

Defining 'Family' when a child is acutely ill at home

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Context

- The rising use of health services for acute childhood illness is often attributed to the loss of the extended family.
- It is assumed that families used to use their extended family for support.
- This paper will review research evidence from differing ethnic groups in the UK which clarifies the ways in which family is defined when a child is ill at home.



Carleton, C. G. (circ. 1880) Extended family USA

The two studies

Authors	Aim	Methodology	Sample
Neill 2008, 2010, Neill et al 2013	Explore psychosocial influences on family management of acute childhood illness at home	Grounded theory Unstructured interviews 4 sets of data collection	15 families (mainly white British) 25 interviews
Neill et al 2014a,b Jones et al 2013,2014 (ASK SNIFF team)	Explore parent's and HCPs' use of information resources during decision making in acute childhood illness at home.	Grounded theory methodology Focus groups & interviews	27 parents (white British, South Asian, Travelling families) 16 first contact clinicians

Definitions of family during acute childhood illness

- Almost exclusively defined as nuclear family of resident parents and children
- Reflects Finch's (1989) hierarchy of obligations within families with nuclear at the core
- Contemporary families recognised as having diverse forms, but not when children are sick.



The official portrait by Pete Souza, official White House photographer.



Seattle Municipal Archives from Seattle, WA



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/nedrichards/>

Containing acute childhood illness within family

I don't really ask anybody else, no. Never really ask anybody else. I say to M (her partner) "What do you think?" (Mother)

Managing yourself, I think that's something again that's put on to you by society and even people like GPs, health visitors. We've all taken a sick child to the doctor only to be pooh-poohed away (Mother)

People don't want to get involved anymore (Mother) It's mainly your friends and you don't want to burden your friends with your family problems. (Father)

Parents' roles during acute childhood illness

- Parents' roles revert back to traditional gendered caregiver patterns.

It's usually me that stays off work... have to work it round.. (Mother)

- Justified by mothers and fathers

It's usually their Mum they want anyway, isn't it? (Father)

You know what Dad's are like, he doesn't really know what to do... They don't know what to say, do they when anyone's ill? (Mother)



<https://mamasemptynest.wordpress.com/category/children/>



<http://justsimplyg.blogspot.co.uk/2011/11/reminders-for-my-teenage-son.html>

Exceptions to the 'rule'

- Young families: view their parents as part of family unit

The first thing I did really was phone my mum and I said 'does chickenpox start off with blisters?' (Young mother)

- Gypsy/travelling families: close knit community
- South Asian families: extended family in the household, respect elders but advice given with caveat
- Family health care professionals (HCPs): advice sought to legitimate health service use

My sister-in-law is a doctor and we rang her ...and she said to us the ones (chickenpox spots) in the eyes need to get looked at (Father)



<https://herbasinergi.wordpress.com>



Zul from Brunei Darussalam

Conclusion

- Definitions of family in British society is shaped around an expectation that families will manage independently
- How families define their nuclear family determines who care for the child
- Findings reflect individualism in British society
- Therefore health services need to recognise that, even when extended families are present, they may not be accessed for advice during acute childhood illness.

Thank you for listening

Any questions?

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www.asksniff.org.uk