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Community-based child abuse prevention: Outcomes associated with a differential response program in California

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Community-based child abuse prevention:
Outcomes associated with a differential response program in California

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Overview of the problem:
Lack of prevention services

- In the U.S., over 2 million child maltreatment reports per year receive no services
- Evidence that unsubstantiated cases re-refer at rates similar to substantiated cases
- Differential response: Voluntary, community-based services for lower risk families

Another Road to Safety overview

- Eligibility criteria: screened out of traditional investigation; child age 0-5 or a pregnant mother in the home; and residence in certain designated neighborhoods.
- Referral to community organization which offers weekly visits with paraprofessional home visitor
- Provides the following types of interventions: social support, connection to local resources, assistance with basic needs, and developmental screens/attention on child and parent relationships
Purpose of Study

To examine agency processes and client experiences associated with Differential Response in Alameda County, along with preliminary outcomes and neighborhood factors, in order to inform the development of an evidence-based curriculum to train BSW & MSW-level students.

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Methods

Process study
- Focus groups with line staff (n=12)
- Interviews with managers (n=16)
- Interviews with clients (n=48)

Outcome study (Survival Analysis)
- Treatment group: 161 families who received intervention
- Comparison group: 477 families eligible for intervention
Process study findings

Program goals

- Overarching goal: Prevention of child welfare system involvement
- Proximal goals:
  - Elimination of unmet basic needs
  - Strengthening the attachment relationship
  - Provision of temporary social support
  - Increased connections with community resources

Program components: Targeting basic needs

- Theoretical support: Hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943)
- Types of interventions:
  - Use of basic needs fund to address one-time, acute needs
  - Referral to community resources that address basic needs, such as food banks
  - Assistance with transportation
Program components: Strengthening attachment relationships

- Theoretical support: Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969)
- Types of interventions:
  - Providing opportunities for parents to enjoy time with their children
  - Modeling appropriate behavior with children
  - Offering information on child development

Program components: Providing social support

- Theoretical support: Perceived and enacted social support (House, 1981)
- Types of interventions
  - Listening to clients share their feelings
  - Giving reassurance and compliments
  - Normalizing the experience of asking for help

Program components: Connecting families with resources

- Theoretical support: Institutional resources theory (Jencks & Mayer, 1990)
- Types of interventions
  - Providing referrals to community services
  - Accompanying families on appointments
  - Helping them fill out paperwork
Outcome study findings

Client outcomes: Report as failure

- Unadjusted: Hazard ratio 1.03, p-value 0.87
- Evidence of strong confounding by prior reports
- Clients with prior reports only: Hazard ratio 0.69, p-value 0.064

Client outcomes: Investigation as failure

- Unadjusted: Hazard ratio 1.45, p-value 0.05
- Clients with prior reports only: Hazard ratio 0.96, p-value 0.85
Client outcomes: Substantiation as failure

- Unadjusted: Hazard ratio 1.82, p-value 0.15
- Clients with prior reports only: Hazard ratio 0.84, p-value 0.71
- Rare event, large confidence intervals

Major findings

- Findings in-line with meta-analyses of child maltreatment prevention programs that show small treatment effects
- Findings also fit with other DR studies that have found no difference in re-reporting for DR and non-DR families
- Intervention may have beneficial outcomes in untested domains, such as parenting and health

Discussion:
How can the design of DR programs be improved in order to make a demonstrable impact on families’ lives?
Evidence base on basic needs interventions

- Mixed findings, possibly because such programs primarily serve families experiencing poverty and crisis (MacLeod & Nelson, 2000).
- Reduced placement rate in the IL Norman program (Eamon & Kopels, 2004).
- Reduction in risk factors for program that focused on basic needs for families at-risk of neglect (DePanfilis & Dubowitz, 2005).

Recommendations: Basic needs interventions

- May make a difference when assistance fits needs
- In cases of great financial stress, may not tangibly improve the plight of families.
- Long-term effects unclear

Evidence base on strengthening attachment relationships

- Evidence that maltreated children are less securely attached to their parents than non-maltreated children (Morton & Browne, 1998).
- Changing the stability of the mother and child’s life can translate into improvements in the attachment relationship (Egeland & Sroufe, 1981).
- Meta-analysis found that short-term, focused programs had greatest efficacy in affecting parental sensitivity and parent-child (van Ijzendoorn, Juffer, & Duyvesteyn, 1995).
Recommendations: Strengthening attachment relationships

- Develop clear guidelines and goals on how to work with families on their parenting.
- Add targeted behavioral interventions to provide feedback and modeling related to sensitive caregiving.
- Provide families with consistent opportunities to enjoy fun time together, accompanied by feedback intended to promote sensitivity.

Evidence base on social support for maltreating families

- Maltreating parents measure lower on perceived support than parents who do not maltreat their children (Daniel, Hampton, & Newberger, 1983; Egeland & Brunquell, 1979).
- Directionality and causality of this relationship, and its implications, are unclear:
  - Families may lack in social supports, in which case it may be logical to increase their social networks.
  - Families may fail to make use of supports, in which case social skills training may make sense.
  - Perceived social support may be a stable personality trait that is not malleable.

Recommendations on social support for maltreating families

- Home visitor can provide temporary support; however, form of support is unsustainable.
- Consider fostering long-term connections, rather than grafting a temporary relationship with a worker onto families' lives.
Evidence base on community resources

- Relationship between neighborhood conditions and parents’ perceptions and usage of community resources (Coulton, 1996).
- Parents’ perceptions of community resources may influence parenting practices (Elder, et al., 1995; Pinderhughes, Nix, Foster & Jones, 2001).

Recommendations on community resources

- Foster ties with informal as well as formal sources of support in the community
- Engage in activities that transform the array of neighborhood social services along the dimensions of availability, accessibility, quality, and affordability

Questions?

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References


