



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Perceptions of Service Providers and Parents Regarding Improving Outcomes of Young Children Living in Circumstances of Disadvantage

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Marie Dietrich Leurer, RN, PhD

Assistant Professor, College of Nursing, University of Saskatchewan

Doctoral Committee

- **Dr. Kathryn Green, Dept Community Health & Epidemiology, College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan (Supervisor)**
- **Dr. Sylvia Abonyi, Dept Community Health & Epidemiology, College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan**
- **Dr. Nazeem Muhajarine, Dept Community Health & Epidemiology, College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan**
- **Dr. Debbie Pushor, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan**
- **Dr. Marlene Smadu, College of Nursing, University of Saskatchewan**
- **External: Dr. Megan Aston, School of Nursing, Dalhousie University**

Funding

- **Centre for Knowledge Transfer**
- **Saskatchewan Health Specialized Nurse Educator Bursary**

Background

- Some children live in circumstances that make it more difficult for them to develop the health status and capacities needed to succeed later in life
- How can society best reduce this inequity?
- Previous research has focused on two areas:
 - 1) Determining risk factors for impaired childhood outcomes
 - 2) Evaluating the impact of specific programs on outcomes

Knowledge Advancement

- Lack of research exploring insights of health and social service providers particularly across programs
- Need for research that considers broader contextual issues

Research Questions

What do service providers and parents believe would most effectively facilitate optimal development of children living in circumstances of disadvantage?

- What challenges do these families face?
- What barriers impede participation in programs intended to support these families?
- What strategies would most effectively improve childhood outcomes?

Research Approaches

- Qualitative Policy Research
- Community-Based Participatory Research
- Knowledge Transfer and Utilization Methodology

Research Method Phase I

(Apr. – Sept. 2006)

- Recruitment letters sent to service providers in Regina organizations delivering programs to families with young children living in circumstances of disadvantage.
- Follow-up call made to request interview
- 26 interviews conducted with 29 service providers from 24 different Regina programs (1 lost to follow-up)

Organizational Involvement

- Research proposal presented to Regina & Area Early Childhood Network for feedback and support (February 2006)
- Preliminary results presented to service providers at two meetings for interpretation and advice
- Mixed advice regarding whether to access parents
- Organizations not interested in forming an advisory group to guide next phase, although very interested in receiving results.

Research Method Phase II

(Aug. – Nov. 2007)

- Parents recruited using handouts distributed at two agencies
- \$30 honourarium to participants
- Three focus groups held (total 24 parents) at three different programs
- Phase I results presented verbally and on PowerPoint slides for parental discussion and feedback
- Focus groups audio-taped and transcribed

Data Analysis

Inductive approach to discover regularities by:

- Transcribing interviews/focus groups
- Re-listening to audiotapes
- Rereading transcripts
- NVIVO₇ software used to assist in category creation and adjustment

Findings



Programs Offered by Participant Organizations

- Childcare and child skill development
- Parental skill development
- Assistance in meeting basic needs
- Individual advocacy

Challenges

Psychosocial

- Mental illness & addictions
- Societal attitudes
- Unhealthy partner relationships
- Lack of role model
- Lack of family support
- Lack of self-esteem

Structural

- Poverty
- Food insecurity
- Lack of transportation
- Inadequate housing
- Lack of education

Psychosocial/ Structural

- Isolation

● Emphasized by parents

Barriers to Participation

Psychosocial

- Feel judged
- Discouraged by family, peers, partner
- Cultural barriers
- Fear, mistrust, discomfort

Psychosocial/ Structural

- Survival mode & crisis mode

Structural

- Program demand exceeds capacity
- Lack of transportation
- Unaware of available programs
- Rigid criteria
- Transiency
- Lack of quality childcare
- Emphasized by parents

Strategies to Improve Childhood Outcomes

Psychosocial

- Culturally appropriate programs
- Welcoming atmosphere
- Change societal attitudes
- Build sense of community

- Healthy relationship & self-esteem programs
- Mental health & addictions programs
- Parent skill development programs

Psychosocial/Structural

- Individual advocacy
- Emphasized by parents

Strategies to Improve Childhood Outcomes

Structural

- Family income
- Flexible & client-centered programs
- Funding for early childhood programs
- Assistance finding & accessing programs
- Provide quality childcare
- Long-term, stable program funding
- Assistance with transportation
- Food security initiatives
- Support for those trying to change
- Housing programs

Themes

- **Interrelatedness and Syndemics Theory**
- **Instability**
- **Power Imbalance**
- **Lack of Belonging or Connectedness**

I. Interrelatedness & Syndemics Theory

I have come to the conclusion that over time what you find is that poverty kind of intensifies every other problem and every other crises that families are dealing with. So there could be a range of issues in terms of problems within the family, whether it's dealing with addictions for the parents, or a range of factors that might lead to family breakdown and family dysfunction. But ultimately, not having the income and the services to kind of meet the basic needs will intensify all those problems. And in many cases it really is kind of the prime problem so it strikes me that there just really is a higher level of stress and crises for families that are really uncertain as to how they're going to kind of meet the basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, etc.

(Service Provider)

II. Instability – Family Level

*I'm thinking of some girls lives where they're a single mom living with their own single mom and they're living in poverty and their brother has addiction issues, he's in a gang, and so life is constantly revolving around his drug use and these people coming to the home. And I just think, how could you be involved in a program when you don't have stability and you don't know what your day-to-day life is going to be. How do you go somewhere everyday and commit to a program?
(Service Provider)*

II. Instability – Program Level

Some programs they just fund for six months and then they don't fund you for another six months and then they will ask you to start up again. You've laid off your staff already. You bring in new staff and by the time you bring them up to speed, the program burns out. So some programs will fund you for a year, but in a year you have to make a huge funding proposal again. So there isn't what you call three year funding ... that would be long-term and we could focus more on doing the work rather than the paperwork, but that doesn't happen. (Service provider)

III. Power Imbalance

I hear them [young parents] talk about how they get treated by the police, hospital workers, court workers. And they basically say they are treated disrespectfully. And so if I go with them, it seems as though they get taken more serious and get treated with a higher level of respect. (Service Provider)

I moved out of two places because being a single parent, woman working or whatever ... they [landlords] are perverts. They are like literally perverts. They'd be like, 'Oh, you're short on your rent this month? You know, is there' ... oh my God... 'Do you want to make it up for, you know, you're fifty dollars short. Want to make that up?' I'm standing there, just me and my baby, I mean, like no man around. You know, what am I going to do? And he's my landlord. He can just throw me out and he can walk into my house. (Parent)

IV. Lack of Belonging or Connectedness

I think a lot of people are transient and they move out of their community quicker before they can connect and move on and off reserve, move to different cities, very transient...so it is harder to make a connection and to get comfortable with a community and an area and programming. (Service Provider)

Young people often enough will join a gang because that's family. That's their community. They can identify with them, especially if they haven't been able to identify strongly with their own family. Or if they haven't been able to identify strongly with a school community that is supportive and is where they would have their social life, their friends, hopefully their parents involved in some way with teachers and school and that sort of thing.

(Service Provider)

Policy Implications

- Minimum guaranteed income
- Housing
- Universal childcare
- Sustainable funding of community-based organizations
- Mental health and addictions services

Areas for Further Research

- Comparison of effectiveness of comprehensive, holistic interventions versus more focused interventions in impacting childhood outcomes
- Extent current programs consider barriers to participation in program design, delivery and evaluation
- Stability – at both familial and organizational levels

QUESTIONS?