

#### About the Executive Summary

This executive summary provides the highlights of the most recent issue of the *Children's Mental Health Research Quarterly*, available for free at [childhealthpolicy.ca](http://childhealthpolicy.ca). The *Quarterly* presents the best available research evidence on a variety of children's mental health topics. The BC Ministry of Children and Family Development funds the *Quarterly*.

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#### About the Children's Health Policy Centre

We are an interdisciplinary research group in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University. We focus on improving social and emotional well-being for all children, and on the public policies needed to reach these goals. To learn more about our work, please see [childhealthpolicy.ca](http://childhealthpolicy.ca).



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WINTER 2016 Vol. 10, No. 1

# Helping children with behaviour problems

At any given time, roughly 30,000 children and youth in BC and 240,000 in Canada experience behaviour problems that are severe enough to warrant diagnoses of either oppositional defiant or conduct disorder. Tackling two of the preventable causes of these disorders — socio-economic disadvantage and child maltreatment — can help to reduce these numbers.

### Treating childhood behaviour problems

When prevention efforts have not succeeded, much can still be done to help young people with serious behavioural problems. Through a recent systematic review, we identified three highly effective psychosocial programs that helped children across a range of developmental periods:

- *Incredible Years Basic* taught socio-economically disadvantaged mothers and fathers with young children effective parenting techniques in 13 to 16 group sessions. Up to 10 years after the program ended, children had significantly fewer oppositional defiant disorder diagnoses and symptoms.
- *Project Support* focused on young children with oppositional defiant or conduct disorder who had been exposed to intimate-partner violence. The program first provided practical supports to these disadvantaged children and their mothers. Then mothers learned effective parenting skills while children engaged with a pro-social adult mentor for eight months. Between eight months and two years after the program ended, children had significantly fewer oppositional defiant or conduct disorder diagnoses and symptoms.
- *Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care* placed disadvantaged teenage girls, deemed chronic delinquents by the courts, with trained and well-supported foster parents for an average of six months. Foster parents and biological parents were taught a points-based rewards system to encourage positive behaviours. Girls also participated in individual therapy and worked with a life skills trainer. More than a year after this program ended, girls had significantly lower rates of delinquency.

Our review also found that the medication quetiapine reduced behaviour problems in adolescents with conduct disorder in a very small and very brief drug company-funded study. However, this antipsychotic medication has also been associated with significant side effects.

### Applying these findings in BC

Beyond noting these three successful programs, our review suggested a number of themes to inform practice and policy:

- By teaching effective parenting skills when children are younger, behaviour problems can be reduced before they become entrenched. And when childhood behaviour problems are addressed earlier, significant — and costly — hardships such as involvement in the youth criminal justice system may even be avoided entirely.
- Prior to starting any treatment intervention, a comprehensive, multidisciplinary assessment is needed — to ensure that social causes of child behaviour problems such as child maltreatment are carefully addressed. As well, treatment planning always needs to involve the parents.
- Psychosocial interventions such as parenting programs are the first choice for addressing child behaviour disorders.

Please view our full issue to learn more about how society can help children with serious behavioural problems and their families. 