



Measuring the impact of the Social Workers in Schools service using linked administrative data

Social Workers in Schools (SWiS) is a government-funded, community social work service provided in most decile 1-3 primary and intermediate schools, and kura kaupapa Māori.

The social workers work within school communities to support individual children, and their families and whānau, and to provide programmes to selected groups of children and to schools. Children and their families and whānau take part voluntarily.

One social worker serves a school or cluster of schools and kura with a total roll of between 400 and 700 students.

The government spends \$21.4 million annually on the programme.

Evaluating outcomes for students

Past evaluations and kaupapa Māori studies of SWiS have found there is wide-ranging support for the service. SWiS is seen as having a wide range of important benefits.

However, there have been few attempts to measure the difference SWiS makes for students. In 2016 and 2017, the Ministry of Social Development and Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children worked in collaboration with other researchers to look at the impact of SWiS on student outcomes using linked administrative data. Two studies were completed.

In the 2018 paper, we used linked data in the Statistics NZ Integrated Data Infrastructure. We examined whether for students enrolled in schools and kura that newly received SWiS in the 2012-13 SWiS expansion, there were reductions in:

- stand-downs and suspensions from school
- care and protection notifications to Child Youth and Family (CYF)
- Police apprehensions for alleged offending.

Positive results for certain groups of students

There were indications of some encouraging impacts on outcomes.

For students most likely to receive individual case work, we saw a general pattern of lower relative rates of adverse outcomes for students in SWiS expansion schools after they received the service. Sixteen of 21 subgroup effects measured showed lower relative rates of occurrence; five of those statistically significant at the five percent level.

Positive impacts on outcomes were strongest for:

- Police apprehensions for Māori boys in the schools and kura where social workers has their office based
- care and protection notifications for Pacific students.

For kura kaupapa Māori, we found no evidence that the impact of the expansion of SWiS was different compared with mainstream schools. However, we observed that enrolment in a kura kaupapa Māori is associated with large improvements in each of the three outcomes.