



Healthy Families New York Home Visiting Program Improves Birth Outcomes

Background

Promoting optimal child health, including preventing low birth weight, is a primary goal of Healthy Families New York (HFNY). Indeed, low birth weight (defined as a birth weight of less than 2500 grams or 5 lb. 8 oz.) is associated with many negative outcomes. Low birth weight babies face an elevated chance of early mortality, health

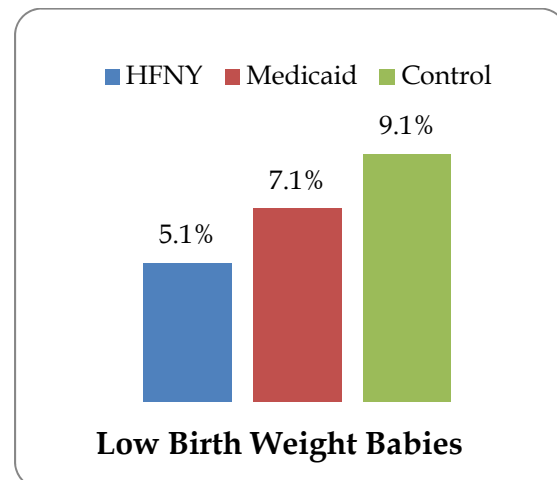
problems, and developmental delays. They are twice as likely to be placed in foster care and to be maltreated than their normal weight peers. Pregnant women who are young, African American, and/or poor face a substantially higher risk of delivering low birth weight babies than other mothers.

Healthy Families New York (HFNY) Home Visiting Program Prevents Low Birth Weight Babies

To examine whether HFNY achieves its intended program goals, researchers at the Center for Human Services Research and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services collected data in a randomized controlled trial conducted from 2000-2008. Based on the analysis of 506 birth records, our study shows that *home visited mothers (the HFNY group) were half as likely to have low birth weight babies than those who did not receive HFNY services (the control group)*. HFNY mothers were also less likely to have low birth weight babies than mothers in a Medicaid population.

While the mothers of the HFNY group were less likely than those of the control group to deliver low birth weight babies across all racial/ethnic groups, the program effects

were particularly strong for African American mothers. *Only 3.1% of African American mothers in the HFNY group had low birth weight babies, while 10.2% of African American mothers in the control group had low birth weight babies.*



How HFNY Works

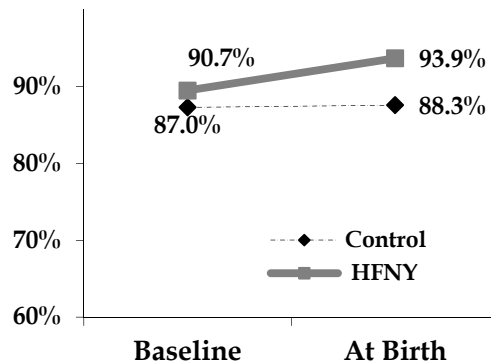
To better understand how HFNY helps to prevent low birth weight, researchers examined program data on the content of home visits and other services provided to HFNY participants.

Findings indicated that the home visitors helped expectant mothers to achieve positive birth outcomes by improving linkages to medical providers, nutrition programs, and social services. As indicated in the figure below, HFNY helped improve mothers' access to primary care providers during the prenatal period while there was little change among mothers in the control group.

Program data also demonstrated that home visitors helped mothers to access resources such as WIC, food stamps, food pantries, nutritional counseling, and housing assistance.

We also believe that social and tangible support by a home visitor may have contributed to a healthier and less stressful pregnancy and lowered the likelihood of low birth weight especially among African American mothers. Home visitors also provide instruction during the prenatal period and encourage participants to engage in healthy prenatal behavior.

Mothers with Primary Care Providers



For more information on this study, see Lee, E.; Mitchell-Herzfeld, S.; Lowenfels, A.; Greene, R.; Dorabawila, V. & DuMont K.A. (2009). Reducing low birth weight through home visitation: A randomized controlled trial. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 36; 2: 154-160

Healthy Families New York is a home visiting program targeted to meet the needs of highly stressed families with multiple risk factors. HFNY works to support positive parent-child bonding; promote optimal child and family health, development, and safety; enhance parental self sufficiency; and prevent child abuse and neglect. Based on its rigorous research, the RAND Corporation has designated HFNY as a “proven” practice (see www.promisingpractices.net). For more information on HFNY, please visit www.healthyfamiliesnewyork.org

The Center for Human Services Research (CHSR) is located within the School of Social Welfare at the University at Albany. CHSR has over 20 years of experience conducting evaluation research, designing information systems, and informing policy and program development for a broad spectrum of agencies that serve vulnerable populations. For more information, visit www.albany.edu/chsr