Supported playgroups for children from birth to five years

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Aim

Describe the current state of knowledge regarding the impact of supported playgroups.

Summarise the methodology and findings of an evidence brief developed by the Parenting Research Centre (PRC) for the Benevolent Society.*

Present updated findings since the release of the evidence brief.

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

EVIDENCE BRIEF

Supported playgroups for children from birth to five years

BACKGROUND

Supported playgroups have been developed as a way to provide low-intensity support to families. They are facilitated playgroups that may also provide health and wellbeing services to parents and carers of infants and young children. Supported playgroups are typically run by a trained
What are supported playgroups?

Low-intensity support for families.

Lead by facilitators.

May provide health and wellbeing services.

Generally weekly, group session with parent/carer and child.
What are supported playgroups?

Strengthen the parent-child relationship.

Provide parents and children with opportunity to socialise.

Improve children’s early learning potential.

Enhance parental wellbeing.
Types of supported playgroups

- Structured or unstructured.
- Targeted or general population.
- Provide opportunity for referrals to services.
Types of supported playgroups

Structured Vs. Unstructured
Types of supported playgroups

Targeted Vs. General Population
Methodology
Methodology

A targeted review.

Presents an overview of the most recent research.

Studies and reviews sought from expert colleagues.

Targeted search of Google Scholar conducted:

• Search terms: “supported playgroup” OR “supported playgroups”.

• Publication date was restricted from 2014-2015.
How did we choose what to include?

Inclusion criteria:

- A facilitated playgroup.
- Playgroup included parents/carers and their children.
- Children aged between 0-5 years.
- Findings of study included impact on child.
- Studies of any quality and design.
How did we choose what to include?

Exclusion criteria:

- Non-English.
- Books, chapters, conference papers, theses, protocols.
- Playgroup was not facilitated.
- Findings of study only focused on parents.
- No children aged below 6 years.
- Study was already included in a systematic review.
2 Systematic Reviews

3 Individual Studies
Assessing quality of the evidence

Systematic reviews were considered high quality, if:

- They addressed a clearly defined question.
- There was an a priori search strategy.
- They searched a minimum of three databases.
- Grey literature was specifically searched for.
- There was more than one rater for extraction of study information.
Assessing quality of the evidence

Study design elements which influence quality:

- Comparison group.
- Randomisation to groups.
- Follow-up measures.
- Interviews only.
- Sample size.

Individual studies of the highest quality are Randomised Control Trials (RCTs).
Systematic Reviews
Systematic Reviews

N = 2.


12 studies included in Lakhani & Macfarlane, 2015.

34 studies included in Williams et al., 2015.


Systematic Reviews: Findings

Early indications that supported playgroups may positively influence:

• Children’s physical health and wellbeing.

• Social competence.

• Emotional maturity.

• Language and cognitive skills.

• School readiness.
Systematic Reviews: Findings

Strongest evidence was for **structured** supported playgroups.

**Targeted** supported playgroups had greater success at engaging parents and children.

The only intervention with a strong experimental design was the *Early Home Learning Study (EHLS)*.
The Early Home Learning Study (EHLS)

Hackworth et al., 2013.

Evaluated two parallel cluster-randomised controlled trials, N = 2,228.

Conducted across 20 local government areas in Victoria.

Aimed to enhance the early home learning environment for young children from disadvantaged families.

Improved children’s communication and socio-emotional skills and their general development.
Authors noted generally low quality studies were included in the reviews.

Only 1 RCT found across both Systematic Reviews and ~7 quasi-experimental studies.

Typically found:

- Qualitative methods.
- Small number of participants.
- No comparison groups.
- Data collection methods unclear.
- Outcomes generally focussed on feasibility, acceptability, satisfaction and implementation process.
- Often offered within another community based service.
Systematic Reviews: Quality of Reviews


- Comprehensive search strategies covering period of 2000 to 2014.
- Clearly defined research question, search strategies and inclusion/exclusion criteria.
- Neither systematic review reported if 2 or more individuals were involved in the rating and extraction of studies.
Individual Studies
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weber et al., 2014</td>
<td>Parents of young children, aged 0 – 5 years.</td>
<td>10 week structured supported playgroup targeting active play.</td>
<td>- Children spent significantly more time actively playing outdoors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sydney’s Western suburbs, Australia.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Occurred during the week and on weekends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabrizi, 2014</td>
<td>Children with special needs (developmental delay, ASD or down syndrome).</td>
<td>Structured supported playgroup to increase the playfulness of children.</td>
<td>- Playfulness significantly increased at the end of playgroup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aged 15 months to 3 years.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Playfulness significantly increased four weeks after playgroup had finished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knaus &amp; Warren, 2015</td>
<td>Parents of children from a low SES independent school, aged 0 – 3 years.</td>
<td>A structured and targeted supported playgroup aimed to improve school readiness.</td>
<td>Playgroup leaders reported observing in children:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CALD groups specifically recruited.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Improved learning and developmental outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perth, W.A.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- An increase in independence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Children establishing relationships at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Assisted in improving school readiness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Quality assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Comparison Group</th>
<th>Follow up</th>
<th>Randomisation</th>
<th>Date type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weber et al., 2014</td>
<td>N = 74</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabrizi, 2014</td>
<td>N = 8</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knaus &amp; Warren, 2015</td>
<td>N = 30</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Interviews only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implications

Initial support for benefits to children in outcomes that support school readiness.

Particularly when:

• Playgroups are structured with specific interventions.

• Playgroups are targeted to select populations.
Recommendations

A consistent definition of supported playgroups is needed.

More high-quality research is needed.
Limitations of this targeted review

Not a Systematic Review.

Based on a few key resources.

Unable to combine data from studies.
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