Public Awareness Work Package Final Report

Key Findings

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The methods used to conduct the research were:

1. Surveys - 1,000 adults were interviewed face-to-face in 2015 and another 1,000 adults were interviewed again in 2016. Both surveys asked about the local awareness of Tusla and the expected outcomes of the Public Awareness work of Tusla is that children and families are inclusively aware of available supports and are therefore less likely to fall through gaps as all relevant services are working together in Tusla’s prevention and early intervention system. This research has enabled us to look at how the public understand PPFS and Tusla and how and the public can best be informed about services and how to access them. We have also developed a focus on media reporting of PPFS and Tusla issues. It is important to inform how Tusla can best inform the public of services into the future.

2. Print Media - A total of 1,497 news items from a wide sample of print and national Irish newspapers were analysed between 2014 and 2017.

3. The literature reviewed included national and international studies, reports and qualitative research on how public awareness campaigns have been achieved by other organisations.

4. Semi-structured interviews were carried out in 2017 with 100 stakeholders in the Tusla services in Ireland.

5. Twelve HIQA reports carried out on child protection and welfare services between 2014 and 2017 were analysed.

Population Surveys:

The main findings from the surveys are as follows:

- The public are a lot more aware of Tusla in 2018 than in 2015: knowledge increased progressively across 2016 (50.1%) and 2017 (57.2%). More articles were negative with some positive or mixed.
- The number of news items regarding Child Protection and Welfare reports completed between 2014 and 2016 (n=97) to 2017 (n=51).
- Very little negative coverage was given to young peoples’ mental health (0.5%).
- News items regarding Support Services were more positive than negative in 2014 (65%), whereas Child Protection and Children in Care were more negative than positive in that year at 62% and 85%.

Print Media Analysis:

The main findings from the print media analysis were as follows:

- Media coverage shows there is more than one narrative about PPFS and Tusla and that both positive and negative reports are available.
- There is a clear reference of the media to view family support work more in terms of child protection and children in care than family support work approaches.
- News items about Tusla and PPFS increased progressively across 2016 (16%) and 2017 (27%).
- The role of schools in creating and maintaining greater family support has been demonstrated and greater public awareness about what prevention partnership and family support services are has been established. The findings show the extent to which people rely on their own networks for help and also demonstrate the way in which the media, at least, purpose of family support services delivered from universal and specialist services.
- The following are some of the key messages that have emerged from the findings:
  - Regarding awareness and knowledge of Tusla, our key messages are:
    - The public understanding of PPFS differs somewhat of likely need for services.
    - The relationship between child protection and family support needs to be clearer.
    - The relationship between Family Support and Generic Universal Services needs to be considered.
    - Most family support in Ireland is delivered through family and informal support networks.
    - Public awareness work.

HIQA Analysis (2014-16):

A detailed content summary of all HIQA Child Protection and Welfare reports completed between 2014 and 2016 was carried out. No specific measure for public awareness currently exists. From the research, five themes pertaining to public awareness were identified from the analysis:

1. Awareness strategy is in place for the public.
2. Awareness strategy is in place for external agencies.
3. Information is available to the general public.
4. Measures are in place around language barriers.
5. Measures are in place around communication difficulties.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

- A variety of different ways to inform the public about Tusla should be used. In this work, it is important to take account of differences based on rural-urban context, age and levels of likely need for services.
- The role of schools in creating and maintaining greater awareness among young people should be considered in partnership with teachers and the Department of Education.
- The finding that families rely mostly on their own networks should be used to advocate strongly for the increased quality and quantity of local general support services to families from other Government departments responsible for family and community support.

The media and the public need more information about what family support services are. It is important to make clear in communications that while Meitheal and Signs of Safety are two distinct models of practice aimed at preventative and protective work respectively, they are complementary approaches.

Greater partnership working with the media through local and national events be established as part of the ongoing public awareness work.

The Child Protection and Welfare Standards from the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) and a measurement of public awareness actions relating to family support practice.
Further Information

If you would like to read the Public Awareness Work Package Final Report, or any of the publications listed above please visit our website www.nuigalway.ie/childandfamilyresearch
If you have any questions on our research, please email cfrc@nuigalway.ie

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