

Healthy Families New York: Results of First Year of Evaluation



Program Summary

Healthy Families New York (HFNY) is an OCFS initiative operating in 28 sites across the state in which pregnant women and mothers with newborns are provided with home visits until their child enters 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 first year of an evaluation of HFNY. The evaluation demonstrates that the program helped mothers develop healthier parenting attitudes, adopt less harmful parenting practices, experience better birth outcomes, and reduce their levels of alcohol, tobacco and drug use. These short-term effects are expected to produce long-term impacts on children's emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development.

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 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 one year after their child's birth. The effects of the program were measured by comparing the treatment and control groups on several outcome measures.

This randomized trial will continue to track each mother and family's progress through the child's third birthday. The results documented below are from the 1-year interview and include findings for the entire sample, as well as from specific sites and subgroups defined by demographic and other risk factors.

Specific Findings

- ◆ Mothers participating in Healthy Families New York developed more positive parenting attitudes. This is significant because healthier parenting attitudes contribute to lower rates of abusive or neglectful parenting behaviors.

HFNY mothers who were under age 18 or were less depressed reported markedly lower support for physical punishment. In one site, mothers reported more appropriate expectations for their children.

- ◆ HFNY mothers reported fewer incidents of psychological abuse, physical punishment, and neglect involving their one-year-old children.

- ◆ HFNY reduces risk factors that can lead to long-term health problems for children.

*HFNY mothers gave birth to **significantly fewer low birthweight babies**. This means that fewer children will be at risk for illnesses and cognitive or neuromotor problems associated with low birthweight.*

A higher percentage of HFNY mothers reported having health insurance for their child and, in one site, a higher percentage reported receiving WIC.

HFNY mothers with at least one child before the study began were more likely to breastfeed their babies.

- ◆ HFNY reduces mothers' use of harmful substances. This may help prevent later problems related to health, parenting, and social relationships.

HFNY resulted in less cigarette smoking among mothers under age 18. Also, in selected sites, mothers reported less use of alcohol and illicit drugs.



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