

# RISK FACTORS FOR NOT BEING READY TO START SCHOOL

**Authors:** Prof Sinead Brophy (S.Brophy@swansea.ac.uk)  
Dr Emily Marchant (E.K.Marchant@swansea.ac.uk)  
Hope Jones (H.E.Jones@swansea.ac.uk)  
Michael Parker (969307@swansea.ac.uk)  
Amrita Bandyopadhyay (A.Bandyopadhyay@swansea.ac.uk)

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**In this Data Insight researchers at Swansea University Medical School investigate the risk factors for children's low school readiness (e.g. low vocabulary & communication, low on ability to socialise).**

**This work is a collaboration between ADR Wales' Early Years Strategic Impact Programme, the Welsh Government, the Centre for Population Health (CPH) and Public Health Wales.**

## What we did

A review of published research undertaken by researchers at Swansea University examining factors associated with school readiness indicate that area-level factors, parental demographic and health factors and child health factors all play a role. Those associated with higher school readiness included higher levels of child care provision in the area, living in private housing, mother's age (between late twenties or thirties), breastfeeding (higher rates and longer breastfeeding duration), child living with both parents and a nurturing parenting style. Parents in good physical and mental health and the child in good physical health (being born at term and a healthy birth weight) are factors associated with higher school readiness. Conversely, the factors that are associated with lower school readiness include low access to childcare, higher levels of unemployment (family and area-level), living in social housing and exposure to poor environment such as damp. Parental factors include maternal heavy drinking behaviours, mother who smoked during pregnancy, younger mothers (teenage mothers) or older mothers (40+ years) and parents with poor physical health (hypertension, diabetes etc) or poor mental health. Single parent or step-parent families, low expectations by the parent for the child, preterm or low birth weight child, and poor health of the child are also associated with low school readiness.

## Background

School readiness indicates whether a child has the ability and capacity to achieve at the appropriate level in formal school. School readiness is strongly linked to a child's environment before starting school and includes language and communication skills, personal and social development, physical development, cognitive skills, and basic knowledge of vocabulary. If children are not ready for school it can take many years for them to catch up with children who are school ready. School readiness has been identified as a key public health concern in a review of UK public health systems and policy approaches to early child development (Black et al, 2019). Therefore identifying the factors associated with low school readiness is a priority in closing the gap in children's school readiness and improving outcomes for children.

## What we found

Within Wales the provision of interventions for vulnerable families is offered by Flying Start. Flying Start is an early years Welsh Government funded programme for families of children under 4 years of age. The programme aims to make a decisive difference to the life chances of eligible children in identified Flying Start areas by providing access to childcare; health visitors; parenting support; parent/toddler groups; and speech, language and communication support. We examined the percentage of children who have low school readiness and do not live in a Flying Start area (and so cannot obtain the help and support). We found in Wales, 14.1% of children in non-Flying start areas had low school readiness and 21.0% of those in Flying Start areas (6.9% higher in Flying Start areas). However, it is important to note that most children do not live in a Flying Start area and so in absolute numbers, more children who have low school readiness do not live in a Flying Start area in Wales.

## What next?

The next steps for this research will be developing a predictive model for school readiness (before school starts) to examine if a child who is likely to have low school readiness but who does not live in a Flying Start area, can be identified in advance in order to offer help and support, compared to the prediction of living in a Flying Start area.

Our analysis reveals that there are multiple risk factors for low school readiness in children. This data provides us with further opportunities to explore the significance of various factors in predicting school readiness such as low birth weight and maternal smoking. Knowing the risk factors can help inform policy regarding the provision of interventions and access to resources for the most vulnerable children and their families.

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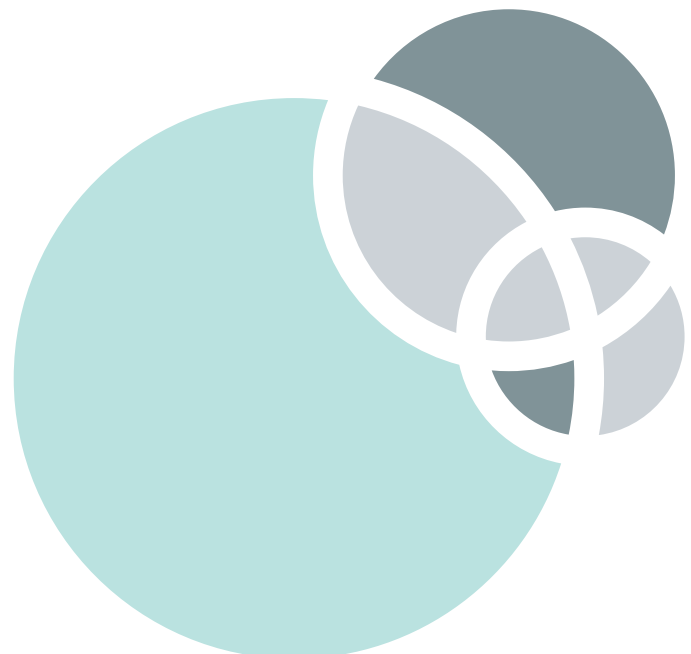
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### Reference

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ADR Wales brings together specialist teams, data science experts, and statisticians as part of the Economic and Social Research Council (part of UK Research and Innovation) funded ADR UK. Our team is made up of specialists in their field from Swansea University Medical School, the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD) at Cardiff University and the SAIL Databank at Swansea University with statisticians, economists and social researchers from Welsh Government. Together ADR Wales develops new evidence which supports the Welsh Government's national strategy, Prosperity for All to improve the lives of people in Wales.

For further information please contact

[Cathrine.E.Richards@Swansea.ac.uk](mailto:Cathrine.E.Richards@Swansea.ac.uk)

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