
Monitoring and evaluation of family intervention services and projects between February 2007 and March 2011

Introduction and background

Family interventions were set up to work with some of the most troubled and challenging families to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB), youth crime, inter-generational disadvantage and worklessness. They take an intensive and persistent multi-agency approach to supporting families to overcome their problems, coordinated by a single dedicated 'key worker'. Family interventions form part of the Prime Minister's commitment to work with every troubled family – and specifically to turn around the lives of the estimated 120,000 troubled families in England.

This report provides the latest monitoring evidence on families working with a family intervention between February 2007 and 31st March 2011.

Key findings

- Of the 12,850 referrals¹ to a family intervention 69 per cent (8,841 families) were either currently working with a family intervention or had previously completed an intervention, two per cent were placed on a waiting list and three per cent refused to work with a family intervention. The remaining 26 per cent of referrals were not offered a family intervention, either because they did not meet the referral criteria (54 per cent) or a family intervention was not needed (38 per cent).
- Family interventions continue to work with very disadvantaged families, including a considerably higher than average proportion of lone parents (64 per cent compared to 25 per cent in the general population) and large families (51 per cent have three or more children under the age of 18).
- A total of 3,675 families exited a family intervention between February 2007 and 31st March 2011.

¹ Of all the families referred to a family intervention - 554 families were referred more than once.

- At least half of the families completing a family intervention were reported to have a successful outcome in the following areas:
 - poor parenting (53 per cent)
 - relationship or family breakdown (56 per cent)
 - domestic violence (65 per cent)
 - involvement in crime (65 per cent) and/or ASB (60 per cent)
 - lack of exercise or poor diet (52 per cent)
 - drug or substance misuse (50 per cent)
 - alcohol misuse (55 per cent);
 - truancy, exclusion or bad behaviour at school (57 per cent).
- Families were least likely to achieve a successful outcome in relation to mental health (40 per cent) and worklessness (20 per cent).

Methodology

As part of the original evaluation of the design and set up of Family Intervention Projects², the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) created a secure web-based monitoring system (Information System) in 2007 to collect comprehensive data about all families referred to a family intervention. This information is collected and inputted by family intervention staff and provides quantitative evidence about the type of families referred to a family intervention, their circumstances and risk factors when a Support Plan is put in place, how they are progressing at regular formal reviews, their outcomes at the point a family exits from a family intervention and whether these outcomes are sustained nine to 14 months after they leave a family intervention.

The findings presented in the report are based on the families referred to family interventions in 159 local authorities (LAs; 150 top tier LAs and 9 district councils) prior to 31st March 2011. The outcomes analysis is based on a smaller number of LAs (120) where families had actually exited a family intervention (i.e. not all family interventions had been operating long enough for families to have completed their intervention). The report is primarily based on simple descriptive statistics which provide a summary of the quantitative evidence. In addition statistical modelling (logistic regression) was used to look at the factors associated with successful and unsuccessful outcomes. We also report the findings from a small scale impact assessment to look at the extent to which the outcomes reported can be attributed to the ASB Family Intervention Projects.

Families referred to family interventions

- Of the 12,850 referrals³ to a family intervention 69 per cent (8,841 families) were either currently working with a family intervention or had previously completed an intervention, two per cent were

² <http://www.education.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/acf44f.pdf>

³ Of all the families referred to a family intervention, 554 families were referred more than once

placed on a waiting list and three per cent refused to work with a family intervention. The remaining 26 per cent of referrals were not offered a family intervention.

- The agencies who most commonly referred families to family interventions were Social Services, including Children and Young People's Services (referred 24 per cent of families); local ASB teams (13 per cent); and Youth Offending Services or Youth Offending Teams (12 per cent).
- Unsurprisingly, the reasons for referral reflected the type of family intervention. ASB family interventions received more referrals than other family interventions relating to ASB and homelessness. Overall, the most common reason for referral was ASB (58 per cent of referred families).
- 3,338 of the referred families were not offered a family intervention. In more than half of these cases (54 per cent) this was because the family did not meet the qualifying criteria for the intervention (e.g. their problems were not severe enough) and in just over a third of cases other services were felt to be more appropriate to support a family.

Profile of family intervention families

- Family interventions continue to work with very disadvantaged families, including a considerably higher than average proportion of lone parents (64 per cent compared to 25 per cent in the general population) and large families (51 per cent have three or more children under the age of 18). Three-quarters of families were workless households (where no adult member aged over 16 years was in employment), compared to 13 per cent of households in England⁴. Thirty-two per cent of families had one or more children aged 16 or under with special educational needs (SEN).
- The majority (88 per cent) of family members were White. Three per cent of family members were Black, two per cent Asian, and seven per cent were classified as 'other or mixed race'. The proportion of White family members is slightly higher than the national average but has declined over time (91 per cent in 2008).

⁴ [Workless households for areas across the UK in 2010](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-223100), ONS, Released 8 September 2011
(<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-223100>)

Presenting risk factors at the Support Plan stage

The presenting risk factors are categorised into five domains: family functioning and risk, crime and ASB involvement, health, education and employment.

- 81 per cent of all families had a problem with family functioning at the Support Plan stage. The most common problem for families was poor parenting (67 per cent of families). Other key risk factors for these families were relationship or family breakdown (32 per cent), domestic violence and child protection issues (30 per cent each).
- 85 per cent of families were reported to have engaged with some form of anti-social or criminal behaviour; overall 79 per cent were reported to have engaged with some form of ASB and 39 per cent were in contact with the criminal justice system as a result of their criminal activities (for example a family member was arrested, on bail, probation, a tag or a conditional discharge at the time of the Support Plan).
- 60 per cent of families had at least one child with problems at school (i.e. truancy, exclusion, or bad behaviour).
- Just over two-thirds of families had health problems. Mental health conditions were most prevalent within this domain (39 per cent), and physical health problems were the least reported (10 per cent).
- Just over two-thirds of families had no adult member aged over 16 years in employment, education or training.

The family intervention

- The average length of a family intervention has slightly decreased from 13 months reported in 2010 to around 11 months.
- The weekly hours of direct contact time with a family decreases during their intervention from an average of 9 hours between the Support Plan being put in place and the first Review to 6.6 hours between the final Review and leaving the intervention.
- 86 per cent of families had the same key worker between the Support Plan and leaving the intervention.

Successful and unsuccessful outcomes

- 3,675 families exited a family intervention between February 2007 and 31st March 2011:
 - 70 per cent (2,569 families) left for a successful reason;
 - 4 per cent (142 families) left for an unsuccessful reason;
 - 9 per cent (316 families) left for an inconclusive reason (i.e. a reason which could not be counted as successful or unsuccessful);
 - 18 per cent (648 families) were recorded as having both successful and unsuccessful reasons for leaving, or no reason for leaving was given.
- Considerable improvements were reported across the main outcomes that family interventions seek to address including crime and ASB, educational problems, family functioning and health.
- There was, on average, a 50 per cent reduction in the proportion of families involved in crime and ASB:
 - There was a 58 per cent reduction in the percentage of families engaged in ASB - from 81 per cent of families to 34 – when they exited (representing a 47 percentage point reduction)
 - There was a 41 per cent reduction in the percentage of families involved in crime - from 35 per cent of families to 20 per cent – when they left a family intervention (representing a 14 percentage point reduction based on unrounded percentages)
- There was a 53 per cent reduction in the percentage of families who had a school aged child who was either truanting, excluded or behaving badly at school – from 58 per cent of families to 28 per cent at the end of the intervention (a 31 percentage point reduction based on unrounded percentages).
- There was, on average, a 47 per cent reduction in the proportion of families experiencing risks associated with poor family functioning including poor parenting, relationship or family breakdown, domestic violence or child protection issues. This includes a 34 per cent reduction in the number of families with child protection issues, from 27 per cent at the start of the intervention to 18 per cent at the end.
- There was, on average, a 34 per cent reduction in the proportion of families with health risks including mental or physical health and drug or alcohol problems.
- There was on average a 14 per cent reduction in the proportion of families who were 'workless' (i.e. with no adult aged over 16 in education, employment or training) - from 68 per cent of families at the start of the intervention to 58 per cent at the end of the intervention (a 10 percentage point reduction).
- At least half of family intervention families who were reported to have the following problems at the Support Plan stage achieved a successful outcome (i.e. they no longer had this problem when they left):

- involvement in crime (65 per cent) and/or ASB (60 per cent);
 - domestic violence (65 per cent);
 - truancy, exclusion or bad behaviour at school (57 per cent);
 - relationship or family breakdown (56 per cent);
 - alcohol misuse (55 per cent);
 - poor parenting (53 per cent);
 - lack of exercise or poor diet (52 per cent);
 - drug or substance misuse (50 per cent).
- Just under half (49 per cent) of families with child protection issues at the Support Plan stage no longer had this problem at the end of their intervention.
 - Families were least likely to have achieved a successful outcome in relation to mental health (40 per cent) and worklessness (20 per cent).

Factors associated with successful and unsuccessful outcomes

- The longer families worked with a family intervention there was a slightly greater chance that they achieved a successful outcome in all of the five domains (crime and ASB, family functioning, employment, education and health). The duration of the family intervention was associated with successful outcomes for every individual problem across the domains.
- The analysis also identified a number of socio-economic characteristics associated with an increased chance of success in the five domains which could help to inform how support might be tailored to address specific needs.
- Non-white families and workless families were less likely to address family functioning problems. Whereas families who were in debt at the beginning of the intervention were more likely to achieve success with family functioning.
- Families with younger children appeared to have an increased chance of success addressing problems connected with crime and ASB. Whereas families with at least one child subject to a child protection plan were less likely to achieve success on crime and ASB, education, employment and health.
- Larger families were less likely to address family functioning, education and employment problems.
- Families with older children were more likely to achieve success in getting at least one adult in the family into work, however these families were less likely to achieve success relating to health.

- Families who were supported by a Child Poverty family intervention were less likely to achieve success relating to health.
- Families with at least one disabled person and those with nobody (aged 16 or over) in education, employment or training were less likely to address their health problems.

Sustainability of outcomes

- 470 families⁵ were followed up nine to 14 months after exiting a family intervention to establish whether they sustained the outcomes they achieved during their family intervention.
- Despite efforts to track the progress of these families (via other agencies), family intervention workers inevitably lost contact with some families.
- Families who were not followed up tended to have achieved less successful outcomes, particularly in relation to their ASB, poor parenting skills and relationship or family breakdown.
- We can cautiously conclude that families were more likely to sustain a successful outcome in relation to family functioning, crime and ASB, and education:
 - 84 per cent of the families sustained their outcomes in the family functioning domain;
 - 71 per cent of the families sustained their outcomes in the crime and ASB domain;
 - 89 per cent of the families sustained their outcomes relating to education.
- A lower proportion of families sustained their health outcomes (61 per cent).
- Whilst families appeared to sustain their employment outcomes (84 per cent), this should be treated with caution due to the small number of families for whom this data was available.

⁵ This is out of a total of 775 families that were eligible for the post-intervention stage.

Impact assessment

- We estimated impact by comparing what happened to a sample of 56 comparison families with ASB FIP families on key outcomes.
- The study provides clear evidence that ASB FIPs reduce crime and ASB amongst the families they work with.
- There is also evidence, albeit not statistically significant, that ASB FIPs help reduce education and employment problems amongst families.
- There is however limited evidence that ASB FIPs generate better outcomes than other non-FIP interventions on family functioning or health issues, although FIPs do appear to be at least as effective as these alternatives.

Conclusions and implications

This report builds on the compelling evidence endorsing the role and value of family interventions. The outcomes reported at the point of exit have remained consistently high since the projects were first set up despite the increasing number of families being worked with. In the current economic climate it is very encouraging that family interventions appear to be achieving a similarly impressive set of results in a shorter time duration (from 13 months in 2010 to 11 months in 2011). However, as there is a link between the length of intervention and success we will need to wait to assess the impact of a shorter duration of intervention in the longer term.

The findings from the impact assessment provide the first indication that the positive outcomes achieved by families can be attributed to a family intervention and go some way to address an important gap in the evidence base. There is also further encouraging evidence that the outcomes are sustained nine to 14 months after leaving an intervention.

Additional Information

The full report can be accessed at <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/>

Further information about this research can be obtained from

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This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.