

ABSTRACT BOOKLET

Children and Childhoods Conference 2026

15-16 JULY 2026



University
of Suffolk



WEDNESDAY 15 JULY 2026

9.30–11.30am | Session One

Plenary Session: Child Criminal Exploitation

Towards a welfare turn in Child Criminal Exploitation? Risk, relational victimhood and the future of multi-agency responses in light of new UK legislation

Paul Andell, University of Suffolk

Over the past decade, Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) has emerged as a major safeguarding concern within the United Kingdom. Initially framed through lenses of gang involvement, youth violence and organised crime, contemporary policy increasingly recognises exploited children as victims of abuse rather than solely offenders. This paper examines whether recent developments represent a genuine welfare turn in responses to CCE, or merely a limited reconfiguration of existing systems of risk management.

Drawing upon findings from a recent Home Office commissioned Rapid Evidence Assessment of 62 UK and international studies, alongside 15 years of research examining gangs, county lines and criminal exploitation, the paper argues that CCE cannot be understood through simple victim–offender binaries. Rather, exploitation is relational, contextual, and frequently characterised by shifting identities in which young people may simultaneously experience victimisation, agency, coercion, resistance and participation. Such complexity challenges conventional criminal justice categorisations and calls for more nuanced safeguarding responses from the proposed new UK legislation.

The extraneous factors that bring African-Caribbean children and young people to the threshold of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales

John Pitts, University of Suffolk and University of Bedfordshire

This presentation draws upon recent research undertaken by researchers from Bedfordshire and Manchester Metropolitan universities entitled “Exploring racial disparity in diversion from the youth justice system” and funded by the Nuffield Foundation. Its purpose is to interrogate the social, economic, psychological, cultural, legal, social welfare and educational factors that bring African-Caribbean children and young people to the threshold of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales. The paper brings together material from a broad range of academic sources to support the proposition that these factors constitute powerful predisposing factors for involvement in youth criminality.

Safety plans for young people from a local authority perspective

James Alexander, London Metropolitan University

Over the past 10 years, local authorities have sought to embed a public health approach to youth safety. Community Safety Partnerships and new requirements placed on local authorities through the serious violence duty mean that efforts are increasingly coordinated through multi-agency partnerships, including statutory, voluntary and VCS services. There is now a greater focus on early intervention around the risk factors identified to impact youth safety, with programmes to reduce school exclusion, increase understanding around neurodivergence, train frontline staff in trauma-informed practice, increase therapeutic support for children and families and provide employment support have become the norm.

Through drawing on data from five local authority-based youth safety focused evaluations, this presentation will discuss both the benefits and limitations of this approach. The evaluations highlighted that although the focus

was on contributing to a long-term reduction in violence, they were designed, funded and evaluated over the short term. Therefore, it is not known whether interventions designed to make a long-term impact, but which only last a relatively short time, can produce the change intended.

The increased focus on early intervention and prevention often means those who are at most risk of involvement in violence and whose actions are often fuelling the fear-motivated knife carrying of others can be left under supported. A public health approach to tackling youth violence may have a greater impact if there is more attention on ensuring the sustainability of interventions, with more emphasis on working with those already involved in youth violence to leave the riskier aspects of their lifestyle behind.

Child Criminal Exploitation: Lived experience voices of victimhood

Kelly Gray and Adam Norton, University of Suffolk

This presentation explores the lived experiences of children, young people, and families affected by Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and County Lines activity. Using survivor and family testimonies, it highlights experiences of grooming, coercion, exploitation, and the frequent misrecognition of victims within criminal justice and safeguarding systems.

The presentation also examines the interventions identified by victims and families as most effective, including trauma-informed and multi-agency approaches. These lived experience accounts form part of a national awareness-raising and practitioner training programme developed by the University of Suffolk, the National County Lines Coordination Centre, and the Ivison Trust. To date, more than 1,500 practitioners have received training through the programme.

12.00–1.00pm | Keynote

Childhoods on the edge of justice — and the continuous attempt to understand

Speaker: Doris Buhler-Niederberger

Professor Emerita, University of Wuppertal, Germany

President of RC 53 “Sociology of Childhood”, International Sociological Association, 2006-2010

Stories told by children will be examined in greater depth — stories which, like miniatures, depict childhoods on the edge of justice, and are told rather in passing with no more than two or three sentences. These stories reveal the intersection between children’s generational position and societal injustices such as marginalisation, the structural indifference of social institutions, violence, and war. This convergence creates a unique experience of hardship and threat for the children. I have heard such stories in my private life — as a child from adults and as an adult from children; it seems to me that they are particularly often used across generations to communicate painful and humiliating childhood experiences. I have also been told such stories as a researcher. In all phases of life and in my various roles, I have found it difficult to respond to them; both emotionally and conceptually.

Drawing on various fields of research, I will highlight these stories and the attempt to process them. These fields include policing families, residential care, school failure, families affected by violence, and childhood in war and conflict. Twofold attention is called for: Firstly, such narratives require methodological attention, despite often being told casually and briefly, and initially appearing banal. Secondly, while our concepts address social processes or institutional logics — remaining within the emotionally safe realm of social mechanisms — we require concepts that can capture situations arising at the intersection of generational position and social injustice. In this sense, the lecture is a plea for research that is closer to children’s lived experience.

2A: Youth Endowment Fund Project

Beyond risk: what health, safeguarding and evidence can contribute to children on the edge of justice

Chair: Nicki Bramford, Youth Endowment Fund

This session explores what helps for children and young people on the edge of justice when evidence, youth justice, clinical insight and youth voice are brought together. Framed around *Childhoods on the Edge of Justice*, the discussion considers how children encounter, navigate and are shaped by systems of crime, safeguarding and social regulation, and what more joined up responses might look like in practice. Drawing on contributions from the Youth Endowment Fund, Youth Justice, clinical psychology and youth voice, the panel will reflect on children and young people whose lives sit at the intersection of violence, trauma, safeguarding concerns, unmet need, exclusion and justice-system contact.

Topics will include translating evidence into practice, understanding children's experiences across systems, and how agencies can work together to respond earlier and better.

The workshop is suitable for practitioners, academics, students and policymakers interested in childhood, social justice, safeguarding, public health and youth justice. It will offer participants a structured and practical way to connect evidence with action in their own settings.

The panel contributors include:

- Laura Knight, Head of Toolkit, Youth Endowment Fund
 - Youth Advisory Board representative and Hollie Hartley, Youth Understanding Manager, Youth Endowment Fund (facilitating the youth voice section)
 - Dr Rebecca Bealey, Clinical Psychologist, Norfolk Youth Justice Service
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2B: Child Protection and Safeguarding 1

Between family and state: shifting boundaries of child protection in contemporary China **Xiaorong Gu, University of Suffolk; Zheng Mu, National University of Singapore; Shu Hu, Singapore University of Social Sciences**

This article examines the evolving boundaries of responsibility and authority in child protection in contemporary China, focusing on shifting dynamics between the family and the state. Drawing on a content analysis of key legal and policy documents on child protection promulgated between 1991 and 2024, we trace the evolution of China's legal discourse on child welfare and child protection. We reveal a complex interplay between Confucian familial ethics, socialist ideologies, and Western child rights paradigms derived from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Rather than a linear transition from tradition to modernity, China's child protection discourse reflects a hybrid ideological synthesis that selectively integrates elements from these distinct traditions to serve the state's evolving developmental and governance objectives in regulating childhood and social life.

Three major findings emerge. First, the legal construction of childhood demonstrates a fusion of Confucian, Maoist, and Western conceptualisations, combining ideological instruction, moral development, and an

emphasis on collective loyalty with increasing recognition of children as rights-bearing individuals. Second, there is a notable shift toward child-centric and children's rights discourses in defining violence against children, underpinned by expanding state welfare interventions. This marks a departure from the traditional familist model of care, in which parents and kin networks bore primary responsibility for child development. Third, the findings identify in the most recent legal documents the emergence of a multi-agency child protection system that encompasses family, school, societal, governmental, and judicial responsibilities, in line with the ecological systems approach to child development and dominant child protection frameworks in Western societies. However, enforcement mechanisms remain weak, particularly in terms of budget allocation, funding stability, and pinpointing structural factors at the root of the vulnerabilities of particular groups of children, which may compromise the system's operational effectiveness.

The article makes two main contributions. First, it illuminates the shifting boundaries of care and protection between family and state, highlighting how legal reforms both challenge and reproduce China's deep-seated moral hierarchies and governance rationalities. Second, it contributes to the theorisation of the social governance of childhood by situating China's evolving child protection framework within broader debates on welfare state transformation, and evolving governmentalities. In doing so, the study provides a critical lens on how the Chinese state redefines childhood — not only as a site of social governance but also as a domain through which the public-private boundaries in shaping 'the nation's future' are constantly negotiated.

Transitional safeguarding for young people — bridging the 'cliff edge' and empowering vulnerable young people entering adulthood

Katherine Allen, University of Suffolk; Laura Stevens, University of Suffolk

"Services for young people really do drop off, and I don't mean drop off in a gradual manner, it's an absolute cliff edge. It is so abrupt and so stark, and it is literally at the point of them turning 18." (Interviewee 3)

Becoming an adult is a process, not a single event. However, at 18 years old many young people face an abrupt drop-off or reduction in services, and a change in legal status, creating a dangerous 'cliff edge' for vulnerable young people. Where can they go for help now? Who will support them? The Norfolk-based Transitions Service engages young people aged 17–25 who may be at risk of involvement in serious violence, working flexibly with young people to provide holistic emotional and practical support, service navigation and advocacy.

This paper details findings from a mixed-methods evaluation of the Transitions Service, exploring how the programme works to promote protective factors and mitigate identified risk factors, contextual barriers and facilitators to programme effectiveness, 'stories of change' co-produced with young people and their family members, and pathways to wider impact. The interactive session will invite conference attendees to reflect on case studies regarding young people transitioning into adulthood, considering what services are available to them, and how we can safeguard them. Authors conclude by describing how learning from the evaluation is currently being used to enhance future programme monitoring and delivery.

Teacher wellbeing and institutional responses to youth conduct problems: a psychological and care ethics perspective on callous-unemotional (CU) traits

Laura Oxley, University of York

Children who present with CU traits, such as low empathy and lack of guilt, typically demonstrate significant conduct problems that are linked with higher rates of contact with youth justice and safeguarding systems. These behavioural profiles pose substantial challenges not only for formal justice contexts but also for educational environments, where persistent conduct problems are a key contributor to poor wellbeing in the teaching profession. This study investigated how teacher wellbeing is impacted by working with students who present with conduct problems and CU traits. The study also considered the strategies teachers use to manage

the conduct of such students. Finally, it explored whether teachers' perceptions of their students' behaviour and their own burnout symptoms fluctuate over one academic year.

A longitudinal survey design was used to gather data from 33 participants in England at three time points during the 2024-25 academic year. 16 schoolteachers in England also participated in semi-structured interviews, having completed a screening measure which indicated that they were likely to be teaching a student with CU traits. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to examine the data in-depth.

The findings suggest that working with students with high CU traits, while having some rewarding aspects, generally has a negative influence on teacher wellbeing, with the impact seemingly particularly strong for early career teachers. However, teachers also reported drawing on a range of strategies to support and maintain their own positive wellbeing when working with these students, thus mitigating the negative impact to some extent.

4.00–6.00pm | Session Three

3A: Children's Homes Unpacked: Insights into Residential Child Care

Unregistered children's homes and safeguarding risk

Paul Nelson, Anglia Ruskin University; Sarah Colley, Anglia Ruskin University

This paper draws on findings from recent research examining unregistered children's homes and child exploitation in the UK. Hundreds of vulnerable children are currently accommodated in illegal homes (Children's Commissioner, 2024) and these settings remain poorly understood, under-regulated and difficult to quantify. This research addresses an important gap in knowledge by examining the scale of unregistered provision and the safeguarding risks associated with it. In collaboration with policing's Eastern Region Special Operations Unit (ERSOU) and an Anglia Ruskin University-led steering group, the study combined Freedom of Information requests to local authorities with qualitative interviews with practitioners from policing, local authorities and non-governmental organisations to examine the current issues.

Drs. Nelson (Criminology) and Colley (IPPPRI) will present their findings highlighting significant challenges in establishing the true prevalence of unregistered homes and the number of children living within them, whilst also demonstrating how pre-existing vulnerabilities can be intensified within weakly regulated environments. We will argue that unregistered children's homes create structural conditions in which exploitation risk is heightened and conclude that urgent reform is required to address the regulation and commissioning of these homes, in addition to limited multi-agency information-sharing and child-centred safeguarding practice.

Structure and agency in everyday life in unregistered children's homes

Nicki Cooper, Anglia Ruskin University

This PhD study critically examines unregistered children's homes operating illegally in England, with particular attention to the consequences of unregulated provision for young people's safety, wellbeing, and longer-term outcomes. Informed by structuration theory, the research explores the relationship between structure and agency, focusing on how institutional, organisational, and contextual conditions shape everyday life within these settings. A qualitative design will be employed, using interviews with two participant groups: practitioners, including social workers, residential care staff, and other professionals working in this area; and adults with lived experience of having previously lived in unregistered children's homes operating illegally. The data will be analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. The study aims to generate a deeper and more critical understanding of how these environments are experienced and retrospectively understood, to

foreground lived-experience perspectives, and to contribute evidence that can inform policy, regulation, and professional practice.

Young black males care leavers' journey through higher education

Keyinde Ajayi, University of Suffolk

This paper, marking the beginning of my PhD journey, presents the rationale for the study. Approaching the transition from care into adulthood while pursuing higher education presents significant challenges for young black male care leavers (YBMCLs) in the UK. These young people often navigate independence with limited relational, emotional, and institutional support, while simultaneously confronting structural inequalities, racism, marginalisation and low educational expectations. Despite growing concern regarding the educational outcomes of care-experienced young people, there remains limited UK-based research specifically examining the experiences of YBMCLs within higher education. This study addresses this critical gap by exploring how race, care status, socio-economic disadvantage and institutional practices intersect to shape educational trajectories and outcomes.

The research adopts a qualitative, retrospective autoethnographic and ethnographic methodology grounded in lived experience. Drawing upon Critical Race Theory and intersectionality, the study critically analyses personal narrative, experiential knowledge, and existing literature to examine how YBMCLs negotiate adversity, resilience, identity, and belonging within higher education institutions. The methodological approach foregrounds reflexivity and provides an in-depth analytical framework through which underrepresented voices can be meaningfully centred. The study argues that YBMCLs experience multiple and intersecting barriers that significantly impact access, participation, progression and attainment in higher education.

This research aims to make an original contribution to knowledge by addressing the absence of focused UK research on YBMCLs in higher education. It offers a critical framework for informing policy, practice, and institutional reform aimed at improving educational outcomes, support systems, and equity for care-experienced black male students within the UK education system.

What it was like growing up in a children's home? Outline of my doctoral research

Nina Livermore, The Open University

Residential children's homes remain one of the most misunderstood elements of the child welfare system. Despite persistent criticism and concerns regarding cost and outcomes, the number of children requiring residential placements continues to rise. This study explores residential care from a perspective that is often missing from policy and practice debates: the voices of adults who experienced growing up in children's homes.

The research asks the open question — "What was it like growing up in a children's home?" The study invites participants to reflect on their experiences and the meanings they have constructed over time. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the research focuses on how care-experienced adults interpret and integrate their childhood residential care experiences into their adult identities.

Data will be generated through semi-structured interviews with approximately eight to 15 adults aged 18 and over who spent more than one month living in a children's home during childhood. I will recruit participants through professional networks, advocacy organisations, and online communities connected to care-experienced adults. Although small in size, the sample supports the IPA approach, enabling rich, detailed exploration of individual narratives. Given the sensitive nature of recalling childhood care experiences, the research adopts a trauma-informed and ethically robust design. Safeguards include careful venue selection, informed consent, the right to withdraw, anonymisation and signposting to support services where required.

This study aims to contribute to contemporary debates about the role, value, and future of residential care, to inform practice, and highlight how residential care might better support children and young people.

3B: Child Protection and Safeguarding 2

Child protection teams and child development: unfolding complexity

Ana Cristina Pernata, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Madeira, Portugal; Dora Periera, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Madeira, Portugal; University Centre for Research in Psychology – Unit of University of Madeira (CUIP-UMa), University of Madeira, Portugal)

The Portuguese Child and Youth Protection and Promotion System has as its central purpose the promotion of the integral development of children and young people at risk, considering as essential pillars of its intervention a systemic and bioecological perspective, the importance of critical developmental periods, and the characteristics of parental functioning. The efficacy of a protective intervention is the result of a complex process that strives to conceal, coherently, several technical and scientific domains. But are there specific aspects of the intervention process as the quality of the assessment, the coherence of the intervention, the integration of levels of inference related with the developmental progress of children?

This qualitative included five cases (opened and closed between 2017 and 2023) analysed through documentary analysis of 123 reports written by the members of a multidisciplinary technical advisory team to Portuguese court. The analysis focused on the actions of professionals through the process, the integration and balance between the levels of inference in reports, the social-judicial agreement and the impact on family and child development.

The results show that changes in parenting behaviour are more consistent through time when the proposed intervention is adjusted to the specificities of parental functioning and parents are actively engaged. Children's developmental gains emerge from the articulation between detailed assessment, appropriate intervention, and enough time to structural change of family functioning. It is concluded that the effective promotion of child development is associated well-founded assessments and reports, coherence between social, therapeutic and court interventions, and temporal continuity.

The carceral reach of state and NGO alliances in India's child protection system

Sujatha Subramanian, University of Innsbruck, Austria

My paper argues that India's child protection system is a carceral system that upholds and maintains Brahmanical patriarchy by policing and regulating girls from working-class, oppressed caste, religious minority communities. The experts, state, and non-state institutions that constitute India's juvenile justice system frame it as a system that protects and cares for vulnerable girls and promotes their healing, empowerment, and rehabilitation. These bodies of knowledge erase how caste in the form of Brahmanical patriarchy undergirds India's juvenile justice system. A significant number of girls are brought to child-protection institutions, also known as shelter homes, after being labelled by the Indian state as "victims" of sexual offences because of the consensual romantic and sexual relationships that they are part of, relationships that transgress Brahmanical patriarchy.

Through a close reading of India's child protection policy on child sexual abuse, interviews with state officials and workers of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the paper explores the entangled nature of state and NGOs within the child protection system. I argue that the role played by NGOs as child protection experts is central to understanding how the system's policies disproportionately affect multiply marginalised communities by extending the carceral reach of the Indian state. My paper contributes to feminist critiques of development

discourses and institutions which highlight the role played by transnational organisations in the functioning of the state and the messy boundaries between state and non-state institutions.

The information and support needs of child victims

Catherine Nixon, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration

The Children's Hearings System is part of Scotland's multi-agency, welfare-based response to youth justice. When the Children's Hearings System is used to address youth offending, the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 allows victims to be told whether a children's hearing has been arranged for the child who has caused harm, and what the outcome of that hearing has been. The amount of information that is currently shared is considered insufficient for the purposes of safety planning by those who have been physically and sexually harmed by children. The lack of appropriate victim support services for child victims has also been highlighted.

In this presentation we draw upon qualitative data gathered from child victims, their parents and children who have caused harm to explore what information and supports should be provided to child victims. We highlight the emotional harms that victims experience when engaging with youth justice systems; the challenges of obtaining information and support when a multi-agency response to youth offending occurs; how providing information about the nature and function of youth justice approaches can help to set realistic expectations around outcomes for victims; views on what information and support was and should have been available to child victims; and how the rights of children who are harmed and those who have caused harm can be balanced when providing information and support. In doing so we provide evidence of the need for child-centred, trauma-informed and restorative victim support services to sit alongside welfare-based approaches to youth justice.

Needs before deeds: understanding the children's hearings system

Catherine Nixon, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration

The Children's Hearings System uses a welfare-based approach to address the underlying needs of children who come into conflict with the law. In this presentation we provide an introduction to the Children's Hearings System, its underlying ethos of addressing needs rather than deeds, and how its functions align with the wider legislative approach to youth justice used within Scotland. In doing so, we review the decision-making framework and inter-agency agreements in place to ensure that children are provided with opportunities for rehabilitation rather than criminalisation.

To support understanding of why a welfare-based approach to justice is used we draw upon data from three studies examining: 1) the nature of the offences children referred to the Children's Hearings System are accused of; 2) the backgrounds and needs of children aged eight to 15 who have been referred to the Children's Hearings System after coming into conflict with the law. The data gathered in these studies emphasises the extent to which serious allegations of physical and sexual harm are referred to the Children's Hearings System and the factors that are taken into consideration when making decisions around how offending behaviour should be addressed. The data also illustrates the high levels of adversity trauma, neglect, exposure to harmful behaviours by others, victimisation and exploitation (both criminal and sexual) present in the children's lives. The presentation concludes with reflections upon how knowledge around the needs of children aligns with the legislative vision for youth offending in Scotland and how this is impacted by public sector resourcing.

THURSDAY 11 JULY 2026

9.30–11.30am | Session Four

4A: Contextualising Childhoods

Contextual sensitivity in statutory child protection: reflections from remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia

Shuang Wu, Department of Communities, Western Australia Government, Australia

Statutory child protection systems are typically guided by legislative frameworks that prioritise the “best interests of the child”. In Western Australia, this principle is embedded within the Children and Community Services Act 2004 (CCSA), which provides the legal foundation for safeguarding children and responding to harm. While the legislation offers an essential framework for decision-making, translating these principles into everyday practice can be complex. Frontline practitioners often encounter situations in which the interpretation of children’s best interests must be negotiated within diverse family, community and cultural contexts.

This paper draws on reflective practice from my current role as a Child Protection Officer working in a remote region of Western Australia. Using a reflexive and autoethnographic perspective, the presentation explores how practitioners interpret and operationalise legislative principles when responding to children’s care and protection needs. Particular attention is given to the importance of contextual sensitivity in practice. Working with Aboriginal families and communities highlights how historical, cultural and social contexts shape both families’ experiences of the child protection system and practitioners’ decision-making processes.

Rather than viewing statutory intervention as a purely procedural application of policy, this paper argues that effective child protection practice requires ongoing interpretive judgement and contextual awareness. Understanding the broader social and community contexts in which families live is essential for ensuring that safeguarding responses remain meaningful, ethical and responsive to children’s rights.

Marginalisation and evolving capacities amid the global polycrisis: insights from longitudinal research in the global South

Kate Pincock, Nicola Jones, Gayatri Nautiyal, Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE)

Research in the global South, where youth have long faced deep-rooted structural uncertainty and precarity, has increasingly sought to elucidate the means by which some young people are able to navigate the structural conditions which generate marginalisation. While dominant theoretical frameworks for understanding youth marginalisation remain largely informed by research undertaken in the global North, longitudinal evidence from the global South on young people’s evolving capacities can help to nuance understanding of marginalisation processes.

This paper presents findings from the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme, a mixed methods longitudinal research study (ongoing since 2016) in multiple lower and middle-income countries with marginalised young people including refugees, those living in remote rural communities, girls married as children, and young people with disabilities.

Longitudinal findings indicate that the global polycrisis has intensified marginalisation for the most disadvantaged youth through its deleterious impact on social protection, livelihoods and public service provision. While interpersonal support (from family, peers, mentors) plays a key role in scaffolding young people’s evolving capacities, this too is increasingly jeopardised by socioeconomic changes.

Online connectivity enabled by access to technology is inequitably distributed along gender and socio-economic divides.

Drawing on these findings, we propose that 'marginalisation' as a structural process needs to be brought into dialogue with young people's subjective experiences of marginalisation. By attending to the role of the relationship networks in which young people are embedded and what enables their evolving capacities, we also strengthen our understanding of what forms of support can enable diverse youth capacities as they evolve into early adulthood amid constraining structural conditions.

Employing Domestic Helpers Reshape Parenting Time Allocation

Lu Meng, Hong Kong Baptist University; Adam Ka-lok Cheung, Hong Kong Baptist University

In Singapore, live-in domestic helpers are an important source of household care support for families with young children. Yet existing studies focus more on maternal employment and less on how domestic helper hiring reshapes the allocation of parenting time between mothers and fathers, as well as different types of childcare time.

This study utilised time-diary data from the first two waves of the Singapore Longitudinal Early Development Study data, with a final analytic sample including 7,596 observations and 3,798 children. We estimated child-level panel regression models to examine the association between hiring a live-in domestic helper and parenting time use across two waves. The panel unit was the child, with repeated observations in Wave 1 and Wave 2. Our primary specification used fixed-effects models at the child level, which account for time-invariant unobserved heterogeneity at the child and family level. As supplementary analyses, we also estimated random-effects models. Separate models were fitted for each parenting-time outcome, by parenting involvement type (including engaged time, accessible time, and shared time), by activities (care activity, play activity, social activity, achievement activity, travel activity, and total time of all activities), and by day measures (across weekly day, weekday, and weekend).

The findings indicate that employing domestic helpers significantly reduces parents' time spent on childcare, with a more pronounced effect observed among mothers than fathers. Compared to fathers, mothers experience a larger decline in total childcare time. Further analysis by activity type shows that the presence of domestic helpers is more likely to reduce mothers' time in routine caregiving activities, whereas for fathers, the reduction is concentrated in social and play-related activities. In addition, the results reveal a nuanced pattern in parental involvement: while the employment of domestic helpers decreases mothers' engaged time, it simultaneously increases their accessible time. For fathers, however, domestic helpers only reduce engaged time, with no significant effect on accessible time. Overall, this study provides important insights into family dynamics in Asian societies, offering a more nuanced understanding of intra-household time allocation. It also has important implications for addressing gender inequality within families and promoting early childhood development.

Cruel interdependency: rethinking care, dependency and relational constraint through young carers in contemporary China

Kefan Xue, University of Oxford

In recent decades, sociological research has examined 'young carers' — children under 18 who undertake caregiving responsibilities for ill or disabled family members. Existing scholarship documents both vulnerability and resilience, yet caregiving relationships are often conceptualised through binary frameworks that emphasise either familial solidarity or structural exploitation. Such approaches provide limited analytical space for understanding relational formations in which care is simultaneously sustaining and constraining, emotionally meaningful yet structurally depleting.

Drawing on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork (2022–2024) with 30 young carers aged 12–17 and their family members across urban and rural China, this paper develops the concept of cruel interdependency to address this analytical gap. Cruel interdependency reconceptualises caregiving as a multidirectional relational formation characterised by mutual indispensability, shared vulnerability and structurally conditioned emotional attachment within contexts of welfare retrenchment and familialised responsibility. Care is experienced as morally inescapable and relationally binding: children provide care but are also cared for, while adult family members simultaneously depend on and feel conflicted about children's contributions.

Rather than viewing dependency as hierarchical or unilateral, the concept foregrounds how emotional attachment itself becomes a mechanism that sustains caregiving while reproducing constraint. The 'cruelty' lies not in interpersonal harm but in structural conditions that render emotionally sustaining relationships inseparable from depletion and limited alternatives. By reconceptualising dependency as dynamic, shared, and emotionally embedded, this framework extends relational sociology and contributes to broader debates on care ethics, intergenerational inequality, and the restructuring of family-based welfare.

4B: Children's Rights

The optional protocol on a communications procedure and the limits of universality in international child rights protection

Oluwapelumi Adedotun, University of Hertfordshire

This paper argues that the optional status of the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure (OPIC) to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) fundamentally undermines the principle of universality in human rights law. Optional protocols often contain more demanding obligations, such as accepting external adjudication and reputational consequences, which states resist due to fears of politically motivated complaints, preference for domestic sovereignty, and lack of political will. This optional status creates unequal access to justice, as only 48 states had ratified the OPIC as of 2021, systematically denying children in non-ratifying states (like Nigeria, cited as an example) access to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, even in cases of grave violations. This "geographical lottery" prioritises state sovereignty over the child's right to remedy, contradicting the UNCRC's emphasis on the child's right to be heard and state accountability. The OPIC is intended as a last resort complement to domestic justice, not a replacement. To encourage wider ratification, the paper recommends two practical steps: strategically using the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) to apply pressure on non-ratifying states and integrating the OPIC into accession criteria or political dialogues within regional human rights systems. It concludes that a global child rights treaty that excludes millions of children from international justice based solely on their country of residence cannot claim full legitimacy.

A comparison of independent children's rights institutions in the Americas

Brian Gran, Case Western Reserve University; Agnes Lux, Eötvös Loránd University

While independent children's rights institutions (ICRIs) play crucial roles in the promotion and protection of children's rights, they are also concerned with social changes needed to ensure the realisation of children's rights. Establishment of ICRIs has been advocated through various international human rights instruments since the late 1980s. The first European Ombudsmen for Children was set up in Norway, and the first US children's ombudsperson was established in 1979 in Rhode Island, but soon in Latin America as well. Since then, over 200 independent national human rights institutions (IHRIs) and ICRIs operate in more than 70 countries, possessing different sizes and competencies. As the US is the only country that has not ratified the UNCRC, it is especially interesting to see how institutional approaches to children's right are working. In the US, institutions (called

ombudsman or child advocates) were set up at the state level and do not work on behalf of all children, but focus on child protection, often possessing duties to monitor child welfare system or children in correction institutions. What powers and organisation would a US national ICRI need to possess? Many Latin American and Caribbean countries have established broad-based independent human rights institutions. Some IHRIs operate in reference to the UNCRC as well as commitments to Organisation of American States (OAS) instruments. This presentation will consider the socio-legal fields in which these institutions operate to defend and advance children's rights. This study is believed to be the first comparison of ICRI established in the Americas.

Governing childhood risk: institutional safeguarding and social harm in Nigeria

Nwaobia Christian Uchechukwu, Enyinnaya Caleb Initiative

On an average night at Oshodi, Lagos, Nigeria, girls as young as nine, push through gridlock traffic selling bottled drinks and water to strangers. At night, the same children are victims of harassment, beating and sexual abuse but no institution takes any action. This is not a one-time event. It is the daily life of millions of Nigerian children who are left in the abyss of poverty, social ills and institutional failure.

In Nigeria, the Child Rights Act was adopted in 2003, but less than 25 out of the 36 states have adopted it, leaving large numbers of children without any legal safeguard. This paper examines the response of state and non-state institutions to childhood vulnerability in relation to crime, risk, safeguarding, and social harm in Nigeria.

A qualitative multi-site study based on a qualitative design was applied with 28 in-depth interviews conducted with child protection officers, social workers, and policymakers in Lagos, Kano, and Rivers State. Thematic analysis was used to analyse gaps in institutional practice and policy.

The results indicate that three key failures exist: ineffective legal enforcement, grossly underfunded welfare services and juvenile justice systems that criminalise vulnerable children instead of protecting them. More than 70% of the respondents said that they were working without standardised safeguard measures. These findings require urgent legislation, more institutional responsibility and safeguarding mechanisms of children in Nigeria. They should be protected from crime because they are entitled to safety, justice and a great future.

Children's rights in England: how did we get here, where are we going?

Joe Latimer, Just for Kids Law

In an era of intensifying childhood poverty, political dysfunction and eroded welfare provision, what can children's rights do? Just for Kids Law is a charity providing criminal defence and public law legal representation to children and young adults in England. Public law and community care solicitor, Joe Latimer, will provide an overview of their work, and an explainer on key developments in children's rights over the last two decades. He will reflect on what risks and social harms are facing their clients today, and how the law is being used to support them. Finally, he will address what the organisation thinks children's rights need to do given the crossroads we find ourselves at.

4C: Schools and Communities — Panel Discussion

Chair: Ivana Lessner Listiakova, University of Suffolk

This panel discussion explores how schools and multi-academy trusts actively engage with their local communities to support the holistic development of young people. It highlights their role in addressing social injustice through strong civic and community missions, moving beyond academic achievement to wider social responsibility. The discussion brings together perspectives on how education systems can act as agents of change, fostering inclusion, equity and opportunity.

4D: Schools and Educational (In/ex)clusions

Autoethnography of the support teacher's experience in Italian primary school: forms of institutional ableism of the pupils' educational experiences

Anna Uboldi, University of Turin, Italy

This work examines the practical implementation of the right of education and social inclusion for pupils with disabilities in Italian state primary schools. Italy, with its one-way model, constitutes a European reference point for school inclusion policies. Despite the principle of the inclusion of all pupils in a single common school path in ordinary public institutions, some rare special schools also coexist.

The data come from an auto-ethnographic research conducted as a precarious part-time SEN teacher in public primary schools (2016–2021), in a province of northern Italy. This work questions the daily experience as a SEN teacher, as a specific lens through which to reflect on the dynamics, related at the foundation of educational inclusion. It aspires to critically examine some circumscribed conditions — structural and cultural — within which the inclusive challenge is played out daily in the classroom. It is argued that the repercussions of certain work practices, and of the minute interactional dynamics, that dot school life, can also concern the very ability of the Italian school system to guarantee educational inclusion. The very persistence of a system of attitudes, values, routinised ways of thinking and evaluating — which permeates educational institutions — hinders a daily realisation of the rights of pupils with disabilities. Symbolic boundaries, practical classifications and stigmatisation processes, of the pupil and 'his teacher', are investigated.

The symbolic delegitimation of the special needs teacher is a decisive element that can block inclusive teaching strategies. An unequal status quo is maintained that goes, however, even beyond mere intra-occupational hierarchies and concerns the cultural ways and tools through which we think and approach diversity.

The BELONG framework — developing a tool for educators to support pupils who move schools

Laura Cristescu, University of Birmingham; Clara Joergensen, University of Birmingham; Laurence Lessard-Phillips, University of Birmingham; Tom Perry, University of Warwick

A substantial number of children move schools outside standard age-based transitions, sometimes because of individual or family choice, but also often due to wider social, economic or institutional forces. As such, pupil mobility sits at the intersection of childhood poverty, housing instability, migration, and education systems under pressure, positioning mobile pupils at a critical crossroads in their educational trajectories. Pupil moves

may place particular demands on schools serving disadvantaged, coastal urban or highly mobile communities, as they often support a disproportionate number of mobile pupils.

Research shows that school responses and approaches to mobility matter greatly, shaping pupils' experiences of learning, wellbeing and belonging, as well as the wider school community. However, educational practices to support mobile pupils are most often reactive, lacking from evidence and frequently overlooking the diverse reasons for mobility.

Drawing on insights from the School MOVES project, this presentation introduces the BELONG framework, a tool to help schools provide structured, informed, and equitable support for mobile pupils. The framework includes six areas of relevance to school mobility for educators: Basic needs, Emotional wellbeing, Learning experiences, Organised participation, Nurturing relationships, Growth and progress. For each area, the accompanying tool will provide educators with (1) guidance on recording relevant information about the child and their family; (2) evidence of 'why it matters' from the School MOVES study and wider literature; and (3) example strategies and practices from schools participating in the study. The initial draft of the BELONG framework will be further defined in collaboration with the study participants and piloted at participating schools.

Young people's encounters with everyday school-based material realities — a reflection on precarity and social justice

Irum Maqbool, University of Cambridge

This paper discusses the impact of encounters with everyday school-based material spaces in shaping experiences of 17 secondary school students in Lahore, Pakistan. Drawing on theoretical insights from Schutz's (1970) idea of lifeworld and writings anchored in Global South Youth Studies, this paper focuses on young people's narratives of navigating material realities in low resource schools. Using this sociocultural environment as an explanatory category, this paper argues for close listening of diverse experiences to appreciate the role of precarity in mediating young people's transition to adulthood (Cooper et al., 2021). Through its focus on individual experiences of material precarity this paper offers insight into the discursive construction of gender and barriers to social justice. This allows for further consideration of the long-term impact of structural inequalities in determining precarity and privilege in a Global South context with marked and increasing inequalities.

12.00–1.30pm | Session Five

5A: Critical Childhood Studies Workshop

Making children invisible, silencing their voices — failing institutional responses as a matter of justice

Lars Alberth, Leuphana University Lüneburg; Doris Bühler-Niederberger, University of Wuppertal; Leon Dittmann, University of Wuppertal

The workshop combines the presentation of cases on failing institutions of childhood in Germany with joint audience activities on concerted strategies of response. Looking at childhood institutions' generationally structured responses to the needs, interests, and voices of children, evidence repeatedly indicates that institutions like schools, child welfare, or child protection discounts the concerns of children. Various practices and strategies treat children as irrelevant or absent in the formal regulations, routines, stocks of knowledge, or interactional conduct of institutional contexts. In return, children's invisibility has to be treated as a practical

accomplishment complicit with the generational order and the silencing of their voices cannot be treated as a mere property of a child (e.g., inability, lack of knowledge, or loyalty). Thus, the matrix of institutional processes and generational order may result in various forms of harm and injustices that calls for inquiry.

The workshop starts with two short inputs:

Generational processes of demarcation and institutional ghosts in child protection

Lars Alberth, Leuphana University Lüneburg, Germany

Institutions of child protection operate based on generational demarcations, treating children as “seen, but unnoticed” (Harold Garfinkel), hence as bearers of action without consequences. Drawing on interactionist considerations regarding the “social life of nothing” (Susie Scott), three demarcation processes are regarded: silencing, institutional isolation, and negative trajectories. An increasing obligation to address childhood while silencing children’s voices and activities leads to social ghosts, claiming justice for forgotten but unresolved harm (Avery Gordon): This is particularly evident in cases of institutional violence, where unaddressed pasts turn into pressing yet difficult-to-resolve problems of institutional presence.

When pupils misbehave — and their perspective doesn’t matter

Doris Bühler-Niederberger and Leon Dittmann, University of Wuppertal, Germany

School records for children with special educational needs are a particular type of document. Although they resemble ‘medical records’, a ‘disease’ is not necessarily named, nor is its development. Rather, some ‘disease’ is simply assumed to be present from the outset. Children’s characteristics, behaviour, and living circumstances are presented in such a way that they can be interpreted as expressions of, symptoms of, or causes of the ‘disease’, without connections becoming specified. The text would remain incomprehensible if the reader did not tacitly share this assumption. In contrast, the children tell a story which, whilst not always coherent, presents actions and reactions.

The workshop addresses researchers and practitioners in sociology, education, and child welfare, as these areas overlap in that many of children with special needs are actually child protections cases, yet both institutions tend to turn a blind eye to this. The joint activities with audience members will focus on existence of and experiences with phenomena of silencing of children’s voices from an international and comparative perspective, their dynamics and consequences, as well as counterstrategies.

5B: Methodological Approach to Inclusive Research

‘Our caring world through art’: building bridges, crossing borders... co-creatively

Kremena Dimitrova, Oxford Brookes University; Roxanne Korda, The Open University; Guida de Abreu, Oxford Brookes University; Sarah Crafter, The Open University; Nelli Stavropoulou, The Open University

This presentation centres on the ongoing research of ALPHABETICA’s Our Caring World through Art (OCWA): a co-creative intervention delivered by Oxford Brookes University and The Open University with children and young people from three to 18 in formal and informal educational settings. ALPHABETICA, an EU-funded Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme, seeks to understand and address the inequalities in access to the arts and arts education. Sitting at the crossroads of the arts (visual and performance arts), social sciences (psychology), formal and informal education settings (secondary schools, libraries, and youth clubs), OCWA uses participatory arts-based approaches to examine the experience of the arts in underserved and

disadvantaged communities, with the aim of improving the participation of children and young people facing exclusion from arts-based activities and learning opportunities.

This presentation will communicate the ongoing arts-based workshops in libraries and schools, examining their impact through the lens of pedagogies of enchantment (Renshaw, 2023) and co-creative arts-based workshops as tools towards developing sense of self and identity. Through this, we will show how equity in access to the arts can act as a transformational and powerful tool towards children and young people's emotional and social development and how this can be framed as a vital element in the educational landscape.

The spiritual child: methodological approaches to children's spirituality

Karen Sullivan King, East Coast College/University of Suffolk

This presentation positions young children's experiences and expressions of spirituality as a significant yet often overlooked dimension of their future making. Early educational pioneers recognised spirituality as natural, innate and present from birth. Although contemporary studies increasingly frame spirituality as a disposition shaped through encounters with nature, play, creativity and meaningful relationships, definitional challenges persist and early childhood remains underrepresented within this field.

Situated in practice, my research seeks to make visible how young children experience and express spirituality in ways that honour their agency, subjectivity and right to meaning making. The study adopts Métiassage, an arts informed narrative methodology particularly suited to spirituality research because it resists reduction, linearity and singular interpretation. By weaving together children's creative artefacts, spoken narratives, embodied actions, moments of silence and researcher reflections, Métiassage creates space for forms of expression often marginalised by language centric and adult led methods, positioning children as co-constructors of meaning.

The researcher is situated as both storyteller and scientist, producing layered, dialogic accounts that preserve the integrity of children's sense making about self, relationships and the world. Its immersive and flexible nature aligns with traditions of ethical research with children, allowing methods to adapt responsively as insights emerge rather than forcing children's experiences to fit predetermined frameworks. Methodological approaches that attend to both what can be seen and what can be sensed are essential for making visible the potential of children's spirituality as a protective and generative asset — supporting them in navigating uncertainty, cultivating hope and contributing meaningfully to future worlds.

Making sense of the non-sensory room: an ethnographic study of an alternative provision primary school in the UK

Jack Glover, University of Birmingham

For this presentation, the focus will be on the thoughts and feelings of children in an alternative provision primary school on their 'non-sensory room'. The non-sensory room is a place within the case study school, which is intended as a space to host children who display aggressive or disruptive behaviour within class. The label 'non-sensory' is used within the school due to the reduced number of sensory objects in the room, when compared to the rest of the building.

This case study school hosts 68 children, age five to 11 with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school adopts a trauma-informed approach, with the intention of supporting the children's emotional development. Via an ethnographic approach to the research, 12 children were invited to take part in play activities, with the intention of facilitating conversational interviews.

Using Gibbs (1988) model of reflection, the perspectives of the children were reflected upon and then analysed via a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022). One of the most pertinent themes that emerged within the

conversations with the children was that of the non-sensory room. Overall, children displayed a mixture of perspectives towards this room; some viewed it as a space for self-regulating their emotions, meanwhile others felt the space was akin to an isolation room.

The non-sensory room demonstrates numerous ethical issues regarding completing ethnography in an educational environment, especially in an institution where there are persistent behaviour issues. The research also demonstrates the importance of including the perspectives of children in research in alternative provisions.

5C: Children and Migration

Migration narratives in early years policy: a discourse analysis of six strategic documents

Donna Gaywood, University of Gloucestershire; Anna Max, University of Suffolk

This research explores subtle narratives about migrants which have filtered into government policy, impacting everyday practice by establishing 'taken for granted norms'. It builds on Wilson-Thomas and Gabi's (2025) analysis of English early years regulatory documents, using Critical Race Theory. Also, Gaywood, et al's (2026) Pedagogy of Welcome which highlights the importance for early educators to understand the political, social context of migrant children and the invisibility which shrouds their lives. A Foucauldian framework was used to identify issues of knowledge and power, troubling regimes of truth about those on the margins of society and identifying the contradictory requirements of policy. A discourse analysis of six early years policy documents was undertaken. The positionality of children and practitioners, alongside narratives of migrant children were examined. Bauman's (2016: 9) notion of "mixophobia: fear of the unmanageable volume of the unknown" was also utilised. Ethically, Levinas' (1961) work was used to honour and affirm migrant children. Additionally, our positional links to common migration experiences of isolation and Otherness (Gaywood et al 2020) were interrogated. Findings suggest migrant children and their families are subtly positioned as a threat or in need of protection; early educators are expected to undertake surveillance as agents of the state. This has potential to seriously impact migrant children's well-being and sense of self. Although subtle, it feeds into feelings of unbelonging and increases isolation. We suggest this also impacts educators as their role is made untenable and at odds with core early years values of nurture and care.

Beyond the asylum encounter: narrative portraits of everyday epistemic injustice among forced migrant children and youth in Sub-Saharan Africa

Manya Oriel Kagan, International Institute of Applied Systems Analysis, Austria

This paper engages with the children in forced migration (CFM) living in Sub-Saharan as knowers. Epistemic injustice provides a useful lens for analysing how knowledge, credibility, and authority are structured. It allows us to capture the exclusion of forced migrants as knowers and the institutionalised disbelief which they live with. While such dynamics have been examined mainly in Global North asylum systems, they remain under-theorised in other migration governance contexts, where displacement is often managed through different legal regimes and institutional arrangements. These differences make Sub-Saharan African displacement contexts, especially in relation to children, an important and necessary site of inquiry. This paper reframes epistemic injustice among CFM not as discrete moments of exclusion, but as an ongoing lived condition produced through interactions across institutional, familial and social spaces. Their knowledge is continuously discounted through credibility deficits, restrictive procedures and unequal participation. Drawing on ethnographic research in Uganda and at the Zimbabwean–South African border, we present two narrative portraits of CFM to analyse the everyday epistemic injustices they experience. Through them we examine how testimonial and hermeneutical injustices emerge across children's lives, asking whose knowledge counts, whose voices are heard, and who is granted epistemic authority.

Time for caring and hopeful response: addressing trauma and despair in the experience of immigrant children

Wilma Robles-Melendez, Nova Southeastern University, US

Working with children, we well know every moment is a time to care. There are times when caring becomes particularly crucial to advocate for children's wellbeing. Such is the moment in life that we are in, when realities reiterate caring efforts especially for immigrant children, with multiple challenges continuing defining their realities. Echoes of challenges, prejudice, violence, conflicts raise concerns as despair, trauma marks the lived realities of many immigrant children. Concerns for the wellbeing of immigrant children calls for determined and caring efforts, underlining an ethical responsibility in response to their needs (Noddings, 2005). Their need is for intentional responsiveness to inspire hope. Hope for better times, let's remember, continues to encourage resilience, a sense of possibility and of what is to come (Snyder, 2002). In the midst of violence and contextualised unfairness, the voice of immigrant children continues calling for attention to their realities (Cohodes et al, 2021) and to their developmental needs (NAEYC, 2020). Their need is for caring to inspire their hope while society remains challenging everyone (Fan & Kang, 2025).

Today, responsiveness to immigrant children's needs continues to be critical, demanding caring efforts and intentionally centred practices for their wellbeing. At stake is their future. Drawing from a critical literature review and analysis of immigration stories, this session presents a framework for caring and hope-centeredness in the attention and delivery of services for immigrant young children. Promoting hope as resilience-building factor and caring sensitivity, discussion addresses children's rights and societal developmental responsibilities for immigrant children.

5D: Practitioners' Workshop

Enhancing practice to empower children — embedding trauma-informed approaches in practice

Maureen Haaker, University of Suffolk

Developed in partnership with the University of Suffolk, Suffolk Virtual School, and Suffolk Psychology and Therapeutic Services, this workshop introduces a CPD module designed to support professionals working with children and young people who have experienced trauma and adversity. Participants will explore the principles and practical applications of trauma-informed practice (TIP), while experiencing some of the interventions and approaches embedded within the module itself. Drawing on an interdisciplinary evidence base spanning education, psychology, and child development, the session provides a foundation for understanding the impact of trauma on children's experiences, behaviour, and learning. Participants will also be introduced to practical strategies that can support more relational, responsive, and ethically informed professional practice.

6A: Children's Voices and Silences

Affective silencing and the politics of childhood voice in Jeannette Walls's "The Glass Castle"

Kriti Sonkar, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, India

This paper examines, through a reading of Jeannette Walls' *The Glass Castle* (2005), the relationship between childhood trauma, voice and affective silencing. The paper aims to situate the memoir within broader discourses of voice, justice, and identity in childhood trauma narratives. While family is instinctively understood as the space that propagates articulation of emotion and experience, this paper interrogates the very foundational structures that determine which emotions are voiced, heard, or silenced, revealing how they enable or disable the child's emotion. Within domestic structures of the Walls family, emotional legitimacy is granted unevenly, which exposes the narrator to neglect or instability. The child's response is frequently regulated by familial hierarchies that privilege parental authority. Thus, for the child, the family becomes an early site where power governs affect, acknowledgement, and even the possibility of voice.

Drawing on Lura Otis's concept of "banned emotions," the paper extends her framework from social hierarchies among adults to the parent-child relationship, where emotional regulation functions as a mechanism of control and social regulation. This produces what the paper terms 'hegemonic affect,' resulting in the child's affective life being disciplined through processes of self-censorship and emotional adversity inducing deeply ingrained trauma. To further understand this dynamic, the paper also engages with the psychoanalytic framework of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, whose concepts of 'psychic crypts' and 'incorporation' illuminate how unacknowledged trauma becomes internally sealed.

By retrospectively articulating the stifled voices of her childhood through *The Glass Castle*, Walls transforms silence as a structured condition of trauma and affective erasure into testimony. The paper ultimately contends that Walls positions storytelling as an ethical act of attending to the child's marginalised voice.

Complicit silence: how interlocking power relations render children unheard in Japanese elementary schools

Nozomi Fujisaka, University of Osaka, Japan

Harm within schools can emerge through everyday interactions embedded in power dynamics among teachers, parents, and children. Such harm is often associated with overt acts of abuse or bullying; however, it can also result from individuals' efforts to maintain their positional stability within the school community.

Using interactive interviews with 11 former classmates from a single Japanese elementary school, this paper examines how webs of power and interest were recognised and narrated by those who experienced them as children. Interviews ranged from one to three hours and centred on teachers' guidance practices (*shidō*).

The findings revealed a tripartite hierarchy among teachers, students, and parents. The dominant actors across all three groups form complicit relations that mutually reinforce one another's status. Subordinate teachers were marginalised not only by colleagues but also by students tacitly encouraged to do so by dominant teachers. Similarly, subordinate parents were publicly humiliated at school meetings while dominant parents consolidated alliances with teachers.

Within this interlocking system, the legitimacy of a teacher's guidance was determined not by its content or fairness, but by the relational position of those involved: the same act of correction carried different weight depending on whether the child, parent, or teacher occupied a dominant or subordinate role.

This study demonstrates that harm emerges not from isolated misconduct but from the silent complicity woven into everyday relational structures, rendering subordinate children systematically unheard. Findings are limited to a single school cohort, and generalisability warrants caution.

Environmental harms and childhood in India: an exploration of children as key agents for sustainable change

Ravinder Barn, Royal Holloway, University of London; Damanjit Sandhu, Punjabi University Patiala, India

Urban India illustrates the complexities of earth system governance, marked by overlapping pollution sources, rapid demographic change, and uneven institutional capacity. Evidence shows that children are disproportionately vulnerable: physiologically more sensitive to contaminants and routinely exposed to high-risk micro-environments such as school commutes, outdoor play spaces, and households with limited water treatment, ventilation, or clean fuel options. Yet policy reviews indicate that Indian states have not integrated children's needs into environmental frameworks (Balel, 2025).

While scholarship on childhood and the environment is expanding, little is known about how children in the Global South navigate environmental challenges in their everyday lives. Drawing on an original qualitative study of children's subjectivities in Punjab, India, this paper examines their present and future concerns, everyday activism, and ecological understandings. Using an ecological theoretical lens, we identify key themes including environmental vulnerability, ontological security, and political agency. We highlight how social divides shape unequal structural constraints.

Challenging Western-centric models that prioritise individualism, visibility, and formal political participation, we show how children engage in culturally grounded, collective, and often subtle forms of everyday action. Using multi-modal qualitative data — namely focus group discussions, written exercises, and drawings from 52 children aged 14–16; we analyse children's accounts of environmental conditions and spatial experiences, including journeys between home and school. These narratives reveal how spatiality intersects with structural inequality and environmental justice.

Children's accounts underscore the limits on their agency imposed by macro- and micro-level power structures. We conclude by outlining implications for policy and practice within the context of India's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2070.

From origin to destination: intergenerational educational mobility and the value of children in China

Lu Meng, Hong Kong Baptist University; Henglong Luo, University of Oxford; Man-Yee Kan, University of Oxford

The Value of Children (VOC) plays a central role in shaping children's developmental outcomes as well as parenting practices. Yet existing research has rarely examined the formation of these values from the perspective of intergenerational mobility. Drawing on a parent-level cross-sectional sample constructed from multiple waves of the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS), this study employs the Diagonal Reference Model (DRM) to investigate how intergenerational educational mobility shapes parents' VOC.

The findings reveal that parents' emotional valuation of children is primarily determined by their own attained educational status (destination), rather than their family-of-origin background (origin). However, this pattern

exhibits substantial gender and urban–rural heterogeneity. Specifically, mothers’ VOC is almost entirely shaped by their own educational attainment, reflecting a strong adaptation to current socioeconomic conditions. In contrast, fathers’ VOC is jointly influenced by both origin and destination. This dual influence is especially pronounced in rural areas, where fathers’ values display stronger path dependence on family-of-origin education, whereas rural mothers remain predominantly shaped by their own attainment, suggesting a distinct gendered pattern. Furthermore, upward educational mobility significantly strengthens rural fathers’ emotional VOC, indicating a shift from instrumental to emotional orientations toward children. Such mobility effects, however, are not observed among mothers. Overall, this study advances the VOC literature by incorporating an intergenerational mobility perspective and demonstrates how educational attainment, gender roles, and mobility trajectories intersect to shape childrearing values within China’s urban–rural dual structure.

6B: Children’s Rights and Responsibilities

This is my truth, tell me yours. Positioning children as authors of knowledge through facilitation of narratives in dialogic interactions

Federico Farini, University of Northampton; Angela Scollan, Middlesex University

The debate on children’s rights has articulated two discourses around intergenerational relationships: the discourse of children’s needs and the discourse of children’s interests. Children’s needs positions adults as advocates who act on behalf of children, to provide children with what the judgement of adults deem as essential for their development. Children’s interests position children as members of a social group, who share common interests and who can voice them, bringing about consequential changes in the contexts of their experiences.

Within a discourse of children’s needs, public policy responses have been driven by the concern for the impact of poverty on the development of young children. Socio-economic disadvantage has become the target of therapeutic intervention which is characterised by outcome-driven teaching, curricula-centred activities and strong limitations to young children’s self-determination.

Nevertheless, the discourse of children’s needs is not a monolith. This presentation discusses educational practices in early years settings, situated in London neighbourhoods characterised by high level of deprivation, where the participation of young children in poverty to their own education is conceptualised within a discourse of children’s interests.

Based on video-observations of educational activities, the presentation argues that facilitation of young children’s agency can successfully position them as authors of valid knowledge in form of narratives that share perspectives and emotions concerning experiences in schools, in the families, in their neighbourhoods.

Facilitation can fulfil the potential of narratives as interactive spaces of polyphony, where different perspectives are combined creating “small cultures,” emancipating children in poverty from a position of personal deficit and social inadequacy, while education becomes conducive to their self-determination.

Child trafficking, social norms, and the limits of rights-based interventions in Ghana

Bianca Boateng, St Mary’s University

This paper examines how child trafficking is understood, negotiated, and, at times, normalised within community contexts in Ghana. While dominant policy frameworks conceptualise trafficking through a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), emphasising protection, victimhood, and legal intervention, everyday

interpretations of children's work and mobility often diverge from these frameworks. Drawing on qualitative interview data, this study explores how community members interpret children's involvement in work, the boundaries between acceptable labour and exploitation, and the social conditions under which harm is recognised or dismissed.

The findings highlight persistent moral ambivalence. Participants frequently framed children's work as necessary for survival, skill acquisition, and socialisation, even in cases that align with formal definitions of trafficking. At the same time, there was evidence of discomfort and uncertainty, particularly where children's wellbeing appeared compromised. Reporting such cases was often constrained by norms surrounding family autonomy, respect, and non-interference, producing forms of everyday silence and complicity.

The paper argues that these tensions expose the limits of applying universalised rights-based frameworks without sufficient engagement with local moral economies. By placing empirical insights in dialogue with debates on cultural relativism, the analysis demonstrates how competing constructions of childhood, responsibility, and harm shape responses to trafficking. The paper concludes by reflecting on the implications for policy and intervention, suggesting that more contextually grounded approaches are required to address child trafficking in ways that are both effective and socially legitimate.

A surrogate child's right to citizenship: comparative analysis of South Africa and Nigeria **Oliseyenum Deborah Ezekiel-Okoh, University of Pretoria, South Africa**

This paper examines how child trafficking is understood, negotiated, and, at times, normalised within community contexts in Ghana. While dominant policy frameworks conceptualise trafficking through a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), emphasising protection, victimhood, and legal intervention, everyday interpretations of children's work and mobility often diverge from these frameworks. Drawing on qualitative interview data, this study explores how community members interpret children's involvement in work, the boundaries between acceptable labour and exploitation, and the social conditions under which harm is recognised or dismissed.

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From time immemorial childbearing in African society was basically natural (per Virginian) and mainly in marriages. Similarly, the ancient matrimonial plagues of infertility made many couples in Africa like the world generally to devise traditional method to evade the scourge of childlessness. The advent of scientific and technologically assisted mode of reproduction like surrogacy has immensely provided succour in this regard. However, children born through surrogacy are in some cases entwined with complicated human right dilemmas, particularly and most especially rights to citizenship. The inability of surrogate children to acquire citizenship exposes them to the painful risk of statelessness.

This study provides an in-depth analysis on the right of surrogate children to citizenship using South Africa and Nigeria as comparative examples. One of the main comparators of the study borders on the historical, cultural

and religious perception of surrogacy, which impacts on surrogate children's right to citizenship. Another fundamental comparator is the absence and obstacles of legal framework regulating surrogacy in Nigeria and South Africa respectively.

This research will draw lessons from other countries with progressive legislation such as the United States of America, India and Australia regulating surrogate children's right to citizenship. This study will critically examine the extent to which case laws, literature and foreign jurisprudence impacts on the recognition of surrogate children's right to citizenship in South Africa and Nigeria. This study aims to address and promote the plights of surrogate children's right to citizenship in South Africa and Nigeria.

Who teachers become matters: professional identity, childhood wellbeing and educational justice

Kate Sida-Nicholls, University of Suffolk

Children's experiences of schooling are shaped not only by curriculum, assessment and policy, but by the teachers they encounter every day. For young people experiencing disadvantage, instability or marginalisation, the presence of confident, relational and professionally secure teachers can be particularly significant. Yet teacher professional identity is rarely framed as a social justice issue. It is more often discussed through workforce, retention or professional development agendas.

This paper challenges that separation. Drawing on a longitudinal narrative inquiry with early career secondary teachers in England, it explores how teachers construct professional identity during the first three years of teaching. Using self-determination theory and self-efficacy theory, the study examines how autonomy, competence, relatedness and efficacy beliefs shape teachers' developing sense of who they are and who they are becoming in the profession.

The findings suggest that professional identity is not simply an individual achievement. It is formed within institutional cultures, relationships, policy expectations and local school contexts. Where early career teachers experience relational support, meaningful professional agency and opportunities to build competence, they are more likely to develop a secure and sustainable professional identity. Where these conditions are weakened, teachers may experience professional fragility, reduced confidence and a diminished sense of agency.

This matters for children and young people. Teachers' professional identity influences the stability, quality and relational texture of pupils' educational experiences. The paper therefore argues that supporting teacher identity is not only a question of teacher retention or workforce reform. It is part of the wider social justice conditions through which children's wellbeing, participation and future opportunities are either protected or placed at risk.

6C: Technology and Childhood

A double-edged sword: AI's impact on children and young people

Annie Taylor, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has vastly increased in scale and scope in recent years, with AI systems underpinning many of our daily activities, and with increasing involvement in the planning and delivery of public sector services. Despite AI's prevalence, there has been little research focus on how AI impacts children's lives and their rights, and minimal research that includes the perspectives of children and their parents/carers.

In this paper, we report on a recent qualitative study which used focus groups with children, parents/carers, and professionals to explore the ethical, legal and rights-based issues around the use of AI, both generally and within child protection and youth justice systems. We found that there was a tension between supporting children's access to information, inclusion and participation, and keeping them safe. Concerns were also raised about potential impacts on children's learning and development, alongside wider wellbeing issues, including potential impacts on children's ability to form and maintain human relationships, 'addictive' algorithm-driven social media feeds, and longer-term impacts on the labour market and quality of life.

We conclude that transparency, bias, accuracy, human oversight, and privacy and consent are key ethical and practical considerations when considering the use of AI in children's services; human connection and relationships are crucial and should not be replaced by AI; and any use of AI within society should prioritise children's best interests. The need to monitor children's safety and rights is particularly strong in child protection and youth justice systems, where children, young people and families may already be experiencing multiple adversities.

Designing inclusive digital self-regulation frameworks for neurodivergent youth: a cross-national qualitative study

Jasmina Troshanska, University of Tetova, North Macedonia; Ivana Lessner Listiakova, University of Suffolk

This study explores the design of responsible digital self-regulation frameworks for neurodivergent youth, with a particular focus on individuals on the autism spectrum. As digital technologies increasingly shape young people's daily lives, the need for structured, ethical, and inclusive approaches to digital engagement has become more urgent. The research adopts a cross-national comparative design, examining perspectives from the United Kingdom and North Macedonia to identify shared challenges and context-specific differences in supporting self-regulation in digital environments. Using a mixed qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with educators, youth support professionals, and stakeholders working in inclusive education and mental health. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns related to attention regulation, digital habits, emotional engagement, and environmental influences. Particular attention was given to how neurodivergent youth experience digital spaces, including both the benefits (e.g., accessibility, autonomy, and learning opportunities) and risks (e.g., overstimulation, dependency, and reduced self-regulation skills).

Findings highlight the importance of integrating personalised, sensory-aware, and context-sensitive strategies into digital self-regulation frameworks. The study proposes a model that combines educational practices, technological design principles, and policy-level recommendations to support balanced and meaningful digital participation. Cross-national insights reveal both common needs — such as the demand for structured guidance and educator training — and differences shaped by educational systems and cultural contexts. The research contributes to the growing field of inclusive digital education by offering evidence-based recommendations for developing responsible, user-centred digital environments that promote well-being, autonomy, and engagement among neurodivergent youth.

Girls managing tech-facilitated gender-based violence in the urban slums of Kolkata, India **Kabita Chakraborty, York University, Canada**

My presentation will explore how girls are observing and experiencing new and complex interactions with technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) in the conservative bustees (urban slums) of Kolkata, India. In the bustees, the rise in TFGBV is directly related to girls' recent access to smartphones. While boys have had access to these devices for over a decade due to early entry into the workforce, it was only in 2022, through a government-sponsored smartphone ownership scheme linked to secondary education, that most girls in the bustees gained access to regular online connections.

Drawing on my recent fieldwork, I show that power relations within Indian smartphone technologies are unfolding within existing social, cultural, and moral landscapes for young people. Girls are experiencing familiar problems like stalking, sexual harassment and slander, as well as new kinds of problems like doxing and AI-facilitated porn/image manipulation. I share how girls are discouraged from reporting or revealing TFGBV due to social stigma, a dysfunctional justice system, and for fear of losing newly gained access to their connected lives. My presentation reminds us that violence in digital spaces is not separate from a contemporary patriarchal society that is managing the colonial legacies of injustice and corruption, which are complicated by caste, religion, class, and gender.

Poster Presentations

Capturing moments and telling digital stories creatively with primary aged girls

Melanie Manning, University of East London

This poster presentation will outline the use of creative participatory methods within an ethnographic study, exploring the digital experiences of primary age girls in the United Kingdom (UK). The digital diary is used as a data collection method and a participatory platform through which girls' can record and reflect on their everyday digital engagement beyond the boundaries of the fieldwork site. The poster examines how this method supports agency, amplifies girls' voices, and generates rich situated data about girls' digital life.

Teacher wellbeing and institutional responses to youth conduct problems: a psychological and care ethics perspective on callous-unemotional traits

Laura Oxley, University of York

This poster examines teacher wellbeing within institutional responses to youth conduct problems associated with callous-unemotional (CU) traits. Drawing on qualitative data from 22 teachers in English schools, it explores how students presenting with characteristics such as low empathy, restricted affect, and lack of remorse, are positioned within school-based behaviour management systems that often mirror early pathways into youth justice intervention. Integrating psychological perspectives on CU traits within a framework of the ethics of care, the study highlights the moral asymmetry teachers may experience when providing care without emotional reciprocity. This dynamic produces moral distress and challenges both professional identity and safeguarding practices. The findings position schools as key sites of early intervention, where institutional responses to perceived risk can shape trajectories of marginalisation. The poster argues for psychologically informed, care-based approaches that better support teachers whilst disrupting punitive responses to vulnerable young people.

Constructing a "special" child: risk narratives in German adoption practices

Hannah Kaußen, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany; Aytüre Türkyilmaz, TU Dortmund, Germany

This proposed poster contribution examines the social construction of the adopted child as a "special" child within institutional adoption practices. Drawing on qualitative data of an ongoing sociological study of adoption processes in Germany (funding: DFG), we examine how professional discourses and assessments shape prospective adoptive parents' understandings of adopted children through frameworks of risk, vulnerability, and anticipated adversity. These constructions are shaped by the notion that adopted children arrive with a biographical and medical "backpack." This metaphoric backpack is portrayed as opaque and externally assembled, containing unknown histories, possible trauma, and medical uncertainties. Our analysis demonstrates how these constructions shape institutional decision-making and parental expectations but go

far beyond the adoption placement itself: By emphasising prenatal bodily damage and expectations of future developmental difficulties they are intertwined with adoption narratives from the outset and broader debates on childhood, risk, and family formation.

The literacy practices of kindergarten children in Chillán, Chile

Isidora Castillo Rabanal, University College London

The literacy practices of kindergarten children in Chile are understudied, especially children from low socioeconomic backgrounds who attend public kindergartens. Understanding them can help relevant people, like educators and families, enrich these children's learning experiences. Considering this, I aimed to explore the relationship between kindergarten children's home and kindergarten literacy practices, arguably the most relevant settings for children in this stage. This poster focuses on the preliminary findings of my doctoral research, particularly in the eight themes that summarise how the home and kindergarten literacy practices are connected and even influence each other. These findings suggest that kindergarten staff and parents agree on certain priorities for the children's education, which do not necessarily emphasise literacy. Nonetheless, the children experience a variety of literacy practices in both settings, which are influenced by new technologies.

Playing on the edge: a study with displaced children in Mexico

Alejandra Vijil Morin, University of Cambridge

Latin America has the highest proportion of child migrants globally. Displaced children encounter layered forms of structural violence: precarious legal status, unsafe transit conditions, and limited access to protection systems. Despite the harsh conditions, children still play. Even when their basic needs are not met, when caretakers identify their reality as dangerous or characterise play as inappropriate, children find opportunities to play "inside the cracks". Initial findings from my arts-based, childist study with displaced children in Mexico reveal how they actively reclaim and negotiate spaces for play in overcrowded shelters, while using playthings to narrate their difficult journey on their own terms. Children's play practices reveal alternative ways of navigating and responding to harm.

By centring children's perspectives and experiences, this study highlights the value of play as a critical space of agency and meaning-making at the edges of justice, while also challenging the dominant deficit-based narratives of migrant children.

The (ir)regularities of parenting behaviour: implications for intervention in shelter homes

Nádia Dias, University of Madeira, Portugal; Ana Isabel Sani, University Fernando Pessoa, Porto, Portugal; Dora Pereira, University of Madeira, Portugal

The quality of parenting is an important determinant of children's healthy development. Professionals in shelter homes for mothers and children victims of violence should also address parenting processes. Considering the Functional Model of Parenting Behaviour, this work aimed to study how specific dimensions from parenting functioning — child's health and development, impulse control and parenting skills – are related. After the ethical procedures, were analysed 48 cases of parents of children under child protection measures assessed through the Parental Capacities Assessment Guide. The analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and the Chi-Square Test. The results indicate that the classifications of impulse control and parenting skills were significantly associated across all age groups, but child's health and development and parenting skills' classifications are significantly associated only in cases of parents with children older than five years old. The findings suggest the important role that mediating processes (namely impulse control) have in parenting functioning and how it can be a key point between parenting capacity and parenting skills. Implications for shelter homes intervention will be discussed.

Participation of refugee and migrant children in residential care

Leonor Pereira, Fernando Pessoa University, Porto, Portugal; Ana Isabel Sani, Fernando Pessoa University, Portugal, and University of Minho, Portugal

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews with residential care professionals and academics to explore the participation of refugee and migrant children in justice and reception systems. Thematic analysis identified four key themes: A. Participation: From Right to Practice; B. Barriers to Effective Participation; C. Adaptation and Flexibility in Intervention; D. Good Practices and Suggestions for Improvement. Findings reveal significant structural, cultural, and institutional barriers — such as language difficulties, limited system knowledge, irregular documentation, and mistrust — that restrict meaningful participation. Despite this, active involvement enhances young people's decision-making abilities, life skills, and sense of belonging. A comparison between groups shows that academics emphasise legal frameworks and rights, while practitioners focus on everyday challenges and the need for culturally and emotionally responsive approaches in practice.

Children's participation in the justice system

Maria João Costa, University Fernando Pessoa, Porto, Portugal; Ana Sani, University of Minho, Portugal and Portugal University of Madeira; Dora Pereira, Portugal University of Madeira, and University Research Centre in Psychology (CUIP-UMa), Portugal

The right to participation affirms that all children should be respected and involved in decisions affecting them, with their views considered according to age and maturity. This study aimed to examine strengths and weaknesses in justice system practices that support children's participation, based on their own perspectives. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through brief questionnaires and interviews with 11 children and young people in contact with the justice system, revealing generally limited and basic knowledge about procedures. Results show that professionals' attitudes strongly influence children's experiences: supportive relationships enhance participation, while lack of sensitivity hinders it. Although most participants reported positive overall experiences, professional behaviour was identified as the main barrier. The study highlights the need for continued research and improvements to better understand children's experiences and strengthen meaningful participation in justice processes.

Outdoor learning in English primary schools: exploring the structural and cultural barriers and enablers in Key Stage 1 and 2 of primary education

Beverley Derrett, University of Suffolk

Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) is widely recognised for its potential to enhance pupil engagement, wellbeing and curriculum learning. However, despite a substantial evidence base supporting outdoor learning, its implementation within English primary schools remains inconsistent. Existing research has focused predominantly on pupil outcomes, with less attention given to the factors that influence teachers' use of outdoor learning in everyday practice.

This study explores the structural, organisational and professional factors that enable or constrain curriculum-linked outdoor learning in Key Stages 1 and 2. Focusing on accessible settings such as school grounds, local parks and community spaces, it examines how policy, accountability pressures, leadership practices, school context and teacher agency shape implementation.

Adopting a critical realist perspective, the study uses a mixed-methods design comprising an online questionnaire and follow-up semi-structured interviews with primary teachers and school leaders across England. The findings aim to provide insight into the persistent gap between advocacy and practice and inform future leadership, policy and professional development.

Children's rights in England: how did we get here, where are we going?

Joe Latimer, Just for Kids Law

In an era of intensifying childhood poverty, political dysfunction and eroded welfare provision, what can children's rights do? Just for Kids Law is a charity providing criminal defence and public law legal representation to children and young adults in England. Public law and community care solicitor, Joe Latimer, will provide an overview of their work, and an explainer on key developments in children's rights over the last two decades. He will reflect on what risks and social harms are facing their clients today, and how the law is being used to support them. Finally, he will address what the organisation thinks children's rights need to do given the crossroads we find ourselves at.

Enhancing parental insight and action against online sexual exploitation of minors

Mariana Monteiro and Ana Sani, Fernando Pessoa University, Porto, Portugal and Research Centre on Child Studies (CIEC), University of Minho, Portugal

Online sexual violence against minors comprises any sexually exploitative interaction initiated by an adult for sexual gratification. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional descriptive design, this research analysed a sample of 200 caregivers of children aged seven to 17 via an online survey.

Findings reveal that while 59.5% of children play online games, predominantly in private spaces like bedrooms (48.7%), parental awareness remains inconsistent. Although a majority of participants reported high digital literacy (57.1%) and awareness of monitoring software (68.9%), a significant knowledge gap exists regarding specific threats. Notably, 48.7% were unfamiliar with "online grooming", and only 34.5% prioritised the risks of interacting with strangers. Despite these gaps, 67.2% maintained open communication with their children, and 84.9% advocated for a more proactive role for educational institutions in prevention. The study concludes that while digital skills are prevalent, targeted education is required to bridge the gap between technical proficiency and effective risk management.
