The experiences of immigration detention of children, young people and their families

Background

Children and young people under the age of 18 are being increasingly detained in the UK for the purposes of immigration control. They are detained either with their families or alone as perceived adults because their age is being disputed. The Children’s Society and the Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID) have been funded by the Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund to work with children and families in immigration detention and to campaign for the end to the detention of children and their families. This campaign is now called OutCry! The study described here is being carried out to provide robust research evidence to support this campaign.

Aims and objectives

The overall aim of this piece of research is to explore the views and experiences of immigration detention of children, young people and their families in order to inform the campaign to help end the detention of children for the purpose of immigration control.

The research study has the following objectives:

- To provide a picture and an understanding of the current experiences of children, young people and their families in immigration detention in the UK from their perspective;
- To provide detailed case studies and examples of the views and experiences of children, young people and their families to help inform the OutCry! campaign and to illustrate ways in which the Government is contravening its own policies regarding the welfare of children;
- To explore in more detail the following aspects of being in immigration detention:
  a) the reasons for being detained from the families’ perspective, the length of detention and outcome post-detention, including multiple detentions;
  b) the experiences of families who have been separated during detention;
  c) the impact of detention on the physical health and emotional wellbeing of children and access to healthcare for families;
  d) the children’s experience of education and play while in detention;
  e) the children’s experience of the physical environment and food;
  f) the impact on detention and post-detention on the children and families social relationships and social networks;
  g) parents’ and older young people’s perspectives on their situation, including why they say they are in the UK, what they expected when they arrived in the UK, whether the
possibility of being detained played a part in their decision making about coming to the UK and what factors are preventing from returning ‘home’.

**Methods**

1) Literature review of children and families’ experiences of immigration detention and the impact of detention on physical and mental health.

2) Examination of 20-25 case files kept by Children’s Society workers working with children and families detained in Yarl’s Wood Immigration Detention Centre.

3) Qualitative interviews with 20-25 people, including up to 10 children and young people and up to 10 parents after they have left detention and with 5 professionals who have worked with children and families in Yarl’s Wood Immigration Detention Centre such as staff from education, health and social care settings.

4) The qualitative data collated from these methods would be supplemented by the presentation of the main findings of the quantitative data held by the Children’s Society monitoring system, CHYMS in the interim and final reports.

**Timescales**
The proposed research will take place between December 2009 and July 2010.

**Funding**
A mixture of funding from the Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund and The Children’s Society finances this research.

**Staff**
Abigail Knight, Senior Researcher is leading the project with assistance from Viv Jackson, Sessional Researcher and PhD Student, University of Bristol. The analysis of statistical data from CHYMS will be carried out by another member of the Research Unit.

For further information about the research, please contact:

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