

**Can Early Intervention Help Children who have Parents with a Severe Mental Illness?: A  
Literature Review and Service Evaluation.**

**Study 1: Children of Parents with Mental Illness; a Theoretical Framework for Intervention  
Programs.**

**Study 2: Program Evaluation of an Early Intervention for Children of Parents with Mental  
Illness**

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## **Study 1: Children of Parents with Mental Illness; a Theoretical Framework for Intervention Programs.**

### **Abstract**

Children of parents with Mental Illness (MI) have been identified as being at increased risk of developing mental health problems themselves. As a result, programs designed to reduce their risk have been developed, and Australia has been a world leader in this area. Notwithstanding the face validity of such programs, the theoretical and empirical foundations of these interventions have not been well-established. The aim of this article was to review literature relevant to both the theoretical and empirical basis of programs for children of parents with MI. To achieve this, the wider literature concerning Early Intervention (EI) for children at risk of developing mental health problems was initially considered. This included discussion of the concept of resilience, and the moderating variables of the parent-child relationship and stigma. A more systematic review of published EI program evaluations focusing on primary school aged children of parents with MI follows. Whilst these evaluations generally found improvements in such outcomes as mental health literacy and the development of protective factors immediately post-intervention, ascertaining long-term outcomes was limited by methodologies employed. Four intervention strategies were found used across EI programs reviewed, including psychoeducation, the development of coping skills, group work, and the development of social support networks. Additionally, one study was found to use play based engagement. The absence of a theoretical framework was identified as a limitation for all but one study in the current review. As such, a theoretical framework integrating theories of resilience with cognitive and behavioural theories as well as social cognition theory is proposed, highlighting the mechanisms through which common intervention strategies may impact the child's resilience.

Key words: children of parents with a mental illness, early intervention program, intervention strategies, outcomes, resilience, theoretical framework.

## Study 2: Program Evaluation of an Early Intervention for Children of Parents with Mental Illness

### Abstract

Children of parents with Mental Illness (MI) have an increased risk of poor developmental outcomes, and as such, Early Intervention (EI) efforts aimed at this population are a priority. Governing bodies advocate for the evaluation of these EI programs, and the current study adds to a growing evidence base. Kidz Club (KC) is a two day program with a three month follow up group, targeted at primary school children of parents with a MI, which has not previously been evaluated. Unlike most evaluations, the current program evaluation implemented a methodology incorporating a logic model. The hypothetical ‘if-then’ chains within the logic model were based on a theoretical framework presented in an earlier study. A pre-post design incorporating mixed measures was adopted. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. During 2014, four KC programs were evaluated, with a total of 23 participants aged 5 to twelve. The logic model informed the choice of measures, which were drawn from published sources where possible. KC’s implementation and short-term outcomes evaluated. The KC manual was found to be delivered with an average of 75% fidelity. Children were engaged well in the material presented, and KC met most of its five objectives. Significant improvements in children’s attitudes towards people with MI were identified, suggesting a reduction in stigmatising beliefs and potentially self-stigma. Children’s knowledge of coping strategies and of options for support seeking significantly increased post KC. The measurement of mental health literacy was impacted by poor measurement sensitivity; however children’s qualitative data indicates learnings were made. Findings are discussed in relation to the ‘if-then’ chains of the logic model, providing some support for the theoretical framework proposed in an earlier study. Recommendations based on findings are provided and limitations discussed.

Key Words: children of parents with MI, logic model, program evaluation, psychoeducation, resilience, stigma.