

Preventing Multi-Generational Child Protection Involvement

Presenters: Dr Jade Purtell, Dr Amy Gill & Sarah Morris

Turning
Point

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Service responses to early parenthood and out-of-home care

Dr Amy Gill



Study Overview



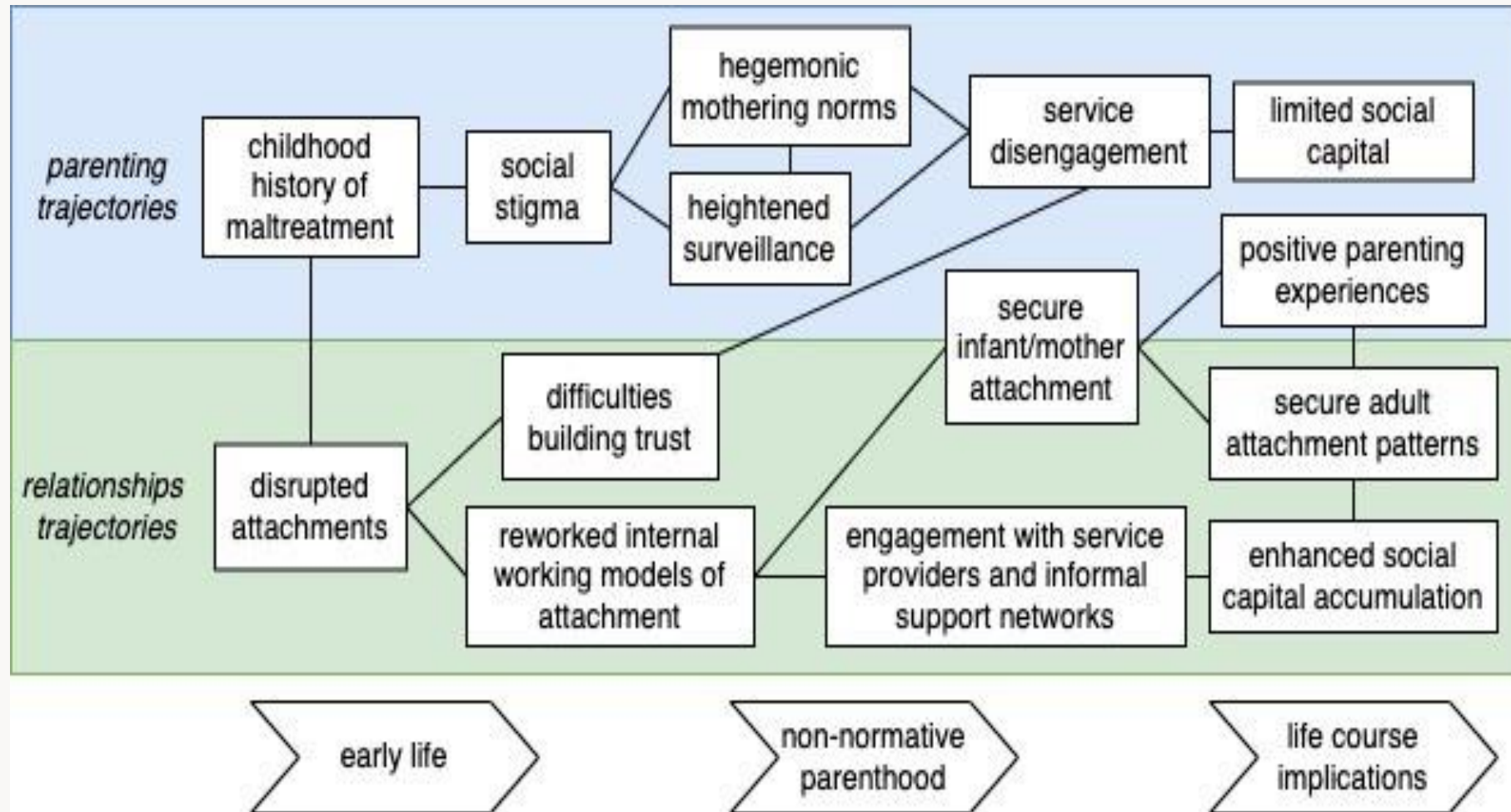
Gill, A., & Luu, B. (2025). A Population-Based Analysis of Birth Rates and Placement Patterns Among Care-Experienced Young Women in New South Wales, Australia. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-024-00995-8>

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A life course model of early parenthood and out-of-home care



Relationships-based practice recommendations

- Consistency
- Authenticity
- Honesty
- Attending to power differences
- Positivity
- Sensitivity
- Promoting informal support networks

Policy recommendations

Gradual, supported transitions from out-of-home care

- 10.5% of the young mother sample aged out >8 weeks pregnant (N = 191)
- Almost one third of these young women gave birth within approximately six weeks of aging out

Address placement and housing stability

- Young women were most likely to have their first child between the ages of 18-20.
- Young women who gave birth in care (N = 227) had high rates of perinatal placement changes.

Placement changes during pregnancy	Placement changes after pregnancy
48% changed placements	38% changed placements
M = 1.8	M = 3.2
≤ 6 weeks before birth = 14.5%	≤ 6 weeks after birth = 31%
≥ 3 placement changes = 18.4%	≥ 3 placement changes 43.7%



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Engaging Practice

With young people transitioning from care

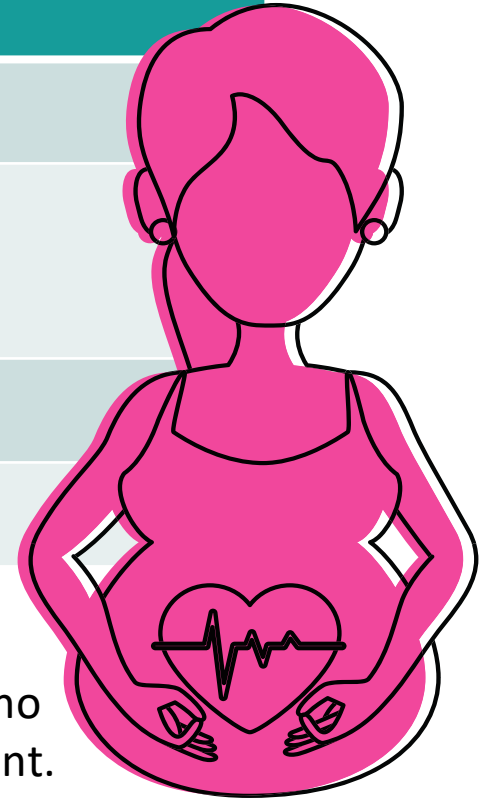
Dr Jade Purtell



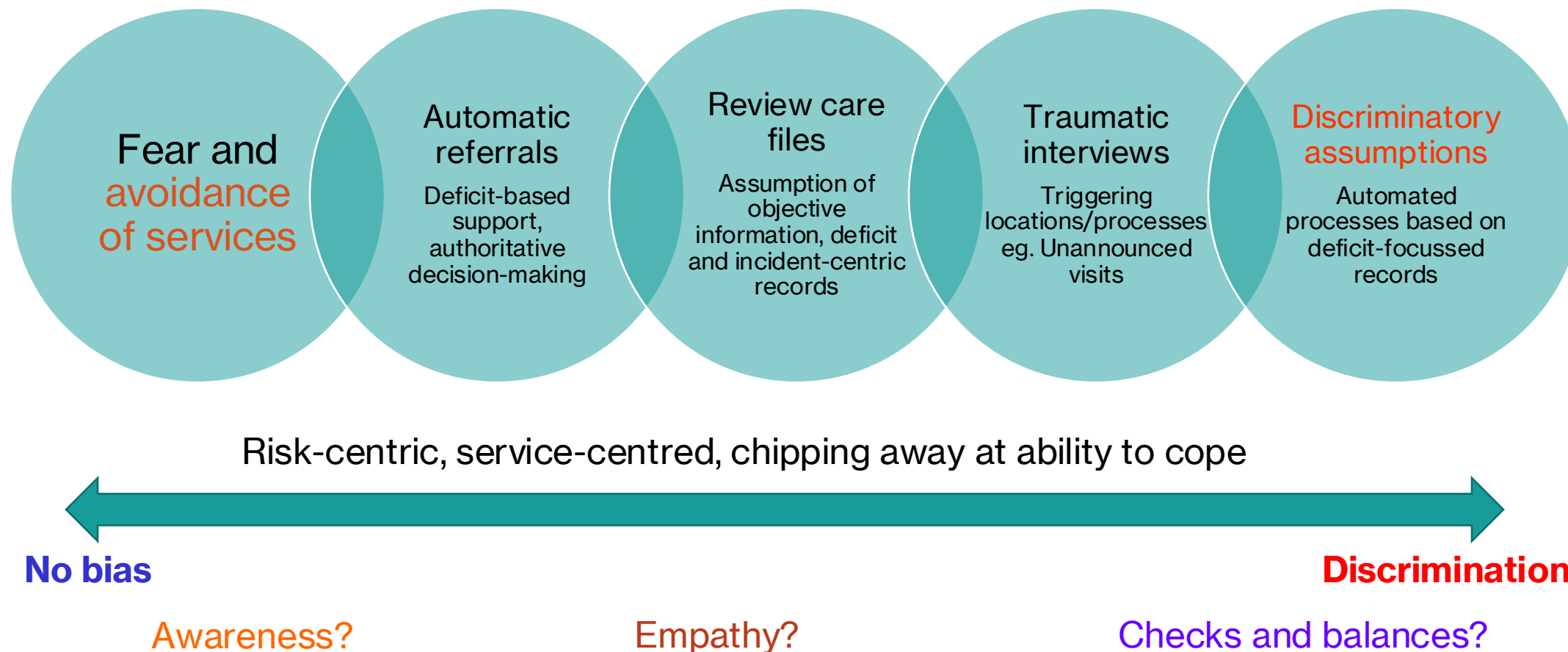
Ambiguous loss and *wanted* pregnancies

Source	No. of care leavers in study	Age	Birth rate female %	Comparison non-care female birth rate %	Birth rate male %	Comparison non-care male birth rate %
(Courtney et al., 2005, p. 56)	603	19	31.6	12.2	13.8	6.5
(Courtney et al., 2007; Courtney et al., 2005, p. 55)	591	21	56.1	23.5	30.2	11.5
(Courtney et al., 2009, p. 58)	602	23-24	66.8	30.1	44.3	18.3
(Courtney et al., 2011, p. 80)	596	25-26	71.7	40.7	52.7	27.7

Dworsky and Courtney (2010) found that 22% of young women in the Midwest study of transitions from care who had been pregnant by 17 or 18 years of age, and 35% of those who were pregnant by 19 years of age, had 'probably' or 'definitely' intended to become pregnant.



Dimensions of systemic 'surveillance bias'



Purtell, J et al. (2021) [*Where Is the Village? Care Leaver Early Parenting, Social Isolation and Surveillance Bias*](#), International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice.

Dimensions of emancipatory practice



Building positivity, breaking trauma bonds, building self-reliance and self-determination...



No bias

Mother/baby/family-centric support

Interdependence and independence!!!

Systemic and individual empathy?

Co-production

The village to raise our children in!

Purtell, J et al. (2022) [*Healing Trauma and Loss and Increasing Social Connections: Transitions from Care and Early Parenting*](#), Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal.



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Breaking the Cycle

Sarah Morris – Research Fellow
Monash University



Structural Disadvantage Following Care

Longitudinal data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that young people leaving out-of-home care are significantly more likely to:

- Enter social security systems early and remain dependent long-term
- Experience homelessness and housing instability
- Have disrupted educational attainment
- Face chronic financial insecurity

“Well, I can’t read and write or anything like that, so I find it very hard to get on with my life”

(Mendes et al., 2025, p.30)

Intergenerational Child Protection Involvement

Care Leavers frequently enter adulthood without access to:

- Intergenerational wealth or financial security
- Stable and affordable housing
- Consistent education attainment
- Family or kinship support networks
- Trauma-informed health and mental health services

This reflects not individual failure, but rather the failure of our siloed systems.

“I worked all my life in jobs no one else wanted. I didn’t end up with anything—no house, no savings, nothing.”

(Morris et al., 2025, p.36)

Prevention Requires Structural, Not Surveillance-Based, Responses

Evidence consistently demonstrates that the most effective protective factors include:

- Stable housing
- Economic security
- Access to education and employment
- Trauma-informed health and mental health services
- Long-term relational support

These factors reduce family stress, improve wellbeing, and strengthen parenting capacity.

Recommendations

Trauma-Informed Aged Care as the Foundation

Trauma-informed aged care for older Care Leavers means recognising the lasting impacts of institutional childhood abuse and neglect, ensuring services are safe, relational, flexible, and respectful, and embedding practices that reduce retraumatisation. It requires sensitive identification, meaningful choice, long-term trust with workers, and training co-designed with Care Leavers and Care Leaver agencies - so that care is not only delivered, but delivered in ways that uphold dignity, autonomy, and safety.

Priority Access & Identification (Gold Card)

Expand priority access to essential services that allow Care Leavers to age in place, including in-home aged care, medical and dental care, housing, and mental health supports.

Expand the Care Finder Program

Ensure older Care Leavers can navigate systems and access information in ways that build trust and reduce overwhelm.

De-Institutionalise Aged Care & Develop Specialist Residential Alternatives

Reform should be guided by the principle of de-institutionalising aged care for Care Leavers: shifting resources away from large, institutional settings and towards home-based, community, and small-scale alternatives that uphold autonomy, dignity, and safety.

Strengthen the Role of Care Leaver Agencies

Provide stable, long-term funding to expand the role of Care Leaver support agencies.

Embed Lived Experience & Advocacy in System Reform

Ensure Care Leaver voices are central to aged care policy and service design.

Strengthen and Stabilise the Workforce

Address workforce instability so services are safe, consistent, and relational.

Standalone First Nations Response

Develop a First Nations-led response for Stolen Generations Care Leavers, recognising their distinct experiences shaped by colonisation and intergenerational trauma.

(Mendes et al., 2025)

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