



Update on the CHAMPIONS Project, July 2021

The CHAMPIONS Project is a national 18-month study looking at the impact of COVID and living through lockdown on children under 5 who are living in temporary accommodation (TA) due to experiencing homelessness. Our research partner The Children's Society is looking at the impact on young people aged 10-19; these age ranges cover two critical stages in a child's life that affect their development and future life chances.

The project has four linked research objectives through which we will co-develop recommendations to help children and families recover from the pandemic.

1. Scoping review
2. Needs analysis
3. Feasibility assessment
4. Knowledge exchange

There is also a policy workstream to focus on relationship-building and engagement and impact activities with policymakers.

The research with families is supported by our Community Engagement Partners (CEP) panel: we are working in partnership with families and young people with lived experiences of TA so every step is informed and guided by them.

This report gives an update on the first 8 months of the project from November 2020 to July 2021.

1 Progress and indicative findings

1.1 Scoping review

We have conducted a systematic scoping review, supplemented by interviews with local experts, to map international public health interventions that have focused on accessing marginalised children and improving outcomes in children living through challenging conditions. Our aim is to synthesise and learn from the strategies of delivering early public health intervention programs at scale in LMIC and HIC, and present them to professionals and families in the UK to inform strategies for England during the recovery phase of the pandemic.

The CHAMPIONS review team has completed work on the review and it will be published soon. Our Review protocol will shortly be submitted for registration. We will be presenting some of the main findings as infographics, and selected examples will be shared on our social media accounts.

A conference abstract has been submitted to The Lancet; it is currently under review. This is an important avenue for us to identify and work with international experts in child health and wellbeing interventions.

Interviews have been conducted with public health experts in LMICs. There were two aims: the first was to seek information from researchers and professionals who work with the marginalised communities in LMIC using various methods to reach this hard-to-reach group of people. The second was to supplement the systematic literature review by identifying effective working practices, either in unpublished reports or technical reports for the funders. We have a first draft of the findings; they are being used to inform the professionals interviews.

1.2 Needs analysis: Families study

Our work with families focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on children under 5, taking an integrated, holistic approach across their environment (and housing in particular) and health. It addresses health, education, development and wellbeing and explores with families how the changes brought by COVID-19 have affected them. We believe in empowering families and as well as looking at the impact on child development, we are also looking at ways in which families have coped and supported their children through the pandemic. Children can bounce back from these challenges and live the lives they deserve, if they get the right help.

Finding families to talk part

After receiving ethical approval at the end of February 2021, we began recruitment and, over the last five months, we have contacted several hundred organisations that work with families experiencing homelessness all across England, many of whom have linked with the project as partners, supporters and stakeholders.

We have proactively worked to make our study as inclusive as possible, learning from our CEP Panel and other experts in the field, and developing strategies to support involvement.. The interview and survey can be completed on the phone rather than by video call. We can arrange for a translator, if needed, to help with the interview and the survey, which could be either a professional or a community/peer facilitator that the participant trusts. A community facilitator can be present at the interview if the participant wants to have someone there with them. ***If you know someone who needs support to take part, please ask them to get in touch or contact us for them.***

Quantitative study

In the second week of July, we launched our online questionnaire for families:

https://dmupsy.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9G2zNgmUYaGppRQ

Qualitative study

We began interviews with families in May and these will continue over the summer.

Although it is too early to present findings from the qualitative interviews, we are sharing some quotes from our families interview participants that give a flavour of what they are telling us. (Note: at the moment we are using ID numbers rather than pseudonyms for participants.)

Parents talked about how the isolation of social distancing, lockdown and the travel ban had affected their child, and particularly the impact if children did not have many opportunities to socialise with other children.

My child is at this age now when she doesn't go to nursery yet, she's always alone at home and all her attention from me is for her. When you go outside, she's thinking OK, everything is for me. *[7730, a single parent with a 3 year old]*

After the pandemic, when we could go out and see them, when she sees them she could never play with them [her cousins]. Everybody feels like a stranger to her. *[2881, a single parent with a daughter aged 3]*

Parents also described how their children were frightened by the risks of the pandemic, especially in shared accommodation where several families shared the kitchen and bathroom and there was hesitance about how clean and safe it was for everyone.

"[My children] wouldn't touch any food, even after washing, first a wash and then give to the kids. They're really scared at that time... five families and we're using one bathroom." *[3600, a single parent with three children]*

"I moved to the temporary accommodation in one room as well, there is no fridge, there is no washing machine. You share the bathroom with all sorts of people. It was really horrible for my daughter." *[2881, a single parent with a daughter aged 3]*

Living in an overcrowded flat and having to keep the children indoors and away from their friends and family could affect children's behaviour:

"The lack of space does not help because it's not like they have their own space to be able to go relax or calm down. You know, if they have an argument, they're still in each other's faces because of the lack of space." *[6962, whose children were 4, 6, and 8 and living in a 1-bed flat]*

"My child is actually naughty now. I don't know why, I think it's because of the other kids in here as well, like they're all on top of each other... he's not bonding with other children, he's not learning from other children, he's just playing by himself all day." *[2051, a single parent with a child aged 18 months]*

Home schooling could also be difficult in families with such limited resources, particularly in accommodation where families could not afford or were not allowed to have broadband and where they were relying on costly mobile data.

"There's no space to teach them anyway. In the front room, you know, it fits a sofa with a coffee table and a small TV. Coffee tables aren't sufficient for three children." *[6962, whose children were 4, 6, and 8 and living in a 1-bed flat]*

"We weren't allowed the internet... I could have put on some stuff for her like learning stuff, alphabet stuff, but I couldn't." *[6121, a single parent with a daughter aged 2]*

Participants also talked about how much it helped them to have the comfort and practical support they had received from community and religious organisations. One participant praised the support she'd had from neighbours in her family-only accommodation. This helped keep her spirits up, and in turn she made sure that her children kept in touch with their friends and family through online video calls, because it made such a difference to their happiness and ability to cope.

“Especially when they are talking to their friends, you know. They will see what their friends are doing, there they are... Sometimes they'll show each other something on their phone... they will be laughing. So it's cheered them up a lot.” [9207, a parent with 2 children aged 5 and 3]

There is so much more to say, and we look forward to giving a more in-depth update in the autumn, when we will be able to triangulate interview data with survey data.

1.2.b Young Person's study

Half of the interviews of young people aged 10-19 who are living in TA have been completed.

A full analysis will be available later in the year but, as with the Family study, the Young Person's study is drawing out narratives around the challenges of overcrowded housing and the isolation of missing friends and family during COVID-19, against a backdrop of young people being conscious that where they're living isn't where they're staying permanently.

It's also bringing to light stories of the incredible resourcefulness, creativity and positivity of young people and their families in making the best of the circumstances they're in, which we will share with you in our next update.

1.3 Feasibility assessment: Professionals study

In this research workstream, our aim is to map the different cadres of health professionals, public health and social care workers, third sector organisations and local officials per site. We are exploring the barriers they or their colleagues encountered in providing care to children under 5 living in temporary accommodation, the challenges they perceive these families experienced during the COVID-19 crisis and their strategies for supporting them beyond the pandemic.

We begin with pilot interviews with frontline workers with families experiencing homelessness and will use these findings to inform the professionals' survey, which will be launched later in the summer. The first interviews are being arranged at the time of writing (mid-July 2021).

1.4 Knowledge exchange: Digital platform

The digital platform was launched in February and there are further exciting plans for developing content, including an animation for families giving information about support options and a multilingual video to share the findings with families.

We wanted to provide a tool so that people could send us stories and photos about their experience of living in temporary accommodation while caring for a child under 5, if they were not taking part in the research. We've added a 'Your stories' section, where people can upload photos and words, and will share what people send us.

As well as the website, we have an active presence on social media, using it for networking and publicising our activities. We also use it to keep up to date what is happening in the sector and the work that other organisations are doing on the impact of COVID-19 on the health and wellbeing of children experiencing homelessness.

2 Policy implications

We have been engaging with policymakers from an early stage in the project so we have a clear idea of the policy landscape in order to understand the most effective ways to ensure the project recommendations reach the people who can put them into practice.

The June 2021 meeting of the APPG on Ending Homelessness focused on the long-term impact of child homelessness. This was an important opportunity to introduce the project to policymakers and specialists in the field. The PI, Prof Lakhanpaul presented evidence and Thelma, one of the members of our community engagement panel, provided a moving narrative, describing her personal experience of living in temporary accommodation as a child, while caring for her mother. You can find both of the APPG talks on our YouTube channel:

Professor Lakhanpaul: <https://youtu.be/CLec7LNNxBg>

Thelma: <https://youtu.be/Sy9rRZU7t8U>

(With appreciative thanks to Crisis, who recorded the event.)

We are continuing this work by networking with MPs, Directors of Public Health and local authority leaders, statutory bodies such as Public Health England, professional organisations and policy making bodies. This is laying the groundwork for the project to make an impact when we begin to publish findings.

Our first Engagement Meeting is scheduled for October, and we will be presenting our early findings at that session.

3 Community engagement

Co-production is a key part of our research approach. We have convened a **Community Engagement Partners (CEP) Panel** of experts by experience; three members have lived in temporary accommodation with their children. Two members are young people who lived in TA as children.

So far, we have had two meetings of the CEP panel and members have supported us with the following work:

- Simplifying the video scripts that explain the project to families

- Reviewing the participant information sheets
- Reviewing the family questionnaire to make it easier to complete

Each of these activities has made our research more appropriate and easier to use for the families we are engaging with.

Thelma, a member of the CEP Panel, also spoke at the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Ending Homelessness about what it was like for her living in emergency accommodation with her mum for many years when she was a child.

We have convened an **Advisory Panel**, made up of subject experts in housing, homelessness and children's health and wellbeing, which meets for the first time in July 2021.

Our current advisory panel members are:

- Professor Jo Richardson
- Professor Anna Gupta
- Dr Bianca Lee
- Dr Jeanette Bowlay-Williams
- Dr Shahid Islam
- Dr Emily Witt
- Dr Sarah Cockman
- Dr Indrani Lahiri
- Samantha Dorney-Smith
- Jane Cook
- Sam Pratt
- Alex Florschutz

Our research partners will also be present: British Association for Community Child Health, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, EKAM Foundation, The Children's Society and Public Arts Health & Us (PAHUS).

AB members have already been acting as consultants to the project, supporting our recruitment work, and advising on our strategy for media communication and engagement with policymakers. Together we are laying the groundwork for our findings to be heard by senior policymakers and leaders.

4 Training the next generation of researchers

In the first eight months of the project, we are pleased to have been able to offer training opportunities to seven undergraduates and postgraduates from different disciplines. This is important capacity-building work for the future; students have gained valuable research skills and practical experience of working in a research team, which will help in their future career.

Diana Margot Rosenthal, UCL PhD student, continues to work on their thesis; the topic is closely related to CHAMPIONS with a particular focus on barriers to accessing health

services for children under 5. Gema Milla de la Fuente and Jingyuan Sun (UCL Health Psychology) worked on the families' qualitative and quantitative study respectively, and supported our recruitment with families. Daniela Cossio Martinez and Arunima Shrestha (UCL MSc Global Health) are working with Dr Kaushik Sarkar on the scoping review, gaining experience of systematic literature reviewing, and contributing to the publication. Priyam Deka (UCL BSc Epidemiology and Data Science) is developing our conceptual map, which will visualise the interrelationship between the different ideas and themes coming out of our research. Dr Christen van den Berghe is supporting our recruitment before going into her FY1 training at the Whittington Hospital. Dr Rosemary Roberts is working closely with Dr Sorcha Mahoney to complete her dissertation on the impact of COVID-19 on peer support and socialising for young people, prior to beginning her paediatric training.

Charlie Firth, a DMU BA Photography and Video graduate who is starting a MSc at DMU in October, has joined the Communications team and is supporting our work with social media. In October, we look forward to welcoming Katie Gent (DMU Criminology and Psychology) who will be joining us for six months to support the project's engagement and impact work. We are proud to work with some very talented young people.

Can you help with our recruitment?

Please share our call for participants, and let us know of any organisations that could put us in touch with families.

Twitter: https://twitter.com/champions_ta/status/1395301868428042244

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/championstaproject/photos/a.112315617599377/140370151460590/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPFtBt8NEcj/>

The next project update will be in October 2021. In the meantime, if you want to keep up to date with what we're doing, please join the mailing list by emailing champions@ucl.ac.uk.

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