

CAF/25/NM/21 - A realist evaluation of the use and influence of Voice of the Infant/Child (Vol/C) intervention on the practice of health visitors.

Voice of the Infant/Child (Vol/C) is a method health visitors (HVs) use to give children a chance to express their feelings and thoughts and be part of decisions about their lives. It helps adults understand childrens' experiences and wellbeing by listening to what children say and watching how they behave, then explaining it to others to make sure the child's voice is heard. This gives children a say in decisions that affect them.

Aim: To explore with families, HVs and trainee HVs how the Vol/C is being used by HVs and trainee HVs in Grampian (a region in Scotland) to assess vulnerable infants' needs looking at what works, why, how and for whom.

Need: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international agreement of the rights and protections every child (under 18) should have (United Children's Fund UK 1989). According to the UNCRC all children have the right to have their opinions heard and taken seriously. From the 16th July 2024 the UNCRC became part of the law in Scotland, meaning that rights of children must be respected in all decisions.

The Vol/C method consists of policies, guidelines, education, tools and toolkits, a 'Good Practice Checklist' and the Scottish Model of Infant Participation. It is part of a promise to treat all babies fairly in Scotland. Practitioners in Grampian have been using the Vol/C method since 2021, but we don't yet know enough about how or when it helps HVs assess children's needs and views.

Approach:

Throughout the research process, I will work with public partners in the study to develop:

1. Initial ideas of how the method works,
2. Create materials and questions for the study,
3. Look at the results to see how the method works in different situations and why it works for some people and not others.

A realist evaluation study helps us understand how something works in real life. The study will have 2 parts-

1. Understanding how the Vol/C works
This includes looking at what we already know and talking to key people to help explain how the method should work.
2. Realist evaluation of the Vol/C
This part of the study looks at how the method works with vulnerable infants in Grampian and why it may work differently for different people/ in different situations.

We will use these methods in the study:

- Interviewing 9-12 parents of vulnerable infants (aged under 3) and 12 HVs/trainee HVs from across Grampian to understand their experiences of the Vol/C.

- Holding focus groups or interviews with HVs/trainee HVs to understand the training and support they have and how the method works in practice.
- Reading anonymised documents such as clinical records and reports.
- Accessing relevant files, copying and redacting any identifiable information prior to the data being stored for analysis.
- Carefully analysis of the information we collect to understand if, how and when the method supported the HVs/trainee HVs to assess the infant's views.

Sharing findings: I will share what we find through –

1. Local parent/child groups and social media,
2. Writing an article for a peer reviewed health journal with a member of the patient/public involvement (PPI) advisory group,
3. Giving talks at local and national meetings and conferences,
4. Making a fun video to share with team leaders, HVs and trainee HVs.

Impact: The findings from this study will help enhance HVs' practice when working with families, especially those who need extra support. This will lead to better decisions for children to ensure they get the care they need to meet their full potential.