



Harvard Family Research Project
Harvard Graduate School of Education

Home Visit Forum Research Projects

In December of 2000, the Home Visit Forum voted to establish an area of collaborative inquiry around three questions all related to the central strategic issue of family engagement in home visitation:

- How do you recruit participants?
- How do you engage participants?
- How do you retain participants?

Supported by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, each participating organization received a mini-grant to embark on a focused research endeavor that addresses these questions. The results from these research studies are starting to become available and to provide valuable information for each organization, for all Home Visit Forum participants, and for the home visitation field at large. For those programs that have completed their studies, links to the summaries of the results are available below.

Grant Projects for Organizations

Early Head Start (EHS)

EHS engaged in a complete analysis of research materials collected in 17 diverse research sites. The goal of the research was to learn more about patterns of engagement across multiple measures. In particular, EHS looked at data about the engagement of families at various levels of risk, the patterns of engagement with families that choose mixed models of home- and center-based services, and the characteristics of home visitors who are most successful in engaging families.

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)

HIPPY USA examined the attrition rates of families in the HIPPY programs. In particular, the study focused on the differences in the programs themselves and the training and supervision of home visitors. The research was conducted in collaboration with the Child and Family Studies program at University of South Florida (USF), and focused on home visitors and their supervisors in 10 local HIPPY program sites. HIPPY USA has also regularly shared information with the Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP), a Home Visit Forum member conducting a similar study.

Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)

NFP was interested in what factors influence attrition from, and retention in, the program. This study used available data as well as newly collected interviews with nurse home visitors conducted on-site and over the phone. In particular, NFP developed an existing model that uses participant and NFP program characteristics that may influence participant retention or attrition and explored

what characteristics from the data may be predictive of retention or attrition. The study also described what strategies nurse home visitors use that may influence attrition and retention.

The Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP)

PCHP examined what impact home visitors' characteristics and prior experience have on families' attachment to programs. Working from the parents and families' perspective, this study used focus groups and surveys to understand the key reasons why families participate in and are retained by PCHP and how who this particular group of home visitors are may impact their decisions. In partnership with HIPPI, this study also examined how the educational and cultural backgrounds of home visitors influence engagement patterns, providing important understandings about matching families with home visitors.

Healthy Families America (HFA)

HFA addressed implementation factors that may impact retention in home visitation programs by examining two key issues: adherence to HFA credentialing criteria (model fidelity) and the perspectives of community partners on HFA's responsiveness to local needs (community engagement). The project used archival administrative data from approximately 145 credentialed HFA sites and used both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Parents as Teachers (PAT)

PAT increased the collection of baseline data about recruitment and retention of PAT families nationally. The goal was to develop and identify specific benchmarks and best practices in the retention of families in PAT stand-alone and PAT programs blended with other models such as EHS and HFA. Data were collected from approximately 600 PAT sites through surveys and phone interviews with PAT program directors.

PAT also completed an additional grant project on best practices for collaborative implementation. PAT studied the correspondence between indicators of quality operating in various home visiting models as well as the best practices for blending home visiting models. This research was conducted via two methods: through a tool that analyzes the similarities, differences, and overlaps between PAT and other Forum members, and through the use of focus groups that discuss best practices.

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters' Research Project

Program and Provider Factors in Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters Programs *Executive Summary*

Diane Powell
Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters
April 2003

Project Purpose and Goals

This multiple case study of commonalities and variations in programmatic and provider factors across 10 Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) sites was conducted in order to explore variables related to family retention and to inform HIPPY policies and practices in the areas of establishing programs; recruiting, training, and supervising home visitors; and retaining families.

Methodology

From a review of the home visiting literature, a conceptual framework was developed depicting the hypothesized relationships between program attributes/organizational factors, provider factors, and retention and engagement of families. Through surveys, interviews, and focus groups with coordinators and home visitors at the 10 sites, information was gathered on funding sources; collaborative partnerships; supervisory practices; program adaptations; site recruitment procedures; work environment; relationships among staff; and home visitor background, job responsibilities, preservice and in-service training, job satisfaction, community involvement, and service delivery style. In addition, programmatic data on participant demographics, enrollment and retention, and home visit completion were obtained. The data analysis examined grouped coordinator and home visitor data and program characteristics within and across sites. In addition, attrition data for the past 3 years from a sample of HIPPY programs was gathered and analyzed.

Key Findings

Over all, HIPPY programs report high rates of family retention within a program year, although, for some sites, retention rates were found to be highly variable across program years. There was some indication that low retention across years was associated with changes in program size. Some variations were encountered across programs in methods used to calculate retention, including definitions and criteria for enrollment and termination. Coordinators and home visitors identified several factors felt to be associated with family retention. These included parent misunderstanding of the nature of the HIPPY model and what would be required of them, home visitors leaving, and degree of flexibility and adaptation of the model to individual family needs.

The findings on retention provide a starting point for further investigations including examining retention rates within each of the 3 HIPPY curricula years and re-enrollment rates of families across years, quantitative studies of the association between home visitor turnover and family attrition, the relationship between model adaptations and family engagement, and finally, factors affecting program capacity to handle rapid growth. Standardization across programs of definitions and methods of calculating retention will be essential for further study of factors affecting retention.

Practice and Policy Implications

Analysis of the qualitative data provided findings on programmatic operations that can be used to inform HIPPY national policy, training, and monitoring activities. These include home agency attributes that best support HIPPY programs, the range of adaptations occurring across sites, the

effects of funding stability, and programmatic impacts of funder-imposed requirements. Comparison of these findings with those from other national home visiting programs should provide a basis for discussion and opportunities for cross-model learning.

Nurse-Family Partnership's Research Project

Home Visitor Strategies as an Indicator for Participant Engagement Executive Summary

Patricia Moritz, Ph.D. and Ruth O'Brien, Ph.D.

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April 2003

Project Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the study is clarify those factors involved in engaging participants in the Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) nurse home visiting program that may influence their retention in, or attrition from, the program.

The goals of the study are to

- Further develop an existing model that uses participant and NFP program characteristics that may influence participant retention or attrition.
- Explore characteristics from NFP home visiting data that may be predictive of retention or attrition.
- Describe strategies nurse home visitors use to engage participants as a potential factor influencing retention or attrition.

Methodology

For aims one and two, currently available data from sites were used to further develop and use an analytic model of characteristics that may influence retention and attrition. Several exploratory and regression techniques were used along with mixed-model logistic regression methods to accomplish these aims. These data were available in the NFP Clinical Information System and contain data relevant to client, NFP program, nurse and site characteristics from standard measures used by all NFP sites. The third aim was carried out by individual interviews with nurse home visitors and supervisors who have been involved with the NFP program for at least 1 year and who serve NFP participants who have completed at least the infancy stage of the program. These interviews were conducted in person. The data obtained include (a) the strategies used in developing their relationship with clients, (b) how the nurse ascertains that a participant appears to be at risk for leaving the program, (c) what makes the nurse feel a participant is difficult to work with, and (d) how the nurse/program responds when a client has frequent missed appointments. The qualitative data were analyzed using ethnograph and ongoing content analytic techniques.

Key Findings

The quantitative modeling analysis reflect attrition as of December 2001. Attrition seemed to be influenced by home visitor turnover, whether or not the mother was married or lived with their mothers, and the number of home visits completed during pregnancy. That is, attrition was higher among those who experienced a turnover in their home visitor and among married participants compared to unmarried women living with their maternal mothers. The early relationship between the mother and the nurse home visitor during pregnancy also seemed to be an important factor, with longer and uninterrupted contact during pregnancy promoting retention following birth of the

infant. Qualitative analyses showed a difference in the expectations and expressed beliefs about how clients act as a participant in the program. Younger participants (young teens) were noted to be more difficult to engage in the program process and content.

Practice and Policy Implications

These findings indicate a need to review training strategies and program content for nurse home visitors and supervisors. It is too early to determine policy implications based on this small-scale study.

The Parent-Child Home Program's Research Project

The Role of Home Visitors' Characteristics and Experience in the Engagement and Retention of Parent-Child Home Program Participants *Executive Summary*

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April 2003

Project Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the current project was to identify home visitor characteristics associated with greater retention and engagement of families in the Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP).

Methodology

Parent graduates of the program from five districts on the East Coast were interviewed about their experience with their home visitor (using focus groups and questionnaires), and data were collected from home visitors on the families' levels of participation and engagement with the program. Data were also collected on home visitors' demographic characteristics as well as their level of burnout.

Key Findings

Focus group data indicated that parents were, in general, very happy with PCHP and their home visitors. These data were corroborated by quantitative data that indicated high means for satisfaction with the program. Parents did, however, wish for greater curriculum flexibility and greater attention to the temperament match between a home visitor and children. Parents in focus groups also expressed a wish for more of the program, both in terms of longer sessions as well as in terms of a longer period of eligibility (e.g., 3 program years rather than 2).

Cultural match between the home visitor and the parent, the home visitor's status as a parent participant in the program, and home visitors' education and experience with PCHP were all related to aspects of parents' engagement and retention. Data indicated that parents who were of the same racial/ethnic group as their home visitors and that parents who lived in the same community as their home visitors reported greater satisfaction than parents who were not matched on these variables. Although parents might not associate their satisfaction with being matched based on race/ethnicity per se, a common cultural background clearly facilitated the development of a positive working relationship between parents and home visitors. The bulk of the racial/ethnic matching, however, occurred in one district, so it is difficult to say whether parents in that district were more satisfied because of the racial/ethnic match or something else about that district. It is possible that coordinators in that district knew that racial/ethnic match was important to families while coordinators in other districts consider other variables to be important.

Home visitors' reports indicated better engagement for families who were not matched with them in terms of race/ethnicity. Those home visitors who were former parent participants themselves reported greater use of library and community programs for the families they worked with than

home visitors who were not former parent participants, but less absolute improvement. For home visitors, then, engagement was not related to the family's cultural similarity to them, and perceptions of success were colored by the home visitor's own prior experiences.

Coordinators' attendance reports indicated greater engagement for families in which the home visitor was a former parent participant herself and in which the home visitor had many years of experience working with PCHP. In other words, home visitors with a greater history of experience, both as a participant and as a home visitor, had more consistent attendance records from their families.

Practice & Policy Implications

The results point to the importance of community-specific hiring practices for home visitors. With regard to training practices, home visitors should receive education on how to remain within the guidelines of PCHP theory and goals but also be flexible to the needs of families. Home visitors can also benefit from training on how to measure success and on the importance of keeping accurate, consistent records of the quantity and quality of home visits. In addition, support for home visitors is essential in preventing burnout, since those with long tenures reported symptoms of burnout.

Healthy Families America's Research Project

Implementation Issues in HFA Family Retention: The Impact of Model Fidelity and Community Engagement

Executive Summary

Kathryn Harding and Nancy Peddle
Healthy Families America
April 2003

Project Purpose and Goals

Fidelity and community engagement are often viewed as conflicting processes in program implementation. Very little attention has been paid to these processes and how they impact prevention services. Either of these processes could impact family retention, a widely recognized challenge in voluntary prevention programs. This project explored the relationship between fidelity, community engagement, and retention, using administrative and survey data from Healthy Families America (HFA) program sites. The HFA model is ideal for examining these issues, as it incorporates a mixture of required and adaptable elements, and emphasizes the importance of community engagement in program implementation. The HFA model constitutes a balanced approach to fidelity and flexibility, fostering a site's achievement of both fidelity and community engagement.

Methodology

HFA's national credentialing process was the source of administrative data on fidelity and community engagement. Fidelity ratings were provided by peer reviewers trained in the HFA model. Community engagement was measured by perceptions of four constituent groups: participating families, staff, program organizing group (e.g., advisory board), and community partners. Obtaining data on family retention that were valid and comparable across program sites proved more challenging. A national survey of HFA sites was used to collect this information. Several methodological challenges were encountered in the study, typical of those often experienced with administrative and secondary data. As a result, the study sample for credentialed HFA program sites was limited to 31 sites. In addition to the main hypotheses, the study included

analyses of retention with 290 HFA sites that completed a national survey of program characteristics.

Key Findings

Although the problems encountered suggest the need for caution in the interpretation of findings, study results highlight the important role that staff play in family retention. Retention was correlated with staff perceptions of the program, as well as staff experience in home visiting. Qualitative analysis of open-ended questions of program likes and dislikes yielded additional support for the importance of staff influences on family retention. Retention was not related to measures of program fidelity, nor was overall fidelity related to measures of community engagement.

Practice and Policy Implications

Despite its limitations, the study offers some support that community engagement, particularly as perceived by staff, impacts program performance, at least in the area of family retention. Other valuable lessons from the study include the need to improve the measurement of retention, and recognition that program factors, including factors that differ between national models, may impact retention, indicating a need for cross-model research.

Parents as Teachers' Research Project

Understanding Recruitment and Retention in Parents as Teachers Programs Executive Summary

Karen A. Guskin and Danielle Pauley
Parents as Teachers National Center
April 2003

Project Purpose and Goals

This project was designed to broaden the knowledge base about families' engagement in Parents as Teachers (PAT) services. The primary goals of the project were to systematically evaluate PAT program data in order to: (1) extend knowledge about existing recruitment and engagement practices and performance, (2) learn more about recruitment and retention of families in programs with different structures, (3) identify PAT benchmarks for family engagement, and (4) enhance standards, curricula, training, annual data collection, and information systems to include more information on recruitment, attrition, and engagement.

Methodology

A family engagement survey was developed for completion by PAT program supervisors. The survey covered the areas of program structure, service delivery, definitions, benchmarks, and relationship between engagement and outcomes. Five hundred and sixty-three PAT "blended" and "stand-alone" sites were identified from the Parents as Teachers National Center (PATNC) program database and sent the survey to complete. Criteria for selection included programs with more than one parent educator that had been in operation for a minimum of 2 years. A total of 447 programs returned their surveys, yielding a 79% response rate. To gather an expanded picture of selected sites' challenges and strengths in engaging families in services, phone interviews were also conducted with program directors from a sample of sites that represented variation in performance on engagement.

Key Findings

Descriptive analyses of the survey data yielded detailed information about programs' definitions of

enrollment; benchmarks for acceptable refusal of services, enrollment, and dropout; difficulties engaging families; and beliefs about minimal service dosage needed to achieve outcomes.

Statistical analyses showed a number of key findings when programs' reported dropout rate was compared to key programmatic features. A lower rate of dropout was associated with programs that primarily use self-selection as a recruitment strategy, programs that are universal access in nature, and programs that are not blended. There was also a trend toward lower dropout rates when programs reported using the same staff person to both recruit and deliver services to families. The rate of dropout for programs with weekly visits was significantly higher than for those programs with monthly or every other month visits.

Parent educator turnover was also related to family dropout, with programs that indicated a major problem with parent educator turnover reporting higher dropout rates than those programs that indicated no problem with parent educator turnover. Lower parent educator turnover was evident when programs paid their parent educators a salary rather than hourly compensation.

Practice and Policy Implications

Results of the project will be shared with our networks as we establish feedback loops to practice. These findings will be used to improve PAT programs' implementation and further PATNC's quality improvement efforts, data management systems, and training development. The findings also contribute to the larger knowledge base of family engagement in early childhood home visitation programs. As more programs blend home visitation models to best meet the needs of their communities, there is an increasing demand to ensure effective integration of services, while maximizing accountability and outcomes. Sharing the information from this project and entering into dialogue with other early childhood home visitation models concretely benefits service providers and the families they reach.

Parents as Teachers' Research Project

Best Practices for Collaborative Implementation Executive Summary

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April 2003

Project Purpose and Goals

In order to support quality implementation of the Parents as Teachers (PAT) model in a variety of program types or “blended” programs, this project examined the correspondence between indicators of quality for different home visiting models, and explored best practices for blending home visiting models.

Methodology

Two data collection methods were used in this project. First, focus groups were conducted to explore best practices for collaborative implementation. Second, individuals knowledgeable about three particular program types that PAT is most frequently blended with (Early Head Start, Even Start, and Healthy Families America) analyzed the correspondence between quality standards for their program type and PAT.

Key Findings

Focus Group #1

Programs look for models that “fit” with their program, are research-based, are flexible, and are user friendly. As programs blend models, model developers need to be ready to:

- Articulate the compatibility between their model and the mandates programs are funded to accomplish.
- Recognize that their model may be viewed as a curriculum or one of many service delivery strategies within a program.
- Review the expectations they have for programs in regard to data collection.

Focus Group #2

- Participants identified increased flexibility in meeting the diverse needs of parents as the most common advantage of blending program models, followed closely by an increase in the amount and array of services that could be provided.
- Participants identified dilution of services and model drift as the most common disadvantages of blending.
- Participants stated that blending program models requires a complex set of skills and that staff training could be a lengthy and expensive process to ensure that staff can deliver a range of service models.
- Participants identified well-trained staff, client-centered services, planful visits, and reflective supervision as the top four elements to be expected in any quality home visiting program.

Analysis of Correspondence Between Standards of Quality

Thematic similarity was evident among the standards for PAT, Early Head Start, Even Start, and Healthy Families America. Each set of standards clearly reflect a family-centered approach to services. Within the PAT standards are three strands that highlight critical program and staff competencies for successful implementation of the PAT model. For purposes of analysis, these strands were mapped onto to a concept of model fidelity that contains three key aspects: structural, functional, and operational. The resulting analysis found that, of the three aspects of model fidelity, functional fidelity demonstrated the greatest correspondence between models, while operational fidelity demonstrated the least correspondence.

Practice and Policy Implications

Strengthening Model Structure and Quality

Several working assumptions held by PAT National Center staff appear to be confirmed by the findings of this project. These assumptions center on why the PAT model has grown substantially since its inception, including the value of the research based curriculum, the training opportunities, and the flexibility of the model. The focus group findings also confirm new directions that have been discussed internally at the PAT National Center, including the need to examine how training can be tailored for blended programs, how PAT fits as a curriculum into programs that already implement the four core components of the PAT model, and how to maintain the flexibility of the model while addressing the boundaries of that flexibility.

The Role of Home Visitation in Early Intervention and Family Support

Blending of program models frequently occurs when staff perceive that the program's capacity and ability to reach its goals would be further strengthened by the addition of another model. Programs seem to select models that either fit well within their existing mode of service delivery or that fit well with the program's purpose. Home visitation, as reflected by the focus group discussions and the standards for the models, conveys a clear message of a family centered, strengths-based

approach. Whether through blending or simply through sharing core values, the various models of early childhood home visiting contribute this philosophy and approach to working with families to the broad network of early intervention and family support.

Update

Since the completion of this project, the Parents as Teachers standards have been revised and are no longer in draft form. The current edition of the standards no longer retains the strands referenced above. However, the conclusions of the conceptual analysis that was based on the strands appears to remain accurate.

In the fall of 2004, Parents as Teachers National Center revisited the correspondence analysis of its standards with those for Early Head Start, Healthy Families America, and Even Start. Several individuals knowledgeable about these programs have been asked to review and give feedback on the revised analysis, which is based on the current edition of the PAT standards.

It is our goal to establish some consensus with other early childhood home visiting models about the correspondence between our program quality standards, thereby providing additional guidance to blended programs in the field.

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About Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP)

Founded in 1983 by Dr. Heather Weiss, HFRP conducts research about programs and policies that serve children and families throughout the United States. By publishing and disseminating its research widely, HFRP plays a vital role in examining and encouraging programs and policies that enable families and communities to help children reach their potential.