Measuring Outcomes Of Usual Care Youth Psychotherapy: Who and What To Ask?

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Psychotherapy Outcomes

• Importance of measuring psychotherapy outcomes
  – Providers increasingly required to demonstrate tx effectiveness and monitor progress
• Effectiveness historically defined as decrease in symptom severity
• Calls for expansion in the range of outcome indicators

Multidimensional Model

• Impact of tx may be underestimated if only youth symptoms are measured (Kazdin,2000)
• Importance of a multidimensional conceptualization of outcomes for youth mental health services (Hoagwood et al., 1996)
• Methodological complexity of this multidimensional conceptualization

Informant Differences

• May be differences in various stakeholders’ perceptions of change in outcome constructs
  – Informant differences often attributed to measurement error
  – Important source of information when evaluating tx effectiveness (Lambert et al., 1998)

Current Study

• Examines the complexities in measuring outcome in usual care psychotherapy
• Extent of agreement in the identification of youths who “improve” in treatment according to different measures completed by youths and parents

Participants

• 111 families of youths receiving publicly-funded outpatient mental health tx in San Diego County
  – Subset from a larger study of 170 participants
  – Families who had complete baseline and follow-up data
• 68 males and 43 females
• Ages 11 to 18 (M = 13.5, SD = 2.0)
Measures

- Internalizing and externalizing symptoms
  - The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL: Achenbach, 1991)
- Youth adaptive functioning
  - Vanderbilt Functioning Index (VFI: Bickman et al., 1998)
- Quality of family relationships
  - The Family Relationship Index (FRI: Holahan & Moos, 1983)

* Administered at baseline and 6-month follow-up

Identifying “Improvers”

- Youths who showed the most positive change during tx
  - Difference score calculated by subtracting the six-month follow-up score from the baseline score (for each measure)
  - Those with difference score greater than 1 SD from the sample’s mean difference score classified as having clearly “Improved” on that measure
- Extent of overlap across “Improver” groups by informant and by domain was examined

Improvement on Specific Domains by Stakeholder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Domain</th>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Caretaker/Parent</th>
<th>Overlap Across Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symptoms (CBCL/YSR)</td>
<td></td>
<td>14 (13%)</td>
<td>17 (15%)</td>
<td>5 out of 26 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functioning (VFI)</td>
<td></td>
<td>18 (16%)</td>
<td>16 (14%)</td>
<td>2 out of 32 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment (FRI)</td>
<td></td>
<td>19 (17%)</td>
<td>22 (20%)</td>
<td>4 out of 37 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlap Across 3 Domains</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 out of 33 (3%)</td>
<td>1 out of 44 (2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overlap Across Domain by Stakeholder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Report</th>
<th>Parent Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Domains</td>
<td>3 Domains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Domains</td>
<td>2 Domains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Domain</td>
<td>1 Domain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

- Complexity of determining the impact of tx based on change in outcome indicators
  - Minimal overlap between youth and parents on each domain of outcome
  - Almost no overlap for each stakeholder’s report across the three domains
  - Support the notion that measuring one domain provides limited perspective (Hoagwood et al., 1996)

Conclusions

- Consistent with research demonstrating limited agreement among stakeholders on desired outcomes (Garland et al., 2004; Hawley et al., 2003)
- Contribute to existing knowledge base in the area of outcome measurement by
  - Examining both multiple domains and multiple informants
  - Identifying clients who improved on standardized measures rather than looking at correlations between informants.
- Importance of reviewing what is meant by “improvement” in usual care psychotherapy
Implications & Future Directions

• Study did not address methodological challenges:
  – Assessing clinically significant change
  – Identifying outcome trajectories

• Highlights dilemma that determining impact of care depends on who is asked about what

• Has been minimal discussion about implications of selection of indicators and/or informants

• Future research
  – Increasing the feasibility and ecological validity of multidimensional outcome measurement