

What We've Learned About the Michigan Model of Infant Mental Health–Home Visiting

A summary of research findings from more than 20 published studies

Thank you for participating in the Michigan Model of Infant Mental Health–Home Visiting (IMH-HV) program. Your involvement has helped our research team learn a great deal about how this program supports families.

Below is a summary of what we have found across more than 20 published studies, made possible by the time and trust you shared with us. Citations are included so you can learn more about any finding that interests you.

Learn more about the model: [Zero to Thrive's IMH-HV research page](#)

Supporting Parent Well-Being

Parenting can be both rewarding and challenging. Many parents who participate in IMH-HV are dealing with stress, depression, or difficult experiences from their own childhoods. Our research shows that IMH-HV can make a meaningful difference in parents' mental health. For example, mothers who received IMH-HV showed meaningful improvements in depression symptoms after one year compared with mothers who did not receive services ([Jester et al., 2025](#)).



We also found that the program can help reduce the effects of parents' past adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma, so that these difficult experiences are less likely to negatively affect their children's development ([Riggs et al., 2022](#)). Even when mothers had symptoms of post-traumatic stress, children in the IMH-HV group showed better social and emotional well-being than children whose mothers did not receive the program ([Ribaud et al., 2022](#)).

Strengthening the Parent-Child Bond



A core goal of IMH-HV is to strengthen the bond between parents and children by supporting parents to become more attuned and responsive to their babies and toddlers. Our studies show that parents who receive IMH-HV become more sensitive caregivers over time. For example, they become better at noticing and responding to their child's cues ([Rosenblum et al., 2020](#)).

Parents also develop stronger “reflective functioning,” which means they become better able to think about their child's thoughts and feelings and

understand how their own emotions may shape their parenting ([Brophy-Herb et al., 2023](#)). We found that the more sessions families attended, and the more experienced their therapist, the greater the improvements in this reflective capacity ([Stacks et al., 2022](#)).

These changes in how parents understand and respond to their children are at the heart of what makes IMH-HV work.

Helping Children Thrive

When parents are supported, children benefit too. Our research has found that children whose families received IMH-HV showed stronger language development and better social-emotional skills, even when their parents had experienced significant adversity.

One study found that IMH-HV helped buffer the negative impact of parents' adverse childhood experiences on their toddlers' language abilities ([Riggs et al., 2022](#)). We also found early evidence that the program may influence children's biology in positive ways. Specifically, a study examining DNA methylation—a process that affects how genes are expressed—found that the epigenome of infants and young children may be sensitive to the parent-child relationship and to this type of early intervention ([Petroff et al., 2024](#)).



Keeping Families Safe and Connected to Resources

IMH-HV helps reduce risks associated with harsh parenting and child maltreatment. Specifically, families who received IMH-HV showed lower levels of harsh parenting and reduced child abuse potential over time, with greater participation linked to greater reductions ([Julian et al., 2021](#); [Julian et al., 2023](#)).

The program also connects families to important services. Families in IMH-HV were significantly more likely to receive referrals to medical care and to attend preventive health visits, while their children were less likely to need emergency department visits ([Pitzen et al., 2025](#)). When IMH-HV was integrated into obstetric care settings, it led to increased connection to services during the perinatal period ([Jester et al., 2024](#)).

For families involved in the child welfare system, our studies of infant-toddler court teams, where IMH-HV is provided alongside specialized court services, showed that children were more likely to be reunified with their parents and showed improvements in development and parent-child interaction ([Stacks et al., 2019](#); [Stacks et al., 2020](#); [Stacks et al., 2025](#)).

Commitment to Quality and Equity

We are committed to ensuring that IMH-HV works well for all families. Our research has examined how therapists deliver the program and found that they maintain strong fidelity to the core components of the model (Huth-Bocks et al., 2020).

We have also studied how factors such as race and culture affect the therapeutic relationship, finding that strengthening cultural responsiveness in therapist training is an important step toward more equitable care ([Torres et al., 2022](#); [Torres et al., 2024](#)).

Additionally, we've learned that families with greater psychological needs, such as those experiencing depression, tend to stay in treatment longer. This suggests that the program is reaching and retaining families who may benefit most ([Jester et al., 2023](#)).

Final Summary and Next Steps

Together, these findings tell a powerful story. The relationships that form between families and their IMH-HV therapists make a meaningful difference. By supporting parents' mental health, strengthening the parent-child bond, and connecting families with resources, IMH-HV helps create the conditions for children to grow and develop in healthy ways.

None of this would be possible without the families who participated in this research. We are deeply grateful for your time, your openness, and your continued interest in this work. Thank you for helping us learn how to better support families like yours.

What Comes Next?

We recently completed a seven-year follow-up, reconnecting with families to learn about the long-term effects of IMH-HV on parents' and children's development and mental health. It was meaningful to hear from families again, and we are thankful to everyone who took part.

Stay tuned—more results are on the way!

LEARN MORE ABOUT IMH-HV

Visit zerotothrive.org/research/imh-hv/ to learn more about the model, the research behind it, and additional publications.