An Ecological Approach to Family Intervention in Early Childhood: Embedding Services in WIC

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Early Steps Families
Challenges in Providing Child and Family Mental Health Services to the Poor.

1-Many services are paid by personal insurance and cover only DSM disorders.

2-State funded services are often poorly supported, ineffective, not research based, and in some cases possibly iatrogenic.

3-Solution: Embed affordable and effective interventions in agencies that have wide access and repeated exposure to children and families (Hoagwood & Koretz, 1996)
Three Goals of this Talk.

1- Provide an overview of the ecological approach to family intervention and treatment (ecoFIT).

2- Review findings from a pilot study applying the ecoFIT to high risk young families participating in WIC services.

3 - Review initial findings from a multi-site outcome study applying the ecoFIT to high risk young families participating in WIC services.
What is an ecological approach to child and family therapy?
The Ecology of Self Regulation

Behavior Settings

Relationship Dynamics

Child Adjustment

Schools

Peers

Teachers

Parents

Neighborhood

Home

Spouses

Siblings
Six Features of An Ecological Approach to Child and Family Interventions (EcoFIT)
(From Dishion & Stormshak, 2006)

An ecological approach...

☑ is based on an *empirically based model* of child and adolescent problem behavior;
☑ is *family-centered*, addressing adult leadership and support in the change process;
☑ is *assessment driven*, with decisions regarding intervention needs following careful assessments;
☑ targets *social interactions* with parents and peers to make long lasting change;
☑ addresses *client motivation to change* as a core component;
☑ utilizes a *health maintenance model* delivered in service settings that involve children and families;
A Developmental Model for the Influence of Family and Peers on Child Adjustment
(from Dishion & Patterson, 2006)

- Parent-Child Relationship
- Parent Guided Socialization
- Peer Network Coalitions

Early Childhood       Middle Childhood       Adolescence
A Broad Overview of Intervention Outcome Literature
(Dishion & Stormshak, 2007)

Four nonspecific factors which undermine intervention effectiveness (from Dishion & Stormshak, in press):

- Potentially Harmful
- Potentially Beneficial

- Unsupervised Peer Groups
- Peer Contagion

- Child Self Regulation
- Adult Involvement
- Positive Relationships
- Behavior Management Skills
Research on the Effectiveness of Interventions that Target Parenting

Effective Parenting Interventions Reduce...

- Early Childhood Oppositional Problems
- Middle Childhood Antisocial Behavior
- Adolescent Delinquency
- Adolescent Substance Use
Process of Change

Pre-contemplation

Contemplation

Preparation

Action

Maintenance

Support Self-efficacy

Advise

Avoid

Arguments

Oppose

Perspective

Explore Ambivalence

Develop Discrepancy

Question
Interventions that Address Motivation to Change

- Drinker’s Check-Up (Adult problem drinking)
- Family Check-Up (Family management)
- Teen Check-Up (Self-regulation)
An Overview of the ecoFIT Strategy
(Dishion & Stormshak, 2007)
Service Systems Affecting Mental Health of Children and Adolescents

Developmental Stage

- Early Childhood → WIC, Preschools
- Childhood → Public School Setting
- Early Adolescence
- Adolescence → Community Programs: Treatment and Rehabilitation
Early Steps Pilot Project Research Design (N=120)

W.I.C. Services

Screening

Assessment

Random Assignment

FCU  Control
Three Year Effects on Parent Report Problem Behavior in Early Childhood.
(Shaw, Dishion, Supplee & Gardner 2006)

Effect size at age 4 = .45 sd
Three Year Effects on Observations of Parent Monitoring in Early Childhood
(Shaw, Dishion et al, 2006)

Effect size at age 4 = .48 sd
Early Steps Multi-site Research Design
(N=731: Eugene, Pittsburgh & Charlottesville)

W.I.C. Services

Screening

Assessment

Random Assignment

FCU  Control
Design of the Early Steps Multi Site Project (Dishion, Gardner, Shaw & Wilson)

- **Study Sample**: 731 WIC Families with Toddlers
- **Design**: Longitudinal follow-up age 2 to 5
- **Retention**: 89% from ages 2 to 3
- **Ethnicity**: 50.1% European American (n=366)
  27.9% African American (n=204)
  13.4% Hispanic/Latino (n=98)
  8.6% Other (n=63)
- **Gender**: 50.5% Male (n=369)
  49.5% Female (n=362)
Primary Caregiver ratings on Problem Behavior (Dishion, Shaw et al, under review)

Intervention Effect (.16)

I = Intervention
C = Control
Intervention Outcomes on Direct Observations of Parent Positive Reinforcement

Videotaped Home Observations at age 2 and 3 Years

Ratings of Proactive Parenting

Time

Age 2

Age 3

Experimental Group
- Control
- Intervention
Changes in Observed Parenting Mediates Reductions in Children’s Problem Behavior.

(from Dishion, Shaw, Connell et al, under review)
Concluding Comments.

1 Embedding family interventions within agencies such as WIC is feasible and cost effective (average # hours=3 for toddlers);

2 The families that are the most at risk are the most likely to engage in the FCU (single parents, teen mothers, low education, low income)

3 Although effect sizes are small, they are enduring overtime

4 Future work on the ecoFIT model will focus on improving engagement in skill-building interventions that focus on parents ‘positive behavior support’.
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