

Program Area A: Children and Parenting

The family is the fundamental system for the care and upbringing of children. The developing child is influenced positively and negatively by relationships with other family members, and children also affect and influence other family members' behaviour toward them. The relationships among family members are also situated in larger social contexts, all of which impact on the capacity of families to meet the needs of children's development. The focus of activity in the Children and Parenting Program is the use of developmental research to provide guidance on effective ways in which intervention programs can join with families to promote positive child development. The Program also encompasses the research work of the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, which is based at the Institute.

Child care in cultural context (new core project)

The study of Child Care in Cultural Context continues a tradition of research at the Institute into the interactive impacts of child care and family on child development outcomes. The study focuses particularly on the influence of continuities and discontinuities among systems of beliefs, values and methods of child rearing between home and child care settings. The study also seeks to assess how continuity between home and child care can be promoted (for example, through open and extensive communication), and the extent to which the impact of parent-carer differences is mitigated through mutual negotiation and respect for cultural diversity.

As discontinuities across child rearing dimensions might reasonably be expected between families from non-Anglo cultural backgrounds and mainstream child care services, the project involves studying home-care relationships among families from three cultural groups: Anglo-Australian, Horn of Africa (including Somali, Eritrean and Ethiopian groups), and Vietnamese-Australian. Children under the age of three years using centre based long day care, family day care and informal care arrangements will be involved in the research. Children, parents and carers will be recruited through child care centres, Family Day Care schemes, maternal and child health services, and ethnic welfare

services. Data collection for the project is likely to commence at the end of the 2000 calendar year, after an extensive consultation process.

Further, to complement the study of Child Care in Cultural Context, researchers in the Institute's *Children and Parenting Program* are building strategic alliances with researchers at universities in New South Wales to examine the feasibility of conducting research on the impacts of multiple and changing child care arrangements on child development outcomes.

The state of play – children and families (new contract)

In order to advise the Minister for Family and Community Services, the National Childcare Advisory Council is currently undertaking a review of the likely nature and shape of demand for child care in 2001 and beyond, and how best to meet this demand. To assist Council in its work, researchers in the *Children and Parenting Program* conducted a non-core funded study on the views of parents and families using a range of child care services. Seven focus group discussions in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland were conducted in which the perspectives of parents were collected on a range of issues relevant to the demand for future child care services. A report has been completed for the Council.

Australian Temperament Project (newly imported project)

The Australian Temperament Project is a major longitudinal study which has followed children from infancy to (currently) 17–18 years. It began in 1983 with the enrolment of a representative cohort of over 2000 infants and families from urban and rural areas of Victoria. The cohort has been followed up 11 times at one to two yearly intervals with the twelfth wave of data collection currently under way at child age 17–18 years.

The Institute now houses this project and will take responsibility for the next wave, planned for next year, together with researchers from the University of Melbourne and the Royal Children's Hospital. The foci for the year 2000 survey are the identification of individual-, family- and community-level risk and protective factors for adolescent antisocial behaviour, substance use and depression; resilience against the development of adolescent problem behaviours; and stability and change in longitudinal pathways to these three adolescent problems.

Parenting-21 (existing core project)

Parenting-21 (the title refers to this century), and the Commonwealth-funded extension involving Torres Strait Islander families, is the Australian component of an International Study of Children, Parents and Schools (ISPCS) which includes teams from the United States, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden. The aim of the international study is to identify cross cultural differences and similarities in parenting beliefs, values and behaviour. Within this, the particular aim of Parenting-21 is to document parenting beliefs and behaviours among Australian families from different cultural backgrounds. It is anticipated that findings from the research will be used to inform future planning and development in family and child support services.

Parenting-21 has continued to meet its commitment to the international study by

contributing to the 1999 Spain workshop and by preparing material for the planned book. In addition, an Institute monograph will be released summarising the results from the Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander data, and a report on the Torres Strait Islander extension study – the Bui Sei Boey Wagel (Family of the Future) project – has been prepared for the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care.

Evaluation of 'Looking After Children' (existing contract)

The Institute evaluation of 'Looking After Children' assessed the impact of a 12-month trial of this program on child development outcomes, partnerships between children, families and service providers, understanding of child development needs, and remedial action. The research phase of the study, now complete, documents the value of this approach to out-of-home care services in Australia. The project is now disseminating information about the feasibility and value of adopting this approach in Australian child welfare services. This includes the release of an Institute monograph, presentation at an international foster care conference, and preparation and publication of journal articles.

National Child Protection Clearinghouse

The National Child Protection Clearinghouse has undertaken a number of research projects on child protection and child abuse prevention. The purpose of these studies is to identify the ways in which child abuse prevention is being undertaken in various parts of Australia; to contrast the effectiveness of different strategies; and to examine appropriate models of service delivery in the area of child and family support.

National audit (new contract)

The National Audit of Child Abuse Prevention Activity was begun in late 1999 with the intention of describing the range

and scope of child abuse prevention activities throughout Australia. By identifying programs from which service providers can learn, the audit will help to avoid 'reinventing the wheel', and information collected will be incorporated into a searchable database mounted on the Institute's Web site. Over 35,000 questionnaires were distributed, and it is expected that a draft national report will be completed in October 2000.

Research strategy (new contract)

The National Clearinghouse has been commissioned by the National Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect to develop a National Child Abuse Prevention Research Strategy. The project involves a detailed assessment of the current state of child abuse prevention research in Australia and the development of a National Child Abuse Prevention Research Strategy that can be endorsed and published by the National Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse. The

project complements the National Audit of Child Abuse Prevention Activity and its report is expected to be published by the National Council in September 2000.

Program evaluations (existing contract projects)

Three non-core funded studies – the Family and Neighbourhood Links Project, the Enhanced Client Outcomes Project, and the Western Metropolitan Region Pilot Family Outreach Service – were completed for the Department of Human Services Victoria in 1998 and 1999. These involved the evaluation of three innovative child protection/family wellbeing strategies being piloted in various regions of the State. The Institute has received permission from the Victorian Department of Human Services to produce a monograph based on the final report of the *Evaluation of the Enhanced Client Outcomes* pilot project, and another monograph, focusing on the evaluation methods employed in the three programs, is pending.