Kinship Care: JA to UK – Family Dynamics, Culture & Gender Context

Sharon McPherson

2023 Churchill Fellow





In Loving Memory of Ryan Isaiah McPherson-Peters
27.09.2008 – 11.10.2022

the CHURCHILL fellowship

coram | better chances for children since 1739

Disclaimer

Copyright © 2025 by Sharon McPherson. The moral right of the author has been asserted.
The views and opinions expressed in this report and its content are those of the author and not of the Churchill Fellowship or its partners, which have no responsibility or liability for any part of the report.

Photographs and permissions

Prior consent was gained to use images and any actual name and direct quotes contained in this report for the purposes related to this research only. This report may be reshared in its entirety and quoted, but permission to reuse images must be sought from the report author prior to use.



1. Executive Summary

This research into understanding the cultural and family dynamics context of kinship care came about initially due to the ongoing dearth in knowledge relating to the assessment, engagement and support needs of African and Caribbean kinship care families. My recognition of the need for such cultural context knowledge was further compounded by the death of my grandson Ryan aged 14 in 2022, as he experienced as a Black boy adultification by professionals which led to his mental health vulnerabilities as a child going unseen.

The choice of Jamaica as the country for my research is because the largest population of 'Windrush' migration came from there and this dominance is also reflected in the Families In Harmony (FIH) network. My interest is in the correlation between the adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) of the Windrush migration 'Barrel Children' left behind in Jamaica and the ACEs of Caribbean heritage kinship care children in England. This is coupled with exploring whether living in a predominately black populated country verses living in a host predominately white populated country had any bearing on the cultural parenting practices and support needs of kinship caregivers.

To explore these curiosities I had discussions with kinship caregivers and professional representatives from state agencies and community organisations, using semi-structured one-to-one interviews and focus groups whilst in Jamaica, alongside one-to-one online meetings before and after the field research visit.

A summary of the key findings from caregivers includes themes such as cross-generational tensions linked to changes in cultural practices of respect for elders, valuing faith practices and the materialistic shift in values, as well as concerns around the adultification of children, and the safeguarding particularly of girls. The key findings from professionals focused on monitoring and managing such high volumes of informal kinship care arrangements, including concerns around child shifting practices and its impact on missing in education figures. The issue of state welfare provision, and its ability to truly meet the basic needs of kinship families was expressed as a dominating factor impacting the lived experiences of kinship children.

You can find my detailed findings at the end of sections 6.1 and 6.2.

Recommendations

With the expansion of the preferred permanency option for children unable to live with their parents now being kinship care, for Black African and Caribbean families it is unlikely this can happen in an equitable manner without the minimum of the following:

Policy Improvements

- **National racial equity plan for children's social care:** a national strategy which includes specific reference to kinship care and improving the informal arrangements more akin to Black Africa and Caribbean families. This must include as a minimum, a vision, systematic review and clear objectives to deconstruct the historically embedded racial biases in state agencies policy and practice.

- **Education racial equity inclusion policy:** changing the approach of schools in supporting children who have experienced ACEs, reducing racial disparity by demonstrating a trauma-informed inclusion approach that factors in the impact of racism and racialised trauma.

Research Improvements

- **Ring-fenced research funding:** specific investment into the development and funding of a consortium project with co-production at its core. With research areas generated and co-researched in partnership with lived experience, caregiver or those raised in kinship care within Black African or Caribbean heritage families. This approach contributes to racial equity by increasing knowledge about and visibility of seldom seen community peer researchers.

- **Acknowledgement of historical context:** Research linked to kinship care relating to the Black African and Caribbean community must for integrity sake acknowledge the historical context, including the ripple effect legacy of the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, economic migration, Windrush, structural and systemic racism.

Practitioner Improvements

- **Building racial equity bridges:** improving trust and access to support, contributes to closing the racial equity gap in kinship care. All local authorities must commit to working in partnership with Black led local and national organisations as part of developing a racially inclusive and equitable local offer.

- **Informal kinship care support packages:** practitioners must work from a principle of best interest of the child and stop using the caveat of private family arrangement to deny children and their caregiver's access to assessments, resources and support.

- **Racial context assessments:** The cultural nature of kinship care in Black families means that children are more likely to be cared for by a relative informally. Therefore, each family must be assessed through a racialised lens which includes their prior understanding and experiences of UK state system.

- **Early Help:** practitioner cultural complacency must be addressed through continual professional development and courageous conversations, to avoid "good enough" beliefs and attitudes, coupled with misdirected cultural curiosity and budget constraints missing opportunities to provide early help interventions that keep children safe and supported in stable family arrangements.

Support & Services Improvement

- **Improving education outcomes:** targeted support particularly for Black boys growing up in kinship care arrangements, emphasising the safety factor created when children remain in community school education. Ring-fence funding for culturally specific support co-produced in partnerships with Black-led organisations and ensure capacity building is included, alongside collaboration with the virtual school provision.

- **Culturally appropriate therapeutic interventions:** Children must not continue to be disadvantaged because their parents or caregivers are too afraid or racially traumatised to reach out for help. Caregivers must be given access to culturally appropriate therapeutic support to address the emotional and mental wellbeing of the children in their care. This offer should be extended to assist caregivers to access support to address their own adverse experiences to ensure they can continue to provide safe, loving and stable homes.

- **10-year multi-agency kinship care pilot partnership:** Fully funded, anti-racist, solution-focused partnership with key state stakeholders' children's social care, health, education, youth justice and housing fully present, funded and committed to changing the narratives, stressors and practices contributing to in arrangement and outcome racial disparities. This partnership must have resources and authority to sign off on decisions.

To access a digital, downloadable PDF copy of the full report, visit https://familiesinharmony.org.uk/cf-report or scan the QR code below.