

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Help in bringing up baby

Professor Hannah Dahlen and Professor Virginia Schmied of the Family & Community Health Research Group and Professor Cathrine Fowler at the University of Technology are investigating the links between complications and interventions in pregnancy and birth and the growing number of mothers seeking residential parenting services. The project, supported by the Australian Research Council in partnership with Karitane and Tresillian Family Care Centres, aims to undertake the first in-depth study of the women who use such care in the first year of their baby's life.

"Physical and mental health problems during pregnancy and after birth are known to have significant short- and longer-term impacts on the woman as well as on the health and development of her child," Professor Dahlen says. "However, it is not clear if there is a relationship between health complications in pregnancy, mode of birth and obstetric interventions, physical health and recovery and an impact on parenting experience and capacity."

Organisations such as Karitane and Tresillian have been providing support for parents of infants and young children in NSW since the early 20th century – about 4500 women now use Tresillian (2696) and Karitane (1780) residential services each year. The usual reasons for admission relate to infant feeding problems and sleep and settling concerns, but maternal mental health issues are also common. Australian studies show more than 30 per cent of women have babies with sleep and/or settling problems and often end up exhausted and in poorer mental and physical health than other mothers.

This project will examine Karitane and Tresillian admissions dating back to 2000, taking account of factors including age, cultural background, pregnancy and birth experience, infant health and maternal physical and mental health to try to



Image: Holly Priddis Photography

ascertain what distinguishes such mothers from those who have had no need of residential parenting support. Focus groups with Karitane and Tresillian staff will contribute to the research.

Changing maternal demographics and increases in obstetric intervention over the past decade underline the importance of this project. The findings will help with service delivery and health planning to better meet the needs of women, as well as providing high-quality educational services for nurses, midwives and other health professionals.

Project Title: Characteristics, trends, co-admissions and service needs of women admitted to residential parenting services in the year following giving birth in NSW

Funding has been set at: \$149,684

Other Researchers: Ms Yvonne McCann (Karitane) and Mr Robert Mills, Mrs Marie Dickinson and Mrs Jane Kookarkin (Tresillian Family Care Centres)

Contact Details: h.dahlen@uws.edu.au
URL - <http://www.uws.edu.au/fach/fach>

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