

## What Works for Children? review of the research priorities of social care practitioners working with children.

In 2004-2005 a review was carried out of studies which had asked practitioners working with children in health and social care about their priorities for research. Eight studies were found and we were able to obtain the original survey responses for four of these. After adding responses to the What Works for Children website survey to these, over 1000 responses were collected and analysed. Table 1 presented here lists all topics which were mentioned more than ten times. Table 2 lists findings from those published studies for which we didn't have the original survey responses.

**Table 1: Research questions most frequently asked by practitioners**

Research topic	n
<b>Employee issues</b>	
Workload and associated problems	23
Multi-agency working (subset asking specifically how to make multi-agency working work)	23 (15)
Funding: lack of it, how to manage with insufficient funds, where to get funding	15
How to deal with stress/low morale at work	15
Communication within department/management problems	11
Violence against social workers or residential care staff	10
<b>Family support</b>	
What is the comparative value of preventative work rather than crisis intervention?	24
Do our family support activities work?	23
Do family/neighbourhood/community centres work?	17
<b>Parenting</b>	
Living with substance-abusing parents (what are the effects on children?)	27 (21)

Living with parents with mental health problems (what are the effects on children?)	16 (12)
Are parenting programmes effective in improving parenting/child's behaviour?	13

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### **Child Protection**

Are child protection interventions effective? What are the best approaches?	31
How do you assess risk/parenting ability and motivation effectively?	19

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### **Adoption/fostering/residential care**

What are the effects/pros and cons of continuing contact with the birth family for adopted children?	25
What are long/medium term outcomes for fostered and adopted children?	16
What is there/what works/what is best practice for supporting care leavers?	13
What are the effects of being in residential care?	10

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### **Disability including learning difficulties**

What is good practice and what are the effects of respite care for children with disabilities/complex health needs/learning difficulties?	13
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### **Behaviour problems**

What works in behaviour management?	21
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### **Therapy**

What works with therapy and counselling interventions, when and how (diverse situations including children and young people experiencing domestic violence)?	17
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### **Outreach**

How can we engage hard-to-reach families/individuals (most frequently mentioned services are family work and CAMHS)?	26
(Of these) How can we engage fathers in our work?	13

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### **Evaluation**

How do we evaluate our project/ how can we prove our project works?	19
We would like to find out users' views of this service	11

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**Table 2: Published summaries of research priorities from papers for which no original data were available**

Research suggestion	N	%
<b>Tozer &amp; Ray, (1999)</b>		
• Evaluate preventative intervention	41	14
• Children accommodated/ contact with birth parents	23	8
• Needs assessments	19	7
• Evaluation of services (e. g., outcomes of residential care)	19	7
• Survey of placements	13	4
• The process of recruitment of adopters	12	4
• Process of needs assessments	12	4
• Effectiveness of planning for services (inc. costs of services)	12	4
• A positive way of working with children/ young people	10	3
• Service user involvement	10	3
Total	171	58
<b>Smith (1995)</b>		
• Evaluating the effectiveness of services	71	30
• Analysing the social needs of individuals and groups	63	27
• Improving methods of social work	50	21
• Developing ways of working with other agencies	18	8
• Issues relating to social work staff	18	8
• Exploring social policy issues	15	6
Total	235	100

## O'Brien & Wrighton (2001)

no frequencies  
available

- Assessment: What carers' qualities indicate good outcomes for children placed?
  - Preparation: How can you effectively prepare children and carers for placement?
  - Matching: What indicates a good match? How do different types of placement compare? Which are more successful? What prevents children from being placed permanently?
  - Contact: How does contact affect outcomes?
  
  - Education: Why don't children looked after do well at school?
  - Children's mental health: How can attachment be assessed? What can help children with emotional and behavioural problems?
  - Children's views: What do children say about their experiences in care?
  - Post-placement support: How can this be most effective?
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## References

O'Brien, K. & Wrighton, P. (2001) What social workers want from research when planning for children's permanent care. *Adoption & Fostering*, 25, 68-70.

Smith, J. (1995) *Social workers as users and beneficiaries of research: a report of project funded by the ESRC*. University of Stirling Social Work Research Centre.

Tozer, C. & Ray, S. (1999) 20 Questions: the research needs of children and family social workers. *Research, Policy and Planning*, 17, 7-15.

For more information about this study see  
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