

DoCS Research to Practice Update

A regular update for staff on the latest national and international research

Indigenous Issue

Issue 30, June / July 2009

The Research-to-Practice Update has been produced as an acknowledgement of National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week (5-12 July 2009). The publications listed in this issue highlight the availability of resources covering a diverse range of topics. It is important to acknowledge that there is a need for rigorously evaluating programs for Indigenous peoples in the fields of early intervention, out-of-home care and child protection to close our knowledge gap on the effectiveness of Indigenous-specific programs. It sends a strong message of what needs to be done to build our knowledge base about what works and what doesn't work for Indigenous peoples in early intervention, out-of-home care and child protection.

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Research Publications – What's New!

Early Intervention

Improving the representation of Indigenous workers in the mainstream childcare workplace

Hutchins, T., Frances, K., & Siggers, S. (2009). *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 34(1), 2-9.

This article is concerned with the under-representation of Indigenous workers in mainstream childcare services and the associated problem of the under-representation of Indigenous children in such services. Specifically, it focuses on workforce issues that serve as barriers to both attracting and/or retaining Indigenous staff. The research methods included focus groups, community consultations and interviews with key stakeholders in the childcare field, in order to identify Indigenous childcare workers' needs and preferences as well as those of their children, families and communities. An analysis of international and national literature on the Indigenous childcare workforce provided a context for the evidence presented from the focus groups and individual consultations, and as a point of reference to compare existing understandings to those arising from these discussions. The research findings highlight three key issues that serve as significant barriers to Indigenous people entering and/or remaining in the childcare workforce, and to Indigenous children and families accessing mainstream childcare services: the lack of the provision of culturally safe workplaces, the lack of flexible employment practices, and the lack of opportunities for Indigenous workers to receive on-the-job training.

Contact [Early Childhood Australia](#) to request a copy of this article.

Australian Indigenous perspectives on quality assurance in children's services

Hutchins, T., Frances, K., & Siggers, S. (2009). *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 34(1), 10-19.

The Australian Government has recently committed to the development of an integrated system of assuring national quality standards for Australian childcare and preschool services. This article addresses two fundamental issues relating to the development of an integrated system as it applies to Indigenous children's services. Specifically, these issues relate to a conceptualisation of quality child care from an Indigenous perspective, and to the participation of Indigenous services in an integrated quality assurance system. Who defines quality, what quality looks, sounds and feels like, and how to measure quality were questions examined in this study. Research methods included focus groups, community consultations, and interviews with key stakeholders in the childcare sector in order to identify the key issues regarding childcare quality assurance for Indigenous families and service providers. The research findings highlighted some serious incongruities between mainstream approaches to quality assurance and those valued by Indigenous families and service providers.

Contact [Early Childhood Australia](#) to request a copy of this article.

Monitoring vulnerable families: A two year outcome study

Turner, M. (2009). Clarity Research Limited on behalf of the Family Help Trust, New Zealand.

This Report provides evidence that the risk of child abuse among the most socially deprived families can be significantly reduced through effective home visitation. This New Zealand based research is the first evaluation to show that positive changes can occur in the lives of the most vulnerable children, when a service is specifically geared towards working with those families at greatest risk of child abuse. It provides valuable information that can help improve the outlook for many more vulnerable infants and families. These findings can guide clinical practice, as well as providing governmental social agencies and policy analysts with an evidence base by which to improve family functioning, therefore reducing the incidence of child abuse and neglect among our most vulnerable families and infants. No differences were found in outcomes between Māori and non-Māori in any of the core indicators.

Contact the [Family Help Trust NZ](#) to request a copy of this report.

The next frontier: Prevention as an instrument of social justice

Kenny, M. E., & Hage, S. M. (2009). *Journal of Primary Prevention*, Vol. 30(1), 1-10.

Preventive interventions that reduce oppressive societal structures, change attitudes that contribute to oppression, and enhance individual, family, and community strengths that empower persons to resist oppression represent important vehicles for advancing social justice. Social justice prevention is informed by the work of George Albee, in conjunction with ecological theory, positive

psychology, the emancipatory communitarian framework, and multiculturalism. This US manuscript describes the convergence of these influences in defining a social justice approach to prevention that integrates concerns relevant to context, strengths, culture, and power differentials, and evaluates social justice prevention as represented in current prevention literature.

<http://www.springerlink.com/>

Preventing racism and promoting social justice: Person-centered and environment-centered interventions

Buhin, L., & Vera, E. M. (2009). *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 30 (1), 43-59.

This US paper proposes that prevention of racism is a social justice issue in light of the pervasively detrimental effects of racism on all members of our society and the especially traumatising effects for people of colour. Review of contact theory and its extensions provides the theoretical background for person-focused prevention strategies. Specifically, the paper describes a model primary prevention program to address the development of racist attitudes and beliefs in white children as a way of stopping future racist traumatization of people of colour. Advocating for public policy changes is discussed as a valuable environment-centered prevention tool in working toward social justice. Implications for training incorporating multicultural counselling competencies, critical psychology, prevention science, and advocacy are discussed.

<http://www.springerlink.com/>

Promoting a social justice approach to prevention: Future directions for training, practice and research

Hage, S., & Kenny, M. (2009). *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 30 (1), 75-87.

The final paper of this special issue devoted to prevention and social justice calls for prevention practitioners and researchers to redirect their energy and resources to creating genuine social change. To begin, the contribution of the American Psychological Association ethical code to social justice-oriented prevention work is explored, and significant ethical issues that need to be further addressed by the current code are briefly outlined. Second, the authors discuss the implications of a social justice approach to prevention for training, practice and research. Finally, they invite readers to take the lead in putting a social justice prevention approach into practice.

<http://www.springerlink.com/>

Out-of-Home Care

After the apology: Why are so many First Nations children still in foster care? A summary of the research on ethnic over-representation and structural bias

Blackstock, C., Green, S., & Baldry, E. (2009). *Children Australia*, 34(1), 22-30.

Although the undesirable child outcomes arising from the chronic over-representation of First Nations children and young people in child welfare care have been broadly acknowledged in Canada, research on this critical issue is just emerging. This paper summarises the North American literature on ethnic over-representation and structural risks to inform future research directions in First Nations

child welfare. Comparisons to the situation of Aboriginal children in Australia are also discussed.

Contact [Children Australia](#) for a copy of this article.

Prediction of placement into out-of-home care for American Indian/Alaskan Natives compared to non-Indians

Carter, V.B. (2009). *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(8), 840-846.

Nationally representative child welfare data collected between October of 1999 and December 2000 were utilised to explore those variables that would predict the likelihood of American Indian/Alaskan Native children being placed into out-of-home care compared to non-Indian families. In comparison to non-Indian children, American Indian/Alaskan Native children came from poorer homes, and had caregivers with greater mental health and alcohol abuse service needs compared to non-Indian caregivers. Possible bias by child protective services workers may have affected the decision-making that led to the removal of American Indian/Alaskan Native children from their homes. Acknowledgement of past and present instances of racism in the child welfare system can lead to a decrease of American Indian/Alaskan Native children being placed into out-of-home care.

DOI: [10.1016/j.childyouth.2009.03.006](#)

The social and family backgrounds of infants in South Australian out-of-home care 2000-2005: Predictors of subsequent abuse notifications

Delfabbro, P., Borgas, M., Rogers, N., Jeffreys, H., & Wilson, R. (2009). *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(2), 219-226.

The study examined the social and familial characteristics of 498 infants entering South Australian out-of-home care between 2000 and 2004 (n=225 entered only for respite, n=273 for other formal placements). Analyses focused on the extent to which background characteristics, most notably a history of prior abuse, was able to predict subsequent child abuse notifications once children had exited care. The results showed that most children entered care due to a clustering of significant background problems, including poverty, domestic violence, physical abuse, substance misuse, and neglect. Around 50% of infants were returned to homes where there were subsequent notifications of abuse. Logistic regression modelling conducted separately for respite only and those formally entering care showed that prior abuse was a reliable predictor of ongoing abuse notifications in both samples. In some models, prior abuse yielded a very high probability (N60%) of some ongoing notifications suggesting that these statistical models could be used to enhance risk assessments conducted prior to reunification decision-making in South Australia.

The study includes a sample of Aboriginal children and young people.

DOI: [10.1016/j.childyouth.2008.07.023](#)

Intergenerational and interconnected: Mental health and well-being in grandparent caregiver families

Smithgall, C., Mason, S., Michels, L., LiCalsi, C., & Goerge, R. (2009). *Families in Society: Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 90(2), 167-175.

Research shows that a substantial number of grandparent caregivers are caring for children with developmental delays or emotional or behavioural problems, and that many caregivers have clinical levels

of depression. This US study explores grandparent-caregiver families' mental health needs as well as use of and barriers to accessing mental health services. Interviews with families revealed unmet mental health needs and an interconnectedness between grandchildren's and their grandparent caregivers' well-being. In the survey component, service providers described problems highly consistent with those reported by grandmothers, including school-related or attention-related concerns among children and depression, stress, and frustration among grandparents. Findings suggest implications for practitioners and policymakers regarding service access, expectations about services, and the fit between clients' needs and the services available. Although not specifically Indigenous, the challenges faced by grandparent carers are universal.

<http://www.familiesinsociety.org/>

Child Protection

Child sexual abuse and Aboriginal communities in Australia: A case study of non-inclusive government intervention

Fawcett, B., & Hanlon, M. (2009). *European Journal of Social Work*, 12 (1), 87-100.

In this article, a particular event which occurred in the Northern Territory in Australia in 2007 is used to examine and constructively critique a government strategy that prioritised an invasive and non-participatory form of intervention. The justification for this course of action was the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse. In order to examine both the action taken and the ongoing implications, a case study approach is adopted and despite the recent apology to the 'stolen generations', it is argued that links between current events and those of the past can still be made. These include Aboriginal

communities continuing to be viewed in a negative, homogenising and pathologising manner and the recurrence of the pervading belief that complex and entrenched structural problems, endemic oppression and poverty can be solved by simple and straightforward solutions. The authors contend that events in Australia's Northern Territory have implications for social workers internationally and that these can be seen to challenge the value base of social work and the integrity of the profession.

Contact the [European Journal of Social Work](#) to request a copy of this article.

Creating a system of care for children's mental health in a Native American community

Werrbach, G., Withers, M., & Neptune, E. (2009). *Families in Society: Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 90(1), 87-95.

This article describes the creation of a system of care in children's mental health by the Passamaquoddy Tribe located in Princeton, Maine. The history of this Native American community; the impact of oppression, historical trauma, and contemporary economic, health, and educational inequities on child and family health well-being; and the barriers to providing culturally competent child mental health services are reviewed. Descriptions of the key components and core concepts of the system of care are presented along with case examples highlighting the array of services. Finally, implications for practice in the creation of culturally competent systems of care within Native American communities are discussed.

<http://www.familiesinsociety.org/>

Addressing disproportionality and disparity in child welfare: Evaluation of anti-racism training for community service providers

Johnson, L.M., Antle, B.F., & Barbee, A.P. (2009). *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(6), 688-696.

Concerns persist about the over-representation and differential treatment of children and families of colour within the US child welfare system. Although many researchers and practitioners have considered ways to combat these problems, there continues to be a shortage of empirical support for proposed interventions. This article describes the evaluation of anti-racism training designed to address disproportionality and disparity by educating members of the child welfare community about issues of race, power, and oppression. Pre- and post-training evaluation questionnaires were completed by 462 training participants between June 2007 and June 2008.

Questionnaires measured changes in participants' attitudes toward race and knowledge of key concepts regarding race and racism, as well as their satisfaction with the training, and expected practice changes. Preliminary findings indicate that participants were very satisfied with the training, increased their knowledge of issues pertaining to race and racism, and became more aware of racial dynamics.

[DOI: 10.1016/j.chilyouth.2009.01.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2009.01.004)

Neighbourhood influences on young children's conduct problems and pro-social behaviour: Evidence from an Australian national sample

Edwards, B., & Bromfield, L. M. (2009). *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(3), 317-324.

Mechanisms by which neighbourhood socio-economic status influenced children's conduct problems and pro-social behaviour were investigated using data from a nationally

representative study of 4983 four-to-five-year old children growing up in 257 neighbourhoods in Australia. Children's conduct problems were found to be associated with neighbourhood socio-economic status, neighbourhood safety and neighbourhood belonging after accounting for family demographic variables. Further analyses demonstrated that perceptions of neighbourhood safety and neighbourhood belonging mediated the relationships between neighbourhood socioeconomic status and children's conduct problems. Furthermore, the associations of neighbourhood safety with conduct problems were mediated by neighbourhood belonging. A different pattern of results was evident for pro-social behaviour. Neighbourhood cleanliness and neighbourhood belonging had a direct association with pro-social behaviour and no mediated associations were evident. The study includes a sample of Aboriginal children.

[DOI: 10.1016/j.chilyouth.2008.08.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2008.08.005)

The occasional evil of angels: Learning from the experiences of Aboriginal Peoples and social work

Blackstock, C. (2009). *First Peoples Child & Family Review: A Journal on Innovation and Best Practices in Aboriginal Child Welfare Administration, Research, Policy & Practice*, 4(1), 28-37.

This paper explores how the propensity of social workers to make a direct and unmitigated connection between good intentions, rational thought and good outcomes forms a white noise barrier that substantially interferes with their ability to see negative outcomes resulting directly or indirectly from their works. The paper begins with outlining the harm experienced by Aboriginal children before moving to explore how two fundamental philosophies that pervade social service practice impact Aboriginal children: 1) an assumption of pious motivation and

effect and 2) a desire to improve others. Finally, the paper explores why binding reconciliation and child welfare is a necessary first step toward developing social work services that better support Aboriginal children and families.

<http://www.fncfcs.com/>

Is the over-representation of the poor in child welfare caseloads due to bias or need?

Jonson-Reid, M., Drake, B., & Kohl, P.L. (2009). *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(3), 422-427.

One hanging question in child welfare policy and research is whether there is an artificial over-representation of the poor in child welfare caseloads or whether this reflects the co-occurrence of poverty and need. In order to address this question, this US study uses data from child welfare (report, assessment, service and re-report), income maintenance, special education, hospitals, juvenile court, public mental health treatment, and census data. Poor children reported to child welfare are compared to non-poor children reported to child welfare and also to poor children not reported to child welfare. Poor children reported for maltreatment had greater risk factors at the parent and neighbourhood levels and higher rates of negative outcomes than children in either comparison group. Among children reported for maltreatment, poor children have worse outcomes, both within child welfare (e.g., recurrence) and outside of child welfare (e.g. juvenile court, hospitalisation for violence) than non-poor children. These data suggest that the over-representation of poor children is driven largely by the presence of increased risk among the poor children that come to the attention of child welfare rather than high levels of systemic class bias. Although this article is not

Indigenous specific, it does have a high representation of people of colour in the sample.

[DOI: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2008.09.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2008.09.009)

Family needs in child neglect cases: A cluster analysis

Chambers, R.M., & Potter, C.C. (2009). *Families in Society: Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 90(1), 18-27.

Whereas research has identified risk factors for neglect, there has been little attention to examining subgroups of neglecting families. The purpose of this US-based study was to see what types of parental, family, and poverty-related needs were present in child neglect cases and to determine if coherent clusters of needs could be identified. A case record review of 160 substantiated child neglect cases from a public child welfare agency were reviewed, and cluster analysis with step-down bi-variate analyses was used to determine groupings. Results revealed three distinct subgroups of family needs: low needs, substance abuse, and economic/domestic violence/mental health. The need for integration of interventions for these subgroups, and potential directions for such integration, are discussed. Study includes representation of American Indian clients.

<http://www.familiesinsociety.org/>

Reports

2008 Social Justice Report

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2009). Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney.

This year's Social Justice Report looks at what is needed to improve Indigenous human rights protection,

remote Indigenous education, healing and health equality. The Report sets out some of the key steps that governments can take over the next 18 months to progress a new agenda for Indigenous affairs.

<http://www.humanrights.gov.au>

Social inclusion: Indigenous social exclusion

Vinson, T. (2009). Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney on behalf of the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

This is the sixth of a series of commissioned papers on social inclusion/exclusion. Part of the picture of social exclusion of a group can be conveyed by a statistical profile. While not revealing the whole story such a profile in the case of Australia's Indigenous population certainly confirms that they are excluded from a range of life opportunities, experiences and tangible amenities generally regarded by a majority of their fellow citizens as essential parts of life.

<http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/>

Social inclusion: Intergenerational disadvantage

Vinson, T. (2009). Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney on behalf of the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

For some time now work participation statistics in Australia have confronted us with the apparent prolongation of the disadvantages experienced by some parents in the lives of their offspring. Australian Bureau of Statistics data has indicated that young people whose parents are not

in work have lower labour force participation rates and higher unemployment rates than young people with at least one parent at work. More recently, information gathered from a group of jobseekers showed that young people with one or both parents in work were significantly more likely to have found stable employment over a one year period than young people whose parents were not in work. It is the meaning of this type of pattern that is explored in this paper and an attempt is made to estimate the extent, the medium and cost of the passage of disadvantage from one generation to the next.

<http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/>

Social exclusion: The Sydney experience

Anglicare Diocese of Sydney, Policy Unit Research Paper (2009).

This report uses longitudinal demographic data (July 2007 to February 2009) from seven ANGLICARE Emergency Relief centres to describe the different facets of deprivation that clients experience. Over the 20 month period, 12,863 service users accessed services through some 27,000 visits. Of the 12,863 users, 11% (1,414) identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This report endeavours to provide, through statistical analysis, the material reality of poverty - who are the people experiencing it and what are the issues. However, in and of itself, such data can imply but not describe the nature of the experience. That is best left to those who know it so well - the people who come through the doors of the Emergency Relief (ER) services accessing assistance. In order to provide a clearer picture of poverty, focus groups were conducted across a number of ANGLICARE service sites. Information gathered from these

groups has been utilised in this report. The report provides a demographic breakdown of clients who accessed Emergency Relief services during the time of the study.

<http://www.anglicare.org.au/>

Indigenous families and children: Coordination and provision of services. Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009 (Occasional Paper No. 23)

Flaxman, S., Muir, K., & Oprea, I. (2009). National Evaluation Consortium (Social Policy Research Centre, at the University of New South Wales, and the Australian Institute of Family Studies).

This report is one of three themed studies undertaken for the Australian Government as part of the national evaluation 2004-2008 of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS) 2004-2009. The themed studies are part of a cross-strategy evaluation of SFCS 2004-2009 designed to explore particular issues in-depth, and to identify common themes across the Communities for Children (CfC), Local Answers (LA) and Invest to Grow (ItG) programs.

The Indigenous families and children themed study aims to identify the impact of LA, ItG and CfC on service provision and coordination in communities with high proportions of Indigenous children. Through understanding changes to service provision and coordination, the study also seeks to identify the impact of the programs on the lives of Indigenous families and children.

<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/>

Developing a national Indigenous policy framework that recognises needs, rights and legacies and delivers results

Altman, J. (2009). Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra.

This paper is based on a presentation to the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) National Conference, 'Building a Fair Australia in Tough Economic Times', Australian Technology Park, Sydney, on 2 April 2009.

This paper examines current Indigenous policy, including Closing the Gap. This paper argues for a very different policy framework that looks to openly combine three interlinked elements: needs-based citizenship rights, special Indigenous rights, and compensatory 'social justice' rights.

<http://www.anu.edu.au/>

Location and segregation: The distribution of the Indigenous population across Australia's urban centres

Biddle, N. (2009). Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra.

This paper focuses on which cities and large towns Indigenous Australians live in, how the Indigenous population is distributed by neighbourhood within these cities and towns, and what the characteristics of the neighbourhoods are in which Indigenous Australians are concentrated.

<http://www.anu.edu.au/>

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A picture of Australia's children: 2009

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

This report is the fourth comprehensive national statistical report on Australia's children produced by the AIHW. This 2009 report builds on previous work and on work undertaken more recently on the ministerially endorsed Children's Headline Indicators. The importance of the early childhood years in laying the foundations for future health and wellbeing is indisputable. Childhood, and early childhood in particular, is therefore central to the Council of Australian Governments' reforms to healthcare, education and in closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage. Information that supports a better understanding of the key issues affecting children and their families is critical to the success of these reforms.

Part IX of the report focuses on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/>

Resources

Supporting Indigenous researchers: A practical guide for supervisors

Laycock, A., Walker, D., Harrison, N., & Brands, J. (2009). Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, Northern Territory.

Although this resource has a focus on Indigenous health researchers, it may also be useful in other areas of the human services.

Part A: Chapters 1 to 3 raise and discuss workplace issues for Indigenous health researchers and their supervisors. The chapters focus on what makes the supervision of Indigenous researchers different to the supervision of non-Indigenous

researchers, and suggest ways to build a reciprocal and supportive supervisor-researcher relationship and a strong intercultural research team. Much of the information is presented through the reflections, experiences and advice of Indigenous researchers and research supervisors.

Part B: Chapters 4 to 7 provide workplace supervisors with practical strategies to tackle the issues raised in Part A and to support Indigenous researchers.

<http://www.craah.org.au/>

Useful Websites

Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care Secretariat (NSW) Inc. (AbSec)

AbSec is a not-for-profit incorporated community organisation. It is primarily funded by the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS), and is recognised as the peak NSW Aboriginal organisation to provide child protection and out-of-home care policy, issues for Aboriginal families involved in child protection and Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) services, and advice regarding funding decisions for child protection and Associate services.

<http://www.absec.org.au/>

Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), Victoria

SNAICC is the national non government peak body in Australia representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

<http://www.snaicc.asn.au/>

First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada

The purpose of the Caring Society is to promote the well being of all First Nations children, youth, families and communities with a particular focus on the prevention of, and response to, child maltreatment.

<http://www.fncfcs.com/home.html>

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