

Healthy Families New York: Early Findings from the Second Year of Evaluation



Program Summary

Healthy Families New York (HFNY) is an OCFS initiative operating in 28 sites across the state that provides expectant and new parents with home visits until their children enter school or Head Start. The program has operated since 1995, targeting mothers who are at high risk for child abuse or neglect due to factors such as being a teen or having a history of substance abuse. The goals of HFNY are to:

- ◆ promote positive parenting skills and parent-child interaction thereby preventing child abuse and neglect and reducing out-of-home placement;
- ◆ support optimal prenatal care, better birth outcomes, and child health and development; and
- ◆ improve economic self-sufficiency.

OCFS' Bureau of Evaluation and Research, in collaboration with the Center for Human Services Research at SUNY Albany, has just completed the second year of an evaluation of HFNY. The Year 1 findings ([Evaluation of Healthy Families New York \(HFNY\): First Year Program Impacts](#), Mitchell-Herzfeld, et.al., 2005) reported that compared to mothers in the control group, participant mothers developed healthier parenting attitudes, adopted less harmful parenting practices, and experienced better birth outcomes including a reduction in the incidence of low birth weight and, in some instances, reduced levels of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use.

The Year 2 evaluation results continue to identify positive outcomes for HFNY participants. HFNY helped mothers set firm and clear limits for their children and reduced their use of abusive and neglectful parenting practices. HFNY also improved mothers' access to health care, and reduced mothers' reports of somatic complaints among their children.

These short-term gains are expected to produce long-term impacts on children's emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development, as well as mothers' health.

Methodology

The evaluation used a randomized trial—the gold standard for testing program effectiveness—in which eligible mothers from Erie, Rensselaer, and Ulster Counties were randomly assigned to either a treatment group that was offered HFNY or to a control group that received referrals to community services. Mothers from both groups were interviewed at the outset of the evaluation and again at one, two and three years after the child's birth. The effects of the program at Year 2 were measured by comparing the treatment and control groups on several outcome measures.

SPECIFIC FINDINGS AT YEAR 2

Parenting

- ◆ HFNY parents reported engaging in more appropriate limit setting than control parents. Firm limit setting helps to promote clear expectations about behavior. This, in turn, may help the child to feel secure and display fewer problem behaviors, while also helping the parent to feel in control of her child.
- ◆ HFNY parents reported committing, on average, one third fewer instances of severe physical abuse in the target child's second year of life (e.g., hitting child with fist, slapping on face, kicking) than control parents.
- ◆ HFNY was especially successful in reducing the use of abusive and neglectful parenting practices for young, first-time mothers who entered the study prior to their child's birth, and for women who showed signs of depression and lacked a sense of mastery. These findings are similar to the results of other studies conducted on the Nurse-Family Partnership home visitation model (Olds, et. al., "Effects of Home Visits by Paraprofessionals and by Nurses: Age 4 Follow-Up Results of a Randomized Trial," *Pediatrics*, 114, 2004).

Maternal and Child Health Care

- ◆ HFNY resulted in significant improvements in access to a primary care provider and health insurance at Age 2. In addition to the short-term gains, improved access to care may help to promote positive maternal and child health and development in the long-term.
 - 10% more of the HFNY mothers had a primary care provider than mothers in the control group;
 - 5% more of the HFNY mothers had health insurance than mothers in the control group;
 - Twice as many children in the control group went without needed medical care during their second year of life as compared to children in the HFNY group.

Child Symptoms and Behaviors

- ◆ Children in the treatment group were reported by their mothers to have fewer somatic complaints (e.g., constipation, headaches, nausea, aches, etc.) than children in the control group. This reduction may be due to HFNY's ability to reduce the incidence of low-birth weight babies while also sustaining access to care.



New York State
Office of
Children & Family
Services

To obtain the report from the Year One Evaluation, visit our website at:

www.ocfs.state.ny.us

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