

Community Services 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 Community Services staff.

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

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:

- researchtopractice@community.nsw.gov.au, or

Community Services recent reports/publications

**Literature review:
Culturally appropriate service provision for culturally and linguistically diverse children and families in the New South Wales child protection system**

Sawrikar, P. (2009). Community Services.

This Community Services commissioned study addresses the lack of literature in the area of specific cultural groups and cultural issues in child protection. The literature review represents the first output from the study which is due for completion in 2010. It covers national and international literature on the experiences, needs and challenges of CALD families in the child protection system, and that of caseworkers and case managers. It also reviews best practice for CALD groups.

www.community.nsw.gov.au

What makes parenting programs effective? An overview of recent research

Tully, L. (2009). NSW Community Services, Centre for Parenting and Research.

A Research to Practice Note titled *Parenting Programs: What makes them effective?* was published in November 2005. Over the past three years research on parenting programs has flourished. The purpose of this 2009 Research to Practice Note is to update the information on effective parenting programs to assist staff in referring clients to evidence-based

parenting programs and selecting effective parenting programs for implementation. It reports on the aims and key components of parenting programs and their effectiveness, particularly in the child welfare context.

<http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/>

Early Intervention

Epidemiological perspectives on maltreatment prevention

Wulczyn, F. (2009). *The Future of Children*, 19(2), 39-66.

This paper explores how data on the incidence and distribution of child maltreatment sheds light on planning and implementing maltreatment prevention programs. The author begins by describing and differentiating among the three primary sources of national data on maltreatment and points out several important patterns in the data. These involve child development; the social context and the contribution of race and poverty to maltreatment; and also substance abuse and maltreatment recurrence.

According to the data, children of colour are much more likely to be reported than white children, however the author highlights that the research suggests that when whites and minorities who are being compared live in a similar social context, disparities in maltreatment rates narrow to some extent. Another point the author makes is that substance abuse not only increases the risk that a parent will neglect a child, but also appears to affect that child's experience in the child welfare system in that when substance abuse is part of an allegation history, decisions affecting the child tilt in favour of deeper involvement with the

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Human Services
Community Services

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system. The author argues for a closer examination of the means by which community processes contribute to maltreatment. He concludes that the question for researchers is not whether investments in communities are an important part of the prevention strategy, but rather what type of investment is most likely to replace what is missing in a given community.

<http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files>

Progress toward a prevention perspective

Stagner, M., & Lansing, J. (2009). *The Future of Children*, 19(2), 19-38.

The authors chart developments in the field of child maltreatment and propose a new framework for preventing child abuse and neglect. They begin by describing the concept of investment-prevention as it has been applied recently in fields such as health care and welfare. They then explain how the new framework applies to maltreatment prevention, noting in particular how it differs from the traditional child protective services response to maltreatment. The traditional response aims to prevent a recurrence of maltreatment once it has already taken place, the new framework focuses on preventing maltreatment from occurring at all. Rather than identifying risk factors for maltreatment and addressing the problems and deficiencies of the primary caretaker, the new framework focuses on strengthening protective factors and building family and social networks to reinforce the ability of parents to care for their children.

<http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files>

Child Protection

A stitch in time saves nine: Preventing and responding to the abuse and neglect of infants

Jordan, B., & Sketchley, R. (2009). (Child Abuse Prevention Issues No. 30). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

This paper draws on current research and the authors' infant mental health experience. It explores issues in applying a public health approach together with a human rights perspective to provide a framework for service provision that better protects infants from experiencing the damaging effects of abuse and neglect and facilitate the best possible development outcomes. A human rights perspective is also concerned about children as a group but encompasses children's individual rights, as underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, which views child maltreatment as an abuse of children's rights.

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/issues/issues30/issues30.pdf>

Domestic violence and child protection: Partnerships and collaboration

Potito, C., Day, A., Carson, E., & O'Leary, P. (2009). *Australian Social Work*, 62(3), 369-387.

The interface between the child protection and domestic violence sectors is often problematic, in that the two sectors operate relatively independently, with little integration. However, it is widely recognised that these sectors need to work more closely to enhance both women's and children's safety. This paper explores the processes needed for the child protection and domestic violence sectors to develop collaborative partnerships that lead to the provision of higher-quality responses to both women and children. Drawing on collaboration theory, a number of barriers to the

development of successful partnerships are described, and applied to initiatives that seek to develop integrated approaches between child protection and domestic violence services. It concludes that there is much scope for the two sectors to work closely together, but that the development of integrated responses involving both child protection and domestic violence services will take a significant commitment, level of determination, and stamina from both parties.

<http://ejcontent.ebsco.com/>

Using resilience to reconceptualise child protection workforce capacity

Russ, E., Lonne, B., & Darlington, Y. (2009). *Australian Social Work*, 62(3), 324-338.

Current approaches to managing and supporting staff and addressing turnover in child protection predominantly rely on deficit-based models that focus on limitations, shortcomings, and psychopathology. This article explores an alternative approach, drawing on models of resilience, which is an emerging field linked to trauma and adversity. The concept of resilience has seen limited application to staff and employment issues. In child protection, staff typically face a range of adverse and traumatic experiences that have flow-on implications, creating difficulties for staff recruitment and retention and reduced service quality. This article commences with discussion of the multifactorial influences of the troubled state of contemporary child protection systems on staffing problems. Links between these and difficulties with the predominant deficit models are then considered. It concludes with a discussion of the relevance and utility of resilience models in developing alternative approaches to child protection staffing issues.

<http://ejcontent.ebsco.com/>

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Understanding child sexual behavior problems: A developmental psychopathology framework.

Elkovitch, N., Latzman, R.D., Hansen, D.J., & Flood, M.F. (2009). *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29(7), 586-598.

Children exhibiting sexual behavior have increasingly gained the attention of child welfare and mental health systems, as well as the scientific community. Children with sexual behavior problems consistently demonstrate a number of problems related to adjustment and overall development. Appropriate intervention with these children requires a comprehensive understanding of aetiology. This paper reviews the existing research on problematic sexual behavior in childhood within a developmental psychopathology framework. It reviews what is known about normative and non-normative sexual behavior in childhood and highlights definitional challenges and age-related developmental differences. It discusses the relationship between child sexual abuse and child sexual behavior problems, drawing attention to factors which impact on this relationship. It also reviews risk factors for child sexual behavior problems, beyond that of sexual abuse. Implications of a developmental psychopathology perspective on problematic child sexual behaviors to inform future research and intervention efforts are discussed. Implications include the need for attention to normative childhood sexual behavior, developmental sensitivity, and examination of the ecological domain.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu>

Bias, racism and evidence-based practice: The case for more focused development of the child welfare evidence base

Wells, S.J., Merritt, L.M., & Briggs, H.E. (2009). *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(11), 1160-1171.

In spite of continuing concerns about disproportionate representations of African Americans, American Indians, and selected other groups in foster care, development of the practice and policy evidence base has paid little attention to incorporating the specific concerns of these communities in intervention research. The authors review the current evidence-based practice and identify gaps in the knowledge base with specific reference to race/ethnicity/culture and class. They summarise the current research on bias and racism to establish potential mechanisms contributing to racially disproportionate outcomes. They argue that culturally competent practice goes beyond reproaching practitioners and policy makers to be sensitive or to undertake such training. It is a pathway to the development of a more targeted and relevant evidence base: 1) rigorous intervention research with diverse populations could be more intentionally developed and 2) existing rigorous research on successfully addressing bias could be more broadly applied and tested in child welfare. The article proposes a model for evaluating the validity of the evidence base with respect to diverse populations.

[doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2009.09.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2009.09.002)

Exploratory assessments of child abuse: Children's responses to interviewer's questions across multiple interview sessions

Patterson, T., Pipe, M. (2009). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 33(8), 490-504.

This study extends field research on interviews with young children suspected of having been abused. It

examines multiple assessment interviews designed to be inquisitory and exploratory, rather than formal evidential or forensic. The findings are discussed in terms of the growing literature on interviewing children about suspected abuse, particularly in interviews conducted over multiple sessions. Sixty six interviews with 24 children between the ages of 3 and 6 years undergoing an assessment for suspected child abuse were examined. The study showed that assessment of suspected child abuse may involve more than a single investigative interview. It concludes the need for more research examining children's responses to questioning over multiple interviews (or single interviews conducted over multiple sessions) in the development of best practise guidelines for the assessment of abuse.

[doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2008.12.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2008.12.012)

Out-of-Home Care

Young people transitioning from out-of-home care: A critical analysis of Australian and International policy and practice

Mendes, P. (2009). *Australian Social Work*, 62(3), 388-402.

Young people transitioning from out-of-home care comprise one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society. They experience multiple disadvantages resulting from their abuse or neglect prior to entering care, their often negative experiences in care, and the lack of support provided to them as they transition from care. Compared to most young people, they face particular difficulties in accessing educational, employment, housing, and other developmental and transitional opportunities. This paper critically analyses the pathways taken by care leavers, and the Australian and international policy and practice responses. The article concludes on policy and program reforms that are likely to

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lead to improved outcomes for care leavers.

<http://ejsccontent.ebsco.com/>

The profile and progress of neglected and abused children in long-term foster care

Barber, J., & Delfabbro, P. (2009). *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 33(7), 421-428.

This study compared the profile of neglected and abused children in the Australian foster care system as well as differences between maltreatment types in relation to parental contact, reunification and psychosocial progress in care. It examined 235 case files of children entering foster care. The allocated social workers were given questionnaires to complete at the point of intake. All measures were repeated for children remaining in care 1 and 2 years later. The results show neglected children were younger than non-neglected children, more likely to have a physical or mental disability, more likely to experience multiple forms of maltreatment and less likely to pose conduct problems for carers. Neglected children were more likely than non-neglected children to experience a decline in parental contact over time, and were less likely to be reunified with their families of origin. There was minimal difference between neglected and non-neglected in their psychosocial progress while in care. Aboriginal children were more likely to be reunified than non-Aboriginal children when neglect was attributable to transient factors (parental incapacity) but the reverse was true for non-neglected children. The article concludes that neglected children more often require a second form of maltreatment before being removed from home and suggests that children's services workers are less inclined to remove

children for neglect than for other forms of maltreatment. As a consequence, those neglected children who are in care tend to come from more dysfunctional families than non-neglected children do, as evidenced by the relatively poorer parental contact and reunification results of neglected children. Practice implications are discussed.

[doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2006.03.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2006.03.013)

Children's wellbeing in care: Evidence from a longitudinal study of outcomes

Fernandez, E. (2009). *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(10), 1092-1100.

This paper reports research on outcomes of long term foster care from an eight year longitudinal study of foster care placements. The study used a prospective, repeated measures design and a multi-informant approach and assessed the outcomes of 59 children at two yearly intervals as they progressed in placements. Personal interviews were conducted with children over 8 years and all caseworkers. The study highlights outcomes in the spheres of family and social relationships and emotional, behavioural development and the factors and constraints impinging on outcomes. The findings indicate that alongside concerns related to placement stability, academic achievement and emotional and behavioural development, children and young people in this sample displayed positive outcomes in domains such as family and social relationships and pro-social behaviours as they progressed over time in their care placements. Intervention strategies to promote resilient outcomes and facilitate children's care experience are discussed outlining implications for evidence based 'best practice' and directions for outcome-based research with children in foster care.

[doi:10.1016/j.chiayouth.2009.07.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiayouth.2009.07.010)

The association of team composition and meeting characteristics with foster care placement recommendations

Crea, T.M., Wildfire, J.B., & Usher, C.L. (2009). *Journal of Social Service Research*, 35(4), 297-310

Research shows that changing foster care placements is associated with negative outcomes for children. This study examines the extent to which Team Decision Making (TDM) can influence placement recommendations for children currently in foster care. Results show that caregiver attendance significantly reduces the likelihood that a child will be recommended to change placements. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Other

Social work supervision and its role in enabling a community visitor program that promotes and protects the rights of children

Baglow, L., (2009). *Australian Social Work*, 62(3), 353-368.

This article explores the characteristics of traditional social work supervision, and compares it with supervision in the counselling/clinical field and in industry. It contends that while social work supervision has learned from advances in other supervisory fields, the traditional social work supervision functions of administration, education, support, and mediation lead to a more holistic practice within child protection work than is possible using other narrower frameworks. A discussion of supervision within a community visitor program in Queensland that promotes and protects the rights and interests of children and young people who are in state care is used to support this contention.

<http://ejsccontent.ebsco.com/ContentServer.aspx?>

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Reports

Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia

Australian Government
Department of Education,
Employment and Workplace
Relations for the Australian
Government (2009)

The Early Years Learning Framework, part of the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) reform agenda for early childhood education and care describes the principles, practice and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school. The Framework has a strong emphasis on play-based learning as play is the best vehicle for young children's learning providing the most appropriate stimulus for brain development and recognises the importance of communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy) and social and emotional development.

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

The Working with Refugee Families Project: Improving the lives of vulnerable children

Lewig, K., Arney, F., & Salveron, M. (2009). Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia.
Increasing numbers of families arriving in Australia through humanitarian settlement schemes are coming into contact with the child protection system. Many of these families come from African and Middle Eastern countries and have common experiences of trauma, dislocation and loss, and many are victims of genocide, war and torture. Pre-migration

experiences together with the considerable challenges of settling into a vastly different new country can significantly affect family well-being and parenting practices. For many of these families, parenting styles that were normative in their countries of origin are not endorsed in Australia. The lack of validation of parenting beliefs and practices may lead to additional stress for parents from refugee backgrounds. It is important that practitioners and professionals are well informed about how best to support these families using culturally competent child protection, family intervention and community development practices. This report outlines the findings of a three stage research project designed to examine why recently arrived families from refugee backgrounds are presenting to the child protection system and to identify culturally appropriate strategies and models for intervention. The project was funded by the Department for Families and Communities is the first study of its kind in Australia.

<http://www.unisa.edu.au/childprotection/documents>

Books

Healing traditions: The mental health of aboriginal peoples in Canada

Kirmayer, L., & Valaskakis, G. (2009). Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Healing Traditions is a comprehensive guide to the role of Aboriginal history, culture and identity in mental health and healing. The book helps the reader think critically about current issues in the mental health of Indigenous peoples. It has an emphasis on the cultural analysis of the concepts, values and assumptions that shape mental health theory and practice and the nature of Aboriginal identity and experience. The book is divided

into four sections, an overview of the mental health of Indigenous peoples; origins and representations of social suffering; transformations of identity and community; and traditional healing and mental health services. Themes include the impact of colonisation, sedentarisation, and forced assimilation; the importance of land for Indigenous identity; an eco-centric self; notions of space and place as part of the cultural matrix of identity and experience; and Aboriginal approaches and processes of healing and spirituality as sources of resilience. The book is very useful for a wide range of readers including health professionals, community workers, planners and administrators, social scientists, researchers, educators, and students.

Investigative interviewing explained

Ord, B., Shaw, G., & Green, T. (2008). (2nd ed), LexisNexis Butterworths.

This practical easy to read book is based on current best practice in the area of investigative interviewing. It guides the reader on how to conduct investigative interviews with victims, witnesses and suspects. It includes basic witness interviews, advanced cognitive interviews and conversation management in suspect interviews. The book focuses on professionalism and advises on the dangers of 'investigative mindset'. It is appropriate reading for the inexperienced investigator and those interested in sharpening their skills and professionalism.

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Websites/resources

The State Library of NSW in conjunction with NSW Department of Health provides online access to up to date information about alcohol and drugs via the drug info @ your library initiative and through local public libraries in New South Wales. Information that is freely available includes an A-Z of drugs, facts sheets for parents, carers, young people, indigenous people, students and teachers, as well as service details for those seeking help.

There is also dedicated information on drug use and pregnancy. Web resources and public library collections are selected and regularly updated by specialist staff at the State Library of New South Wales in consultation with experts in the field.

[http://
www.druginfo.sl.nsw.gov.au/](http://www.druginfo.sl.nsw.gov.au/)

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