

Supported playgroups working well but need fine tuning

August 28 2012

A Queensland University of Technology (QUT) study has found that supported playgroups are providing valuable assistance to many families but some fine tuning could ensure attendees get the most out of the playgroup experience.

Supported playgroups for vulnerable families are run by community organisations and receive [government funding](#) for a limited period to have a paid facilitator organise the weekly sessions.

QUT researchers at the School of [Early Childhood](#), including PhD researcher Kate Williams, said the study covered urban and regional Queensland involved 18 supported playgroups.

She said that supported playgroups often include families who are culturally and linguistically diverse, including refugee and Indigenous families, young mothers, families with [children with disabilities](#), and parents experiencing depression or [social isolation](#).

Supported playgroups provide extra social and parenting support for families and give parents the confidence to transition to other community playgroups or [kindergartens](#).

Ms Williams said previous research had shown that disadvantaged families were more likely to either not attend or drop out of conventional community playgroups.

"Research has also found that the most disadvantaged children were also the most likely to benefit from attending playgroup so it is important that supported playgroups meet parents' expectations," Ms Williams said.

She said while there had been increasing government funding for supported playgroups over the past decade, little research had been conducted to investigate their effectiveness.

"Our research has provided the first real picture of who is actually attending these playgroups, what they hope to gain from doing so and whether the groups meet their expectations," she said.

"We found that vulnerable families attending supported playgroups have a higher attendance level than is typically seen in similar [family](#) support programs.

"The drop-out rate for vulnerable families attending family support programs is generally about 60 per cent while the drop-out rate for families in our study was around 50 per cent.

"Most parents we surveyed said they joined the playgroup to help their child develop the skills they needed before going to school. Playgroups' ability to address issues of social isolation for parents was also an important factor.

"Parents also reported that they particularly valued learning more about children's development at the playgroups."

Ms Williams said barriers to supported playgroup attendance included lack of transport, child health problems, difficulty in relating to other parents, and difficulty in getting organised at home when there was a newborn child or several children.

"It's important to understand these barriers so supported playgroups can incorporate elements in their programs to help target these difficulties," she said.

She said an improvement in facilitator training would also help improve the effectiveness of supported playgroups.

"While facilitators rated their level of satisfaction with their training on a 10-point scale as 7.75, which is relatively high, many considered they would have liked more specific training to prepare them well to work with vulnerable families and to provide child development advice."

Ms Williams said the research findings would be useful to organisations running supported playgroup programs.

She said it was important to improve the capacities of playgroups to retain vulnerable families so that positive outcomes for young children and their [parents](#) could be achieved.

More information: The study, The Parents at Playgroup Research Report, Engaging Families in Supported Playgroups 2012 is available at eprints.qut.edu.au/50875/ .

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

Citation: Supported playgroups working well but need fine tuning (2012, August 28) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-08-playgroups-fine-tuning.html>

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