



UCL Institute of Health Equity



Evaluating the impact of Children's Centres

Dr Angela Donkin

This report identifies 21 outcomes that are important to improve in the early years which predict future health and development outcomes.

Bowers-Purdes A, Strelitz J, Donkin A and Allen A (2012)

An Equal Start: Improving outcomes in Children's Centres

UCL Institute of Health Equity



This report identifies how best to measure the 21 outcomes identified in an Equal Start

Roberts J and Donkin A, with Pillas D.
(forthcoming 2013)

Measuring what matters

Forthcoming.....

Current measurement

- Broadly children's centres will be moving in the direction of measuring children's development in a satisfactory way through EYFS framework and age and stages questionnaire. (ASQ validated so could maybe expand that)
- However measurement of parenting, or parenting context will be weaker.
- Now –
 - Outputs rather than outcomes, such as the number of families reached and engaged by services
 - Case files that track and demonstrate improvements made by individual families
 - 'Soft' outcome data such as whether a parent feels they or their children have benefited from a service.
 - Harder outcome data often linked with particular intervention. Not comparable

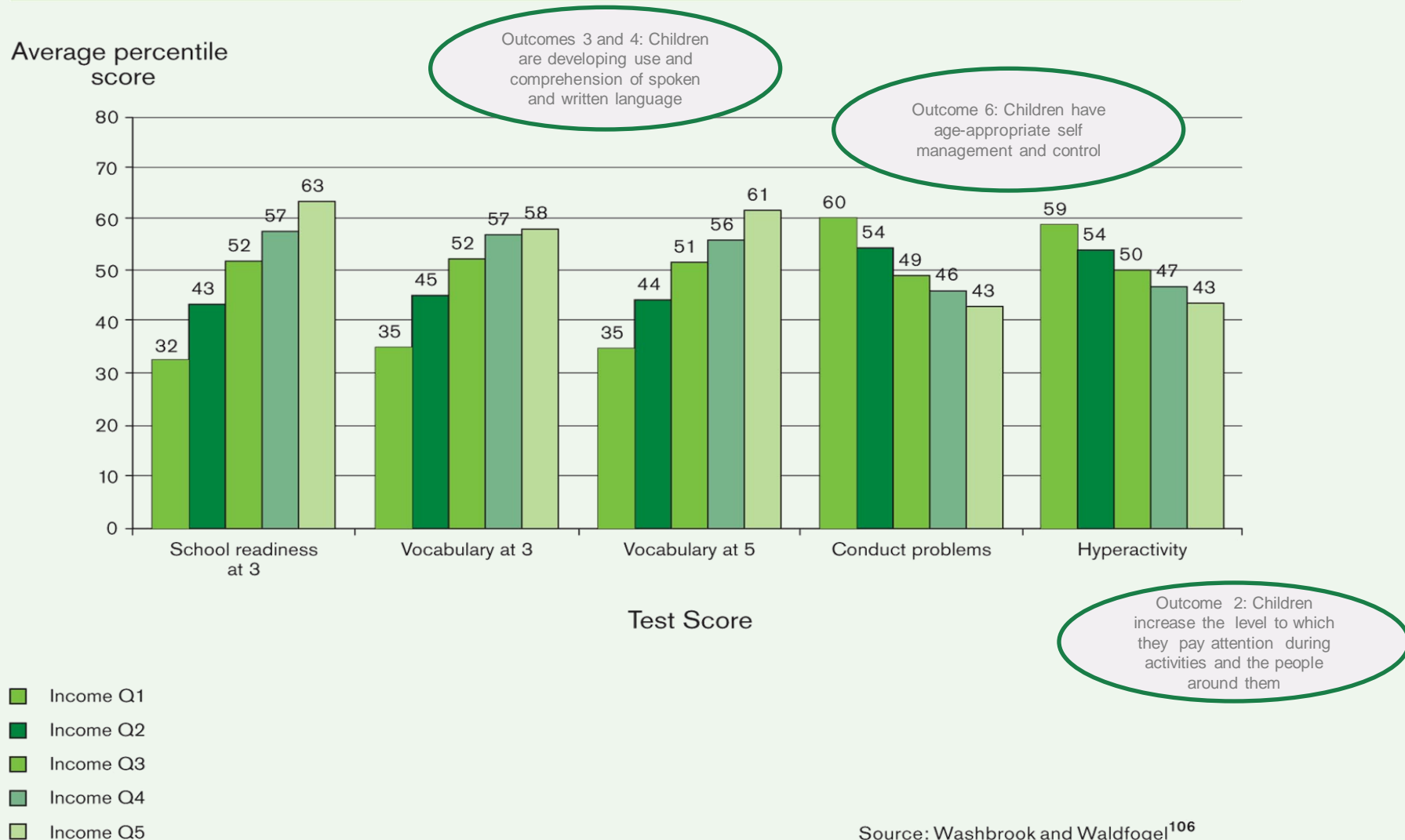
Outcomes

Outcomes grouped into three sections:

- Children's development
 - Good Parenting enables good development
 - Context in which parents live influences parenting
-
- See p. 8 of exec summary.



Figure 2.22 Indicators of school readiness by parental income group, 2008



Children's development

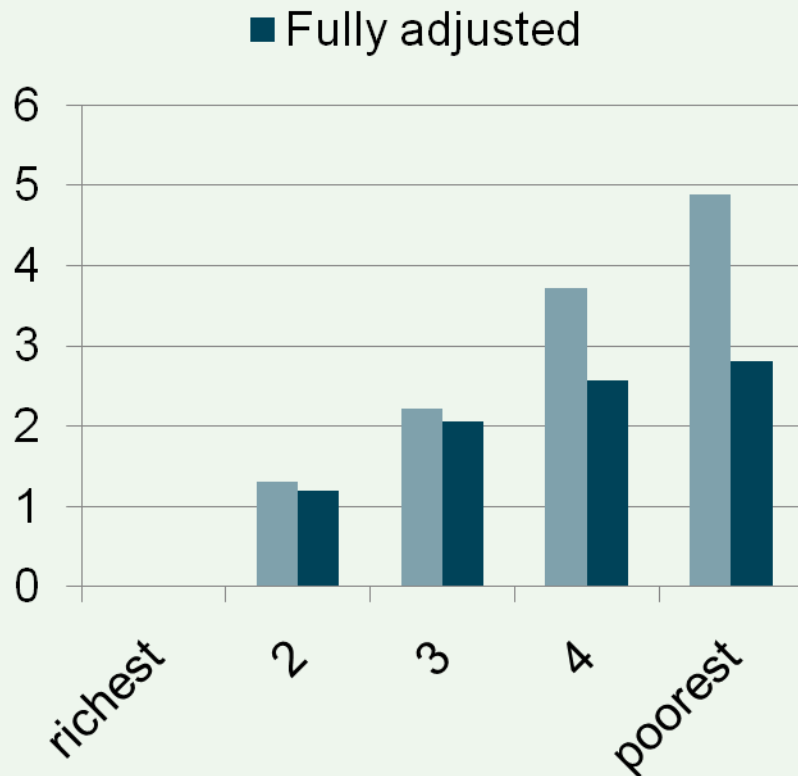
- **Outcome summary:** Paying attention, age appropriate drawing and copying skills, comprehension and use of language, play, emotional self management and control, BMI and low birth weight
- **Measure summary:** Ages and Stages Questionnaire, % of babies born with low birth weight (PHOF), children at age 5 with low/high BMI (National child Measurement Programme)

Improving Parenting

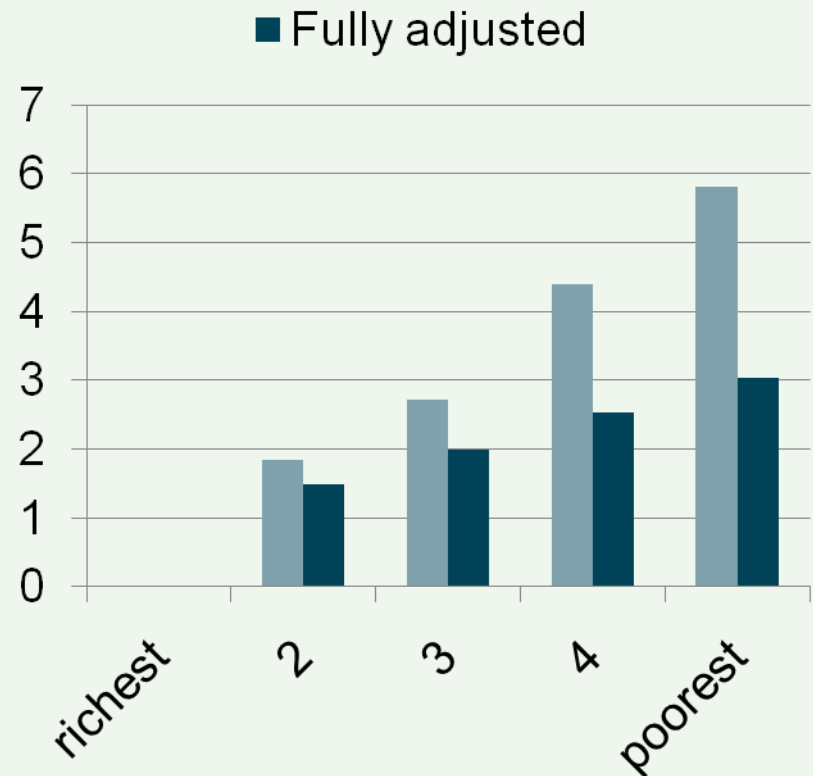
- Outcomes: decrease in smoking, increases in breastfeeding, wide use of language, reading every day, engaging positively, increased responsiveness/attachment, reinforcing boundaries
- Measures: PHOF and vital signs monitoring for smoking and breastfeeding, Early Home Learning Environment Index, Keys to interactive Parenting Scale

Socio-emotional difficulties at age 3 and 5

Age 3



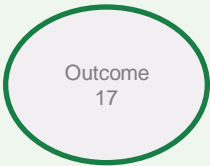
Age 5



Fully adjusted = for parenting activities and psychosocial markers
 Kelly et al, 2010 from the Millenium Cohort Study

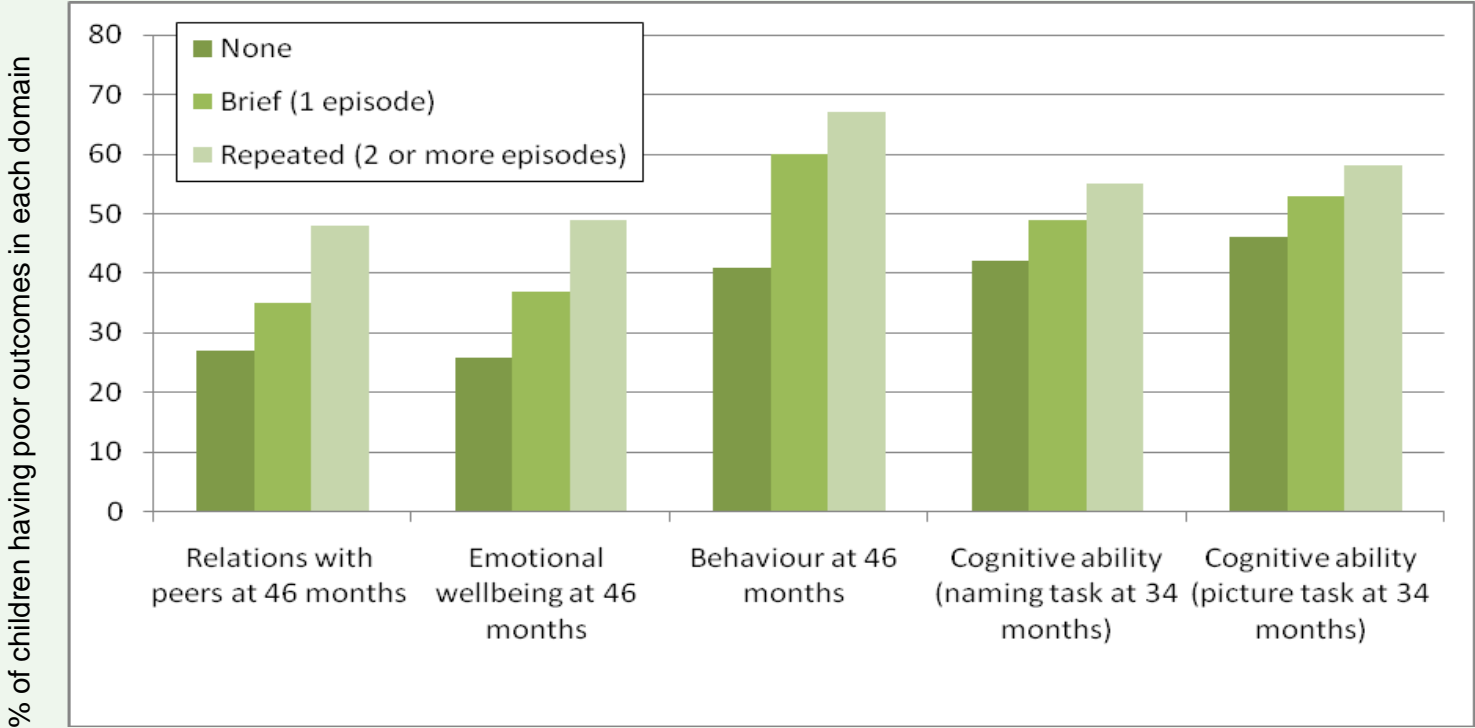
Improving the context in which families live

- **Outcomes:** reduced parental stress, improved mental well-being, support from friends and family, improved literacy and numeracy, improved knowledge of good parenting, improved financial security/getting into work.
- **Measures:** GHQ, life satisfaction and affect balance, 'our relationships', Keys to Interactive parenting scale, % of parents in working households, satisfied with life, attending work related programmes...



Increase in the number of parents with good mental health

Poor child outcomes in relation to maternal mental health status (%)



Marryat L and Martin C (2010) *Growing up in Scotland: Maternal mental health and its impact on child behaviour and development*

A 22nd outcome - outreach

- Children's centres working towards 21 outcomes and measuring them will push forward improvement, but only if they are engaging with the population in need
- Gradient.. Shouldn't only focus on those most at need
- % of disadvantaged and all families with young children (0-5) who have contact and sustained contact
- Need to define population (and 'sustained' contact)

Realising the potential for children's centres

- 2 in 5 children not meeting a good level of development by age 5
- Healthy child programme from pregnancy to 5 – to date mainly immunisation, weight checks.
- In addition 15 hrs free nursery education to 3 year olds and disadvantaged 2 year olds.
- LAs have statutory duty to provide sufficient children's centre's to meet need
- Potential for children's centres to make a real difference.

Challenges

- Not recruited to measure
- Potential incentives to over or under report
- Accurate measurement can be heavy handed – balance - don't want to send the clientele away
- Measuring can take time and resource not available to the centre.
- Different techniques/measures means that commissioners don't know what works best.

Changes needed

- Integrated system of measurement/uniformity across all children's centres
- Strong leadership of early years monitoring system at a local level.
- Having resource and/or training to do this in centres
- Buy in from others – knowing the population statistics and defining populations covered
- Movement from measuring outputs to outcomes
- Base-lining information at the beginning
- Using validated measures rather than self reports
- We need to try to shorten the measures suggested here.

Thank you

Contact details

a.donkin@ucl.ac.uk