

The Early Years Education Program research trial: A progress report

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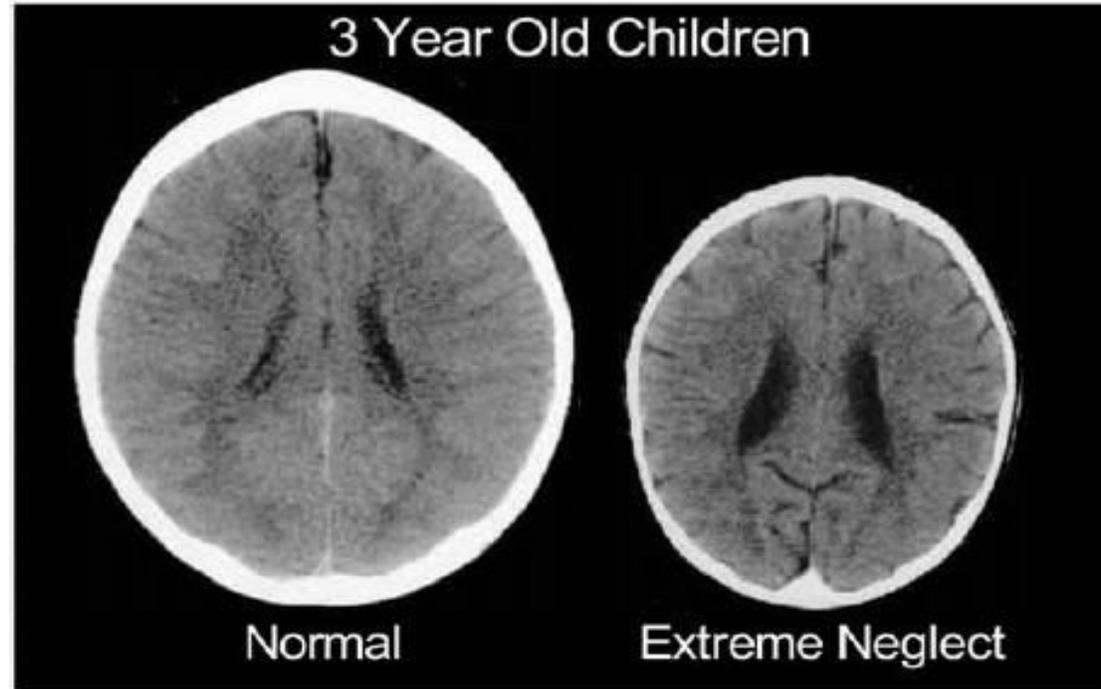
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A short history 1

- Since the late 1990s an increased understanding of the importance of early years for lifetime outcomes.
- As well, a more detailed knowledge of **how** early years matter.
- Example: Extreme neglect and toxic stress in early childhood causes: (i) Impaired brain development; and (ii) Delayed learning of cognitive and social skills.

Infant brain development



- Perry, B. (2002). Childhood Experience and the Expression of Genetic Potential: What Childhood Neglect Tells Us About Nature and Nurture. Brain and Mind. 3, 79-100.

A short history 1

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- As well, a more detailed knowledge of **how** early years matter.
- Example: Extreme neglect and toxic stress in early childhood causes: (i) Impaired brain development; and (ii) Delayed learning of cognitive and social skills.
- A rediscovery (and extension) of evidence on trials of early years programs in US (eg., Abecedarian; Perry pre-school).
- Broad awareness of 'early years' as key policy issue extends to Australia in mid-2000s. But what policy works?

A short history 2

- Initiative to create and trial the Early Years Education Program (EYEP) by the Children's Protection Society (CPS).
- EYEP is targeted at the particular needs of children who in their early years experience significant family stress and social disadvantage.
- CPS brought together a multi-disciplinary team of researchers in 2008-09 to design and implement the program, and to undertake the research trial.
- This talk draws on the work undertaken and reports prepared by the team thus far.
- Project funded by CPS, government departments, philanthropic trusts and donors, and the ARC.

Overview of rest of talk

- A brief introduction to the Early Years Education Program;
- A brief introduction to the EYEP research trial;
- Some findings from the 'Background report' on characteristics of children and their families who have participated in the EYEP research trial; and
- The future.

About EYEP: Rationale

- 1] Mainstream early childhood education and care is not sufficient to remedy the developmental delay of children who experience neglect and toxic stress.
- New thinking on optimal design of programs for this population of children: ‘...linking high-quality pedagogy to interventions that prevent, reduce, or mitigate the disruptive effects of toxic stress on the developing brain’ (Jack Shonkoff).
- 2] Children in Australia who would benefit most from high quality education and care, seem least likely to be able to access it.

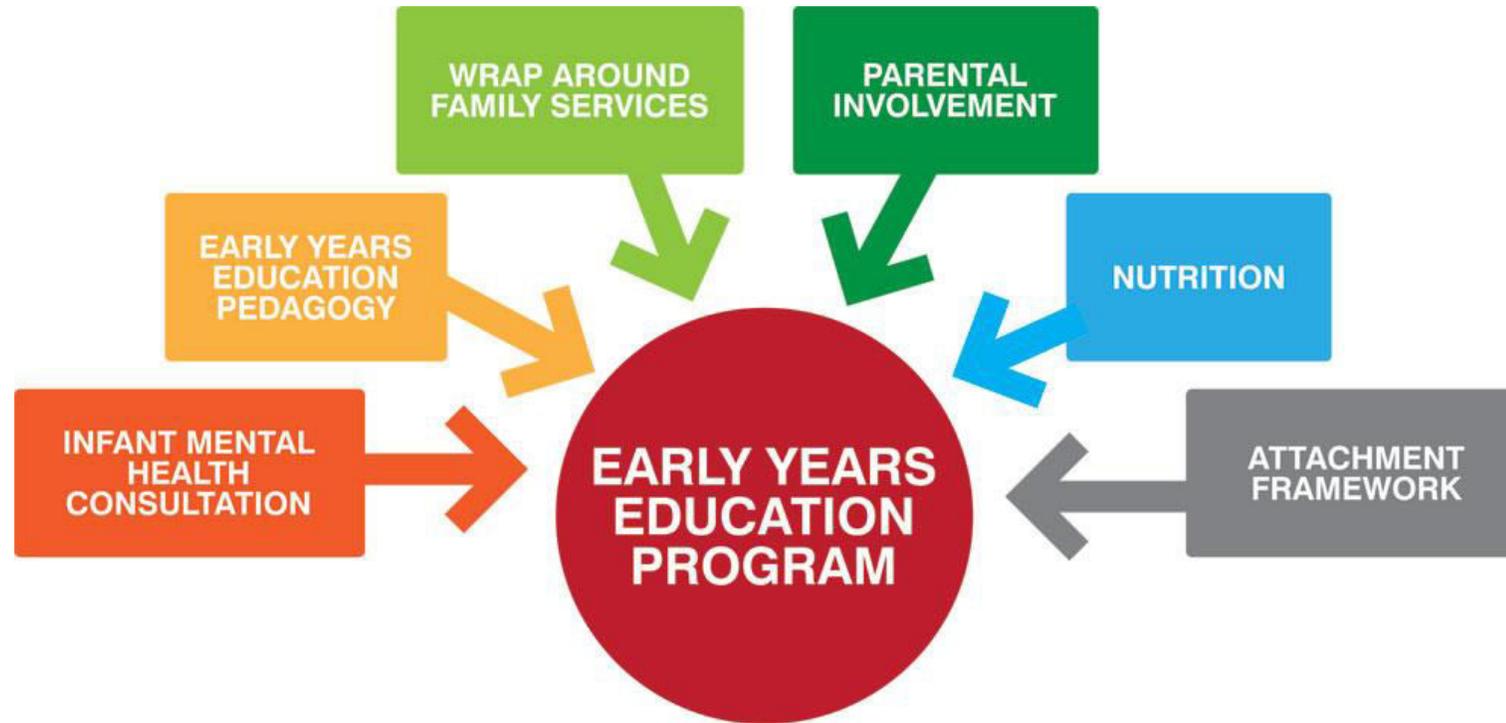
About EYEP: The program 1

- **Objective:** To ensure that vulnerable and at-risk children realise their full potential and arrive at school developmentally and educationally equal to their peers.
- A holistic model of care and education within a childcare centre.
- Key features of EYEP are:
 - High staff/child ratios (1:3 for children under three years, and 1:6 for children over three years);
 - Qualified staff;
 - A rigorously developed curriculum; and
 - The use of relationship-based pedagogy.

About EYEP: The program 2

- Children receive three years (50 weeks per year and 25 hours per week) of care and education.
- Eligibility for EYEP: Children are required to be aged from zero to three years, assessed as having two or more risk factors as defined in the Department of Human Services 2007 *Best Interest Case Practice Model*, and be currently engaged with family services or child protection services and have early education as part of their care plan.

EYEP model



About the research trial of EYEP 1

- A randomised controlled trial as the 'gold standard' for evaluating whether a program 'works'.
- 145 children enrolled in trial from 2011 to 2016 (72 in 'treatment' group and 73 in 'control' group).
- We are investigating:
 - 1] Impact of EYEP on outcomes for children and their primary caregivers; and
 - 2] The benefit-cost of EYEP.
- Able to benchmark against Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.

About the research trial of EYEP 2

- **Outcome** measures include:
 - 1] Children's outcomes
 - Health and development outcomes
 - Level of academic ability and achievement
 - Emotional and behavioural regulation
 - 2] Primary caregivers of children
 - Parenting practices
 - Engagement with neighbourhood and community services.

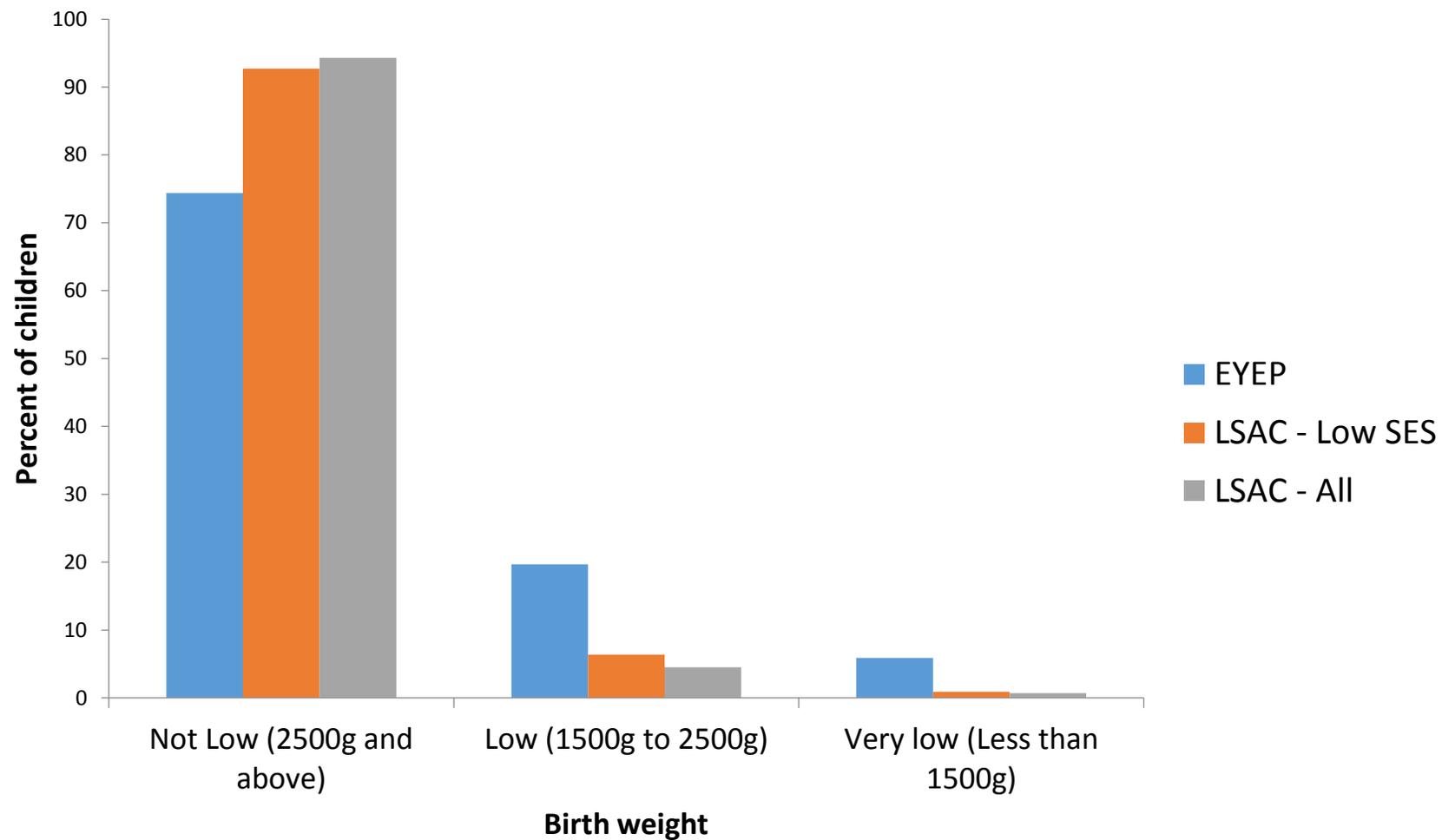
Report no.1: The background report

- **What does the report do?**
- It describes the characteristics of children and their primary caregivers who are participating in the trial of EYEP.
- **Why do we need this report?**
- 1] To make sure that the research trial has been targeted on the population of children that EYEP is intended for; and
- 2] So we know what population the results on the impact of EYEP are relevant to (transportability of findings).

Report no.1: The background report

- **The main findings:**
- **1]** Children participating in the EYEP trial are highly disadvantaged (even compared to children living in what are defined as low socio-economic status households):
- High number of risk factors;
- Lower birth weight;
- Compromised language, motor skill and adaptive behaviour development; and
- More likely to live in a jobless household.

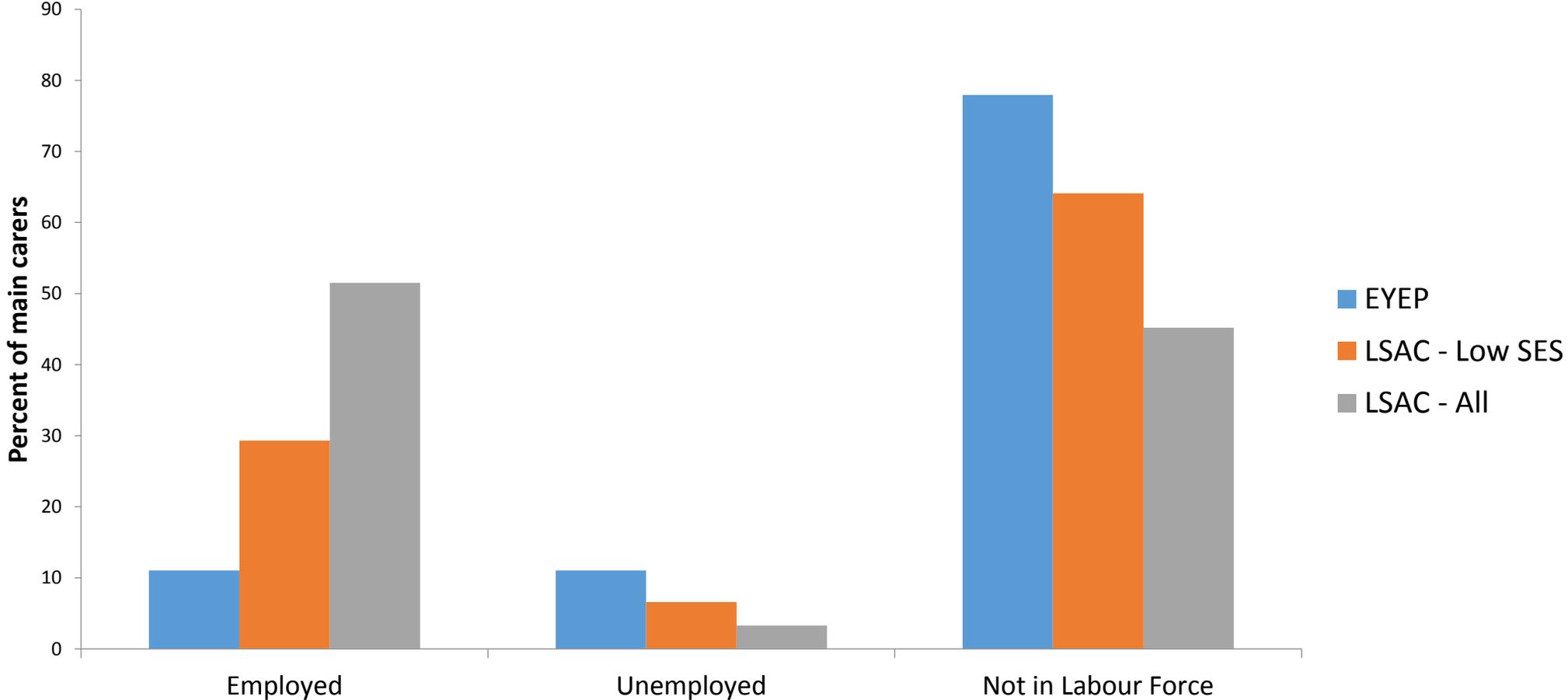
Birth weight of children



Bayley scales of infant and toddler development

| | Cognitive | Language | Motor skills | Social-Emotional | Adaptive Behaviour | Proportion of general population |
|--------------|-----------|----------|--------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| < 85 to >=70 | 12.1 | 24.2 | 25.0 | 7.1 | 26.3 | 13.59 |
| < 70 | 3.2 | 9.7 | 4.0 | 6.3 | 13.2 | 2.28 |

Labour force status of primary caregiver



Report no.1: The background report

- **The main findings:**
- **2]** Primary caregivers of children in the EYEP trial have relatively few personal and social resources available to face the challenges of parenting (again, even when compared to low SES households):
- More likely to be young, out of the labour force, and to have low levels of financial resources;
- Extraordinarily high number of stressful life events resulting in higher likelihood of severe psychological stress.

Labour force status and household income

| | EYEP | LSAC – Low SES households | LSAC – All households |
|---|------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Labour force status: Percent unemployed and not in the labour force | 89.0 | 70.7 | 48.5 |
| Disposable household income: Percent less than \$250 per week (\$ 2016 qtr. 1) | 27.4 | 12.9 | 4.7 |

Measures of psychological and life stress

| | EYEP | LSAC – Low SES households | LSAC – All households |
|---|------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| K6: Percent with severe psychological stress | 25.8 | 4.4 | 2.6 |
| You had a major financial crisis - Past 12 months | 32 | 18.8 | 12.8 |
| You had problems with the police and a court appearance – Past 12 months | 15.3 | 4.0 | 1.7 |

Report no.1: The background report

- **The main findings:**
- **3]** Policy implication:
- ‘...a compelling argument for the need to remove all barriers to these children having access to high quality therapeutic early education and care’.

What's next?

- End of 2017: A report on the impact on children and their primary caregivers of being enrolled in EYEP for the first 12 months.
- Outcome measures for the 12 month report:
 - (i) Child cognitive development – IQ and language skills;
 - (ii) Child emotional and social development; and
 - (iii) Parent stress.
- Subsequent reports in:
 - 2018 (24-month);
 - 2019 (36-month); and
 - 2021 (At school).

Today's presentation draws on:

- Jordan, B., Tseng, Y., Coombs, N., Kennedy, A. and J. Borland (2014), 'Improving lifetime trajectories for vulnerable young children and families living with significant stress and social disadvantage: The Early Years Education Program', BMC Public Health, 14, 965 (10 pages).
- Tseng, Y., Jordan, B., Borland, J., Clancy, T., Coombs, N., Cotter, K., Hill, A. and A. Kennedy (2017), *Changing the Life Trajectories of Australia's Most Vulnerable Children – Report no.1: Participants in the Trial of the Early Years Education Program*;
http://fbe.unimelb.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/2403438/background-report-final-web.pdf