

Data to advocate for changes in factors that impact on the emotional health of children: an example from Western Australia Child Health Surveillance Data

This presentation will focus on the use of child health surveillance data to assess the suitability of a Social and Family Functioning theoretical framework developed at the WA Institute for Child Health Research to monitor changes over time in the emotional health status of WA children aged 12 years and under, and of changes in the factors of the framework. The domains of the framework include income, time, human capital (physical health and education level of parents), psychological capital (family cohesiveness and parenting style) and social capital. Data from the WA Department of Health for the period 2001-03 were used to test the framework (except for social capital). Logistic regressions at both univariable and multivariable levels indicated the relative robustness of the framework. The results indicated that flow of income rather than absolute levels, the combination of hours available for one or both parents to spend with their children, the number of hours that the children watch television and others were important factors. The results of these analyses provide substantial information to traditional mental health promotion units for the development of programs aimed at increasing resilience in individual children and their families. These results also provide substantial information to supplement the individual approach with data necessary to advocate for maintenance of existing policies or change in social policy in areas such as family support, taxation, industrial relations, and education across both State and Federal levels of Government. These results also point to the need for continuing support for practical and useful population health surveillance systems across the life-course.

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