

DoCS Research to Practice Update

A regular update on the latest national and international research

Issue 20, January/February 2008

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.

If you have any comments or suggestions about how we could improve this Update to make it more useful or relevant to your work, please email the Research to Practice Team at:

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DoCS

Family preservation services

Tully, L., (2008), DoCS Centre for Parenting and Research, 50pp.

This review looks at options for family preservation service models for DoCS procurement processes. The review draws on findings from previous literature reviews. It aims to analyse and critique the literature on family preservation services (FPS), and identify strategies to help preserve family units and help children and young people from entering out-of-home care (OOHC). The paper discusses the evidence on the effectiveness of FPS and assessment tools used in FPS. In particular, it highlights the Homebuilders Model as being effective in preventing subsequent out-of-home care placement and maltreatment. This model targets children at imminent risk of placement in out-of-home care. The underlying principle of the model is that it is best for children to remain with their biological family if they can be kept safely at home. The findings of the review show that FPS appear to improve child and family function however, family vulnerabilities, such as substance abuse, mental illness and history of neglect may be linked with poor outcomes. The report discusses a number of key implications for policy and procurement of FPS including issues for research.

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/research_familypreservation_review.pdf

Effective casework practice with adolescents: Perceptions and practices of DoCS staff

Schmied, V., Walsh, P., (2007), DoCS Centre for Parenting and Research, 36pp.

This paper reports on a small scale qualitative research project on caseworkers' perspectives of effective casework practice with adolescents. The sample included 44 DoCS caseworkers. The study aimed to describe the nature and characteristic of the work that DoCS staff undertake with adolescents and their families, explore staff perceptions of effective strategies and identify approaches used to access services for this client group. Seven key categories emerged from the study and contribute to understanding the key elements of effective casework practice with adolescents. The findings emphasise the central role caseworkers play in coordinating services and interventions for at risk adolescents and the sensitive nature of the work. Also the need for caseworkers to develop effective relationships with adolescents, their families and other agencies is highlighted.

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/research_casework_adolescents.pdf

Early Intervention

Reducing the risk for preschool expulsion: Mental health consultation for young children with challenging behaviours

Perry, D. F., Dunne, M. C., McFadden L., Campbell, D., (2008), *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, pp44-54.

Data from literature in the U.S shows a prevalence of problem behaviours in low income preschoolers and increasing numbers of young children are being expelled from child care settings. This article reports on outcomes of a 4-year study designed to reduce the

number of children expelled for challenging behaviours in a large suburban county in Maryland U.S. This study aims to determine if mental health consultation given to care providers reduces the number of at-risk children expelled from child care programs.

The study identified 192 children between the ages of 10 months and 7 years at risk of exclusion. Child care providers rated problem behaviours at referral and discharge stage using the Preschool Kindergarten Behaviour Scales and the Brief Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment. The findings suggest additional support for mental health consultation can be effective strategy for reducing levels of exclusion from child care settings and addressing challenging behaviours. Limitations of the study are discussed.

www.springerlink.com/

Early parenting intervention: Family risk and first-time parenting related to intervention effectiveness

Stolk, M. N., Mesman, J., van Zeijl, J., Alink, L. R. A., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., van IJzendoorn, M. H., Juffer, F., Koot, H. M., (2008), *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 17 (1), pp53-83.

This article reports on a study on the effectiveness of a home based parenting intervention aimed at enhancing mothers positive parenting (sensitivity and adequate discipline strategies) and decreasing externalising behaviours of young children aged between 1- to 3-year who were screened for high levels of externalising behaviour. The study compared intervention between mothers of first-born children and mothers of later-born children. Cumulative risk and parity were tested in a randomised controlled trial with 237 families. The results showed that cumulative risk was not associated with either change in child externalising behaviours or change in positive parenting. A

major finding was that intervention was most effective in families with greater need of support.

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Strengths-based approach and coping strategies used by parents whose young children exhibit violent behaviour: collaboration between schools and parents

Drolet, M., Paquin, M., Soutyrine, M., (2007), *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 24 (5), pp437-453.

This research study explores the strategies adopted by 60 parents of children between 3 and 9 years of age considered to have engaged in violent behaviour, within the meaning of the *Safe Schools Act* (Ontario Ministry of Education, Canada, 2000). This legal framework requires parents to be involved in the decisions concerning their children. The paper builds on research addressing school-parent collaboration and strength based practices with families. It identifies coping strategies used by parents, focussing on strengths and their perceptions of their involvement in school decisions concerning their children's behaviour. The study reports on strategies that enhance the parent-school partnership, such as effective communication, and aims to provide social workers with a mediation perspective to social work practice with families.

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Child Protection

Communication skills in child protection: How do social workers talk to parents?

Forrester, D., Kershaw, S., Moss, H., Hughes, L., (2008), *Child and Family Social Work*, 13 (1), pp41-51.

Communication skills are fundamental to social work practice, however, there is very little research on how social workers

communicate with parents about child welfare concerns. This article reports on a study analysing 24 taped interviews between social workers and an actor playing a parent (a 'simulated client'). Scenarios in which parental alcohol misuse was an issue were used.

The study rated social workers' communication skills as well as simulated clients' resistance and information disclosure responses. The findings showed that social workers mainly asked closed ended questions, used few reflections and rarely identified positives in interviews. However social workers did raise and achieved clarity over issues of concern.

A major concern of the study was the low levels of empathy used in interviews. In cases where high levels of empathy were used there was less resistance and more disclosure of information from simulated clients. The findings suggest that social workers are not communicating well with parents and, as a priority, there is a need for workers to develop skills in maintaining empathic communication while raising child protection concerns. Practical, theoretical and training implications are discussed.

Do good intentions beget good policy? A review of child protection policies to address intimate partner violence

Nixon, K. L., Tutty L. M., Weaver-Dunlop G., Walsh C. A., (2007), *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29 (12), pp1469-1486.

In response to the growing concern that children are adversely affected by being exposed to partner domestic

violence, significant changes have been made to child protection policy in many parts of the Western world. This article reviews and analyses these policies/legislative changes in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand to provide a general analysis of how the issue of child exposure to partner domestic violence has been addressed within a child protection policy context.

The article makes recommendations to address children's exposure to violence at the legislative, organisational, programmatic and policy level. It proposes guidelines to more adequately protect the safety and well-being of children by offering support and protection to the adult victim while holding the perpetrator accountable, for example, if someone needs to be removed from the house then it should be the perpetrator of the violence.

[doi:10.1016/j.chidyouth.2007.09.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2007.09.007)

Collaboration between mental health and child protection services: Professionals' perceptions of best practice

Darlington, Y., Feeney J. A., (2008), *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30 (2), pp187-198.

This article reports on a qualitative study conducted in Queensland, Australia of mental health and child protection professionals' perceptions of best practice when working on cases where there is parental mental illness and child protection concerns.

The study surveyed 232 professionals in mental health and statutory child protection roles. These professionals offered suggestions for improving interagency relationships, collaborative processes, and outcomes for children and parents. Improving communication, enhancing professionals knowledge base in both sectors and providing adequate resources and appropriate

service models were major themes identified. The study recommends a framework for the development and implementation of approaches to interagency collaboration that takes into account formal and informal strategies, operating at a range of levels of organisational influence within the three key domains.

[doi:10.1016/j.chidyouth.2007.09.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2007.09.005)

Who are these parents involved in child neglect? A differential analysis by parent gender and family structure

Dufour, S., Lavergne, C., Larrivée, M-C., Trocmé, N., (2008), *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30 (2), pp141-156.

Studies about fathers and child neglect are scarce. Current research tends to focus on mothers and limits the understanding of the influence of all parental figures on child protection.

This article reports on a study of 1,266 neglecting families which aims to compare socio-demographic characteristics and personal problems between mothers to that of fathers (both biological and surrogate parents) in different family structures. The data, from the *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2003*, was collected by workers in a representative sample of 63 child welfare service areas.

The findings report on the differences and the impact of neglect depending on the parent's situation, their gender and family structure. It suggests that consideration of all parental figures and family structures is essential to better understand neglect and foster the well being and safety of children. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

[doi:10.1016/j.chidyouth.2007.09.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2007.09.002)

Disorder-specific effects of CBT for anxious and depressed youth: A meta-analysis of candidate mediators of change

Chu, B. C., Harrison, T. L., (2007), *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 10 (4), pp1573-2827.

This article reports on a comprehensive review of child and adolescent randomised clinical trials for the purpose of evaluating specific effects of cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) in the treatment of anxious or depressed children and adolescents, using a meta-analytic approach. The results showed that CBT demonstrated positive treatment gains across anxiety, depression, and general functioning outcomes. Findings were generally consistent with CB theory but suggest potentially different mediators in the treatment of anxiety and depression. Results are discussed in terms of implications for mechanisms research, theories of change, and treatment development.

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Substance-exposed newborns: Hospital and child protection responses

Burke Drescher K., *Children and Youth Services Review*, (2007), 29 (12), pp1503-1519.

Federal legislation in the U.S. mandates that newborns identified as prenatally substance-exposed be reported to local child protective agencies, however the legislation does not outline methods of identifying these newborns. In NSW legislation mandates pre-natal reporting 'if there are reasonable grounds to believe that the child is at risk of harm subsequent to his or her birth', and also does not outline identifying methods.

This article reviews studies on the effects of prenatally substance-exposed newborns as well as the existing methods of identifying substance-exposed newborns used by some U.S. hospitals and discusses the benefits and drawbacks. It reports on the inconsistencies in hospital testing and notification to child protection agencies and child protective responses.

The article argues for formal protocols to be developed for ascertaining prenatal substance exposure, including establishing objective criteria that both identifies a newborn as substance-exposed and prescribes under what circumstances a newborn should be brought to the attention of child protective services.

[doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.06.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.06.007)

Out-of-Home Care

Co-occurring problems for substance abusing mothers in child welfare: Matching services to improve family reunification

Choi, S., Ryan, J. P., (2007), *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29 (11), pp1395-1410.

Substance abusing families often experience multiple problems simultaneously. Prior substance abuse research suggests that attention to these co-occurring problems is essential to achieving desirable outcomes.

This study attempts to determine whether tailoring services to meet clients' co-occurring problems improve key child welfare outcomes such as family reunification. It investigates the relationship between matching mothers' needs to service and family reunification for substance abusing families in public child welfare. The sample consisted of a total of 354 substance abusing mothers and their 602 children

enrolled in the Illinois AODA waiver demonstration project.

The results showed that matched services in mental health, housing, family counselling and substance abuse treatment significantly improved the likelihood of family reunification. It found that child welfare systems continue to struggle with low rates of service utilisation and family reunification. The article highlights the importance of researchers, practitioners and policy makers to continue to identify the barriers to the provision of matched services, and to develop strategies for improving the provision of matched services.

[doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.05.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.05.013)

Retrospective and concurrent predictors of the mental health of children in care

Tarren-Sweeney, M., (2008), *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30 (1), pp1-25.

The paper reports on retrospective and concurrent predictors of children's baseline mental health estimates for 347 children recruited to an epidemiological study of children in foster and kinship care in New South Wales, Australia. The study design addresses limitations of previous risk-related research with this population.

A large number of potential risk and protective factors were associated with children's mental health. Cumulative exposure to adversity, attachment theory and foster care practices were attributed to the problems. Implications for social policy are discussed and include identifying children who are in need of care at younger ages, and the harmful effects of perceived impermanence for children in long-term care.

[doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.05.014](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.05.014)

Defining well-being for Indigenous children in care: Indigenous concerns about the social, cultural and spiritual development of Indigenous children in care

McMahon, A., Reck, L., Walker, M., (2007), *Children Australia*, 32 (2), pp15-20.

This paper reports on a study that sought to define social, cultural and spiritual well-being indicators for Indigenous children in care. The study obtained the opinions and knowledge of Indigenous child protection workers and foster carers. Three focus groups were conducted with 20 Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander (ASSI) foster carers and child protection workers in Mackay, a town in North Queensland.

The study examines a series of strategic change indicators that address Indigenous concerns about the social, cultural and spiritual development of Indigenous children in care. Implications for case practice are discussed.

<http://search.informit.com.au/fullText:dn=200707429;res=APAFI>

The experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers in the child protection system

Elarde, P., Tilbury, C., (2007), *Children Australia*, 32 (2), pp 8-14.

This paper reports on a research study conducted jointly by a university based researcher and Indigenous child protection agencies in Queensland, Australia. It explores the support needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers who maintain and support children from their own extended family in care. This research gives the carers a voice to talk about their experiences. The findings suggest

more investment is needed to support Indigenous carers after the placement is made.

<http://search.informit.com.au/fullText:dn=200707428;res=APAFI>

Behavioural problems following reunification of children in long-term foster care

Bellamy, J. L., (2008), *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30 (2), pp216-228.

Reunification of children with their families is the most common and preferred exit in current U.S. policy. However, little is known about the well-being of children following reunification after foster care. The limited research in this area suggests there is a greater risk of behaviour problems for children following foster care.

This study adds to a small body of research and aims to test the effect of reunification by examining risks associated with behaviour problems following long-term foster care. The study uses secondary data analysis with a sub-sample of 604 children from the National Study of Child and Adolescent Well-being (NSCAW) who had experienced at least 8 months of foster care. Risks were measured at baseline and 36 month follow-up.

Findings highlight the complex nature of the relationship between reunification and behavioural outcomes, as well as the need for reunification interventions that specifically target parental mental health and children's internalising behaviours. Reunification research using longitudinal data and qualitative methods is recommended to clarify risks and outcomes across time.

doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.09.008

Under one roof: A review and selective meta-analysis on the outcomes of residential child and youth care

Knorth, E. J., Harder, A. T., Zandberg, T., Kendrick, A. J., (2008), *Children and Youth Services Review*, (30) 2, pp123-140.

Residential child and youth care in many countries is perceived as a 'last resort' solution that should be avoided if at all possible because of scepticism about its effectiveness. On the other hand, there is a view that a residential placement can contribute to the positive development of some youth with serious behavioural and/or emotional disturbances.

This article reports on a meta-analysis using pre-experimental (PE) and quasi-experimental (QE) outcome studies published in the period 1990-2005 covering the development and outcomes for 2,345 children and young persons. Results differentiated between PE and QE studies. Quasi-experimental studies showed that residential programs applying behaviour-therapeutic methods and focusing on family involvement had the most promising short term outcomes. Limitations of the study and implications for practice are discussed.

doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.09.001

In their own words: Challenges facing youth aging out of foster care

Scannapieco, M., Connell-Carrick, K., Painter, K., (2007), *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 24 pp423-435.

This article reports on a study, involving focus group discussions with adolescents in foster care and those who have left care, and describes the challenges they face existing foster care and what is needed for successful transition. Foster parents and child welfare

workers were also interviewed. A total of 72 participants were involved in the study.

Three major themes included youth focused practice, a need for collaboration, better communication with youth, and unmet needs and permanent connections. Strategies to improve case practice with the goal of helping youth achieve interdependence are discussed.

<http://www.springerlink.com/content/pu7217150vr54745/fulltext.pdf>

Risk and protective factors contributing to the longitudinal psychosocial well-being of adopted foster children

Simmel, C., *Journal of Emotional and Behavioural Disorders*, (2007), 14 (4), pp237-249.

This article describes a study based on a U.S. statewide longitudinal sample of adopted foster youth to explore the relationship between early pre-adoption risk factors and subsequent elevated levels of psychopathology symptomatology.

One of the main aims of the study was to evaluate the impact of pre-adoption stressors (prenatal drug/nicotine exposure, early maltreatment, chaotic foster care history) on 293 adopted foster children's short- and long-term psychosocial functioning at ages 2, 4, and 8 years post-adoption. An additional objective was to measure how post-adoption attributes influenced children's functioning.

The study identified several key risk factors that have an ongoing influence on children's functioning throughout the adoptive placement. The strongest risk factors for the

display of behavior problems were sexual abuse, neglect, and having been placed in multiple foster homes. A lack of parental readiness and subsequent ineffective parent-child interaction style were significantly linked to poor outcomes. In addition, longitudinally, the behavior problems remained stable across time. The implications of these findings for the development of services and interventions targeted for adoptive families are discussed.

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=pbh&AN=27615678&site=ehost-live>

Characteristics of four kinship placement outcome groups and variables associated with these kinship placement outcome groups

Chang, J. C., Liles, R., *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal* (2007), 24 (6), pp509-522.

This article reports on a study that investigates factors that may be associated with the disrupted kinship care placements of abused and neglected children. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 130 kin caregivers in the U.S. Participants were randomly selected from lists provided by two child protection agencies and divided into four different outcome groups.

Findings revealed that characteristics of the children such as their health status, ages, and the extent to which they were getting into "trouble" were significantly associated with placement outcomes. The caregivers' perceptions of the quality of relationships between themselves and the children in their care and the birth parents of those children were also associated with placement outcomes. Two other factors affecting outcomes were the frequency of contact between social workers and caregivers and the extent to which services plans were discussed. Practice implications related to these findings are

discussed.

This article can be borrowed from the DoCS library

Reports

Foster care dynamics 2000-2005: A report from the multistate foster care data archive

Wulczyn, F., Chen, L., Hislop, B. K. (2007), *Chapin Hall Centre for Children*, 64pp.

This reports on a study funded by the Casey Family Programs to provide a general overview of children in foster care. The sample includes 348,695 children admitted to foster care for the first time between 2000-2005 in the U.S. The data includes changes in the number of children in care, placement type, movement and exit rates. The report can help inform the large scale DoCS prospective longitudinal study of NSW children and young people in care on their development and adjustment, and factors that affect their outcomes.

www.chapinhall.org/article_abstract.aspx?ar=1465&L2=61&L3=130

Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Australia Social Policy and Research Centre (SPRC), Nov 2007.

The *Left Out and Missing Out* project draws on the concept of deprivation (missing out) and social exclusion (left out) that relate directly to people's living standards. This research was conducted in partnership between academic researchers, community sector researchers and practitioners to draw on first hand knowledge of low-income Australians and describes the meaning and experience of poverty.

http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/ARC_Exclusion_FinalReport.pdf

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Australia's mothers and babies 2005

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Nov 2007.

Australia's mothers and babies 2005 is the fifteenth report providing information on births in Australia from perinatal data collections for each state and territory. The report presents demographic, pregnancy and childbirth factors of women who gave birth in 2005 and the characteristics and outcomes of their babies. This edition includes a chapter on socioeconomic status of mothers.

The report is produced by the AIHW National Perinatal Statistics Unit based at the University of New South Wales and can be used by researchers, academics, students, policy makers and health service planners, and those providing services in reproductive health.

<http://www.npsu.unsw.edu.au/NPSUweb.nsf/page/ps20>

Demand for SAAP accommodation by homeless people 2005-06

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Dec 2007.

Although Supported Accommodation Assistance Program agencies accommodate large numbers of people every day, they cannot always meet all the requests for SAAP accommodation. This report provides information about the level of unmet demand for SAAP accommodation, including how the estimates are calculated.

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10491>

Resources

The November 2007 edition of the Queensland Government Department of Child Safety's monthly magazine is available at:

www.childsafety.qld.gov.au/magazine/2007-11/index.html

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