

DoCS Research to Practice Update

A regular update for staff 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.

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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Early Intervention

The school readiness of Australian Indigenous children: a review of the literature

McTurk, N., Nutton, G., Lea, T., Robinson, G., & Carapetis, J. (2008). Menzies School of Health Research and School for Social Policy Research, Charles Darwin University, Northern Territory.

This article summarises the research evidence concerning the school readiness of Australian Indigenous children. Definitions and methods of assessing school readiness are discussed, including their applicability to the Indigenous population. The risk and protective factors that influence Indigenous school readiness, such as low birth weight, dietary deficiencies and preschool attendance, are reviewed. Also discussed are intervention strategies for promoting school readiness, such as community based antenatal care and nutrition programs. The review concludes that high quality evidence is sparse and effective interventions are few in number.

cdu.edu.au/sspr/documents/

Rethinking school readiness

Centre for Community Child Health, (2008). *Policy Brief 10*, The Royal Children's Hospital, Victoria, Australia.

This policy brief covers research concerning the nature of and pathways to school readiness. The roles of schools, services and communities in providing the conditions necessary for children to start school ready to take advantage of the academic and social learning experiences are discussed.

rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/

Evaluation of services in the Bureau of Milwaukee County Child Welfare

Courtney, M., Zinn, A., McMurtry, S., Power, P., Maldre, K., & Bost, N. (2008). Chapin Hall Centre for Children, University of Chicago, USA.

Three reports by Chapin Hall researchers are combined to provide results from an evaluation of services in the Bureau of Milwaukee County Child Welfare. *Are Family Needs and Services Aligned? Evaluating the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare* summarises the major findings from the three-year evaluation. *An Evaluation of Ongoing Services in Milwaukee County* covers the bureau's program that provides case management services to families of children in substitute care. *An Evaluation of Safety Services in Milwaukee County* covers the bureau's program that provides in-home supports and risk-prevention services to families who have had substantiated child maltreatment reports.

chapinhall.org/article_abstract

Brighter Futures early intervention program interim report

Tannous, W.K., & Katz, I. (2008). *SPRC Report 7/08*, Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW.

This evaluation report of the Brighter Futures program was prepared for the NSW Department of Community Services. According to the report, nearly three-quarters of families who have accessed the program have more than one vulnerability, the most common being lack of social support followed by parental mental health issues and domestic violence. For this report Brighter Futures caseworkers administered a family survey to 168 families. Responses indicate that

almost one third of primary carers had a disability and 65 per cent receive government benefits as their main source of income.

The evaluation will continue until 2010 and there will be regular reports produced over this time. In addition to the family survey data, the next report will include information gathered during the process study and information about the implementation of Brighter Futures.

sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/Brighter_futures

Community capacity building: A review of the literature

Verity, F. (2007). Department of Health, South Australian Government.

This report aims to capture the capacity of communities to shape, lead and contribute to their own well-being and provide a critical overview of the conceptual thinking informing community capacity building with exploration of the implications for practice. It has been written primarily for people working with communities and professional staff who would like to learn more about the conceptual thinking informing community capacity building.

sapo.org.au/pub/pub

Child Protection

The impact of cumulative maternal trauma and diagnosis on parenting behaviour

Cohen, L., Hien, D., Batchelder, S. (2008). *Child Maltreatment*, 13, (1), 27-38.

This study from the United States examines the relative contributions of cumulative maternal trauma (such as a history of interpersonal violence), substance use, depressive and post-traumatic stress diagnoses on parental abuse potential, punitiveness, and psychological and physical aggression in a sample of 176 urban mothers. Cumulative trauma was found to be a significant predictor of all parenting outcomes, even after controlling for demographic and diagnostic variables. Substance use and depression were found to be significantly related to abuse potential. The findings add to a growing literature examining the impact of cumulative trauma on parental functioning. Implications for parenting interventions are discussed.

<http://childmaltreatment>

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

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

Using data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being conducted in the United States, this study tests the hypothesis that information typically collected during a maltreatment investigation can be used to screen children for mental health problems. Cumulative risk scores were created for 3,022 children and compared to reports of clinical-level problems using standardized measures. The study concludes that investigative information could serve the dual purpose of screening children for mental health problems, thus potentially providing benefits and avoiding costs.

<http://researchonsocialworkpractice>

The effectiveness of aftercare services for African American families in an intensive family preservation service

Nelson, K., & Nash, J. (2008). *Research on Social Work Practice*, 18, (3), 189-197.

This article reports on a demonstration project in the United States testing the effectiveness of the aftercare component of an intensive family preservation program for African American families. Individualized support services were provided for up to 1 year after the completion of intensive services. The main outcomes examined in this study were the prevention of unnecessary placements and reduction of future maltreatment. Significant reductions in re-referrals for neglect and improvement in factors contributing to child well-being indicate that child safety was not compromised by providing in-home services as an alternative to placement.

rsw.sagepub.com/cqi

Out-of-Home Care

The psychosocial functioning and family background of children experiencing significant placement instability in Australian out-of-home care

Osborn, A., Delfabbro, P., & Barber, J. (2008). *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30, (8), 847-860.

This paper profiles the family and social background, and psychosocial wellbeing of 364 children with a high level of placement instability in Australian out-of-home care. Children were selected based on reliable predictors of instability and detailed interviews were conducted with case-workers, along with extensive case-file readings. The children in this population were found to originate from families that shared many risk factors. In most

cases, a family history of domestic violence, physical abuse, and parental substance abuse dominated over a history of sexual abuse and neglect. Based on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, over 75% of children were found to have clinical level conduct disorder, two-thirds have peer problems, and around a half are clinically anxious or depressed. The results provided some evidence that children with the poorest overall psychosocial adjustment were most prone to placement breakdowns, but there was no clear relationship between the overall number of family background problems and the level of placement instability. However, individual risk factors, including a history of family violence and abuse were related to more disrupted placement histories for children in care.

[doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.12.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.12.012)

Effects of a foster parent training intervention on placement changes of children in foster care

Price, J., Chamberlain, P., Landsverk, J., Reid, J., Leve, L., & Laurent, H. (2008). *Child Maltreatment*, 13, (1), Feb, 64-75.

This article reports on a United States study to examine the impact of a foster parent training and support intervention (KEEP) on placement changes and to determine whether the intervention mitigates placement disruption risks associated with children's placement histories. The sample included 700 families with children between ages 5 and 12 years, from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Families were randomly assigned to the intervention or control condition. The number of prior placements was predictive of negative exits

from current foster placements. The intervention increased chances of a positive exit, such as parent/child reunification, and mitigated the risk-enhancing effect of a history of multiple placements. Incorporating intervention approaches based on a parent management training model into child welfare services may improve placement outcomes for children in foster care.

<http://child.maltreatment>

Into adulthood: A follow-up study of 718 young people who were placed in out-of-home care during their teens

Vinnerljung, B., & Sallnas, M. (2008). *Child & Family Social Work*, 13, (2), May, 144-155.

In this study, national register data were used to analyse long-term outcomes at age 25 for around 700 Swedish young people placed in out-of-home care during their teens. The sample consisted of 70% of all 13 to 16 year olds who entered out-of-home care in 1991. Results revealed a dividing line between young people placed in care for behavioural problems and those placed for other reasons. Young women and men from the first group had, in comparison with peers who did not enter care, very high rates of premature death, serious involvement in crime, hospitalisations for mental health problems, teenage parenthood, self-support problems and low educational attainment. Young people who were placed for other reasons had better outcomes, but still considerably worse than non-care peers. Young women tended to do better than young men, regardless of reasons for placement. Very high rates of hospitalisations for mental health problems were found among young people placed for behavioural problems. Breakdown of placement was found to be a robust indicator of poor long-term prognosis.

[http://child & family social work](http://child&family-social-work)

Resources

Experiences of children and young people caring for a parent with a mental health problem

Roberts, D., Bernard, M., Misca, G., & Head, E. (2008). *SCIE Research Briefing 24*, Social Care Institute of Excellence, United Kingdom.

This briefing focuses on the experiences of children and young people under 18 years of age caring for a parent or parents defined as having mental health problems that are serious and enduring. The nature and effectiveness of interventions or services are outside the scope of this briefing. These are currently the subject of a systematic review being conducted for SCIE by the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York. Comments on interventions and services are, therefore, confined to the practical and emotional impacts of services as they are experienced by young carers.

scie.org.uk/publications/briefings

Social and emotional learning

Early Childhood Australia Incorporated, Watson, ACT, Australia.

The Early Childhood Australia website provides links to a range of web-based resources for practitioners and parents concerning early childhood development. A recent addition to the website is a link to material concerning the promotion of social and emotional intelligence in children and young people.

earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/

New Books

Child protection, domestic violence and parental substance misuse: Family experiences and effective practice

Cleaver, H., Nicholson, D., Tarr, S., & Cleaver, D. (2007). Jessica Kingsley Publications: London.

This book brings together the facts and latest research to overview what is known about the complex relationships between substance misuse, domestic violence and their effects on children. It discusses the extent to which domestic violence, parental alcohol or parental drug misuse impact on children's health and development, affect the adults' capacity to undertake key parenting tasks, and influence the response of wider family and the community. Implications for policy and practice in both children and adult services are highlighted.

Going local: Working in communities and neighbourhoods

Pierson, J. (2008). Routledge: London and New York.

This book explains how to develop new approaches to working in communities and neighbourhoods, engage with users and their locality, and contribute to strengthening local communities. Topics include: the major concepts, perspectives and policies underpinning work in communities and neighbourhoods; how to maximise the involvement of local people in shaping services and how to develop effective partnerships with local organisations.

How to reach 'hard to reach' children: Improving access, participation and outcomes

Pomerantz, K., Hughes, M., & Thompson, D. (2007). John Wiley & Sons Ltd: England.

This book addresses underlying difficulties affecting children and young people in the community and in schools, relating to under-achievement, disengagement and school avoidance. It explores the consequences of school exclusion and the practices that can enhance the inclusion of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs. The book offers new and creative approaches to promoting multi-agency teamwork in relation to working with looked after children, refugees and asylum seekers and those with challenging behaviour and their families.

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Disclaimer

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