

The Importance of Family and Friends in Advice-Seeking for Rights Problems

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Rights problems such as debt, employment, welfare benefits and family problems are widespread. They are problems of everyday life, affecting many people and many aspects of people's lives and are now well documented. In contrast, there has been little research on the role of family and friends when experiencing a problem and seeking advice. Drawing on comprehensive qualitative research, this article explores how people seeking advice for their rights problems rely on family and friends for help in the advice-seeking process. The research shows that help lies on a continuum from encouraging people to seek advice to assistance with the tasks necessary for problem resolution. The implications of this for service design are considered.

Keywords: Advice-seeking, family and friends, rights problems, civil justice, vulnerable groups, Community Legal Advice Centres

Introduction

Rights problems such as debt, employment, welfare benefits, neighbours, family and consumer problems are widespread (Genn, 1999; Pleasence, 2006; Balmer, 2013). They include problems with family and ex-family members, landlords, creditors, retailers, service providers and government agencies. These problems are therefore not abstract legal problems. They are problems of everyday life, affecting many people and many aspects of people's lives, and interconnecting with key cross-cutting policy concerns such as poverty, social justice and health. An established body of research is now available, highlighting, for example, the mental and physical health cost of civil law problems (Pleasence *et al.*, 2008; Pleasence and Balmer, 2009; Balmer *et al.*, 2010a), the experience of debt problems and their relationship with health, illness and disability (for example, Balmer *et al.*, 2006), the experience of civil justice problems and advice-seeking behaviour among lone parents (Buck *et al.*, 2004), civil law problems in relation to geography (Patel *et al.*, 2008) and to disability (O'Grady *et al.*, 2004), and the extent to which people know about their rights and what to do when faced with a problem (Buck *et al.*, 2007, 2008; Balmer *et al.*, 2010b; Denvir *et al.*, 2012). Research has shown that legal issues frequently occur in combination both with other legal issues (Pleasence *et al.*, 2004; Moorhead *et al.*, 2006; Buck and Smith, 2013; Smith *et al.*, 2013) and wider problems of social exclusion and poverty (for example, Buck *et al.*, 2005). Throughout the last decade there has been an increased policy demand for social research in the civil justice field, reflecting this growing recognition that legal and social issues are interconnected (Buck, 2007).

In contrast, there has been little research on the role of family and friends when experiencing a problem and seeking advice, for legal problems as well as for other problems. Pescosolido (1992) observes that help-seeking has often been seen in the literature as a matter of individual decision-making, and proposes an alternative framework that sees help-seeking decision-making as embedded in the social network. There is also a body of research which has examined the influence of social support and social networks on help-seeking for health-related problems (see Roberts, 1988). The social influence of those close to an individual has been shown to be an important factor in the decision to seek professional help (Rickwood and Braithwaite, 1994; Pescosolido and Boyer, 1999). Cameron *et al.* (1993) found that most patients who sought medical services were prompted to go by a significant other. Campbell and McLean (2003) reported that people are most likely to perform healthy behaviours, including accessing appropriate health services, if they see that trusted peers are doing so. Similarly, Vogel *et al.* (2007) provided support for the idea that attitudes toward mental health services are at least partially transmitted by family and friends, who therefore play a role in whether an individual decides to seek help. Broadhurst (2003) noted, however, that there are very few studies which explore the interface between informal and formal networks, leaving important questions about levels of awareness in communities and mechanisms of lay referral unanswered.

Some recent quantitative data have suggested that family and friends do play a role in advice-seeking for rights problems. Results from the *English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Panel Survey* (Pleasence *et al.*, 2011) show that people obtained help to resolve problems from family and friends and other informal sources for 15 per cent of problems, compared to 29 per cent obtaining formal advice, 10 per cent doing nothing about their problem and 46 per cent handling their problems on their own. Data from the same survey also highlight that advice-seeking strategies adopted by respondents varied significantly by problem type; handling problems with the help of friends or family was particularly common for rented housing, education, welfare benefits and debt problems (Balmer, 2013). Of those who sought help from family and friends, 59 per cent solely used the help of family and friends and 22 per cent used the help of family and friends and a formal advisor, such as a solicitor or a Citizens Advice Bureau.

However, taking these findings alone underestimates the importance of family and friends for people experiencing problems. A survey conducted in Community Legal Advice Centres (CLAC), the policy initiative at the centre of this article, revealed a further role played by family and friends. The data showed that family, friends or work colleagues encouraged 62 per cent of respondents to get advice, and that a third of all CLAC users came to the advice centre with somebody else (Buck *et al.*, 2010). Further, the majority of respondents using a CLAC had found out about the centre by being told about it by another person or organisation (66 per cent), of which half had heard about the centre through family, friends or work colleagues (Buck *et al.*, 2010).

Whilst these quantitative findings hint at the potentially crucial role family and friends play in legal advice-seeking, the data do not provide us with any detailed knowledge on how and why family and friends influence advice-seeking. These questions are better addressed through qualitative data. Over recent decades qualitative research has been increasingly recognised as a valuable tool in applied social policy research (for example, Ritchie and Spencer, 1994; Srivastava and Thomson, 2009). The capture of data which are detailed, rich and complex enables 'how' and 'why' questions to be answered.

This article draws on data from a project which formed one part of a larger programme of research and evaluation (Buck *et al.*, 2010; Smith and Patel, 2010; Fox *et al.*, 2010, 2011) designed to investigate a policy initiative, the establishment of CLACs and the closely related policy initiative of Community Legal Advice Networks (CLANs). Below, we first provide a brief background to the policy. This is followed by a description of the methodology adopted. We then present the results, which have been specifically analysed to interrogate the role of family and friends in advice-seeking for rights problems.

The policy initiative: Community Legal Advice Centres

CLACs and CLANs were commissioned and funded jointly between the Legal Services Commission (LSC)¹ and local authorities (Legal Services Commission, 2006). Through partnership working and joint funding, CLACs and CLANs were expected to deliver integrated advice and outreach advice for particularly vulnerable groups. CLACs and CLANs were a controversial initiative (see for example, Griffith, 2008) because they concentrated LSC and local authority funding for services in social welfare law (i.e. debt, employment, welfare benefits, housing and community care) into one contract, thereby reducing the number of outlets offering publicly funded legal advice. CLACs, the focus of this article, pulled together key services in a geographical area into a single entity. CLANs consisted of a consortium of providers supplying complementary services.

The aim of CLACs was to provide clients with an 'integrated and seamless' advice service for social welfare and family law problems. The services were intended to offer a 'one-stop shop' for clients with multiple legal needs. They were also supposed to meet legal needs from diagnosis and information through to advice and assistance and legal representation in complex court proceedings. Depending on their needs, clients were therefore routed through a system that potentially included: a short diagnostic advice session provided by a generalist advisor; a generalist, often one-off, advice session; and referral to one or more specialist advisors for more complex problems. The advice offered in CLACs encompassed advice for issues such as problems to do with receiving welfare benefits, workplace disputes, problems with landlords, family issues and debt. CLAC services were targeted toward disadvantaged groups, especially those who did not access mainstream services, such as certain black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and clients with mental health problems.

At the time of the research, five CLACs were open and delivering services to clients. These were located in Gateshead, Portsmouth, Leicester, Derby and Hull. Providers of the services included not-for-profit organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureaux, and private sector organisations such as law firms and A4E; in most CLACs, a consortia of organisations provided the service.

At the height of the policy initiative, in autumn 2010, there were eight CLACs and two CLANs. As a result of reforms set out in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act (Ministry of Justice, 2012), around 75 per cent of CLACs' and CLANs' legal aid funded work was removed from their scope. All contracts for CLAC and CLAN services came to an end in March 2013, and joint contracts with local authorities no longer exist in those geographical areas.²

Methodology

The research reported here adopted a triangulated qualitative design, including advice session observations and first and follow-up interviews with both clients and advisors.

Fieldwork was carried out in three of the Centres in 2009, starting with three day familiarisation and logistical visits to the CLACs. Subsequently, two researchers were embedded for one week in each selected CLAC, observing advice sessions and conducting first interviews with clients and advisors. The researchers returned two weeks after the first visit, and carried out in-depth interviews with clients who had been observed and consented to a second interview. Subsequent in-depth interviews were also conducted with a sample of advisors who had been observed. Together these data elements resulted in 169 separate data units.

A total of forty-two advice sessions were observed, with observation sessions covering all advice levels, diagnostic, generalist and specialist, and encompassing the full range of areas of law in which CLACs were delivering services. The length of advice sessions varied from around ten minutes to two hours. Researchers captured on a pro forma a number of details about the sessions, including clients and their demeanour, and who else was present.

Client and advisor interviews were carried out for the advice sessions observed. The total number of clients who agreed to first interview was forty-one. First stage interviews took place immediately after the advice session, with one researcher interviewing the client, and the other the advisor. All interviews were exploratory and interactive in form, and were based on a topic guide which included exploring clients' motivations for attending the CLAC and how they prepared for the advice session. First advisor interviews explored a number of themes including perceptions of interacting and communicating with the client and deciding on courses of action.

Clients who completed a first interview were invited to take part in a second interview. The total number of second client interviews was twenty-nine.³ Second interviews were all conducted away from the advice centres under study, either in clients' own homes or at a community venue. The interviews explored the social and economic circumstances of the client and their routes and pathways to the CLAC, in addition to other themes such as progress with the problem raised at the advice centre.

Second interviews were also carried out with a purposive (non-probability) sample of fifteen advisors designed to include a range of demographics, experience and specialisms. Advisors were asked, among other themes, to describe the factors which made it easy or difficult to work with clients and to identify their problems, and about the use of referrals and signposting.

All interviews with clients and advisors were digitally recorded, with permission, and later transcribed verbatim.

Extensive qualitative data were generated through the research, enabling wide-ranging analysis. The data gathered via observation and interview were analysed using the 'framework' method, an approach to qualitative data analysis developed during the 1980s at the National Centre for Social Research in London (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994) and later incorporated into a standalone Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQ-DAS) package. The central component of the method is the thematic framework which is used to classify and organise the data according to key themes, concepts and subtopics.

Using the 'framework' method, the transcripts and observation records were subjected to a rigorous content analysis. The data were explored using descriptive

accounts and explanatory accounts. Further classificatory and interpretative analyses were carried out and these form the basis of the findings reported here. The findings are illustrated with the use of quotations.

The key themes to emerge from the analysis which are reported here are an introductory section on the profile of service users and their problems, followed by sections on how family and friends support advice-seeking from initial encouragement to seek advice right through to attending advice sessions. The last results section highlights the potential and expectation on the part of some advisors that family and friends also assist after expert advice has been given.

Results

Service users and their problems

The clients themselves were of a variety of ages, ranging from around eighteen to the mid-sixties, and were divided almost equally between men and women. Some were from BME groups and some were from other European countries. The profile of the clients and advice sessions observed during the observation fieldwork stage of the study is shown in [Table 1](#).

One of the most noticeable client characteristics was the prevalence of health problems. In some cases, these were associated with the presenting problem, for example in relation to benefits claims; for others, their ability to cope with their problem was affected by their physical or mental health. Importantly, clients' ongoing health problems impacted on their ability to participate in the advice sessions. Memory problems due to substance misuse, chronic brain disorders such as epilepsy, and earlier brain injury such as stroke, sometimes interfered with clients' recall of facts and detail.

Clients presented at their advice session with a wide range of problems. The most common problems were associated with welfare benefits and these were often presented as mistakes on the part of benefits offices, as refusals or reductions in benefits or as overpayments. In several cases clients sought help with the completion of benefit application forms:

just glad these places exist. I'd be stuck without them. When you're scared of forms you're in the dark a bit.

The next most common problems were debt and employment problems. Several clients presented with family and housing problems. Clients presented with problem clusters, but often wanted help with a particular aspect of the cluster. Several clients were already being seen by the CLAC service about other issues. In total, thirty of the cases observed involved more than one problem. Clustering took different forms and included interrelated and unrelated problem clusters. Problems with debt, welfare benefits and employment were at the heart of the clusters observed.

'Signposting' and encouragement to seek advice

The data illustrate the crucial role of others and the local community in directing and encouraging people to seek advice. Indeed, the most common reason for attending the CLAC was other people's recommendations or local organisations' 'signposting', i.e. being

Table 1 Client and session profile of the observations

Variable	Number of clients
Gender	
Male	19
Female	25
Age	
18–19	1
20–29	7
30–39	15
40–49	7
50–59	7
60+	7
Ethnicity	
White British	29
White other	5
Asian	7
Black African	3
Illness/Disability	
No	22
Yes	22
Advice session type	
Diagnostic	3
Generalist	21
Specialist	18
Category of specialism	
Debt	4
Welfare benefits	7
Employment	1
Family	3
Housing	3

told where to go for expert help. Local organisations that had signposted included the Citizen’s Advice Bureau, the local council and private law firms.

The role of family and friends at this very first stage of advice-seeking can be seen on a continuum of involvement. Sometimes it derived from family and friends knowing what the service was able to offer:

Through one of the ladies at University. They said the best idea is to just go to the advice centre because the people who can help you know the law.

Knowledge was sometimes based on actual experience:

A friend of mine advised me to go and see them regarding my particular matter. She kind of had the same problem as me. And I thought if she was going to go there, then it was a good idea if I went there, too, because we had the same situation and stuff.

At its most involved, family and friends played an instrumental role in assisting people to access advice:

My mum set it all up for me to come here and that.

Once clients had been for advice, they in turn 'spread the word' of the existence of the advice centre, so that others in their social network could also profit from the advice on offer. It was notable that almost all of the clients interviewed said that they would recommend the service to others:

Since this was all done, I've recommended it to two or three people, and I know one that actually has been here.

I've already sent my friend to there the other day to help her sort her water rates out . . . As soon as I find out anywhere I tell everyone 'go there' . . . You're stuck aren't you if you don't know how to do it yourself.

Clients further reported that they would recommend the service to others because it was free, confidential and accessible:

I would tell them to . . . you know it's open five days a week, it's a drop-in centre, you don't need to make an appointment.. Go down, ask them, they'll give you advice on what you can do and what you can't do, so instead of panicking go down.

Knowledge and perceptions of service identity: the importance of community

As illustrated above, clients had found out about the CLAC service through social networks. At the relatively early stage of existence of the CLAC initiative, there were many clients who had limited knowledge on what exactly the Centres were able to offer. Importantly though, where clients were able to articulate a clearer understanding of the CLAC, perceptions focused around the provision of a service for the community:

Because it caters for all the community, not just like separate little areas.

I get the feeling that it's somewhere as a community we can go and seek help in different areas of law.

It is interesting to note the use of 'we' in the above quote, and the sense of the advice service being there for a community, further reinforcing the findings of the above section on family and friends in the locality recommending a local advice centre.

Clients felt that the service was aimed at more vulnerable populations, particularly those who were unable to pay:

I think it's kind of like a citizen's lawyer, where ordinary citizens can go and get legal advice on different aspects. And perhaps for those people who cannot afford to go to private lawyers.

The word community is key to me to kind of like, it's more to do with the community rather than just affluent people.

It's helping the working class basically.

These quotes illustrate the importance attached to advice being for a community and that a sense of belonging and identification engendered a certain level of trust in the advice centre.

However, despite clients identifying that the service was for the community, a consistent theme emerging from the research interviews with clients and advisors was that client knowledge about service scope and expectations often shaped the advice session and impacted on clients' willingness to raise additional issues. Some clients were well-informed; however, there were many clients who had no, or limited, knowledge of what the CLACs were able to offer, and as a consequence did not ask about additional issues. Clients also sometimes had unrealistic expectations of what the advisor could do. As one client described:

I was just hoping someone would make it go away and take over from me and just leave me alone.

Support at the advice session

Clients who came to the CLAC had typically attempted to manage their problem(s) themselves and had reached a crisis point in the problem which they could no longer manage without expert help. Observation and interview data provided evidence that interviewees had been suffering increasing amounts of stress and anxiety as a result of their problems, and some felt their mental health was at risk. Some had tried, unsuccessfully, to get help and advice from other sources, and described feeling increasingly frustrated and distressed by their problems, saying that they felt 'stuck' and the Centre was the 'last resort':

Didn't know what to do: it's a problem that I've been unable to resolve myself. I'm very distressed and disturbed by the situation.

Drop-in was greatly valued by clients as it enabled them to access services quickly following a decision to seek advice. Advisors also highlighted the advantages of drop-in for the type of clients using the services, given the seriousness and urgency of problems and client vulnerability. However, there were disadvantages to drop-in services, especially where demand for advisors led to long waiting times and in some cases to clients being turned away.

As well as being key in the process of decision-making about going to the CLAC for help, members of a client's support network often accompanied clients to advice sessions. Family and friends were observed fulfilling a variety of functions, such as translation, moral support, information and confirmation providers, and a 'voice' when clients were very vulnerable. For example, one client with learning difficulties, who attended the advice centre and the research interview with his parent, relied on his mother to answer many of the advisor's questions (and the questions during the research interview). Conversely, a young man who attended on his own regretted in his research interview that his parent was unable to come with him to provide support and explain his debt problem to the advisor. A client from Lithuania who spoke little English was accompanied by her brother, who took a leading role in the advice session as a translator.

The widespread experience of physical and mental health problems and confidence issues among clients could impact on their ability to participate in the advice sessions;

support from a family member or friend was important for these clients, in particular at the first advice session. Some were stressed and anxious about the prospect of having to ask a stranger for help. For some it was the first time they had spoken to anybody outside of their family about what was happening. Clients described feeling 'scared' and 'ashamed' about having to ask for help.

It was not uncommon to have several adults attend an advice session, and this could be challenging for advisors, as this advisor describes:

The more people in the interview room, the more difficult it is. People come with their mum . . . or their interpreter . . . or sometimes three or four of them. A couple will come together. And then you're managing a meeting . . . and that's a general problem I think.

There were also several instances of 'proxy clients', where somebody sought advice at the CLAC for a relative or a friend who could not attend in person. Typically these 'clients' were representing somebody who was either physically unable to get to the Centre themselves, or who was unable to ask for the help they needed because of a learning, mental health or language difficulty. For example, in one case a woman sought advice about her sister who had been hospitalised because of mental health problems.

After expert advice: a continuing role for family and friends?

In providing advice to clients, advisors made judgements about a client's capability to follow the course of action they suggested, and judgements on how the steps to be taken in furthering the case should be divided between themselves and the client. Health factors and any medication which might affect a client's abilities also had to be taken into account when tailoring services, because of their effect on client capacity. Some clients were very forthcoming about their conditions, enabling advisors to adjust next steps accordingly. Advisors recognised the advantages to the organisation of tailoring services; by encouraging clients able to manage tasks for themselves, advisor time could be allocated to clients with lower capability. However, advisors were not always successful in forming judgements about when to place more responsibility on the client. The data showed that specialist advisors were particularly responsive to client vulnerabilities and had more time in which to assess them.⁴

Advisors also took into account clients' family circumstances when tailoring next steps. For example, one advisor felt that a client had wanted more help with a consumer problem than could be provided, and that his son could provide assistance if needed. She felt that where clients could do things, then they should be encouraged to do so:

we do ask clients to, if they're able to do things like this themselves, you know, if they are more than capable of doing so, then we stress that they do it because we run a drop-in centre, so we want to avoid people coming back with the same problem . . .

Some advisors implied that client capability could be fostered or improved, and mentioned the notion of empowerment. A specialist advisor felt that it 'empowered' the client to do things for themselves, and that if a client was not vulnerable, then an advisor could say, 'it's your problem'. However, vulnerable clients were looking for, and needed, intensive support from the service.

Table 2 Typology of support provided by family and friends in the advice-setting

Pre-advice	
Peer referrers	Recommending advice service based on knowledge or actual experience of advice
Facilitators	Assisting people to access advice, for example, through setting up appointments, providing transport
At advice session	
Passive supporters	Giving moral support at advice session through presence
Translators	Providing language translation at advice session
Speakers	Giving information on behalf of vulnerable clients at advice session
Advice seekers	Seeking advice on behalf of a client unable to attend in person
Post advice	
Action takers	Assisting with paperwork or phone calls after advice session and/or continuing to take action on behalf of clients.

Conclusions

Drawing on comprehensive qualitative research of advice provision, the results presented in this article show the key role family and friends have in the advice-seeking process, highlighting that advice pathways are not trodden alone. The findings are consistent with those of Rickwood and Braithwaite (1994), Pescosolido and Boyer (1999) and Vogel *et al.* (2007) on the role of informal networks in advice-seeking. They mirror Cameron *et al.*'s (1993) findings on significant others encouraging initial advice-seeking. The qualitative findings presented in this article elaborate on the results of the survey of CLAC users (Buck *et al.*, 2010), which showed high percentages of advice seekers being encouraged to seek advice, being signposted and/or being accompanied to the advice centre by family, friends and work colleagues.

Family and friends provide support for advice-seeking for rights issues at the very beginning of people's advice journeys, with encouragement to seek expert help and through signposting to sources of advice. Family and friends therefore have the potential to 'transmit' help-seeking behaviour; through telling family and friends with similar problems about the advice service, the client can pass on experiences and can encourage advice-seeking. These benefits confirm Gourash's (1978) hypothesis that members of social networks affect help-seeking in a number of ways, including buffering stress, as screening and referral agents to professional services, and by transmitting norms, attitudes and values about help-seeking. The importance of family and friends continues in the actual advice-setting, with members of the client's support network often accompanying clients to advice sessions. Our evidence highlights the role that social networks and the local community play in decision-making processes, in informal referrals to expert services, in transferring trust on to the advice centre and in ongoing support in the advice environment and beyond. A typology of the nature of the actual support provided is presented in Table 2.

Given the dearth of research on how family and friends influence advice-seeking for rights problems, policy development and delivery has taken little notice of the potential, and in many cases necessity, of family and friends in legal advice-seeking. The results presented in this article shed light on this previously under-researched area and suggest a range of policy implications, as well as the need for further research.

Research and policy has taken account of the valuable role played by professionals (Pleasence *et al.*, 2004, Legal Services Commission, 2005), such as health and social care workers, in ‘problem noticing’, signposting and referrals to legal advice services. However, the contribution made by family and friends has been overlooked. When considering publicity and advertising for services, it is necessary to think beyond the individual with the rights problem. Thinking creatively about targeting could include, for example, focusing efforts on reaching the immediate family members of young adults who may be in danger of becoming indebted.

Going beyond ‘problem noticing’, signposting and referrals, with recent pressure on publicly funded advice services (Cabinet Office, 2012), friends and family may find themselves taking on more tasks in problem resolution. This could include helping to complete benefits forms, making phone calls or navigating internet advice sources. It could also include helping with organising paperwork and assisting with follow-up steps after formal advice has been provided, as was already expected by advisors interviewed as part of this research. If the role of family and friends is expanded further research will be necessary to understand both the effectiveness and consequences of this.

A connection can be drawn here between the role of family, friends and the local community in assisting people with rights problems, and the Coalition government’s ‘Big Society’ and individual responsibility agenda. An emphasis on both localism (see for example, Lowndes and Pratchett, 2011; Padley, 2013) and on individual responsibility (for example, Lister, 2011; Clery *et al.*, 2013) resonates with an increased role for informal volunteer networks and local community services in helping people deal with rights problems. This is in the context of the landscape of legal advice provision having just entered a period of significant change in England and Wales. The LASPO Act removed, from April 2013, much of social welfare and private family law from the scope of the legal aid scheme. Early indications for social welfare law from the Cabinet Office through the Advice Services Transition Fund (Cabinet Office, 2012) highlight a continuing desire to bring together providers in partnerships and to use different channels to reach vulnerable people in need of support.

The finding about how vulnerable people, in particular, rely on the physical presence of ‘friendly others’ in the advice setting needs to be taken into account in service delivery. This includes simple, practical arrangements, such as having a big enough room to accommodate the client and their supporting people. It also includes advisors being able to advise in context and sensitively to all those attending the advice interview. With increasing emphasis on moving away from face-to-face advice delivery (underlined by proposals in the LASPO Act for a single telephone gateway for publicly funded civil legal advice), it would be easy to neglect the role of family and friends when designing new service structures. For those people reliant on third-party support, telephone-based services need to accommodate three-way communication possibilities, and have clear protocols and procedures for gaining consent from clients for third-party involvement.

A further policy implication arising out of the findings is how to mitigate the disadvantage people without family and friends may experience. Those who lead isolated lives and are not linked into local networks may be at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to signposting to, and support throughout, an advice-seeking journey. The role of (legal) outreach advice (for example, Buck *et al.*, 2009, Forell and Gray, 2009) in providing services to isolated members of communities is important here. As the research presented in this article only included people who succeeded in their advice-seeking,

further research focussing on those who do not seek advice, and whether the existence or otherwise of a social network has any impact on this, would be useful. Networks are clearly important in encouraging and signposting people to advice. For people without these networks, the role of others such as health professionals and social workers takes on a crucial importance.

In sum, the research illustrates that clients need to be advised 'in context'. Clients live within households and experience legal problems not in isolation. People even seek advice for rights problems on other people's behalf. In policy and service delivery terms, this means that the advice process cannot solely be structured around individuals. The findings presented in this article provide new evidence on how family and friends play a key role in advice-seeking for rights problems. More research is needed in this area, in order to ensure service delivery effectively accounts for their contribution.

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Notes

1 The LSC was a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Ministry of Justice, brought into being under the Access to Justice Act 1999 and thereby replacing the Legal Aid Board. The LSC was in turn replaced by the Legal Aid Agency in April 2013, becoming an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Justice.

2 Irrespective of the reforms set out in LASPO, the evaluation showed that whilst there were many benefits to clients of integrated advice provision (see Buck *et al.*, 2010, Smith *et al.*, 2013), the policy initiative had encountered challenges related to joint funding initiatives, partnership working and the cost and lead-in time of the initiative (Fox *et al.*, 2010, 2011).

3 Three clients were not invited for second interviews because they were regarded by researchers as particularly vulnerable and unable to give fully informed consent. Three clients did not wish to participate in the second interview. There were no second depth interviews conducted with a further six clients although they were scheduled. One client could not attend because of illness, the interview of a second client was suspended because the interviewers felt that the client was no longer able to provide informed consent (this client had mental health problems), and in a further four cases the clients did not arrive at the scheduled interview time and could not be traced for rescheduling.

4 In respect of advisor training, the research primarily focussed on advisors' assessments of whether clients had multiple problems, and therefore looked at training across legal categories. The findings suggest that training with respect to client capacity should also be a focus of future research.

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