cleaning so even though I was close with them in a brotherly sense there was almost a parental relationship with them as well”         |
|  |  | 179                  | “the parental role that I felt with my brothers did feel very normal erm it it felt like I had no choice but to take that on”  |
|  |  | 185                  | “so it was me at the age of eight, nine or ten looking after my brothers in an empty house erm so yeah it just felt normal, but it felt normal because actually I didn’t know any different”   |
|  |  | 666                  | “I did sometimes take on again in that placement a more parental definitely older brother responsibility I took that on in terms of making sure I did well at school or I took that on in terms of making sure that they were okay in school and safe or in terms of making sure that they were protected from my foster carers”   |
|  |  | <u>Alice</u><br>37   | “I had a lot of responsibilities with the young, with my younger siblings from being about I think probably from being about eight I was responsible for younger siblings taking them to and from school erm being at home to start dinner that kind of things so levels of erm additional responsibilities that fell on my shoulders as the oldest one who had to set an example” |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

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|  |                             | 111                  | "I spent long periods of time being feeling resentful erm particularly having to do lots... having to be the older responsible one having to erm look after them and you know collect them from school and you know make sure I walked home with them and that kind of thing"   |
|  |                             | 227                  | "my siblings have always been important to me and I think that erm [pause] more than anything that I wanted them to, I wanted them to feel safe and by me not feeling safe that meant they could if that makes sense so there was a sense of tolerating stuff that was happening to me, my experiences within the family home in order to ensure that those experiences weren't felt by my brother and sister I think"  |
|  |                             | 496                  | "I got to about sixteen or seventeen and then I was able to make arrangements to meet up with my sister myself or to see my brother and sister myself and we would go swimming or meet at the park or whatever so we made those arrangements ourselves and I think that it's a demonstration of our tenacity really"  |
|  |                             | 545                  | "there's a thing that comes with being the oldest and being the most responsible and having to set an example which can be a massive chore at times but actually when it's taken away from you you really miss it so there's a sense of loss that goes with that place in the family"   |
|  |                             | Gina<br>408          | "I did the shopping when I was nine, ten, eleven used to go shopping for me mum and she pay me buttons not buttons she pay know you know a few little quid it was like how I earned my pocket money I cleaned the bathrooms I cleaned our toilets I cleaned our sinks I cooked the tea erm when she was barricaded in her room with the furniture up against the room I'd make her a cup of tea and I'd come up and knock and I'd say mum there's a cup of tea outside the door she'd be trying to commit suicide in bed and there'd be a cup of tea outside the door I took over the mothering role" |
| <b>David<br/>Rachel<br/>Sarah<br/>Jürgen<br/>Alice</b> | 2. c) Leaving others behind | <u>David</u> 536     | "that's probably how I would describe those relationships that I left them behind when I left"  |
|  |                             | <u>Rachel</u><br>169 | "I was feeling like I was the one who was you know causing the problems in the house... I wanted to see our [brother] as much as possible like erm but [pause] there was other stuff going on"  |
|  |                             | 270                  |   |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

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|--|--|----------------------|---|
|  |  | 296                  | <p>“me sister told me me brother had been to a party and told his friends that he only had one sister now erm which proper cut me up... I always cry when I say that more for him because I don't know what he was thinking at the time there and I never knew”</p>   |
|  |  | 426-433              | <p>“I was made to feel like it was all my fault why I was in care and that I'd let everyone down... it was good to see them [siblings] but it was more of a guilt feeling because.. my [sister] would have just thought I was or she would have been disappointed more that more than anything like you know that I couldn't hack it at home and I just didn't get on with it”</p> <p>“at first I felt guilty like it was all my fault I felt like they would blame me which maybe they still do blame me but I'm okay with that blame now because I understand why it happened... as I got older and more confident in the reasons why things happened [pause] I felt guilty that I feel more guilty now that they were left than I did at the time”</p> |
|  |  | <u>Sarah</u><br>256  | <p>“I don't think I even wanted to listen to why I just know I didn't like that it was happening so I didn't care why it was happening at the time I wanted to go with the other two”</p>   |
|  |  | 384                  | <p>“I didn't want to be separated well it was not so much the separation that bother me as a sixteen year old it was the fact that I was leaving them at my mum's had we all gone into care and we were still in separate placements... so if that was what happened erm it was the fact that I was leaving them in that situation and I knew what was going on in the house and stuff like that they were being left there that was I'd say what bothered me more”</p>   |
|  |  | 412                  | <p>“I knew I needed to get out of the situation but I don't think the kids should have been left obviously at the time they're not old enough to make that decision for themselves”</p>   |
|  |  | 532                  | <p>“I worried about them a lot more because I didn't know what was going on in the house because I wasn't there”</p>  |
|  |  | 637                  | <p>“I still believe they shouldn't be at my mum's house and she's probably got worse because now I kind of feel like I'm picking up more pieces as times gone on”</p>   |
|  |  | <u>Jürgen</u><br>474 | <p>“my second eldest sister... went to live back with him [Dad] for a while so we were separated from her erm even though... despite all the threats the way he treated us he hit her a lot erm</p>   |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

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|  |   |                     | <p>despite all of that she went to live back with him so that was really weird for me and my brothers because we knew what he was like we thought you know what are you doing we were both confused at her for making that decision and social services for allowing that decision to be realised”</p> <p>616 “being separated from her was difficult lost touch with her for about six years because of it erm and that was those later six years of being in care... we completely lost out on her life and the life of our niece”</p> <p>626 “her decision to go and live back with him and keep in touch with him as well as social services almost allowing that to happen which I found really weird I think it was said to us that she can’t come into the same placement with you because she’s a bit older and you don’t have the space in the home”</p> <p>734 “how the hell did you let my second oldest sister live back with my dad who let that happen who oversaw that”</p> <p>895 “I was angry when I was in care and that decision was made and that was happening I was angry confused worried for her”</p> <p>1142 “being separated from my siblings my elder siblings erm, it was absolute nonsense it shouldn’t have been allowed to happen erm that people should have listened to us, all of us erm when we explained that our dad was an abusive violent man, looking at what he’s done in Canada can you imagine what could have been with my sister erm I find it absolutely shocking that that was allowed to happen”</p> |
|  |   | <u>Alice</u><br>387 | “I hated leaving my brother and sister I hated the fact that they’d had had to stay in the family home and I was really really distressed about what their experiences might be now I wasn’t there to protect them so that had been, so that was really difficult”   |
| <b>David</b><br><b>Rachel</b><br><b>Sarah</b><br><b>Allison</b><br><b>Jürgen</b><br><b>Alice</b> | 2. d) Making a choice / can’t have both | <u>David</u><br>356 | “when Joe weren’t there we didn’t have contact... he brought shame on the family name so we weren’t allowed to speak to him”   |
|  |   | 542                 | “my brothers weren’t allowed to talk to me at that point”  |
|  |   | <u>Rachel</u> 264   |  |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

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| <b>Gina</b> |                       |  | “me mum, me brother and me sister weren’t allowed to come and see me because me dad wouldn’t let them come up to the kids home”   |
|             | <u>Sarah</u><br>476   |  | “I’ve learnt how to play the situation of just keep your mouth shut go round and pretend you like, pretend I like my mum and pretend I like [mum’s partner] and it just keeps the peace a lot better and I get to see the kids” * exception   |
|             | 483                   |  | “I don’t go to see her I go to see the kids” *exception   |
|             | 707                   |  | “it [separation] forces me to have a relationship with my mum that I don’t want to have”  |
|             | 718                   |  | “if the kids didn’t live there I wouldn’t see the woman so I’m forced to have a relationship with her that I don’t want and the kids continually you know get damaged by the situation that they live in and I have to sit and watch that”  |
|             | <u>Allison</u><br>103 |  | “me dad he’d do anything for me but he’d do it behind her back because that’s the type of person she was she wouldn’t allow it”   |
|             | 185                   |  | “me older brother is the same because he doesn’t still speak to my mum now so we’re okay we look after each other we stick together”  |
|             | 549                   |  | “I’d only see me dad by chance because again me mum controls situations and she wouldn’t let him see me so he couldn’t just come round but he would be there because he was me dad but couldn’t tell me mum”  |
|             | <u>Jürgen</u><br>621  |  | “the other sister who went back to live with our dad for some time whilst we were in care we lost touch with her for that patch of time she was living with our dad erm and we were never willing to go and meet her in case he turned up”  |
|             | 632                   |  | “as soon as my dad then disappeared off, off the face of the earth for a little while and left her to it erm she got back in touch with us she said she was worried about us etc. etc. erm it didn’t feel genuine at that point that decision she had made had felt like err a lasting decision one that could never really go back on” |

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|  |  |                     |  |
|--|--|---------------------|--|
|  |  | 649                 | “while she continues to support him and his causes despite the black and white evidence which is in the news it’s on the websites and everything despite all that evidence to say he’d done something so horrible which was even worse than anything he’d done to us so again it was at that point that our relationship with her totally broke down erm beyond repair I couldn’t and I’ve not seen or heard from her since then”  |
|  |  | <u>Alice</u><br>173 | “I’m really close to my sister and we’ve grown much closer as we’ve got older and as neither of us have any contact with our mum erm my mum would was determined that the siblings were not going to erm get on with one another she didn’t want us to she went out of her way her and my stepdad went out of their way to damage that sibling relationship and with me and my brother that’s worked err which makes me feel really sad”   |
|  |  | 181                 | “part of his [brother] contract for having contact with her [mum] he wasn’t allowed to have contact with me and my sister erm and that carried on even into his and like I say he’s in his mid-thirties now”   |
|  |  | 470                 | “I was allowed to go back to the family home for visits if my stepfather wasn’t there and sometimes he worked away and so I was then able to go back to the family home but that never did for particularly satisfying visits”   |
|  |  | 519                 | “I think that, that, that his youth the fact that he was so young and the fact that we’d been so close had effectively severed our relationship because I think he was much more reliant on me mum and stepfather than... and certainly as he got older he was reliant on my mum and stepfather for financial support and all of that kind of thing that he couldn’t have had without staying in contact with them so that... and there was always a price to pay for that there was a price to pay for that and he paid it” |
|  |  | <u>Gina</u><br>229  | “I have literally gone there’s me phone number there’s me address I moved house please phone me and she won’t she just refuses and I have been told the reason she won’t contact me is she doesn’t want to upset me mum again”   |
|  |  | 541                 | “like me mum and me sister can only have a relationship with one of us at a time they haven’t they haven’t worked it out I have”   |

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| SURVIVAL STRATEGIES                                    |                                |                       |   |
|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Participants   | Sub-ordinate Themes            | Cross-References      | Indicative Quotations   |
| Rachel<br>Eloise<br>Sarah<br>Allison<br>Jürgen<br>Gina | 3.a) Pretending vs. Rebellling | <u>Rachel</u><br>28   | "[I] didn't really have much faith in them to- or- faith and probably [pause] what's the word I'm thinking of- not so much trust but I didn't have I didn't see them as... you know that parent figure so I started basically rebelling against what they wanted me to do because I didn't want to do it" |
|  |                                | 52                    | "part of me was relieved because you know I didn't want to pretend things were okay"  |
|  |                                | 188                   | "I felt like I could you know start being me rather than this person who was constantly sort of made to feel like they were the worst person in the word of what they were doing"   |
|  |                                | 228                   | "I had no respect for me mum and dad due to how I'd been what I'd been subjected to when I was younger so when they were trying to tell me to "do this and do that" I was rebelling against that"   |
|  |                                | 534                   | "it went on as long as it did and got to the point where it was me who had to basically rebel in order to get certain people involved erm was wrong"  |
|  |                                | <u>Eloise</u><br>163  | "I recognise now that I was pushing the boundaries and I'd sort of I did rebel a bit"   |
|  |                                | 366                   | "I probably went off the rails a but if I'm honest like I dropped out of school erm I started truanting with another girl so that lead to me dropping out of school and everything"   |
|  |                                | <u>Sarah</u><br>239   | "I was just very confused and didn't really get it and as I say at that point I still kind of thought that everything that had gone on in our house was normal anyway"  |
|  |                                | <u>Allison</u><br>137 | "they would say that I was a troubled child and I'd rebelled but I didn't rebel I had to get out the house and that's what it was the running away was getting away"  |
|  |                                | 234                   | "the only way I could deal with it and get away was you know the rebelling because I didn't wanna go home"  |

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|  |  |                     |   |
|--|--|---------------------|---|
|  |  | 359                 | “when they put me in foster care I didn’t like it felt uncomfortable and didn’t know how to handle so I rebelled I didn’t like living in a house and I didn’t know how to be in a family unit probably brought back memories that I shouldn’t have been there should have been at home so yeah rebelled didn’t like it”   |
|  |  | <u>Jurgen</u><br>52 | “it was very very scary I’m smiling I smile when I feel awkward but it was a scary tough challenging time”  |
|  |  | 180                 | “I felt like I just needed to get on with things erm that’s always been my mindset I think you just replicate what you’ve seen you go to the shops and you cook and you erm you you survive”  |
|  |  | 200                 | “I had an inkling that things would be better elsewhere but I also had a feeling that what I knew was what I knew and I was surviving and I was doing okay even though I wasn’t happy and I was quite constantly stressed as a kid”   |
|  |  | 297                 | “actually because we had food on the table we had stability erm it was better than what we knew”  |
|  |  | 926                 | “when I was in care and in the situation I was always always grateful I always felt like it was better you know the fire frying pan analogy it was always better even though it wasn’t perfect or great and you never know what else is out there you never know what another placement might be like so that was always a concern at the time but at the time I just felt grateful and happy enough was able to survive” |
|  |  | <u>Gina</u><br>59   | “eventually as I say it was me that was in care and me sister that stayed at home so you can see this rejection... as I got older I did start rebelling against that so you know if you get told that you’re erm demanding or rebellious for so long eventually you are what you hear you become what you being told are”   |
|  |  | 106                 | “I would go back home but the minute I did something wrong I’d be back in care again and I got to the point where it was like you’re not putting me back in this children’s home and I ran away erm so I was on the street for a while as well because I was not going back in this children’s home I hated it”   |

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|  |                                 |                       |   |
|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
|  |                                 | 141                   | “being you know being in care affect your whole life and when I left care I was really messed up and did make a lot of wrong choices”   |
|  |                                 | 322                   | “I had all these feelings which is why I was rebelling anyway feelings of rejection feelings me mum didn’t love me feelings of having to be perfect and having this pressure on me that if I didn’t conform I was going into care”                          |
|  |                                 | 324                   | “if I didn’t conform and if I wasn’t perfect I’d have to go back into care so and even now that that’s carried on right through my life I need to be perfect I have to have perfection erm it was a constant battle and my sister was perfect and I wasn’t” |
| <b>David<br/>Rachel<br/>Eloise<br/>Allison<br/>Jürgen<br/>Alice<br/>Gina</b> | 3. b) Desire to break the cycle | <u>David</u><br>718   | “when I have kids I want to make sure that they know that they’re loved and that they know what is right and wrong from a parent and that they feel valued in the house and that they belong there”   |
|  |                                 | <u>Rachel</u> 201     | “there’s opportunities there that you need to take in life so that you know you don’t you don’t waste you know the lessons that you’ve learnt”  |
|  |                                 | 465                   | “what I went through when I was a kid is probably why I haven’t had kids but if I did I’d I’d know that there’s be certain things that wouldn’t continue in the next generation”  |
|  |                                 | 537                   | “I’d never have a child and put it through what my mum and dad had put me through so I was terrified of ever being in a situation where I was responsible for somebody else’s emotional wellbeing if you like”  |
|  |                                 | <u>Eloise</u><br>862  | “I think it has affected me or impacted the way I parent as well because I always tell my children more than once a day that I love them erm you know so I always make sure that they know that they’re loved and they know that they’re wanted”            |
|  |                                 | 873                   | “family means a lot to me my own family because I don’t want my kids to have any sort of experience that I did I want them to have a good life”   |
|  |                                 | <u>Allison</u><br>799 |   |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

|  |  |                      |   |
|--|--|----------------------|---|
|  |  |                      | “you just show your kids love do you know what I mean because that’s where coldness comes from and it could affect your kids and repeat but for me it’s done the opposite I so the opposite I don’t want me kids to feel like me unworthy me kids are my life”  |
|  |  | <u>Jürgen</u><br>346 | “I carried on... you know I made that journey to school an hour and a half there an hour and a half back erm I studied really hard at school and then in the evenings, I was head boy at school as well I was, I was working part time”   |
|  |  | 359                  | “being surrounded by this chaos was really difficult so my room was a safe place in all of that erm it it certainly wasn’t easy and to say no to people when they’re asking you to take part in what they want to do if I didn’t have my younger brothers and I didn’t know that I needed to set an example for them”   |
|  |  | 726                  | “I clung to my thing which was education and I clung dearly to that and I knew my goal was to go to university and as soon as I made it university my life changed that was a total different life for me”  |
|  |  | 1122                 | “she’s [girlfriend] younger than me but she wants kids and I’m the opposite I want to wait for quite a while because I want to be in a real position of stability and feeling settled and able to support them as best I can so the way its impacted me is a real erm carefulness to make sure I’m in financial position erm that I have the house I have all the support available I have the capacity emotionally and mentally to support them” |
|  |  | <u>Alice</u><br>646  | “I was going away to university and I was determined that I was gonna go away to university and I was gonna go away”  |
|  |  | 784                  | “because of those experiences I had but my experiences have been able to put protective factors in place to minimise the chance of my child experiencing the same”  |
|  |  | <u>Gina</u><br>483   | “I started realising that I couldn’t do to my own children what me mum would do to me erm I’d break the chain”  |
|  |  | 607                  | “I’ve learned to break that chain erm because erm just because I’ve had a bad relationship with my family doesn’t mean tha that has to affect my family   |

SEPARATION AND REUNIFICATION OF LAC WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES IN THE UK

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|---|-------------------|-----------------------|--|
| <b>Rachel<br/>Eloise<br/>Sarah<br/>Allison<br/>Jürgen<br/>Alice</b> | 3. c) Cutting off | <u>Rachel</u><br>167  | “me distancing myself from the whole situation”  |
|   |                   | <u>Eloise</u><br>630  | “my dad was more around when I was younger because now it’s quite a distant relationship even though he lives in [large city] but I think my dad was always going through his own battles... so I can’t do that”   |
|   |                   | 737                   | “I’ve had to sort of lock my brother off because my brother will keep raising things every so often will create an argument or would create an issue and because of the way he is I’ve just had to lock him off... as far as I’m concerned I can’t have that contact”  |
|   |                   | 766                   | “there’s no relationship with my mum”  |
|   |                   | <u>Sarah</u><br>138   | “he’s the one with the drug problem and I’ve just gone right okay I’m not talking to you now and stopped talking to him for a year”  |
|   |                   | <u>Allison</u><br>192 | “I still don’t speak to me mum now for two years I can’t it’s not good for me”   |
|   |                   | <u>Jürgen</u><br>241  | “I’m really close now with one of my older siblings but not the other erm because of what my siblings have done I’ve cut off completely from them”   |
|   |                   | 960                   | “we had some contact then erm but since then since I found out she was trying to get my dad out of prison she was supporting him despite what he did... I decided it wasn’t healthy for me to stay in touch with her the way she was so I’ve never heard from her since about 2009”  |
|   |                   | 1010                  | “it’s just the incessant lies where I made a decision I didn’t want to stay in touch with her that wasn’t sustainable I didn’t really see a point if it was just going to frustrate me erm and that she felt the need to lie to me all the time to impress or whatever”  |
|   |                   | 1075                  | “I feel I’ve been cut throat with some siblings as well when I said I’ve almost cut them off and said they’re not good to stay in touch with I suppose that’s my coping mechanism erm but also just being aware that I can’t save everyone I can’t help everyone and lots of my family members have erm they need saving or they need support which I I don’t have the ability to offer” |

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|  |                        |                      |  |
|--|------------------------|----------------------|--|
|  |                        | 1092                 | “with partners err any girlfriend I've had I tend to if we break up I tend to cut them off again it sounds a bit cut throat but it's my way of coping with that difficulty erm and I'm very aware of that and I'm aware that it's and I reflect on it a lot and I'm aware that it's not maybe normal erm so I'd rather delete them off all social media and not stay in touch I just find that a bit weird and I suppose my early life and probably what my mum and dad have done to me has influenced that” |
|  |                        | <u>Alice</u><br>196  | “it was our mother that was causing that friction between us and err and for different reasons I stopped completely stopped having contact with my mum”  |
|  |                        | 731                  | “him and me sister did get back in contact with one another a couple of years ago erm... and remain in contact but it's too difficult for me and him to have any contact he's not able to he's not able to manage erm he's not able to manage my experiences even as an adult man he's not able to to manage those experiences enough so that we could have a relationship erm which is sad but almost inevitable really”  |
|  |                        | 755                  | “my sister had attempted to get back in touch with her and has had periods of time where she has been very distressed about my mum's behaviour and has contacted me about it and I, I'm not able to have those conversations with her because it's too difficult for me”   |
| <b>Rachel<br/>Eloise<br/>Sarah<br/>Allison<br/>Jürgen<br/>Alice<br/>Gina</b> | 3. d) It is what it is | <u>Rachel</u> 387    | “doing the degree helped me realise how people can't be blamed sometimes for how they are and what they do parents and kids [crying]... there's reasons for why we do the things we do and we have to learn by them hopefully and live with what you've done as a parent and a kid init”   |
|  |                        | <u>Eloise</u><br>516 | “I think it was just that was how it was and that was what I knew”   |
|  |                        | 642                  | “even though what I've been through I don't I just get on with it”   |
|  |                        | 651                  | “I know just how it happened for me and I didn't know it could have been any different”  |
|  |                        | 973                  | “it just is what it is I'm 36 now and all that happened you're talking like twenty years ago”  |
|  |                        | <u>Sarah</u><br>295  | “it wasn't the best experience but I knew it was obviously I chose to go into care at the end of the day”  |

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|  |                |     |  |
|--|----------------|-----|--|
|  |                | 778 | "I'd like to say it gets better but I don't really think it does [laughing] I don't know no not really I don't really know it is what it is and it's gonna be that way"  |
|  | <u>Allison</u> | 29  | "its just the way it was do you know what I mean horrible"   |
|  |                | 262 | "in the homes you just get on with it it is what it is"  |
|  |                | 628 | "sometimes I think I shouldn't have really been in care I could have stuck it out maybe just the odd whack and could have got over that till sixteen but it happened it was what happened"   |
|  |                | 693 | "you can't sit there dwelling over things because that would affect you I reckon that would just affect you thinking about it why this why that questioning it all maybe I shouldn't have been in the homes but it is what it is sad really"   |
|  | <u>Jürgen</u>  | 227 | "it's [a sibling relationship] not unconditional not for me and it's not been unconditional and that's a shame and I wish it wasn't like that erm but it's it's the way it is for me"  |
|  |                | 562 | "we received another letter later on in the year saying I'm really sorry I can't take you on erm all the best for life I hope Liverpool continue to do well which is a really random erm but it was almost honest at least it was honest but it was buttered up with Liverpool you're all going do well at school you'll all be fine so those were the only contacts we've had from her and not heard from her ever since" |
|  |                | 723 | "I experienced the same similar neglect erm I experienced the same lack of genuine relationships with any parental figures erm I wish it wasn't like that but it was"  |
|  | <u>Alice</u>   | 383 | "I hated the fact that he got to stay at home and I had to move out because I hadn't done anything wrong and the fact that he then effectively was able to laugh at everybody and make me out to be a liar was just rage inducing erm less so now because you know who's got the energy for that"  |
|  |                | 414 | "they were asked if he'd if they'd ever been abused and said no and so they were then told that I'd told a really big lie that I was erm and that I was bad because I'd told a really big lie that was"  |

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|   |  |                     |  |
|---|--|---------------------|--|
|   |  |                     | like really damaging for the family and everything so I don't know that there was ever any opportunity to be able to make sense of things necessarily it just was what it was"   |
|   |  | 538                 | "I wish he'd been prosecuted and sent to prison for twenty-five years but you know you can't have everything"  |
|   |  | 549                 | "there's a sense of loss as your place in the family home is replaced by somebody else because my sister became the eldest one erm by default just because I wasn't there and erm and so that's so that was harmful without a doubt I think to my identity but I don't know what other options there were and it kind of becomes where it it was what it was and it is what it is" |
|   |  | 782                 | "my life wouldn't be the life that it is without that sexual abuse, would I have chosen to be sexually abused obviously not but my life is, is, is what it is because of those experiences I had"  |
|   |  | <u>Gina</u><br>235  | "I never bin at home for Christmas since I was a kid I'm just it's just it's just one of them things its life that's how life is"  |
|   |  | 754                 | "I can't do this anymore this what am I doin I'm still chasing after this dream and chasing after this belonging of wanting this family I've got me own family why am I chasing the old one I've got this one an if they want me they know where I am my doors always open"  |
|   |  | 874                 | "it's one of them it's it's it's it's how life was then so you can't change it"  |
| <b>David<br/>Rachel<br/>Allison<br/>Jürgen<br/>Alice<br/>Gina</b> | 3. e) It was for the best / better off | <u>David</u><br>146 | "I don't know if this is usual or unusual but it made more sense to be taken into care than not"   |
|   |  | 255                 | "I didn't have difficulty understanding why I was in care or understanding my experiences or anything like that"   |
|   |  | 295                 | "it was the right decision erm the only way it was the wrong decision is as I say that it should have been taken much, much earlier"   |
|   |  | 409                 | "so actually whilst I'd had quite a lot of support and relationships ripped out there I'd been given some that were so much better and stronger it was a good trade"   |

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|  |  |                            |   |
|--|--|----------------------------|---|
|  |  | 637                        | "quite a strong part of my identity now is the fact that I was looked after and I'm quite proud of that I'm quite proud of what I did with it"  |
|  |  | <u>Rachel</u> 179<br>- 186 | "it was a good thing for me because I wanted I needed time away from me parents... I couldn't have continued in the family home so the kids home was you know was a a chance to start again... for me it was a good thing going into care"  |
|  |  | 247                        | "I don't think they would have benefitted the way I did because neither of them felt they was I did about it"   |
|  |  | 394                        | "I feel in a way that that time away from the family helped me to find out who I was and get my head together in order to be a better sister, better daughter, once my head was on straight"  |
|  |  | 436                        | "[I feel] a little bit rubbisher on them because [crying] they didn't have the opportunity to become themselves because they were there for longer than what I was and you see that you see that in both of them now the way I am I'm so different to them because they were they never saw another side to how you can be" |
|  |  | 549                        | "I don't think the other two would have made sense of it the way I did and benefit from it the way I did"   |
|  |  | 565                        | "when they [social services] finally did I think the best thing was done but it just took a long time took longer than it should of but I don't regret being taken into care"   |
|  |  | <u>Allison</u><br>430      | "there was no reason for the lads to go into care because it was only me that was running away she wasn't funny with the lads it was just me"   |
|  |  | 481                        | "I think I benefitted from not being there at home at this time and if I look back now I didn't do bad for myself after being in care so"   |
|  |  | 707                        | "I think it made me the person I am today definitely I wouldn't have been this person, the life experiences seeing things... I think it made me who I am today in the way I think and everything... you got out with your eyes wide open looked after yourself because no one's else is"                                    |

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|  |  |                      |  |
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|  |  | 722                  | "all my life experience made me who I am today and I don't regret it and I look at our kid and I know I'm better at getting on with stuff than he is because I wasn't there at home"   |
|  |  | <u>Jürgen</u><br>504 | "Those reasons were that it was unsafe to live with my dad and that my mum had essentially gone off you know just disappeared off the face of the earth according to them and according to us so I totally agree with those decisions"   |
|  |  | 890                  | "I went from a place of resentment and anger to a place of acceptance and just disappointment I suppose a bit with her but a bit with the situation as well"   |
|  |  | <u>Alice</u><br>367  | "I think if I'd have stayed at home if I'd not if I'd not made my disclosure and told somebody what was happening my life would have been really different so the fact that I became looked after while I was still young enough to give some support to and still young enough to be able to because I was fairly resilient recover from some of those experiences then it was the best thing that could have ever happened to me really in and of all the horrible experiences that I actually I dread to think what would have happened if I hadn't have been looked after"   |
|  |  | 554                  | "I think that for me there was layers of resilience that I don't think that either of my siblings had and I think that resilience was first of all by having more years before my stepfather came on the scene and a sense of safety when I went to be looked after that my siblings didn't have"  |
|  |  | 626                  | "when I first went into care I thought they were lucky being allowed to stay at home that actually they'd got the better end of the deal that it was that they were allowed to stay at home and that I was being punished but actually over time I have recognised that them staying at home was really harmful to both of them erm and so there's so there's a change in perception isn't there with how you see it so seeing them at the time and thinking well actually that's not fair I should have been able to I should have been able to stay at home too when I actually that home was really harmful and it remained harmful for those two children who weren't then protected after I left" |
|  |  | <u>Gina</u><br>110   | "I was never jealous of me sister I was happy that she I always believed that she had this fabulous up bringing because she stayed at home erm she had what we all want we want a be"  |

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|  |  |     |   |
|--|--|-----|---|
|  |  | 577 | <p>at home with our parents that that's the way it's supposed to be isn't it it actually wasn't like that for her and she's actually more messed up now than I ever was which is a real shame"</p>  |
|  |  | 674 | <p>"turning negatives into positives before all that stuff hadn't happened to me I wouldn't be able to help anybody the way I see it is it's an experience that's happened and if I can help somebody else through what I've been through then it was worth it erm obviously everybody wants to have a lovely childhood where nothing goes wrong and we all grow up happily ever after and hunky dory but even kids that aren't in care it's not like that it's not like that for any of us we all have problems we have issues just maybe mine where a little bit dramatic [laughing] more dramatic than other people's so I wouldn't change anything"</p> |
|  |  | 702 | <p>"what happened to her was completely different to me I think I said earlier that I thought she had this hunky-dory life it wasn't because she stayed at home she was constantly manipulated and she still manipulated now she can't see that the very fact that she won't contact me because she doesn't wanna upset me mum is my mum's manipulation of her"</p>   |
|  |  |     | <p>"being a Christian has taught me about forgiving people when you forgive someone you stop hurting you don't realise that erm when you forgive somebody it actually heals you you're the one that can let go then you can let go of that stuff you're not hanging onto it you're not being resentful you're not holding grudges against people and you can move on"</p>   |

## **Appendix N – Journal Author Guidelines**

### **British Journal of Social Work**

#### **Instructions and Notes for Authors and other Contributors**

Please note that the BJSW aims to accept the highest quality articles. With our high number of submissions we anticipate an acceptance rate of 10% of all submitted articles.

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