



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

The Kindness of Strangers: Family-based Early Intervention & Improved Outcomes for Children

Tina Robilliard

**Australasian Conference on Child Abuse & Neglect
15 February 2006**





Children are Dying from Abuse & Neglect

- **40% of child deaths are the result of injuries suggesting abuse or neglect**
- **Child Death Rates:**
(United Nations OECD Countries Report, 2001)

Deaths per 100,000 children

1st	Korea	25.6
2nd	Mexico	19.8
3rd	Portugal	17.8
4th	United States	14.1
5th	New Zealand	13.7
6th	Poland	13.4





Purpose of Research



To examine the effectiveness of family intervention programmes in California & draw lessons for New Zealand on how these programmes can be successful.



Family Intervention is...



..any service provider, whether it be a public nurse, home visitor or behavioural specialist, who works with the family to improve their situation, often by visiting a family at their home on a regular basis.

“Family-based Early Interventions”

- **Early Interventions**
 - interventions into the life of child aged 0-5
- **Family-based Interventions**
 - interventions focused on family-centered services
 - target parents, children, & their interactions





The Case for Family-based Early Intervention



- **Family is the primary setting for development**
- **Early years critically shape outcomes for children**
- **Family-centered programs targeting parents & children build resilience**



Research Question

What is the relationship between family-based early intervention & outcomes for children?

**Family-based
Early Intervention**



effect on



Birthweight

Attachment

Child Outcomes



Health

Abuse & Neglect

Research Sample



N = 297 families

***Birthing Project
USA***



***Birth
& Beyond***

Birthing Project
SisterFriend
(n=51)

Adolescent
Family Life
(n=140)

Birth & Beyond
(n=51)

Research Hypotheses



- **Greater DURATION of service**



Improved Child Outcomes

- **Greater INTENSITY of service**



Improved Child Outcomes

Child Outcomes Measures

- **Reduced Maternal Smoking or Drug Use**
- **Healthy Child Birthweight**
- **Breastfeeding by Mother**
- **Child Health Improvements**
- **Reduced Unplanned Pregnancies**
- **Reduced Child Abuse & Neglect**



Statistical Analysis Used to Compare:



PROGRAMME INVOLVEMENT

- **DURATION**
(days in the programme)
- **INTENSITY**
(hours of home visitation)

DIFFERENCE IN CHILD OUTCOMES

- Maternal Smoking or Drug Use
- Healthy Child Birthweight
- Breastfeeding by Mother
- Child Health Improvements
- Unplanned Pregnancies
- Child Abuse & Neglect



Regression Analysis Results



- **Controlled for socioeconomic status, single-parent families, education & ethnicity**
- **Significant positive relationship between PROGRAMME INVOLVEMENT (based on INTENSITY) & BIRTHWEIGHT**
- **No significant relationship between PROGRAMME INVOLVEMENT (based on DURATION) & BIRTHWEIGHT**

Significant Child Outcomes:

- ▣ Reduced Maternal Smoking or Drug Use
- ▣ **Healthy Child Birthweight**
1unit ↑ in intensity = 49g ↑ in weight,
(p=0.057)
- ▣ Breastfeeding by Mother
- ▣ Child Health Improvements
- ▣ Reduced Unplanned Pregnancies
- ▣ Reduced Child Abuse & Neglect





Key Findings



- **Longer & more intense interventions alone do not improve outcomes for children**
- **A focus on duration & intensity may be to the detriment of a focus on programme quality**
- **Need to consider whether interventions are capable of changing parents' behaviour**



What is Quality?



- **Effective Early Interventions:**
 - have a strong theoretical underpinning
 - begin earlier in the development of the child
 - recognise some children benefit more than others & target vulnerable children
 - are culturally sensitive & responsive
 - deliver services using bundle of interventions
 - are delivered by experienced & qualified staff



Policy Implications



- **Policy needs to recognise that improving a child's well-being is complex**
- **Interventions must be grounded in strong theoretical & empirical research**
- **Interventions need to have flexible duration & intensity and more focus on quality**

There are no easy solutions



Questions?

