Wraparound Child and Family Team Processes Among Transitioning Youth

Mason Haber, Ph.D.
James R. Cook, Ph.D.
Ryan P. Kilmer, Ph.D.
Bianca Hemphill, M.A.

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Transition-age Youth (TAY) in Public Mental Health Systems

- Wraparound child and family teams (CFTs) for TAY and families are an increasingly a focus of attention (e.g., Malloy & Cormier, 2004)
- Wraparound is "family-centered" (Burns & Goldman, 1999)
- This focus on the family can help bolster needed support from caregivers (Cook & Kilmer, 2010)
- However, bolstering support while promoting youth autonomy can be difficult (Walker & Child, 2008)
- This tension may help to explain the mixed findings in existing research

Transition-Age Youth in Wraparound: Prior Research

- Families of TAY…
  - can enhance youth outcomes through ongoing supportive involvement (Furquan et al., 1991)
  - show greater strain and have fewer social resources (Davies et al., 2009)
  - may be less cohesive with more intense conflicts (Laursen et al., 1998)
- TAY in wraparound…
  - improve less than younger youth (Manuelful et al., 2008)
  - in controlled research, have shown greater benefits (Clark, Prange, et al., 1998)
- Lack of participation in CFTs appears to be a problem among all youth (Gyamfi et al., 2007)

- Some experts have recommended shifting to one-on-one approaches (Clark & Hart, 2009)
- However, data do not currently support abandoning wraparound for TAY
- More research is needed to examine whether and how wraparound influences TAY differently
- Very few studies examine family context, specific CFT processes, and youth outcomes of wraparound
- No studies compare these features for TAY vs. younger youth

Current Study

- Overall Objective:
  - To examine age differences between younger and older adolescent youth wraparound CFT processes and outcomes
- Questions
  - Do family context variables – i.e., strain and social resources – differ for TAY vs. younger youth?
  - Do wraparound CFT processes differ and in what ways?
  - Do outcomes of TAY and younger youth and relationships between CFT processes and outcomes differ over time?

Method

- Data Sources:
  - Linked data from the National Evaluation of Systems of Care and the MeckCARES’ local evaluations
  - MeckCARES’ local evaluation data include data on team members observations of CFTs
  - Data collected from 350 CFTs, 1700 meetings, and 9000 participants
- Participants:
  - Among families with data from both sources, the 55 with enrolled youth ages 15 and older were selected
  - These youth were compared to the equal number of families with youth ages 11-13 that had national and local data
Measures: National Evaluation

- Externalizing symptoms from the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991)
  - Defiant, rule breaking behavior, impulsivity
- Caregiver Strain Questionnaire (Brannan et al., 1997)
  - Objective Strain
  - Subjective Internalizing
  - Subjective Externalizing

Results: Caregiver Strain

- All differences were in the direction of greater strain among caregivers of TAY
- Differences on Objective Strain & Subjective Internalizing Strain were not significant
- Differences on Externalizing and Global Strain were significant ($p < .01$ & $p < .05$)

Results: Caregiver Social Support

- Generally, there were few differences
- A trend was shown for caregivers of TAY to report less partner social support ($t = -1.81$, $p < .10$)

Results: MeckCARES’ evaluation

- Assessment of Social Connectedness (Cook & Kilmer, in press)
  - Measures five types of received support (e.g., financial, emotional)
  - In addition to overall levels, breaks down support by source (e.g., family, friends, partners)
- Participant Rating Forms
  - Forms assessing CFT processes from perspectives of youth, caregivers, and service providers
  - Two factors: Cohesion (do we get along?), and Team Functioning (do we get something done?)

Results: Wraparound Processes

- T tests of age differences on cohesion and team functioning showed that:
  - Cohesion, as rated by youth, was lower for TAY ($t = 2.051$, $p < .05$)
  - Cohesion rated by others (i.e., caregivers & service providers) showed no significant differences
  - Team Functioning showed no differences across TAY and younger youth, regardless of rater.
Results: Wraparound Processes

- CFT process ratings were also compared in a 2 (age) x 3 (reporters) x 2 (processes) design.
  - Age: younger (i.e., 11-13) and older (15+) youth
  - Reporters: youth, caregivers’, and service providers’ reports
  - Processes: Cohesion and Team Functioning
- Result: cohesion was lower among TAY, but only when rated by youth.

Results: Wraparound Outcomes

- Longitudinal multilevel models of change showed quadratic (i.e., curvilinear) effects
  - For all youth, CBCL externalizing symptoms decreased over first three follow-up time frames (0 – 1.5 years), then increased in the fourth (1.5 to 2 years)
- Cohesion and Functioning both predicted the extent of quadratic change
- No differences between TAY and younger youth in overall change or process by change effects (y11 = -0.95, t = -0.54, ns)

Summary

- TAY Caregivers reported greater strain, particularly on the externalizing dimension
- Social support was similar
- Cohesion appeared to be poorer among TAY, but only from the perspective of youth
- Externalizing outcomes of TAY and younger youth were similar

Implications, Limitations, & Future Directions

- Caregivers of TAY may be less able to provide ongoing support due to strain.
- TAY perceive their CFTs as less cohesive, unlike other participants.
  - This suggests that TAY may feel disengaged from teams...and that other participants may not be aware
  - Despite these challenges, wraparound impacted TAY similarly to younger youth
- Future research should examine relationships between study variables simultaneously and over time

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Contact Information

Mason Haber – mhaber@uncc.edu

Jim Cook – jcook@uncc.edu

Ryan Kilmer – rpkilmer@uncc.edu

Bianca Hemphill – bhemphi@uncc.edu