

Meitheal and Child and Family Support Networks

Early Implementation of Meitheal and the Child and Family Support Networks: Lessons from the field

KEY FINDINGS



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Introduction

This research provides an insight into the early stages of development of the Meitheal model and the Child and Family Support Networks (CFSN). It explored the implementation of Meitheal and CFSN at a local level in four representative areas, in the wider context of Tusla's overall Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS).

Research Focus and Methods

The research focused on gathering participant perceptions on: key strengths of the implementation process; challenges to the successful development of the model; model fidelity; and the nature of engagement between various partners. A qualitative approach was used, utilising interviews and focus groups with practitioners and managers who took part in the implementation process. Out of the 107 participants involved in the study, over half were internal to Tusla. The remainder included community and voluntary sector representatives and other statutory agency staff.

Key Findings & Messages for Practice

This report answers six research questions.

1. How are referral pathways operating within Meitheal?

- Referral pathways are dependent on particular structures and relationships in the examined area.
- Practitioners from the community and voluntary sector perceive the referral pathways to be quite successful.
- Challenges arise around the workload and management of relationships between the statutory and the community and voluntary sectors.
- The nature of the referral pathway, i.e. divert, step-down or direct initiation from the community has a significant impact on the implementation process and the types of case that Meitheal is used for.
- There is a need for further guidance in the area of divert and step-down referrals from child protection and welfare.

2. Are referral pathways within Meitheal operating as intended?

- The referral pathways are in the process of being established.
- Challenges arise in terms of interpretation of thresholds and communication between different partners in the process.
- The research discovered significant variation in the stage of implementation between areas.



- Levels of participation in the model by some stakeholders is impacted by their workload.
- Where there is a Lead Practitioner, the Meitheal model is more likely to operate successfully.
- Meitheal is perceived to be contributing to the overall wellbeing of families who use the service; to enhance relationships and provide solutions for specific needs.

3. Are there unintended consequences arising from the existence of the Meitheal referral pathway?

- Many participants from Tusla noted increased positive development of closer professional relationships between PPFS teams and other colleagues in Tusla.
- Some areas noted that the introduction of the Meitheal model is acting as a catalyst for systematic changes in the way support for children, young people and families is delivered.

4. Are the relationships/partnerships necessary for the operation of the model in place?

- Most of the areas highlighted strong informal relationships that support the operation of Meitheal.
- Effective communication between different partners enables efficient and timely decision-making.

5. Are the key interface points internally and externally working well (child protection, education and health, in particular)?

- The interface between Meitheal and the Child Protection Welfare system is clear overall, and supports the delivery of the model. Further guidance on this interface is necessary.
- There is a need for stronger linkages between these sectors to support engagement at an institutional level.

6. Is there evidence of enhanced multi-agency collaboration?

- Those who were active participants in the Meitheal model provided strong evidence of enhanced multi-agency collaboration.
- Meitheal processes provide opportunities to build relationships among participants which appeared beneficial in resolving other situations outside of Meitheal.
- There is a positive perception of CFSN; however further consideration is necessary regarding their impact on overall system change.

This literature is derived from the Meitheal and Child and Family Support Networks work package as part of the Development and Mainstreaming Programme for Prevention, Partnership & Family Support.

Full report is available online at: www.nuigalway.ie/cfrc/mainstream/ourworktoday

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