

# DoCS Research to Practice Update

*A regular update on the latest national and international research*

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## Research Publications – What's New!

### Research to practice

*The Research to Practice Program provides an essential link between the latest research and DoCS staff.*

*As part of this important initiative, the Research to Practice Update encompasses a broad range of research publications and resources to reflect the diversity of DoCS staff.*

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- [researchtopractice@community.nsw.gov.au](mailto:researchtopractice@community.nsw.gov.au), or
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Produced by  
The Research to Practice Team  
Centre for Parenting & Research  
NSW Department of Community Services  
4-6 Cavill Avenue  
Ashfield NSW 2131

DX 21212  
Ph 02 9716 2644  
Fax 02 9716 2788  
[researchtopractice@community.nsw.gov.au](mailto:researchtopractice@community.nsw.gov.au)



### Early Intervention

**The effect of Alaska's home visitation program for high risk families on trends in abuse and neglect**

Gessner, B. (2008). *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 32, (3), 317-333.

This article reports on a randomised evaluation of a home visitation program designed to decrease child abuse and neglect. The program was implemented by Healthy Families Alaska and conducted throughout the state in six sites incorporating 21 communities. The primary aim of the study was to determine if children enrolled in the program experienced a greater decrease in child abuse over time. The program targeted families with high risk factors for child abuse. 985 children under two years of age were enrolled in the program. The study compared enrolled children to unenrolled high risk children. The findings found little evidence that the program had a measurable impact on child maltreatment outcomes. The article reports on specific program implementation problems and discusses practice implications.

[doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.08.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.08.004)

**Quality child care supports the achievement of low-income children: Direct and indirect pathways through caregiving and the home environment**

McCartney, K., Dearing, E., Taylor, B., & Bub, K. (2007). *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 28, (5-6), 411-426.

This study examines whether high quality child care protects children from the negative effects of poverty and whether poverty and low income operate as dual risk factors for children. The study compared three

groups of children: those in higher quality child care, those in lower quality child care and those not in child care. Two pathways were assessed, a direct pathway through child care quality and an indirect pathway through improvements in the home environment. The children were observed in their homes and child care settings at 6, 15, 24, and 36 months. An interaction between family income-to-needs ratio and child care quality predicted School Readiness, Receptive Language, and Expressive Language, as well as improvements in the home environment. Children from low income families profited from observed learning supports in the form of sensitive care and stimulation of cognitive development, and their parents profited from unobserved informal and formal parent supports. Policy implications are discussed.

[doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2007.06.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2007.06.010)

**Healthy Families New York (HFNY) randomised trial: Effects on early child abuse and neglect**

DuMont, K., Mitchell-Herzfeld, S., Greene, R., Lee, E., Lowenfels, A., Rodriguez, M., & Dorabawila, V. (2008). *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 32, (3), 295-315.

This article reports on a study that examines the effects of Healthy Families New York (HFNY), a comprehensive and intensive home visiting program based on the Healthy Families America (HFA) model. The goal of the program was to promote positive parenting skills and parent-child interaction, prevent child abuse and neglect, support optimal prenatal care and child health and development, and improve parent's self-sufficiency. The sample included 1,173 families at risk for child abuse and neglect who were randomly assigned to

either an intervention group that was offered HFNY or a control group that was given information and referrals to other services. The results showed that the HFNY program can assist in reducing abuse and neglect among at-risk families in New York State and the benefits of providing HFNY services to diverse groups of women at risk for abuse and neglect. The findings indicate that who is offered home visitation may be an important factor in explaining the differential effectiveness of home visitation programs as well as new ways of thinking about home visitation research. Implications of the study are discussed.

[doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.07.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.07.007)

## Child Protection

### Using cumulative risk to screen for mental health problems in child welfare

McCrae, J. & Barth, R., (2008). *Research on Social Work Practice*, 18, (2), 144-159.

This paper reports on a study testing the hypothesis that information typically collected during a maltreatment investigation can be used to screen children for mental health problems. The study uses data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being. Cumulative risk scores of 3,022 children were compared to reports of clinical-level problems using standardised measures. Bivariate, multivariate, and sensitivity analysis were used. The findings show an association between worker reports of problems and clinical indicators. Of concern was that workers under-identified over half of the children in the study. The study concluded that investigative information could serve the dual purpose of screening children for mental health problems.

<http://rsw.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/18/2/144>

### The Victoria Climbié case: social work education for practice in children and families' work before and since

Balen, R., & Masson, H., (2008). *Child & Family Social Work*, 13, (2), 121-132.

Based on research into the Victoria Climbié Inquiry, this paper outlines an analysis of the literature which made substantial comment on the inquiry and/or the subsequent inquiry report. Four categories of themes emerged from the literature reviewed. The themes are outlined and then connected with concerns identified in journal papers written 10 years or more ago. The paper argues that the gap between recognition that society needs competent, well-trained and skilled social workers and other professionals to safeguard the lives of children and an understanding of what education, training and employment support mechanisms are necessary in order for workers to become and remain well-trained, skilled and effective, remains as wide as ever. The paper concludes with an outline of teaching approaches the authors have adopted and learning opportunities they believe need to be put in place to improve professional practice in children and families' work. These include creative use of child abuse inquiry reports themselves, role plays and simulations as well as workshops designed to enhance critical reflection skills.

### Mothers protection of their children after discovering they have been sexually abused: An information-processing perspective

Coohey, C., & O'Leary, P. (2008). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 32, (2), 245-259.

The article reports on a study aimed to understand why some non-offending mothers did not protect their children consistently after knowing sexual abuse was occurring. The sample included 85 mothers involved in child protection services.

The study uses bivariate and multivariate analysis. It includes a case-comparison design comparing mothers who did protect their children consistently from sexual abuse and those who did not. The findings report on maternal characteristics found in mothers from both these groups. These findings may help practitioners better understand which children are more likely to receive inadequate protection. The article provides examples of questions for non-offending mothers to assist practitioners in assessment and treatment. Practice implications are discussed.

[doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.06.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.06.002)

### Dissociation predicts later attention problems in sexually abused children

Kaplow, J., Hall, E., Karenstan, C., Koenen, C., Dodge, K., & Amaya-Jackson, L. (2008). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 32, (2), 261-275.

This article reports on a study that uses a prospective model to test attention problems in sexually abused children that includes fixed variables, trauma, and disclosure-related pathways. The findings indicate the characteristics of the children who are likely to benefit from intervention. Effective intervention involves providing emotion regulation and coping skills and helping children to process traumatic aspects of the abuse to reduce the cyclic nature of traumatic reminders leading to unmanageable stress and dissociation.

[doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.07.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.07.005)

### Exploring the impact of parental drug/alcohol problems on children and parents in a Midlands county in 2005/2006

Fraser, C., McIntyre, A. & Manby, M. (2008). *British Journal of Social Work*, (Advance Access), 1-21.

This paper reports on a small-scale research project which explores the views of parents/carers and children and young people about the impact of parental substance use and implications for services. The study uses semi-structured interviews and a 'Draw and Write' technique. The findings showed that most adult participants recognised their need for help and had obtained treatment for their drug/alcohol use. However, they were also self-critical about their abilities as parents and tried to combine substance use with meeting the basic needs of their children. The children in the study were aware of the emotional turmoil caused by their parents' substance use and saw social workers as important people in their lives. Families in the study needed substantial help from their extended families, or from social services. The study highlights implications for professionals supporting substance-using families.

<http://bjsw.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/bcn016v1>

**Casework assessments of risk for recurrent maltreatment: Association with case-specific risk factors and re-reports**

Dorsey, S., Mustillo, S., Farmer, E., & Elbogen, E. (2008). *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 32, (3), 377-391.

This article reports on a study that focuses on caseworkers' assessments of risk of maltreatment recurrence among families in contact with social services. The study aims to examine the association between caseworkers' risk assessments and demographic, child, parent and family-level risk factors; and agreement between caseworkers' risk assessments and any subsequent report/s of maltreatment. The sample consisted of 2, 139 cases with a report of child physical abuse or neglect who were not placed in out-of-home care. The data was taken from the National Survey for Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW), a nationally representative sample of youth and families who were the subjects of allegations of maltreatment investigated by child

welfare agencies. The analyses indicated that parent-level risk factors and a prior report of maltreatment were most strongly associated with caseworkers' assessments of risk for both physical abuse and neglect cases. Findings suggest that although caseworkers' assessments were associated with a limited set of risk factors, few factors were associated with a recurrent report of maltreatment. Agreement between caseworkers' assessments of risk and a subsequent report of maltreatment was low and caseworkers appear likely to over-estimate risk. The article suggests considerable work may be needed to improve accuracy and identification of cases most at risk. Practice implications are discussed.

[doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.06.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.06.006)

## Out-of-Home Care

**Re-entry of elementary aged children following reunification from foster care**

Barth, R., Weigensberg, E., Fisher, P., Fetrow, B., & Green, R. (2008). *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30, (4), 353-364.

This study examined re-entry for 273 children between the ages of 5 and 12 years using data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being. In multivariate models, re-entry into foster care was associated with higher Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL) scores and higher numbers of children in the household when the child is living at home. The number of children in families and behaviour problems of the child appeared to be highly problematic for families when children reunified. However, the study suggested that other risk factors need to be considered in the decision to reunify. Implications for future research on re-entry and on placement disruptions from foster care are discussed.

[doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.10.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.10.002)

**The Intensive Mental Health Program: Development and structure of the model of intervention for children with serious emotional disturbances**

Vernberg, E., Roberts, M., & Nyre, J. (2008). *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 17, (2), 169-177.

This paper discusses the development and evaluation of a school and community based Intensive Mental Health program designed to meet the challenging needs and behaviours of children with Serious Emotional Disorders (SED). The program is a comprehensive service model that is tailored to the child and uses best practice for treating children with SED. The paper describes the conceptual framework, treatment principles and model for service delivery for psychological and educational interventions that are supported by the Intensive Mental Health Program.

[www.springerlink.com/](http://www.springerlink.com/)

**Outcomes and findings of program evaluation for the Intensive Mental Health Program**

Vernberg, E., Roberts, M., Jacobs, A., Camille, R., Biggs, B., & Nyre, J. (2008). *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 17, (2), 178-190.

This article describes changes in the adaptive functioning of children enrolled in the Intensive Mental Health program (IMHP), a comprehensive program for high-risk children with severe forms of serious emotional disorders that require multiple and often intensive support. The findings show that most children involved in the program showed marked improvement on multiple domains of functioning as well as a stabilisation of symptoms and environments. At discharge most children attended school regularly and lived with a stable caregiver. The findings indicated a significant reduction in the demand for resources post-treatment therefore preventing

# DoCS Research to Practice Update

psychiatric hospitalisation and other out-of-home care placements.

[www.springerlink.com/content/p735888320607t61/fulltext.pdf](http://www.springerlink.com/content/p735888320607t61/fulltext.pdf)

## Achieving permanency for youth in foster care: Assessing and strengthening emotional security

Frey, L., Cushing, G., Freundlich, M. & Brenner, E. (2008). *Child and Family Social Work*, 13, (2), 218-226.

This article describes the work of Casey Family Services in the development of the Belonging and Emotional Security Tool (BEST). This tool assists social workers to assess the viability of a legally permanent relationship between youth and their carers. Workers can use the BEST to explore older youth's sense of emotional security with their foster parents and foster parents' sense of claiming and attachment with youth in their care. When used with youth and foster parents the BEST was found to facilitate meaningful permanency conversations. The article includes case examples of its use and concludes with a discussion of future directions for using the BEST and broadening its application.

## Reports

### Key national indicators of children's health, development and wellbeing: Indicator framework for a picture of Australia's children 2009

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, (April 2008). Bulletin No. 58, Australian Government.

This bulletin previews the reporting framework and key national indicators that will be the basis of the report, 'A picture of Australia's children 2009', scheduled for release in 2009. This bulletin also contains the Headline Indicators for Children's Health, Development and Wellbeing. The indicators cover a broad range of areas of children's health, development and wellbeing,

including: morbidity, disability, mortality, health risk and protective factors, early learning and education, the influences of family, neighbourhood and community factors, safety and security, economic and social influences, and measures of system performance.

[www.aihw.gov.au/publications](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications)

## Resources

### 2007 Longitudinal study of Australian children research conference

Growing up in Australia, (2008). Australian Institute of Family Studies.

A number of leading researchers presented at the inaugural *Growing Up in Australia: Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) Research Conference* in December 2007. The aim of the conference was to provide a forum for the discussion of research based on the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children data. Topics included: Family structure, quality of the co-parental relationship, post-separation parenting and children's socio-emotional wellbeing; Working families' use of child care; and Parent involvement and children's early learning competence. A number of presentations are now available on the Growing Up in Australia website.

[www.aifs.gov.au/growingup/conf/conference2007.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/growingup/conf/conference2007.html)

## New Books

Radford, L. (2006). *Mothering through Domestic Violence*. Jessica Kingsley Publications: London.

This book aims to challenge the 'mother blaming' culture in which domestic violence is embedded. The authors argue that a mother's role should not be compromised or undermined by the abuser, the courts or current policy. The book provides explanations of how mothers frequently 'lose out' in the system because they are blamed either for not protecting their children enough

or for leaving the family home. A new perspective on the power relations between men and women is provided. The complex relationship between violence and child wellbeing, the risk and protective factors to consider and the need for more research on the impact of domestic violence on children is acknowledged. More research on the assessment of domestic violence through the perspective of mother and child, positive support from agencies, rigorous child support and protection, a multi-agency approach to cases and a policy shift away from mother blaming is recommended.

## Research to Practice Team

### Cate Thomas

Manager, Practice Research  
Phone: 9716 2728  
[cate.thomas@community.nsw.gov.au](mailto:cate.thomas@community.nsw.gov.au)

### Hyllus Munro

Senior Research Officer (Aboriginal)  
Phone: 9716 2381  
[hyllus.munro@community.nsw.gov.au](mailto:hyllus.munro@community.nsw.gov.au)

### Kate Flannery

Senior Research Officer  
Phone: 9716 2642  
[kate.flannery@community.nsw.gov.au](mailto:kate.flannery@community.nsw.gov.au)

### Neriman Kashouli

Senior Research Officer  
Phone: 9716 2571  
[neriman.kashouli@community.nsw.gov.au](mailto:neriman.kashouli@community.nsw.gov.au)

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