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## **Changing Landscape of Advice Provision: Online Forums and Social Media Run by McKenzie Friends**

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### **Abstract**

Without an affordable option for face-to-face legal advice post-LASPO, many Litigants in Person (LIPs) turn to online sources and potentially McKenzie Friends (MFs), who are litigation friends that help LIPs on a voluntary basis or for a fee. Within the legal community, serious concerns have been serious concerns about the quality of information and advice provided by MFs online. Such concerns are especially important in private and public law children cases, where the well-being and safety of children are at stake.

The paper draws on forums and social media groups to investigate queries posted by parents and corresponding MFs' responses. The methodological framework derives from corpus linguistics methods, which enable the quantitative identification of linguistic patterns in the posts and subsequently lead to a qualitative analysis of MFs' functions within the area of online advice provision. The focus on linguistic framing as well as the content of responses allows for the categorisation of MFs' roles in light of their potentially clashing communicative aims, such as addressing LIPs' needs and supporting them with access to information and advice and at the same time establishing MFs' professional standing in legal settings and promoting their services. The findings show that although MFs often provide useful step-by-step advice on procedural and legal matters, the linguistic framing of such advice may potentially relay negative perceptions of the justice system. The paper discusses the ramifications of this online advice provision and aims to contribute to the current debate on professionalising MFs.

### **Keywords**

McKenzie Friends, litigants in person, corpus linguistics, public and private child law, social media.

### **Introduction**

The paper explores information and advice available to Litigants in Person (LIPs) on social media and online forums focusing on private or public child law. Cuts in legal aid following the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) left many litigants without an opportunity to receive legal advice and representation for free. In private family proceedings, for instance, the number of cases where both parties act in person has

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more than doubled since the pre-LASPO numbers in 2013.<sup>1</sup> While in other types of civil cases there are alternative sources of information and advice (such as no win no fee solicitors for civil claims, duty solicitor schemes for housing matters), the long-standing tradition of legal aid in the family law context meant that the third sector was initially not covering this area of law at all, and was then over-stretched post-LASPO to accommodate additional requests.<sup>2</sup> Discussing how the legal profession, third sector and public legal education sector adjusted to the post-LASPO situation, Maclean and Eekelaar<sup>3</sup> have investigated a wide range of options currently available to LIPs, such as online resources, pro bono schemes, unbundling services, law clinics, LIP Support Strategy initiatives, Support through Court volunteer scheme and other third sector initiatives (Citizens Advice or local community advice centres). Despite these positive developments, such initiatives are limited in their geographical reach, the type of representation/advice they can offer, and the number of people they can effectively support. For family law, there is still an alarmingly low number of options, as only some CAB centres and advice clinics provide advice on family law (for example, CAB in the Royal Courts of Justice, CLOCK Network, Leeds University or Birmingham City University law clinics). The lack of affordable legal representation has an impact on the well-being and safety of children in private and some public children cases. For instance, public family cases which no longer qualify for legal aid include children residing in unofficial fostering arrangements where there is a risk of harm, and cases involving children subject to Special Guardianship Orders in the period before the local authority starts care proceedings (as it is only with the initiation of care proceedings that their parents can obtain legal aid).<sup>4</sup> Lack of access to legal representation in such situations has an adverse impact on children and their parents/guardians.

The circumstances where LIPs find themselves without an affordable option for legal representation are favourable for business expansion by fee-charging McKenzie Friends, (MFs).<sup>5</sup> MFs are traditionally defined as litigation friends who help LIPs by (1) providing moral support; (2) taking notes; (3) helping with case papers; (4) quietly giving advice on any aspect of the conduct of the case.<sup>6</sup> However, some MFs are providing advice on law, tactics, case management and even seeking rights of audience (the right to speak on behalf of LIPs in court).<sup>7</sup> This gives cause for concern: MFs are unregulated, often uninsured, and without proven expertise; they neither owe a duty to the court nor have an ethical code; they may

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<sup>1</sup>Ministry of Justice, *Family Court Statistics Quarterly, England and Wales, July to September 2019* [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/857335/FCSQ\\_July\\_to\\_September\\_2019\\_2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/857335/FCSQ_July_to_September_2019_2.pdf), last accessed 19 May 2020.

<sup>2</sup> M Maclean and J Eekelaar, *After the Act: Access to Family Justice after LASPO 2013* (Bloomsbury, 2019)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Ch 11, sec I.

<sup>4</sup> The Law Society of England and Wales. *LASPO DENIED? LASPO four years on: The Law Society Review* (2017) [www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/laspo-4-years-on](http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/laspo-4-years-on), last accessed 19 May 2020.

<sup>5</sup> L Smith, E Hitchings and M Sefton, *A study of fee-charging McKenzie Friends and their work in private family law cases* (Universities of Bristol and Cardiff, 2017) [www.barcouncil.org.uk/media/573023/a\\_study\\_of\\_fee-charging\\_mckenzie\\_friends.pdf](http://www.barcouncil.org.uk/media/573023/a_study_of_fee-charging_mckenzie_friends.pdf), last accessed 19 May 2020. KA Barry, 'McKenzie Friends and litigants in person: widening access to justice or foes in disguise?' (2019) 31(1) *Child and Family Law Quarterly*.

<sup>6</sup> *Practice Guidance: McKenzie Friends (Civil and Family Courts)* (2010) [www.familylaw.co.uk/system/uploads/attachments/0000/8125/McKenzie\\_Friends\\_Practice\\_Guidance\\_July\\_2010.pdf](http://www.familylaw.co.uk/system/uploads/attachments/0000/8125/McKenzie_Friends_Practice_Guidance_July_2010.pdf), last accessed 19 May 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Smith *et al*, n 5 above.

have a low awareness of the duty of confidentiality or the need to register with the Information Commissioner's Office; there is little clarity around fee charging levels.<sup>8</sup>

The research study presented here draws on a form of linguistic analysis – corpus linguistics – using semi-automated methods to identify grammatical and lexical patterns in a body of texts taken from online interactions between LIPs and MFs, ordering individual words or combinations of words according to their frequency or the strength of statistical measures.<sup>9</sup> This methodology can shed light on the following issues: (1) LIPs' concerns related to private and public child law; (2) LIPs' needs for guidance, procedural information and legal advice; (3) functions performed by MFs on social media and online forums; (4) characteristics of LIP–MF interactions; (5) the role of MFs in the post-LASPO climate of access to justice for LIPs. The study is unique in three ways: it is the first study to examine the actual advice provided by a wide range of MFs in response to LIPs' questions; the focus on language use during the LIP–MF interactions allows us to reflect on how MFs build rapport with LIPs and market their services; semi-automated text analysis enables the identification of common patterns in responses, leading to a categorisation of MFs' roles. The paper thus contributes to the policy debate on the role of MFs by illustrating what LIPs could potentially find helpful in MFs' services and how MFs distinguish themselves in the remit of legal advice provision.

### Existing research

A key consideration in the debate on the role of MFs should be LIPs' vulnerability and susceptibility to MFs' unprofessional conduct and biased advice.<sup>10</sup> The inherent nature of family proceedings, not least given their impact on parties' private lives and children's living arrangements, generally leaves LIPs in these cases more vulnerable, irrespective of their social, educational, professional or financial background.<sup>11</sup> However, the background of some LIPs exacerbates their vulnerability. Such demographic characteristics as low educational background, low income, and mental health problems or other impairments and disabilities increase some LIPs' vulnerabilities;<sup>12</sup> as a result, socially vulnerable people are disproportionately affected by legal problems.<sup>13</sup> As legal problems often cluster with additional social, financial and health-related difficulties,<sup>14</sup> socially vulnerable people tend to experience more serious problems and bear more serious legal consequences.<sup>15</sup> A lack of understanding of legal problems and inadequate ability or insufficient opportunities to solve

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> This is further explained in the data collection and methodology section below.

<sup>10</sup> *Reforming the Courts' Approach to McKenzie Friends: Consultation Response* (2019) [www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/MF-Consultation-LCJ-Response-Final-Feb-2019.pdf](http://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/MF-Consultation-LCJ-Response-Final-Feb-2019.pdf), last accessed 19 May 2020; Barry, n 5 above.

<sup>11</sup> Smith *et al*, n 5 above, [24].

<sup>12</sup> R Lee and T Tkacukova, 'A study of litigants in person in Birmingham Civil Justice Centre' (2017) 2 *CEPLER Working Paper Series* [http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/3014/1/cepler\\_working\\_paper\\_2\\_2017.pdf](http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/3014/1/cepler_working_paper_2_2017.pdf), last accessed 19 May 2020.

L Trinder, R Hunter, E Hitchings, J Miles, R Moorhead, L Smith, M Sefton, V Hinchly, K Bader and J Pearce, *Litigants in person in private family law cases* (MoJ, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> P Pleasence and N J Balmer, 'Justice & the capability to function in society' (2019) 148(1) *Daedalus* 140.

<sup>14</sup> R Moorhead and M Robinson, *A trouble shared – legal problems clusters in solicitors' and advice agencies* (2006)

[semanticscholar.org/bed9/8ed9fa30719e0aedb99bb979b638e15cbcda.pdf?\\_ga=2.166562942.1908626054.1572004726-1564447268.1572004726](http://semanticscholar.org/bed9/8ed9fa30719e0aedb99bb979b638e15cbcda.pdf?_ga=2.166562942.1908626054.1572004726-1564447268.1572004726), last accessed 19 May 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Pleasence and Balmer, n 12 above.

them also generates decreased legal capabilities.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, even without any additional complications, LIPs generally struggle to find relevant information and advice or prepare for the hearings adequately and would often appreciate more support.<sup>17</sup> The impenetrable obscurity of legal discourse and unfamiliarity with court procedures creates a further layer of cognitive and communicative obstacles for litigants without prior experience of court processes.<sup>18</sup> One consequence of their decreased legal capabilities and unfamiliarity with legal procedures and legal discourse is that LIPs may not be able to assess the quality of MFs' services or recognise biased advice.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the acknowledgement of potential problems with MFs, recent research studies tentatively recognise that lay advisers can be beneficial for guiding LIPs through the court process.<sup>20</sup> The Judicial Executive Board's consultation report *Reforming the Courts' Approach to McKenzie Friends*<sup>21</sup> illustrates the polarity of views on granting MFs the right of audience as well as potentially creating a standard form notice, Code of Conduct or a Plain Language Guide for LIPs and MFs. On the one hand, there is a clear benefit in having MFs support LIPs in cases involving domestic abuse<sup>22</sup> since MFs, for instance, can present relevant points of law, question witnesses and address the court on behalf of vulnerable litigants, as well as provide moral support to their clients. On the other hand, it is important not to underestimate the possibility that some MFs are agenda-driven or unprofessional in their conduct.<sup>23</sup> The consultation response also notes the current lack of quantitative or qualitative research on the advantages or disadvantages of having LIPs supported by MFs.<sup>24</sup>

The only large scale empirical research on the topic so far is the study on fee-charging MFs in private family proceedings by Smith et al.<sup>25</sup> The study draws on seven court observations and linked interviews (with some of the MFs, their clients and the opposing parties) as well as additional interviews with 20 MFs and 20 LIPs who used MFs' services; both groups in the latter sample were initially approached predominantly via online routes. The findings of that study show identify certain advantages in LIPs being supported by MFs, as most lay advisers: help move matters forward and negotiate a settlement; offer a more affordable option to address legal disputes; have a good working knowledge of court procedures; tend to be aware of the need to restrict their advice to the boundaries of MF roles and their experience and skills.<sup>26</sup> The limitations of the study, however, lie in its predominantly qualitative nature; the self-selecting sample of MFs; a sample of LIPs with mostly positive

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<sup>16</sup> H McDonald and Z Wei, 'How people solve legal problems: level of disadvantage and legal capability' (2016). 23 *Justice Issues* 1; Pleasence and Balmer, n 12 above.

<sup>17</sup> Lee and Tkacukova, n 12 above.

<sup>18</sup> T. Tkacukova, 'Communication in family court: Financial order proceedings from the perspective of litigants in person' (2016). 38(4) *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* 430.

<sup>19</sup> Economic Insight Limited, 2016. *Unregulated Legal Service Providers: Understanding Supply-side Characteristics, A report for the Legal Services Board*. London: Economic Insight Limited.

<sup>20</sup> Trinder et al, n 12 above; Smith et al, n 5 above; Barry, n 5 above.

<sup>21</sup> *Reforming the Courts' Approach to McKenzie Friends: Consultation Response*, n 10 above.

<sup>22</sup> Legal aid for domestic abuse cases is still available to those who satisfy eligibility conditions: [www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/impact-of-legal-aid-thresholds-for-victims-of-domestic-violence](http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/research/impact-of-legal-aid-thresholds-for-victims-of-domestic-violence), last accessed 19 May 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Smith et al, n 5 above; Barry, n 5 above.

<sup>24</sup> *Reforming the Courts' Approach to McKenzie Friends: Consultation Response*, n 10 above.

<sup>25</sup> Smith et al, n 5 above.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, [81].

experience; and the focus on MFs' court assistance, which minimises the potential for observing unprofessional conduct.

The qualitative nature of the study and a low number of MFs observed reflects a relatively infrequent presence of fee-paying MFs supporting LIPs in court settings; only 14 cases included a paid MF out of 846 private family hearings listed on the court days attended by the researchers.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Trinder et al<sup>28</sup> noted only three fee-charging MFs out of 24 MFs accompanying LIPs in private family cases during their pre-LASPO research conducted at the beginning of 2013; the Legal Services Consumer Panel report<sup>29</sup> also predicted a low number of consumers of MFs' services. In a more recent qualitative study, Barry<sup>30</sup> reported that out of 36 LIPs interviewed, two were assisted by MFs. The low numbers recorded in these studies are not necessarily representative of the scale of the out-of-court support provided by MFs; the abundance of websites, online forums and social media groups run by MFs for marketing purposes<sup>31</sup> indicate MFs' strong online presence.

Smith et al<sup>32</sup> also recognise that it is online activities of MFs (and other advisers who do not necessarily identify themselves as MFs) and their pre-hearing advice that are of more concern in terms of access to justice for LIPs. The importance of researching MFs' online presence is further demonstrated by Melville's study,<sup>33</sup> based on the discourse analysis of the websites (and social media threads linked to these websites) run by 13 MFs associated with Fathers' Rights Groups: the contents of such websites tend to project strong misogynistic messages putting children's rights at risk (for instance, mothers are depicted as obstructing contact or falsely accusing fathers of domestic violence). Melville<sup>34</sup> shows that when promoting their services online, MFs frame family courts as being difficult to navigate and lawyers as expensive, unnecessarily adversarial and detached from children's interests; in contrast, MFs' services are presented as child-focused and supportive of shared parenting. Despite the significance of these observations, the study does not fully reflect the wider picture of MFs' social media presence because the analysis draws from static web sites without the interactive element and the focus is on a specific group of MFs.

Building on the findings from the existing research, the paper focuses on online interactions between LIPs and MFs in order to reflect on LIPs' needs and vulnerability and then to explore the quality of legal information and advice provided by MFs in relation to public and private children matters. The analysis of MFs' responses focuses on their content, the functions performed by lay advisers and the linguistic framing of such advice. The emphasis on language use and communicative strategies provides an insight into how MFs' advice is constructed, what inferences can be drawn from such advice and how lay advisers build their professional image online. In drawing on corpus linguistics methods, the paper also illustrates

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, [11].

<sup>28</sup> Trinder *et al*, n 12 above, [11].

<sup>29</sup> Legal Services Consumer Panel, *Fee-charging McKenzie Friends* (April 2014), 17.

<sup>30</sup> Barry, n 5 above.

<sup>31</sup> A Melville, "'Giving Hope to Fathers": Discursive Constructions of Families and Family Law by McKenzie Friends Associated With Fathers' Rights Groups' (2017) 31(2) *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 147; LSPC, n 29 above, [12].

<sup>32</sup> Smith *et al*, n 5 above.

<sup>33</sup> Melville, n 31 above.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

how applied linguistics can be used to contribute to socio-legal research and inform the legal practitioners about the nature of the legal-lay communication.

### **Data collection and methodology**

The methodological approach adopted for the study draws on corpus linguistics tools, which help identify linguistic patterns, quantify the data and thus enhance the objectivity of the subsequent qualitative analysis, which reflects not only on the type of posts provided but also on the pragmatic implications and linguistic framing of such advice. The advantage of using corpus linguistics methods to assist socio-legal qualitative research lies in (i) the speed of data analysis and (ii) the fact that quantifying individual lexical items (individual words or phrases) and identifying underlying linguistic patterns provides a context-specific extraction of representative quotes. As a data-driven, bottom-up approach, corpus linguistics provides an objective basis for semi-automated linguistic analysis and eliminates weaknesses that are sometimes associated with qualitative methods such as discourse analysis: subjective conclusions, selective extraction of features or de-contextualised examples.<sup>35</sup> The data selection criteria for this study followed corpus linguistics principles<sup>36</sup> designed to improve the robustness of the subsequent research: representativeness, sampling and balancing.<sup>37</sup>

The data for the study come from online groups and forums that are open to the public (or require the users to be registered but without any further verification) and primarily directed at LIPs or parents seeking advice from MFs on public or private child law. It is important to note that the term MFs covers a wide range of lay advisers, including family members, friends, legal charity volunteers, fee-charging MFs.<sup>38</sup> There is general agreement among legal professionals that the definition of MFs needs refinement,<sup>39</sup> and the term itself may need replacement in order to improve understanding and reflect MFs' roles more explicitly.<sup>40</sup> For the purposes of the study, it was important to work with a broad definition because online advisers do not always describe themselves as 'MFs' but do provide support and information. The data collection criteria thus reflect the flexibility that exists around MFs and their roles by incorporating different types of online advisers, forum moderators/administrators and facilitators of social media groups. This enables us to explore how online advisers position themselves and what online advice is available to LIPs irrespective of whether the advisers identify themselves as MFs, as this is unlikely to have an impact on LIPs' engagement with them. It was equally important to use a flexible definition of LIPs, as not all forum and social media users may have been actively engaged in court proceedings at the time and some could have been represented by a solicitor/barrister and only used social media to obtain additional advice.

The data was collected from platforms on which LIPs would typically post queries, such as those that appeared in top Google searches and attracted a constant flow of posts with initial

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<sup>35</sup> A McEnery and A Wilson, *Corpus Linguistics: An Introduction* (Edinburgh UP, 2001), 115.

<sup>36</sup> These principles include representativeness, sampling and balancing of texts to be included in a corpus; they are discussed in more detail later in the section).

<sup>37</sup> M Nelson, 'Building a Written Corpus: What are the basics', in A O'Keeffe and M McCarthy (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Corpus Linguistics* (Routledge, 2010), 56. T McEnery, A McEnery, R Xiao and Y Tono, *Corpus-based Language Studies: An Advanced Resource Book*. (Routledge, 2006), 13-21.

<sup>38</sup> LSCP, n 29 above, [2].

<sup>39</sup> Smith *et al*, n 5 above, [78].

<sup>40</sup> *Reforming the Courts' Approach to McKenzie Friends: Consultation Response*, n 10 above, [6-11].

queries, responses and comments. The search terms selected were based on terms mentioned in existing research<sup>41</sup> as well as headings in relevant AdviceNow guides,<sup>42</sup> which are easy-to-read information packs for LIPs, for example, on family court, child arrangements, contact with children, and support for fathers. Other methods used to search for relevant online platforms were to search for forums and groups identified in existing publications<sup>43</sup> and to follow up recommendation from legal professionals who come in contact with MFs<sup>44</sup> and who helped to identify Facebook groups run by MFs focusing specifically on queries in private and public child law.

Ethical considerations were different for publicly accessible online forums and closed Facebook groups. Public forums chosen for the study were available online without any registration; they therefore serve as an open source of information for LIPs who may be seeking answers to similar queries. As discussed by Melville,<sup>45</sup> the analysis of publicly available sources of information provides valuable insight into MFs' online activities and both users and administrators are making a conscious choice to use open platforms, rather than more private ones. Data collection from open forums thus meets ethics research criteria; the posts were nonetheless anonymised for better protection of the identity of the posters.

To collect the data from the closed Facebook groups, it was necessary to create a Facebook account linked to the project and send a message to forum facilitators with more information about the project and its aims. Access to all the groups was provided within days and it was encouraging to see that Facebook groups' facilitators welcomed the concept behind the research project. Since Facebook data access policy does not allow the data scraping approach, it was necessary to make a manual selection of relevant threads within the period of three months chosen for the data collection.<sup>46</sup> Although this slowed down the data collection process and reduced the overall number of threads that was feasible to collect, manual download allowed for a careful selection of relevant threads (for example, threads with decontextualized links not directly relevant to a specific query were excluded); this strengthened the corpus design and allowed for more detailed qualitative analysis.

The final data sample included threads from the three Facebook groups and five online forums collected within a period of three months (time period and titles of forums/groups are anonymised). Whereas all threads were scraped from forums, only 50% of Facebook threads were collected owing to the need to omit irrelevant threads (these usually included a link to a media article without a specific query from a LIP), the slow speed of manual data collection and complications with tracking threads arising from the fact that new posts change the location of active threads.<sup>47</sup> The overall size of the specialised corpus built for this study is

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<sup>41</sup> Lee and Tkacukova, n 12 above.

<sup>42</sup> [www.advicenow.org.uk/](http://www.advicenow.org.uk/), last accessed 19 May 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Smith *et al*, n 5 above; Lee and Tkacukova, n 12 above; Melville, n 31 above.

<sup>44</sup> Legal professionals were approached via the charity Transform Justice, <http://www.transformjustice.org.uk/>.

<sup>45</sup> Melville, n 31 above, [153].

<sup>46</sup> It was possible to scrape all forum threads posted within the three months' period; but since threads from Facebook groups had to be downloaded manually, only relevant ones were collected. The excluded threads contained links to media articles or judgments or simply shared jokes and thus did not contain specific queries from parents.

<sup>47</sup> Facebook search function is limited and was not helpful for identifying the threads once they move location, which meant that it was sometimes difficult to identify the threads and the data required a careful post-collection check to delete any duplicates or those threads that were not within the period for data collection.



178,811 words (70,196 words in the LIPs' sub-corpus; 39,417 in the MFs' sub-corpus; 69,194 words in the sub-corpus containing comments from other users, who are not MFs or the original poster in the thread); the corpus includes:

- 105 threads from three Facebook groups (FB1-3) run by McKenzie Friends (45 from FB1, 30 from FB2, 30 from FB3) which include responses from 31 MFs: two ex-lawyers, three ex-LIPs, 11 active<sup>48</sup> MFs and 15 MFs moderators/administrators (no information available whether they are fee-charging);
- 69 threads from open public forums (F1-5) run by forum facilitators who either claim to have legal background and provide legal information (17 from F1) or do not have any legal background and provide emotional support only (three from F2 for fathers, 24 from F3 for fathers, 19 from F4 for mothers, six from F5); all responses on forums were sent from the same administrative account, which makes it impossible to say how many MFs were involved.

The differences in the numbers of threads from individual platforms are influenced by the frequency of use and the availability of relevant threads during the period of data collection. The fact that 105 threads amount to half of Facebook threads available during the data collection period emphasises the high demand for advice via social media groups. It was important to include forums as well to represent a wider range of platforms which provide legal information and advice to LIPs. The collected data also reflect the gender imbalance in the availability of advice for parents; most of the groups/forums are for the general public irrespective of the parents' gender, but among the single-gender forums, there are more father-oriented ones than ones for mothers. Interestingly, the forums for fathers have MFs responding to questions (providing legal information, as in F2, or just moral support, as in F3), whereas similar platforms for mothers do not have a clearly delineated role for an administrator/forum facilitator and it is other forum users who provide advice and support. Since the sample contains two forums for fathers, it was also important to include at least one forum for mothers in order to reflect the relative availability of advice for fathers and mothers on social media; the other forums/groups do not define their user base according to the family role.

To ensure the objectivity of the corpus-based analysis, the data collected meet the following data selection principles:<sup>49</sup> representativeness (regular use of chosen forums/groups, appearance in top searches); balancing (number of threads proportionate to their use) and sampling (a wide range of platforms and threads). The corpus design and data pre-processing steps also contribute to the subsequent analysis. For instance, the analysed corpus includes a flexible system of sub-corpora: each contribution in a thread was tagged for the role of poster ('original poster' for initial LIPs' queries, 'MF' for MFs' responses, 'poster' for comments by other users); the type of source (name of Facebook group/public forum); and the type of MF (individual MFs were tagged with additional information where available, such as ex-LIP, ex-solicitor, forum moderator). The combination of sub-corpora allows for a variety of detailed comparative analyses<sup>50</sup> (such as LIPs' queries vs. MFs' responses). The pre-processing tasks performed on the corpus included automatic grammatical annotation (part-

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<sup>48</sup> These MFs are likely to charge fees as they refer to their experience in court representing LIPs, offer to private message LIPs or respond to LIPs' requests for MF contacts in specific locations.

<sup>49</sup> Nelson, n 37 above; McEnergy *et al*, n 37 above.

<sup>50</sup> McEnergy *et al*, n 37 above.



of-speech tagging – ‘parent/parents’ as nouns, ‘parental’ as adjective) and lemmatisation (converting inflected word forms to a single representation – the words ‘children’, ‘child’s’, ‘children’s’, ‘child’ belong to the same lemma ‘child’).

To give a basic example: it takes seconds for the compiled corpus to identify that the most frequent noun in the corpus is ‘child’. Conducting the search in the MF sub-corpus for the word ‘child’ allows us to explore in what context the word occurs. Figure 1 shows a screenshot (taken from the SketchEngine<sup>51</sup> interface) of a selection of several concordance lines (lines that show the search word(s) and the adjacent context) from the MF sub-corpus:

emotional wellbeing as well. The **children's** welfare is the paramount (that is, most important) cons  
There is an expectation that the **children's** needs will be put first by parents or other persons carir  
for them. In your post you say the **children** were removed two weeks ago from their parents so thi  
ago from their parents so this means that **children's** services may decide to seek orders from the court so i  
e court so it can make decisions about the **children** . If the matter has only recently gone to court:

Figure 1: Concordances for the lemma ‘child’ in the MF sub-corpus.

From the concordance lines above, we can see that MFs explain the importance of children’s welfare/needs (first two lines), the roles of children’s services (penultimate line) and potentially procedures about decision-making processes (the last line).<sup>52</sup> The context in which the lemma word ‘child’ occurs allows us to choose quotes that are representative of the overall context, such as focus on children welfare. Each concordance line can be further opened for more context and information on the source and MF from whom the quote comes.

The remainder of this article presents the results drawn from common corpus linguistic methods.<sup>53</sup> These methods include:

- word frequency lists: lists of words in a corpus ordered by their frequency
- n-gram frequency lists: n-grams are sequences of a specific number (n) of words
- concordance searches: a display of words/phrases which includes the adjacent textual content for each instance of a word/phrase – see Figure 1
- collocations: pairs of words which occur near one another within a predefined span size<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> The software SketchEngine was used for the majority of the analysis while additional analysis was performed using software currently in development with the working title OurSurveySays. Details about SketchEngine can be found here [www.sketchengine.eu/](http://www.sketchengine.eu/); details about OurSurveySays can be found here [rdues.bcu.ac.uk/oss.shtml](http://rdues.bcu.ac.uk/oss.shtml).

<sup>52</sup> The context of the third line is not relevant to the role of MFs as it only shows the word used in a specific situation – such lines were not include in the qualitative analysis on MFs’ roles.

<sup>53</sup> G Philip, ‘Corpus Linguistics’, in P Seargeant, A Hewings and S Pihlaja (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of English Language Studies* (Routledge, 2018), 361.

<sup>54</sup> Various statistical measures are used to assess the strength of association between the two words in each pair.

- keyness or keyword analyses: keyness assesses the difference in frequency of a word in one sub-corpus compared against another sub-corpus.<sup>55</sup>

These and other technical terms used in this article appear in the glossary in the appendix below.

These quantitatively-driven methods set the priorities and the focus for the qualitative analyses of the sub-corpora and enabled a careful consideration of lexical and grammatical aspects of individual posts. The combination of different methods helped us eliminate any potential negative impact on the analysis due to frequent spelling mistakes or ‘text speak’ forms in the posts (e.g. if a linguistic feature does not appear in n-grams, for instance, it appears in word frequency lists and concordances). The focus of qualitative analysis was guided by the quantitative results and the need to explore the wider themes and communicative goals during LIP–MF interactions. While the main quantitative results are summarised in the form of tables in the Appendix, the qualitative results guided by the quantitative findings are explored in depth in the following sections.

### Overview of LIPs’ queries

The starting point for exploring LIPs’ queries was guided by the most frequent keywords and n-grams<sup>56</sup> as these provide an overview of lexical and grammatical features which stand out in original posts as opposed to the responses. The top keywords in LIPs’ queries relate to family settings (*daughter, ex-partner, son*), health and social problems they are experiencing (*mental health, drug test, emotional abuse, child maintenance*), and court proceedings (*court hearing, high court, court date, first hearing*). The top n-grams, which reveal phrases and structural patterns in texts, show the high occurrence of negation of linguistic expressions for ‘abilities, wishes, obligations’ and ‘knowledge’ (*I don’t know, don’t want to, I can’t, I didn’t, she doesn’t, don’t think, don’t know what, don’t have*).

To contextualise these preliminary quantitative findings, it is important to analyse concordance lines qualitatively with the above-mentioned keywords and n-grams. For instance, the queries referring to ‘mental health’ show to what extent LIPs are vulnerable, while queries with the n-gram ‘I don’t know’ illustrate the despair common among LIPs on social media. The quotations in Table A present a selection of representative contexts in which the search terms occurred; the quotes come from the expanded concordance lines and include full sentences with the node words in bold (for an example of unexpanded concordance lines as they are displayed in the software, see Figure 1). One aspect to note is that the posts in Table A contain many informal expressions, misspelt words, missing punctuation and structurally incomplete sentences. The occurrence of such features should not be used to infer anything about posters’ literacy levels or written communication skills: many of these linguistic features are common in social media interactions and can be viewed

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<sup>55</sup> A list of keywords ordered according to the strength of keyness indicates the main differences between two (sub-)corpora.

<sup>56</sup> The lists of most frequent keywords and n-grams can be found in the Appendix.

as genre specific<sup>57</sup> or dependent on other extra-linguistic circumstances (such as typing on a computer vs. using a smartphone).

Table A	
	<b>mental health</b>
1a	no hope suffer with depression anxiety been diagnosed personality disorder and my children were subjected to my <b>mental health</b> issues drinking domestic violence is there any hope ( <i>Forum 1</i> )
2a	I can't as social won't let that happen as I've complained to much about them all and the police to. And as I've had <b>mental health</b> issues previous they're using that against me!!! ( <i>FB2</i> )
3a	one conviction of burglary and 4yrs of proof how i turned my life around for the better yet im the bad guy cz i have <b>mental health</b> ! i either give up now or ill end up dead ( <i>FB3</i> )
	<b>I don't know</b>
4a	Anyone had relocating problems and managed to go? Please help <b>I don't know</b> what to do, I do have solicitor but she's not offering much in way of advise. ( <i>Forum 5</i> )
5a	do you have any links to any case law please? <b>I don't know</b> what to search for So the bastard adopters have file to courts to adopt ( <i>FB2</i> )
6a	The case management is soon and <b>I don't know</b> what that means and I'm guessing the final hearing comes after that I'll appeal against everything ( <i>FB2</i> )
7a	but I feel like I've lost him march is way to far away I'm missing his first Christmas I don't think I can cope till march <b>I don't know</b> what else I can do. They have told me they can't change there care plan now they have asked for adoption ( <i>FB2</i> )

While the first set of quotes illustrates LIPs' concerns that their mental health is viewed negatively by social services (2a-3a), the concordance lines on the n-gram 'I don't know' indicate that LIPs struggle to find more information on court procedures (6a, 7a) and sometimes do not even know what to search for or what to do (4a-5a, 7a). The phrases related to the lack of comprehension (6a), the inability to identify legal problems (5a), the dissatisfaction with legal professionals (4a) or the legal process (7a) indicate decreased legal capability and higher risk for inaction when facing legal issues.<sup>58</sup> LIPs are thus facing a wide range of problems (1a, 7a) and need a holistic provision of advice<sup>59</sup> with emotional support embedded into legal advice in order to efficiently engage with court processes and procedures (1a-3a, 6a-7a).

In light of the above findings, it was important to examine the most frequent nouns related to the justice system (*court, social, order, judge, care, case, solicitor*) as these indicate the

<sup>57</sup> P Seargeant and C Tagg (eds), *The Language of Social Media: Identity and Community on the Internet* (Palgrave, 2014), 5-11.

<sup>58</sup> H M McDonald and J People, 'Legal capability and inaction for legal problems: knowledge, stress and cost' (2014) 41 *Updating Justice*, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Moorhead and Robinson, n 14 above.

perceptions on courts, the judiciary, lawyers, and on social services & CAF/CASS. The focus of the analysis was on exploring evaluative collocates<sup>60</sup> that co-occur with these words (in the examples below collocates are underlines and search/node words are in bold). The evaluative collocations from original posters and other users show that there are only two positive references in relation to judges ('We had a fab judge', 'good judge'); most of the negative collocations refer to gender inequality in parenthood ('disgraceful gender biased family **courts**', 'typical mother bias in feminist family **court** system') or the perceived passivity of courts to do something about parental alienation and long periods of time when parents cannot see their children ('**court** system is wrong', '**courts** ignore the presence of parent alienation', 'the **court** system fails to protect venerable children', 'social services and **courts** are all stupid they do not care about the parents'). This is a very different picture to the results of the LIP survey conducted in the Birmingham Civil Justice Centre by Lee and Tkacukova.<sup>61</sup> That survey, based on 193 questionnaire responses and 25 follow-up interviews, found that LIPs were generally happy with their court experience and judges; however, the fact that that survey was conducted within the court premises might have impacted the results, as explained in the study's methodology section. The examples above are, however, in line with Melville's<sup>62</sup> findings that MFs' websites linked to Fathers' Rights Groups ('FRGs') often address the perceived gender bias of courts.

There is a similarly clear pattern in the results from the collocate lists for social services and CAF/CASS: original posters and other users mention words such as lies (five times by LIPs, seven times by other users), corrupted (once by LIPs, twice by other users) or express their frustration in relation to these institutions (bullying, no faith, irresponsible, ignorant, scare tactics). LIPs also highlight that legal professionals side with social services ('Disgusting and most solicitors don't and won't fight against **social** now either'; 'Judge just shrugged his shoulders when I proved **SS** were lying'; 'change your **legal** team a lot of them make no effort to fight against the Local Authority') and that it is difficult to find a trusted lawyer ('I'm struggling to find a decent **legal** team to represent me'); 'my solicitor got me a **barrister** and she really hasn't represented me on'). Negative perceptions of the justice system and legal professionals, alongside the signs of decreased legal capabilities, are signs of complex intellectual, emotional, practical and attitudinal barriers experienced by LIPs when attempting to access the justice system.<sup>63</sup>

## Discussion of LIPs' queries

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<sup>60</sup> Two software programmes were used to identify collocates. The collocation function in OurSurveySays was used to extract the words (the collocates) co-occurring in a span of five words left and right of node words; the Word Sketch function in SketchEngine was used to summarise each word's grammatical and lexical environment. Only evaluative comments (positive or negative evaluations within the context of five words to the left and right of the search word, such as 'biased courts') were included; non-evaluative collocates (such as 'attend the family **court**') were excluded as they mainly describe events/actions.

<sup>61</sup> Lee and Tkacukova, n 12 above.

<sup>62</sup> Melville, n 31 above.

<sup>63</sup> G McKeever, L Royal-Dawson, E Kirk, and J McCord, Litigants in Person in Northern Ireland: Barriers to Legal Participation-Summary Report (2018) [papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3523915](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3523915), last accessed 7 August 2020.

The extracts discussed above illustrate three overarching themes that are representative of the overall context of LIPs' queries in the analysed sub-corpus: high levels of distress when looking for information and advice; emotional and social vulnerability; negative perceptions of courts, social services and lawyers. The first two themes correspond with the results of the interview data in Lee and Tkacukova,<sup>64</sup> where some LIPs acknowledged that the reason they were not prepared for the hearing was simply because they did not know where to look for information and, as a result, were confused about relevant procedures or found themselves in stressful circumstances and thus lacked time to prepare. Since the first engagement with court proceedings for many LIPs is via a court form and/or via court correspondence, addressing the lack of guidance materials on the gov.uk website (for instance, how to fill in court forms or links to sources of information) and including local advice centres in court correspondence could partially address court users' needs for support and guidance. Despite the usefulness of verified online or published sources of information, many LIPs still need further support to engage actively with the information, adapt it to their own circumstances and present it clearly in written and spoken form in court.<sup>65</sup> It is generally recognised that experienced (lay) advisers/intermediaries provide LIPs with step-by-step guidance tailored to individual circumstances;<sup>66</sup> MFs' involvement is reported to be beneficial when guiding LIPs during court proceedings.<sup>67</sup> The high degree of LIPs' vulnerability, however, has a negative impact on their ability to find trustworthy sources of information or recognise the hidden agenda in biased advice.

The third theme, negative perceptions of the justice system, should be interpreted in the discursive context of social media groups, which are organised around a common aim/interest. Sharing frustration with the court system is part of the LIPs' online community of practice: it provides an opportunity to deal with the experience of being rejected by the system as unfit for parenting. Given that social media communities tend to create networks for information-sharing purposes, the concept of trust plays an important role in such online exchanges. Sharing their personal stories and receiving fast and frequent responses help users gain trust in the knowledge acquired from the virtual community.<sup>68</sup> The distrust of lawyers increases group users' reliance on the information/advice received via supportive and informative interactions online. The opportunity to share the despair and/or dissatisfaction with the legal system in a trustworthy environment in an informal linguistic style may be one of the reasons for LIPs to turn to social media sites and seek advice from MFs. Yet the potentially false sense of trust that posters on these forums may have is also the reason LIPs may be even more susceptible on social media than in face-to-face settings, which makes it crucial to research out-of-court advice provision by MFs and online advisers. The next section illustrates MFs' approach to offering their services and delineating their expertise while supporting LIPs on social media.

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<sup>64</sup> Lee and Tkacukova, n 12.

<sup>65</sup> Tkacukova, n 18 above; Maclean and Eekelaar, n 2 above.

<sup>66</sup> Maclean and Eekelaar, n 2 above, [199].

<sup>67</sup> Trinder *et al*, n 12 above; Smith *et al*, n 5 above.

<sup>68</sup> CM Ridings, D Gefen, and B Arinze, 'Some antecedents and effects of trust in virtual communities' (2002) 11(3-4) *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 271.

## Overview of MFs' responses

The list of lexical keywords from the MFs' sub-corpus shows that MFs focus on legal concepts and terms (single-word keywords *adoption, law, case, application*; multi-word keywords *care order, adoption order, alleged adoption, family law, child protection plan, parental responsibility, adoption certificate*), family agenda (*child, parent, support, child protection*), institutional settings (*social worker, local authority, care system, foster care*), and MFs' support (*advice sheet, advice line*); grammatical keywords show that MFs frame their responses as options (*if, may, whether*) and advice (*should, need*). As expected, the keywords indicate that, in comparison to descriptive LIPs' queries, MFs' responses reframe the original posts in legal terms and provide information and advice. To illustrate the main themes across the responses and MFs' roles, the examples below will focus on the concordance lines contextualising the lexical keywords *social worker* and *domestic violence* (Table B) and *law* (Table C), grammatical keywords *may, if, whether* (Table D) and the most frequent n-grams (Table E).

Table B	
1b	An independent social worker assessment is when a <b>social worker</b> who does not work for the local authority is instructed to carry out a social worker assessment. ( <i>Forum 1</i> )
2b	[in response to a grandparent concerned about controlling father] Also if he is controlling of mum and the children this should be discussed with the <b>social worker</b> and covered in their assessment and also raised when seeking legal advice as legal aid can be available ( <i>Forum 1</i> )
3b	A risk assessment too see if the child children are being abused mentally physically emotionally not every <b>social worker</b> in the country are corrupt just a said few and of course there's a lot of inexperienced workers too and also too see what kind of parent you are and how too plan for the future of the children if and only if they were being abused remember social services are supposed too be there too help they are voluntary you do not need too engage with them !!!! ( <i>FB2, MFb1, active MF</i> )
4b	The thing you have to be careful of now is not to approach her or the house or the children and be very careful with communication. The next stage could be accusations of <b>domestic violence</b> or harrassment or such like. They do that to get legal aid. ( <i>Forum 3</i> )
5b	Regarding your question about whether children's services could say you cannot be with your partner even though your children never witnessed violence, I think you need to understand that children do not have to witness <b>domestic violence</b> or abuse for it to have a detrimental effect on them emotionally. Children can be affected because of how domestic violence impacts you and the way they see react as a victim of domestic violence. ( <i>Forum 3</i> )

In the process of re-contextualising LIPs' queries within the family law settings, MFs often perform several functions: explaining court procedures and the role of institutions (1b, 2b, 3b); setting LIPs' expectations (3b, 5b); providing advice on the subsequent steps (2b, 4b, 5b). Interestingly, only one of the above extracts (1b) is expressed in a neutral tone. with the main focus on the explanation of the concept of independent social workers. The response in the extract 5b has a persuasive function and includes a helpful re-contextualisation of the LIPs' query from focusing on social services to emphasizing the well-being of children and the negative impact of domestic violence on them. Example 2b illustrates another helpful suggestion as to what should be discussed with a social worker and a legal adviser in case legal aid could be available. The two other examples (3b & 4b) imply a degree of bias against social services or the other parent.

The extract 3b starts as an explanation of the role of social services, but the remark on the variable quality of social workers and the final piece of advice are problematic. Not engaging with social services would lead to losing an opportunity to engage with the process fully; it is common for parents to deny that local authority intervention is needed and lawyers generally recognise that it is their role to challenge such approach and promote the importance of actively engaging with court processes and procedures.<sup>69</sup> According to Masson,<sup>70</sup> lawyers are aware that fighting a case can be therapeutic for parents and encourage their clients to cooperate with social services so that, if required, social workers could be later challenged in court. In this respect, informing a LIP that engagement with social services is voluntary without further explanation about advantages of engaging with them is misleading. The sarcastic remark on the quality of social workers could further discourage the LIP from active engagement with the court process.

The other problematic response, Extract 4b, reframes the anecdotal narrative of women claiming to be victims of domestic violence into preventive advice on how to avoid such situations. Interestingly, MFs seem to be more popular with male court users,<sup>71</sup> possibly due to the prevalence of FRGs where many MFs advertise their services<sup>72</sup> and the availability (albeit very limited) of legal aid funding to victims of domestic violence.<sup>73</sup> Depicting women's allegation of domestic violence as a shady tactic (alongside gender-neutralisation of violence) is one of the common strategies used by MFs linked to FRGs on social media<sup>74</sup> in an attempt to give their clients hope and present a more positive face to the wider public. Although the advice to be respectful of the other parent is useful for all separated parents, the rationale given here is framed as a quick fix strategy for obtaining a more favourable outcome rather than focusing solely on the best interests of children, which is the law's paramount consideration in resolving these disputes.

It is also worth noting the lexical framing of MFs' responses in Examples 3b and 4b. In addition to providing problematic advice and using a non-conciliatory tone or making sarcastic comments, the two MFs use less formal register and sentence structure in their responses. Such linguistic features are common on social media<sup>75</sup> and have an additional function of helping MFs build rapport with LIPs ('xx' kisses is among the top ten most frequent words in the MF sub-corpus) as well as reducing linguistic distance between themselves and their potential clients.<sup>76</sup> Since social media are, at least, partially used for marketing MFs' services, but building rapport and gaining trust of potential clients are other functions of MFs' responses. Overall, the examples in Table B show that MFs provide procedural information and guidance on the role of courts and social services from a closer

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<sup>69</sup> J Masson, "I think I have strategies": Lawyers' approaches to parent engagement in care proceedings' (2012) 17 *Child & Family Social Work* 206.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Smith *et al*, n 5 above; Melville, n 31 above.

<sup>72</sup> Melville, n 31 above.

<sup>73</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission. *Legal aid reforms and women's access to justice*. [www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/cedaw\\_follow-up\\_report\\_march\\_2016\\_update.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/cedaw_follow-up_report_march_2016_update.pdf), last accessed 29 June 2020.

<sup>74</sup> Melville, n 31 above, [167].

<sup>75</sup> Seargent and Tagg, n 57 above.

<sup>76</sup> G R Semin, 'Linguistic markers of social distance and proximity', in K Fiedler (ed), *Social Communication* (Taylor & Francis, 2007).



linguistically and socially-defined position than would be expected from legal professionals.<sup>77</sup>

The extracts from the concordance lines with the node words *law* and *legal* (see Table C) illustrate how MFs' services are delineated within legal settings and in what contexts the node words occur:

Table C	
1c	In a contested hearing advocates will typically make an opening submission stating how they intend to show the court in graphic and incontrovertible terms how they intend to prove a point of <b>law</b> . In closing they will make another oral submission (sometimes written if they run out of time) showing how they did indeed prove that point and refer to the deficiencies of the opposition's evidence in chief. ( <i>FBI MFa5</i> , active MF)
2c	All hearings should be Child focused Maybe just Maybe somebody needs to enlighten the family <b>law</b> courts & caffcass x ( <i>FBI MFa8</i> )
3c	I removed your comment. If you have a legal qualification or a history of practising <b>law</b> then your advice will be valued. If you simply want to share your experience that is valued too. When you tell people what to do based on no technical experience at all your comments will be removed. Please try and be mindful of the amount of harm that you can do my wrongly advising people. ( <i>FBI MFa5</i> , active MF)
4c	Parents tend to argue fact because they know the facts and they don't know <b>law</b> However the court is bound to follow the law and that is why we are here and lawyers earn fortunes. When and if you need help preparing your statements and applications come and ask in here and we will translate your statement into legalese for you and add case law and statutory law that makes it much harder for the court to deviate from their duty to your children. ( <i>FBI MFa5</i> , active MF)
5c	I'm not legally trained but I have plenty of direct experience in family <b>law</b> cases. Please get some proper <b>legal</b> advice before deciding on your next step. one of our many trusted Mckenzie friends will assist you with legal knowledge & the legalese of it we advise members not to give advice from personal experiences only because the wrong information can damage a case xx. ( <i>FBI MFa8</i> )
6c	we ALWAYS get this problem with the <b>legals</b> who will not mount fighting defences and won't put things inststatements. Insist she does and if not you send it indirectly... Also add any relatives who can syoort youm your plan for the child with the things above, what you yourself ntend to by attending suort groups MIND is a god one to mention and is nationak- [...] Also the IAPT programme - NHS England with branches in each town and runs the courses locally ( <i>FB2, MFb5</i> )
7c	You definitely <u>need</u> <b>legal</b> assistance ASAP from a family law solicitor. ( <i>FB3 MFc1</i> )

Most of MFs' functions here range from criticising courts and the legal profession (2c, 6c) to safeguarding vulnerable parents and promoting MFs' services (3c–5c) with only occasional suggestions to seek legal advice from a solicitor (7c) or a clarification of court processes and procedures (1c). In the MFs' sub-corpus, there are overall nine occurrences of MFs' recommending LIPs to seek legal advice from a qualified professional, which indicates that some MFs recognise the limitations of their role and encourage LIPs to obtain professional advice. At the same time, many of the posts, as illustrated here, reinforce LIPs' trust in MFs' advice and professionalism via responses containing specialised knowledge (1c); comments highlighting parents' vulnerabilities and disadvantages (3c, 4c, 5c); and reasoning in favour of using experts who side with LIPs and oppose courts and lawyers (2c, 4c, 5c, 6c).

<sup>77</sup> Tkacukova, n 18 above.

The posts lexically frame MFs as ‘trusted’ (5c) experts who are ‘child focused’ (2c), have ‘technical experience’ (3c), provide ‘proper legal advice’ (5c) and can use ‘legalese’ (4c, 5c). The other discursive strategies used here include: creating the divide between parents and alienating courts (2c, 4c, 6c); explicitly highlighting the need for MFs who can ‘enlighten’ the courts (2c) and support parents in their fight against the legal system (4c, 5c); portraying lawyers as overpriced experts (4c) and courts as institutions that ‘deviate from their duty to children’ (4c). Similar discourse strategies are noted by Melville,<sup>78</sup> who shows that MFs linked to FRGs promote their services by stating that lawyers are expensive, adversarial and do not cater for parents’ needs. MFs thus construct their professional image by advertising their services as child-focused and parent-inclusive and positioning themselves as experienced experts who are fluent in legal jargon but also understand the faults of the system and parents’ needs.

In the MFs’ sub-corpus with 105 Facebook threads, there are three requests from LIPs to MFs to pm (private message) them and 12 offers from MFs to be private messaged by LIPs. There might have been other requests that would not have been picked up by corpus linguistics methods (because the requests could be lexically expressed in a different way and not use search terms *pm, message, email, text*). Furthermore, there are 11 recommendations for either an MF operating locally or suggestions on how to look for a local MF. Overall, approximately 20% of all requests are directed towards an MF (invitation for direct contact or support in finding an appropriate MF), which indicates that social media is one of the marketing strategies used by MFs.<sup>79</sup> These messages tend to be in threads where it is clear that a LIP is party to ongoing court proceedings and requires extensive support and advice on more complicated matters; threads with more straightforward queries (asking, for instance, which form to fill in) elicit only informative responses with relevant steps to follow.

The grammar-related single-word keywords include modal verbs (*may*) and conditional conjunctions (*if, whether*), indicating that MFs talk about possibilities, probabilities and conditions as can be seen from the concordance lines in Table D:

Table D	
1d	Cafcass like to see parents that respect the other usually, although some Cafcass officers can be totally bias, be very careful how you word things with them. Shared care or total care with full respect for time with the other parent. Being totally the more sensible parent <b>may</b> be seen by the judge as the best option, only problem is the building up time of the relationship with dad. I refused the contact center option and argued that there was no evidence that I was a threat to my children. ( <i>FBI MFa14</i> )
2d	Can I ask how old the child is? It would also be helpful <b>if</b> he prepared a brief position statement to tell the court a little bit more about the background, his concerns and what he would like to happen. ( <i>Forum 1</i> )
3d	If you can - say something positive about her - eg she's a good Mum and very organised and you very much want amicable co parenting and just want your child to enjoy her time with both parents. That last bit is the mantra to stick to - at court, talking to Cafcass etc. What Cafcass are looking for is <b>whether</b> the parents get on - if you sound reasonable then they think you'll be a good parent. ( <i>Forum 3</i> )

<sup>78</sup> Melville, n 31 above.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

Examples with grammatical words related to hedging and real/hypothetical conditions illustrate recommendations of MFs in the form of mentoring on what to say or how to behave (1d, 3d) and specific suggestions for further steps (2d). While some of these are potentially useful suggestions (2d), other responses (1d, 3d) could be problematic in terms of ethical conduct; if suggested by a solicitor, these could be viewed, for instance, as in breach of the SRA Code of Conduct,<sup>80</sup> especially the principles of (1d) upholding the rule of law and the proper administration of justice and (2d) acting with integrity. Coaching LIPs (specifically fathers in these instances) on what to say to CAFCASS while promoting shared parenting or co-parenting with equal access to both parents revolves around the rights of fathers rather than the best interest of children.<sup>81</sup> Smith et al<sup>82</sup> label MFs with a particular version of family justice as Family Justice Crusaders; this type of MFs is more evident on social media sites.<sup>83</sup>

Extract 1d, for instance, comes from a post by the MF who is an ex-LIP, illustrating how personal experience may become a reference point for the advice provided to LIPs. On a different occasion the same MF offered another LIP emotional support in response to query about parental alienation arising from domestic violence allegations: ‘my wife even left the home to live in a refuge, can't get more damning than that. I now have the kids living with me full time. (...) Fight fight fight. They have nothing but her word and that is not enough.’ The advice draws a lot on the MF’s personal experience and fails to provide the rationale for procedural steps that courts take to determine the risk to the child before contact can be reinstated.<sup>84</sup> This is only partially covered in the reference to the MF’s experience with overcoming allegations of domestic violence and the need for those allegations to be proved, thus mentioning one of the court procedures. There is, however, no reference to the fact that family courts work to a lower standard of proof than the criminal courts’ concept of proof ‘beyond reasonable doubt’.<sup>85</sup> The explanation of the standard of proof as ‘more likely than not’ rather than ‘beyond reasonable doubt’ would have allowed for a fuller response. This is one of the examples of a response where the function of providing emotional support and building rapport with the LIP becomes more prominent than that of providing a fully informative response. A solicitor/barrister would be expected to frame the response in a more conciliatory tone, explaining the relevant points from the other party’s arguments, important aspects for the judicial decision-making and court procedures.<sup>86</sup>

By contrast with extract 1d, the depiction of CAFCASS in Example 3d has no negative connotations; yet the advice still displays similar pragmatic and lexical framing, mainly sharing the ‘insider’s know-how’ provided within the clearly defined ‘they-us’ framing, where ‘they’ is linked to alienating courts, biased social workers and expensive lawyers, while ‘us’ is linked to the unity among trusted MF experts and parents. It is not the content, but the framing and the communicative intention of the responses that is problematic: the

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<sup>80</sup> Law Centres Network. *The Solicitors Regulation Authority Code of Conduct* (2013) [www.lawcentres.org.uk/asset/download/268](http://www.lawcentres.org.uk/asset/download/268), last accessed 19 May 2020.

<sup>81</sup> Melville, n 31 above, [163].

<sup>82</sup> Smith *et al*, n 5 above, [20].

<sup>83</sup> Melville, n 31 above.

<sup>84</sup> ‘How Do Family Courts Deal With Cases About Children Where There Might Be Domestic Abuse? A Guidance Note for Parents & Professionals’ (Transparency Project) [www.transparencyproject.org.uk/press/wp-content/uploads/DA-GUIDANCE-NOTE.pdf](http://www.transparencyproject.org.uk/press/wp-content/uploads/DA-GUIDANCE-NOTE.pdf), [7]-[9], last accessed 19 May 2020.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, [18]-[19].

<sup>86</sup> Masson, n 69 above.

advice on how to interact with ex-partners and CAF/CASS is contextualised as advice on how to persuade CAF/CASS and courts that the LIP is a good parent rather than focusing on the well-being of children. Although the MF's suggestions should help to progress matters, the tone and the framing of such responses could potentially have a negative impact parents' overall willingness to engage fully with the relevant legal concepts (the paramount welfare of children) or with the other party or judicial proceedings.

Building on the grammatical elements of the MFs' responses, another type of phrase worth exploring is n-grams that appear in the context of giving advice and discussing options (*be able to, you need to*) and categorical statements that reveal the context in which MFs express certainty (*the child is, there is no* as opposed to expressing uncertainty with *the child may/could/possibly is* or *there may/might be no*). The extracts in Table E illustrate many of the MFs' functions previously mentioned: explanation of court procedures and processes (1e, 2e, 4e, 7e); explanation of the role of institutions and additional services (1e, 2e); advice on strategy (2e, 3e, 5e); setting parents' expectations (5e, 6e) and delineating MFs' role (1e). The recurrence of these functions arises from the bottom-up approach of corpus linguistics and demonstrates the significance of the re-occurring roles.

1e	[in response to a query on how to bring a friend to a court hearing] This is called having a McKenzie Friend, the person that accompanies him won't <b>be able to</b> speak for him but can at least give moral support and take notes. ( <i>Forum 1</i> )
2e	For your son it may be helpful if you could let him know that an advocate might <b>be able to</b> help him communicate his wishes feelings to the professionals involved in his life. ( <i>Forum 2</i> )
3e	[in response to the query on a statement for a contested adoption hearing] <b>you need to</b> focus on your changes since the making of the placement order. ( <i>FB2 MFb3, ex-LIP</i> )
4e	[in response to an adoption hearing query on how to contact new social services for an assessment after moving] if you want an assessment <b>you need to</b> make an application on a C2 under PART 25. It depends whether it is public law or private law ( <i>FB2 MFb3, ex-LIP</i> )
5e	If both parents are criticizing each other you get tarred with the same brush and they think if the parents are hostile to each other <b>the child is</b> better off spending more time with one and less with the other - and the more time is usually with the Mother. <sup>87</sup> ( <i>Forum 3</i> )
6e	[in an effort to moderate a comment on what contact parents are entitled to] <b>there is no</b> automatic right to see your child, it's a misconception and you are setting expectation that may not be the actual outcome ( <i>FBI MFa17, active MF</i> )
7e	[in response to a query about how to make sure the parent receives letters from children, who were adopted, once a year as defined in court order] If the adopters do not respond or update letterbox <b>there is no</b> powers to enforce it. Letters are kept in his file though which does show that you wrote. ( <i>FB2 MFb1, active MF</i> )

The extracts in Table E show advice being given on the following issues: additional support that can be available (2e), written statements (3e), documents to be completed (4e), communication with court and ex-partners (5e, similar to 1d, 3d), the rights of parents (6e, 7e). In general, the tone and content of the advice provided here helps MFs build the professional image and reinforce their expertise within the social media groups. On occasion, however, their response is confusing. For instance, Example 4e shows uncertainty as to

<sup>87</sup> 'If sentences' are common in legal discourse. In this extract, the n-gram 'the child is' expresses certainty (as opposed to 'the child might be') as it there is no uncertainty or hesitation expressed lexically and it occurs in the main clause.

whether the question relates to public or private family law; since adoption cases are public cases, the mention of ‘PART 25’ would not lead the parent in the right direction and the confusing information could further decrease the original poster’s legal capability.

Overall, the quotes in Table E show that MFs mostly support LIPs with specific step-by-step advice and clarification of options, as well as setting LIPs’ expectations as to the rights of children and parents (6e) and making new suggestions on what can be done to address existing problems (1e, 2e). Crucially, it is this type of tailored information and advice that LIPs report as being unavailable from static web sources.<sup>88</sup> It is unrealistic to expect that LIPs could, simply by reading generic web sources or guidance materials, gain full understanding and communicative competence in unfamiliar discourse settings.<sup>89</sup> Having prior experience with court procedures as a represented litigant helps repeat LIPs understand what is expected of them.<sup>90</sup> By providing specific suggestions and expressing legal concepts and principles in lay terms, MFs support LIPs in decision-making and planning further steps, tasks that require legal knowledge, extensive experience of court processes and procedures and a good understanding of judicial decision-making principles.

### **Discussion of MFs’ responses**

There are several themes that emerge from examples in the preceding section: the variety of MFs’ functions and the tailored content of MFs’ advice; the tone and framing of advice provision; the professional image built by MFs on social media when interacting with LIPs. Exploring these aspects can contribute to the understanding of MFs’ position in the post-LASPO changing landscape of legal advice provision.

As illustrated above, the advice provided by MFs is tailored to specific LIPs’ needs and covers a wide range of functions, such as: explaining court processes and procedures; clarifying the role of relevant institutions; setting LIPs’ expectations as to relevant legal principles and court proceedings; advising on further steps; providing suggestions as to what to say/write, what to fill in and how to communicate with the other parent, social workers or legal professionals. The usefulness and relevance of such advice and information to the individual LIP’s situation is potentially much higher than that of static web sources or printed materials: advice provided via interaction has more potential to address specific needs, extract legally relevant factors/issues and eliminate possible misunderstandings. Static sources require active engagement with the information, starting from identifying the relevant concepts, interpreting the information, applying it to the specifics of the case and communicating the case within the boundaries set by relevant legal principles.<sup>91</sup> Without prior experience of legal proceedings and some basic understanding of relevant law, it is difficult to overcome the obstacles posed by the complex legal discourse on the lay court users.<sup>92</sup> MFs in the analysed sample provided key information relevant to LIPs’ queries and even advised them on institutional communication strategies. The occasionally incomplete or

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<sup>88</sup> Lee and Tkacukova, n 12 above.

<sup>89</sup> Tkacukova, n 18 above.

<sup>90</sup> Trinder *et al*, n 12 above, [83].

<sup>91</sup> R Assy, ‘Can the law speak directly to its subjects? The limitation of plain language’ (2011) 38(3) *Journal of Law and Society* 383; Tkacukova, n 18 above.

<sup>92</sup> Trinder *et al*, n 12 above; Tkacukova, n 18 above.

potentially confusing advice indicates some MFs' lack of expertise. The incompleteness of advice can, however, also be explained by the fact that remote advice can be limited in its scope: face-to-face advice offers more a holistic and preferred mode of advice for clients and legal professionals.<sup>93</sup>

The medium of advice provision plays a crucial role in MFs' engagement with LIPs: the advice is provided as part of a larger community and the queries tend to elicit multiple responses within a short period of time from at least one online adviser and multiple forum/group users. The immediacy of online interactions, the shared experience of family breakdown and subsequent legal proceedings, the mutual emotional support, and the problem-solving approach create the context in which LIPs build trust in the advisers and the information/advice acquired from the forums/groups led by MFs.<sup>94</sup> The micro-linguistic level of the advice provision (such as simplified lexical choices, shorter sentence structure resembling spoken language) reveals that the forum/group users and advisers interact using informal language style characteristic of social media communication. The informal register enables LIPs to express themselves in a simple everyday language and potentially improves their comprehension of complex legal principles (although the complexity of legal discourse reflects the complex reality it aims to reflect and linguistic simplification is not always possible).<sup>95</sup> Informal linguistic choices also allow MFs to build rapport with potential clients and address them from a closer linguistic and social position without the imbalance in power relations that is common to legal-lay interactions.<sup>96</sup>

Interestingly, both MFs and LIPs share an ambiguous institutional position within court proceedings and cannot fully participate in the proceedings: for instance, LIPs are not always allowed to conduct cross-examination<sup>97</sup> or it may not be possible for them to request an expert witness<sup>98</sup> and MFs have no right of audience.<sup>99</sup> The forum/group users' position as 'outsiders' may be one reason why the 'anti-system' discourse rhetoric is widespread on MFs' social media sites. Much of the MFs' helpful advice illustrated in the preceding section displays signs of problematic framing, for example, when MFs side with one of the parents or criticise social services or courts and potentially risk aggravating the adversarial settings between the parties. Lawyers, on the other hand, consider that one of their crucial roles is to support vulnerable LIPs in their engagement with courts and social services.<sup>100</sup> The macro-linguistic analysis shows that MFs distance themselves from the courts by expressing explicit and implied criticism of the system, a practice that functions as one of their marketing strategies<sup>101</sup> but also that helps them establish the apparent status of experts who know how the system works, and its weaknesses. Unfortunately, the explicit or even implicit criticism of the justice system can potentially have a negative impact on the court proceedings of MFs'

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<sup>93</sup> R Hunter, C Banks and J Giddings, 'Technology is the answer... but what was the question? Experiments in the delivery of legal services to regional, rural and remote clients', in P Pleasence, A Buck and N Balmer (eds), *Transforming lives: Law and social process* (Legal Services Commission, 2007).

<sup>94</sup> Ridings *et al*, n 68 above.

<sup>95</sup> Assy, n 91 above.

<sup>96</sup> Tkacukova, n 18 above.

<sup>97</sup> Smith *et al*, n 5 above; Trinder *et al*, n 12 above.

<sup>98</sup> Trinder *et al*, n 12 above.

<sup>99</sup> *Practice Guidance: McKenzie Friends*, n 6 above.

<sup>100</sup> Masson, n 69 above.

<sup>101</sup> Melville, n 31 above.

clients. To avoid unnecessary problems in the engagement between clients and official institutions, lawyers would typically discourage any negative perceptions of the system.<sup>102</sup> Yet, for MFs, the anti-system discourse functions as a marketing strategy that also helps them create their expert standing.

MFs' professional image is constructed via and references to their experience with legalese while also highlighting the divide between the parents' narratives presented in lay terms and the courts' conceptualisation of the relevant law. While moderating the forums/groups, MFs emphasise the expertise required to provide advice and dismiss the notion that personal experience is sufficient for advice provision. Yet, the occasional references in this study's sample to MFs' personal experience with court proceedings are framed as success stories, while any reference to their expertise is vague; wording such as 'ex-lawyer' or 'legal background' lacks any specific information about the type of legal qualification. Overall, the sample shows a wide range of MFs who operate online. While some of them visibly advertise their services, others may not be fee-charging; one feature they seem to share is the outsiders' view of the system, which unfolds via non-conciliatory tone and the explicit or implicit criticism of the system.

## Conclusion

The study reported in this article has covered a wide range of lay advisers in order to reflect on the content and framing of MFs' advice on social media, as well as to explore the functions performed by MFs and the context of the online advice provision. The study reported here has used corpus linguistics methods (single-word & multi-word keywords, n-grams and collocations) and illustrated how quantitative bottom-up approach can be used for the subsequent contextualised qualitative analysis. The choice of corpus-driven analysis allowed us to extract representative quotes based on quantifiable linguistic features, which enabled the identification of MFs' roles based on lexical and grammatical features drawn from their responses. Because MFs are a very diverse group in terms of their qualifications, professional background, motivations for acting as an MF, court experience or understanding of their roles,<sup>103</sup> the bottom-up approach helped us define characteristics and functions that are shared among lay advisers on social media and delineate their marketing strategy. The study also highlights the importance of the linguistic framing of advice.

By analysing LIPs' queries and MFs' responses on social media and online forums, the article has shown how MFs reframe LIPs' personal narratives by reference to relevant legal concepts. The main functions of MFs' responses include explaining court processes and procedures (including the role of social services and CAFCASS), advising on further steps and setting parents' expectations on issues around the welfare of children. The interactive nature of social media platforms allows LIPs to gain preliminary advice when they otherwise do not know what to search for or where to start. The tailored step-by-step advice provided by MFs cannot be easily extracted from static web sources and brochures: adapting generic advice to a specific situation requires communicative and discursive competence developed through prior experience, and LIPs cannot be expected to have such experience and skills.

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<sup>102</sup> Masson, n 69 above.

<sup>103</sup> *Reforming the Courts' Approach to McKenzie Friends: Consultation Response*, n 10 above.



Creating clear pathways to verified information and guidance as well as protecting LIPs' rights as MFs' clients is important for enhancing the wider access to justice.

This study shows that the provision of advice and guidance on social media is offered alongside elements of promoting MFs' services and constructing their professional image as trusted experts. The particular danger is that the communicative dynamics of online groups can lead to the development of potentially unfounded trust in the information gained there, which could be damaging for socially and emotionally vulnerable LIPs. As discussed above, some of the social media posts explicitly and implicitly criticise social workers and courts. While this approach may be used as a coping strategy for being refused as a parent by the system, it has the unfortunate effect of creating a non-conciliatory contextual framing for the advice then provided. This allows MFs to delineate their services as a unique combination of the assurance that they possess the insider's know-how, understand the client's needs and concerns (being more approachable than lawyers), and are willing to fight the system. The linguistic framing of their responses further helps MFs construct their self-image as experienced professionals supporting parents in their fight against the alienating justice system. It is often not the content of the advice but its tone and discursive function that is problematic. One of the crucial roles of lawyers is to manage their clients' expectations and responsibilities and promote active engagement with court proceedings and social services. The non-conciliatory tone of some advice on social media can discourage some vulnerable LIPs from effective engagement with proceedings.

In closing, the findings from this study prompt consideration of one potential model for reform in this arena. The debate around professionalising MFs should take into consideration that the framing and the tone of advice are closely related to professional ethics and duty to the client. Addressing the professional ambiguity of MFs and clarifying the ethical aspects of their role in the legal system is necessary in order to create clearer conditions for MF-LIP engagement, including conditions that will support LIPs to engage with the court system in an efficient and substantive way. A good example to consider is the model of 'limited license legal technicians' used in Washington, US. To become a legal technician, it is necessary to have an associate's degree in any subject and to pass three exams (in core competencies, family law and professional ethics).<sup>104</sup> The role of legal technicians is to advise LIPs in relation to family matters, including completing court forms, assisting during hearings and advising during the mediation and settlement process. Currently confined to the family law arena, there are plans in Washington state to extend the role of legal technicians to other areas of law. Based on adequate training and a recognition of the importance of lay advisers, the legal technician model offers an option that could usefully be explored in England and Wales.

## **Appendix**

### **Glossary:**

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<sup>104</sup> [www.wsba.org/for-legal-professionals/join-the-legal-profession-in-wa/limited-license-legal-technicians](http://www.wsba.org/for-legal-professionals/join-the-legal-profession-in-wa/limited-license-legal-technicians), last accessed 10 April 2020.

Collocations – pairs of words which occur near one another (i.e. combinations of words which often co-occur, such as *child welfare, family court*); various statistical measures are used to assess the strength of association between the two words in each pair.

Concordances, concordance searches – a display of search results organised in lines as seen in Fig 1.

Corpus – an electronic collection of texts.

Corpus linguistics – a field of applied linguistics which studies electronic collections of texts.

Grammatical annotation – the tagging process for defining parts of speech (annotating *parent/parents* are nouns, *parental* is an adjective).

Keywords (single-word and multi-word keywords) – keywords are identified by keyness measures, which assess the difference in frequency of a word in one (sub-)corpus compared against another (sub-)corpus; keywords are words that stand out in one (sub-)corpus when statistically compared to their occurrence in another (sub-)corpus. A list of keywords ordered according to the strength of keyness indicates the main differences between two sub-corpora.

Lemma – the base word which can be found in a dictionary (*child* is a lemma word for *children, child's, children's*).

Lemmatisation – the process of converting inflected word forms to a single representation, ie the words *children, child's, children's, child* belong to the same lemma *child*.

N-grams – sequences of a specific number (n) of words (3-grams are sequences of three words, such as *I don't know*); all such sequences are extracted from a corpus and presented in the frequency order.

Node word – search word, the word that appears in the middle column (for instance, *child* in Fig 1).

### Tables:

The lists of the top 20 single-word and multi-word keywords are given in Table 1 below. The keywords are ordered according to the strength of the statistical score measuring the frequency of words in the MFs' sub-corpus vs. LIPs' and identifying the 'over-used' words in each sub-corpus:

LIPs' queries (vs. reference sub-corpus of MFs' responses)				MFs' responses (vs. reference sub-corpus of LIPs' queries)			
Keywords		Multi-word keywords		Keywords		Multi-word keywords	
Term	Score	Term	Score	Term	Score	Term	Score
my	4.02	ex partner	1.18	you	4.13	domestic violence	1.48
me	3.62	contact centre	1.15	your	3.69	social worker	1.42
i	3.45	court hearing	1.12	adoption	2.18	advice sheet	1.41
he	2.36	long story	1.12	child	2.13	child protection	1.37
week	2.32	last week	1.12	too	2.07	advice line	1.34

her	2.23	child maintenance	1.1	law	1.99	local authority	1.34
she	2.22	mental health	1.1	case	1.97	care order	1.3
him	2.13	drug test	1.09	parent	1.88	adoption order	1.28
daughter	2.08	other weekend	1.09	may	1.86	alleged adoption	1.25
thank	1.99	next week	1.08	whether	1.8	family law	1.21
ex	1.98	high court	1.08	application	1.77	care system	1.21
back	1.89	court date	1.08	if	1.76	parental responsibility	1.17
his	1.88	seeing son	1.08	should	1.75	private law	1.14
thank	1.79	emotional abuse	1.07	service	1.7	child protection plan	1.14
son	1.77	old son	1.07	xx	1.66	protection plan	1.14
dad	1.77	next year	1.07	need	1.65	child support	1.14
month	1.75	care life	1.06	legal	1.62	foster care	1.14
want	1.75	first hearing	1.06	post	1.59	adoption certificate	1.14
kid	1.72	new partner	1.05	support	1.58	legal advice	1.13

Table 1: Single-word and multi-word keywords in LIPs' queries and MFs' responses generated by the SketchEngine software.

Table 2 lists the most frequent 3-grams and 4-grams in the sub-corpora for LIPs and MFs. Note that the tokenisation rules in SketchEngine separate contractions, hence 2-grams such as *I don't* appear as 3-grams.

LIPs' queries		MFs' responses	
3/4-grams	Freq	3/4-grams	Freq
I do n't	97	I do n't	26
do n't know	31	the social worker	25
n't want to	29	be able to	18
to go to	28	to the court	17
back to court	27	if you have	17
I ca n't	26	you need to	14
I have to	25	the local authority	14
I did n't	24	that you are	14
do n't want	23	in the care	14
what to do	22	you do n't	13
to see my	20	our advice sheet	13
I want to	20	do n't know	13
I do n't know	19	a court order	13

I have a	18	there is a	12
with my ex	17	that you have	12
to be a	17	the child is	11
she does n't	17	of the child	11
do n't think	17	I think you	11
be able to	17	Welcome to the	10
Thank you for	17	I do n't know	10
n't know what	16	there is no	9

Table 2: Top 20 3-grams and 4-grams in LIPs' queries and MFs' responses.