

## **Summary of findings from the What Works for Children website survey of the research priorities of health and social care practitioners working with children.**

### **The What Works for Children website survey**

From August 2004 to February 2005 What Works for Children? (WWfC) ran a survey on [www.whatworksforchildren.org](http://www.whatworksforchildren.org) asking site visitors about their priorities for research. The survey was entitled *What Could Research Do For You?* Any practitioners working with children in social care or allied fields were invited to respond to the following question:

*If you could commission one piece of research to help you in your work with children and families, what would it be?*

For suggestions about interventions (services or activities) respondents were then asked to break down their research question into the target group, intervention, comparison intervention and outcomes of interest. We wanted to see if this helped define questions that would be easier to research and lead to searches that would come up with results closer to what the practitioner had wanted.

### **Formulating research questions**

The detail provided by respondents varied considerably, with questions ranging from the very broad to the very specific. In some cases, research questions were first presented in a relatively vague fashion. Breaking down the research question into target population, intervention, comparison group and outcome, clarified the practitioner's ideas.

Breaking down a research question in this way requires more careful consideration of what exactly one is trying to find out, and why. This process helps in working out how to search for studies on the area of interest in databases and on the internet.

For more information on the importance of carefully defining a research question please see page 10 of the WWfC Evidence Guide (<http://www.whatworksforchildren.org.uk/docs/tools/evguide%20June6%20colour.pdf>) or [www.whatworksforchildren.org.uk/docs/tools/questform.doc](http://www.whatworksforchildren.org.uk/docs/tools/questform.doc).

### **Responses to the survey**

Seventy-two site visitors responded to the survey. Sixty-three of these were from the UK, with three responses from Australia, and one each from Denmark, Ghana, Uganda and the US. Sixty-three practitioners (87.5%) asked questions relating to interventions. Of these 50-51 further completed information relating to the target population, intervention and outcomes and 36 provided information about comparison groups.

Around 26% of those who provided personal information work for Barnardo's. Approximately 17% work for Social Services, and 7.5% work for a PCT.

The main topic of research asked for is shown in table 1 for all topics which were asked for by more than one respondent.

Table 1: Topics of research asked for by more than one respondent

<b>Topic of research asked for</b>	<b>How many times</b>
Parenting	13
Practitioners stress/workloads etc.	7
Therapeutic techniques	6
Child protection	7
General well-being	7
Adoption/fostering/residential care	6
Family group conferences	3
Behaviour	3
Multiagency working	3
Accidental injury	3
Disability	2
Youth offending	2
Attention Defecit Hyperactivity Disorder	2
Domestic violence	2
Self-harm	2
Obesity	2

The main target populations that respondents were interested in are listed in table 2.

Table 2: Target population of interest to researchers

<b>Target Population</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents*</b>
Minority ethnic children	11.3%
Children in at risk groups	11.3%
Looked-after children	9.4%
Carers/parents	9.4%
Children with health problems/disability	9.4%
Children in hard-to-reach groups	7.6%
Children with learning problems/psychiatric problems	5.7%
Children with behavioural problems	3.8%
Children in low income groups	3.8%

\* Some respondents were interested in more than one area

The WWfC website survey was part of a larger review of practitioners' priorities for research. For more information see [http://www.whatworksforchildren.org.uk/for\\_practitioners.htm](http://www.whatworksforchildren.org.uk/for_practitioners.htm).

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25<sup>th</sup> May 2006.