A System of Care for Children’s Mental Health: Expanding the Research Base
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About the Center . . .
The Center is part of the Department of Child and Family Studies at the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida. Since its inception in 1984, the Center has conducted an integrated series of research, training, consultation, and dissemination activities to achieve its mission of improving service delivery systems for children with serious emotional or behavioral disabilities and their families. The Annual Research Conference represents one of the events coordinated by the Center to encourage the development and sharing of information on effective service systems.

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Preface

We are pleased to present the Proceedings of the 15th Annual Research Conference, *A System of Care for Children's Mental Health: Expanding the Research Base*, held March 3-6, 2002, in Tampa Florida. Each year, the conference is host to researchers, policy makers, service professionals, educators, and family members who gather to share their research, insights, and experiences with one another in an effort to improve mental health services and outcomes for children and their families. The Proceedings are designed to capture the discussions, papers, and posters presented at the annual conference, and to inform future research on many aspects of the design, implementation, and evaluation of systems of care for children and their families. The Annual Research Conference's presenters are selected for their commitment to high quality research, and all are invited to submit a brief summary of their work for the Proceedings.

Having hosted the conference and published its Proceedings for the last 15 years, we are struck by the enormous growth of the conference and the concomitant research presented in the Proceedings. Indeed, the Proceedings reflect the evolution of the field of children's mental health research; from initial articles that were primarily talking about work yet to be done to current discussions of national initiatives to build and maintain evidence-based systems of care, or from early epidemiological studies to large-scale, national studies, the Proceedings mark our progress toward increasing the availability of efficacious mental health treatment for children and their families. For example, in the current volume, *Building and Maintaining a System of Care*, is our longest chapter and as such, speaks to the tremendous growth of the field overall. Another lengthy chapter, *Parent and Caregiver Issues*, also reflects an impressive increase in research on family issues. Furthermore, whereas early volumes combined research on education, child welfare, and juvenile justice into one chapter, this volume presents three separate chapters devoted to each issue. A quick overview of the 11 chapter titles in this volume bears witness to the wealth of research currently underway, and hints of further, important research to come.

The Proceedings' contents describe research projects, program evaluations, aspects of investigation, implementation, and innovations to service delivery systems. The summaries reflect an interdisciplinary approach to children's mental health research, and continue to capture trends that influence the work we do for children and their families. These overviews are intended to provide a thumbnail sketch of each project's methodology, findings, and implications for further research. Much of the information here can be found in more detail elsewhere—in published journal articles, books, reports, or through direct contact with the authors. In the back, the author index will help you locate abstracts from your colleagues, friends, and mentors.

With sincere appreciation for our authors, reviewers, and to our colleagues in the field, thank you for your insight, hard work, and dedication to the field of children's mental health research. We hope you will find the Proceedings of theoretical interest and practical use.

On The Web…

The Proceedings are available on the World Wide Web. Go to http://rtckids.fnbi.usf.edu, and you will find a route to this Proceedings in its entirety, as well as past issues.
Each year, as the Research Conference concludes, we look ahead to the Proceedings. The first step, of course, is to invite our presenters to share their work, and we are grateful that so many agree to do so. Thanks to all for their timely submissions, and patience with edits, suggestions and requests.

Upon receipt, each submission is matched with two expert reviewers from the University of South Florida’s Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute faculty and staff. Their thoughtful comments and suggestions continue to contribute enormously to the quality of this volume.

This year’s review team included: Kathy Armstrong, Mary Armstrong, Ilene Berson, Richard Briscoe, Hewitt (“Rusty”) Clark, Norín Dollard, Albert Duchnowski, Mary Evans, Robert Friedman, Angela Gomez, Paul Greenbaum, Mario Hernandez, Sharon Hodges, Ruby Joseph, Mary Ann Kershaw, Krista Kutash, Katherine Lazear, Lodi Lipien, Debra Mowrey, Teresa Nesman, Diane Powell, Steve Roggenbaum, Starr Silver, Bobbie Vaughn, and Svetlana Yampolskaya. Much interdisciplinary expertise is represented by this list. Thank you.

The research conference is characterized by the collaboration of many disciplines; this is true for the production of this volume, as well. The Department of Child and Family Studies (CFS), which is home to the Research and Training Center, contributes support for production of the Proceedings. The department’s CFS Communication staff members have worked on the Proceedings project for many years, and have created numerous strategies that make this publication possible. A special thank you goes to our desktop publishing team, Dawn Khalil and Julie Diniz-Almeida, for their expert assistance in transforming hundreds of tables and figures into publication-ready digital images. We also want to thank Michelle O’Connor, Kiki Harris, and Francis Vayalumkal for their tireless administrative support throughout the publication process.

And last, but not least, we are thankful for the continued leadership and support of our funders: the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education, and the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. These agencies’ commitment to excellence and to improving services for the nation’s children and their families is strong. Our goal is for these Proceedings and all products disseminated by the Center is to reflect their vision.

The editors: Catherine C. Newman, Cindy J. Liberton, Krista Kutash, and Robert M. Friedman

A Special Thank You…
# Table of Contents

**Preface and Acknowledgements** ................................................................. iii

**Chapter 1: Building and Maintaining a System of Care** ................. 1

*Symposium: Outcome Analyses from the Longitudinal Comparison Study of the National Evaluation of the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and their Families Program* ................................................................. 3

Chair: Rolando Santiago

- *Policy Implications of the National Evaluation* ............................................. 3
  Rolando Santiago

- *Survival Analysis of Arrest Data in the Longitudinal Comparison Study* ......................................................... 5
  Tim Connor, Debra Phan, Robert L. Stephens

- *General Growth Mixture Modeling (GGMM) of Alcohol Use Patterns in the Longitudinal Comparison Study* .................................................................................. 8
  Robert L. Stephens, Debra L. Phan, Paul E. Greenbaum

- *Using Services Data to Adjust for Attrition in Outcome Analyses: An Application of Multiple Imputation* ......................................................................................... 11
  E. Michael Foster

*Symposium: Predictors of Service Quality and Family Participation in CMHS funded Systems of Care* ................................................................. 15

Chair: Rolando Santiago

- *Examining Leadership, Organizational Climate and Service Quality in a Children’s System of Care* ................................................................. 15
  Gregory A. Aarons, Michela Woodbridge, Angelina Carmazzi

- *Parents’ and Caregivers’ Satisfaction with Children’s Progress as a Predictor of Continued Enrollment in the System of Care* ................................................ 19
  Kelly Frailing

- *Differential Attrition Rates for NC FACES System of Care Evaluation* ......................................................... 22
  Kelly N. Rogers, Maria Fernandez, Lori Thurber, Andy Smitley

- *Service Utilization and Child and Family Outcomes in Systems of Care* ......................................................... 26
  Robin E. Soler, Bhuvana Sukumar, Brigitte Manteuffel

*Symposium: Service Use and Costs in the Longitudinal Comparison Study of the National Evaluation of the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and Their Families Program* ................................................................. 31

- *Functional Impairment at Intake and Subsequent Service Utilization* ......................................................... 31
  Hoang Thanh Nguyen, Tim Connor

- *Service Delivery Approach, Service Utilization Patterns, and Their Influence on Children’s Outcomes* .................................................................................. 34
  Robert L. Stephens, Qinghong Liao

- *Service Dose Effects on Children’s Outcomes in System of Care and Comparison Communities* .................................................................................. 38
  Tim Connor, Robert L. Stephens

- *The Full Costs of the System of Care: Cost-shifting Across Child-serving Agencies* ......................................................... 41
  E. Michael Foster, Tim Connor, Hoang Nguyen

*Discussion* ......................................................................................... 43

Gregory A. Aarons
Children’s Mental Health Benchmarking Project: 
Year Two of a National Research Effort ................................................................. 45
Sara L. Nechasek, Sylvia Perlman, Richard H. Dougherty

Symposium: An Overview of the Six-year Nebraska Family Central 
System of Care: The Use of Evaluation Data to Reform Services ......................... 49
Chair: William E. Reay

The Nebraska Evaluation Model: Practice and Policy Decisions 
Informed by Case and Program Specific Data: What We Have 
Learned from Fort Bragg, Stark County, and Len Bickman ................................. 49
William E. Reay, Calvin P. Garbin, Mario Scalora

Using Case-specific Information in Support of Wraparound Teams .................... 53
Jill Schubauer, Dave Hoyt

Using Case Specific Information for Quality Improvement, 
Policy Development and Financial Sustainability ............................................... 56
Mark Dekraai

Nebraska Family Central Evaluation Program—Presenting the Parent 
Voice Thru Data ......................................................................................................... 58
Eileen Dakan, Monica Sleicher

Assessing Local Service Systems for Children and Youths 
with Serious Emotional Disturbances in Northwest Indiana: 
Challenges Confronting a New System of Care .................................................. 63
Thomas W. Pavkov, Elizabeth Greenwald

Estimating Unmet Need for Mental Health Services: 
A System of Care Approach .................................................................................. 67
Tom Barrett, Steven M. Banks, Nancy Johnson Nagel, John A. Pandiani

Children’s Mental Health Programs as Seen by Other 
Child Serving Agencies ......................................................................................... 71
Janet A. Bramley, Alice G. Maynard

A Comparison of Approaches Used in Developing Systems of Care .................... 75
Mary E. Evans

Building on Success: MA-MHSPY Replication Strategies for 
Integrated Systems of Care for Children and Families ........................................ 79
Katherine E. Grimes, Allison Appleton

Brief Symposium: Opportunities for Enhanced Effectiveness 
via Continuity of Intent ......................................................................................... 83
Chair: Katherine E. Grimes

Coordination of Clinical Support and Wraparound Services ............................ 83
Katherine E. Grimes, Jacquelyn Subbera

Coordination of Data Management and Analysis Across Systems ..................... 87
Katherine E. Grimes, Brian Mullin

The Armstrong County System of Care: A Case Study Evaluation ..................... 91
James Gaggini

Measuring Interagency Involvement and Referral Patterns 
in Systems of Care .............................................................................................. 95
Lela Baughman, Susan Zaro, John Gilford, Bob Stephens

Building Bridges: Linking Research and Policy Makers .................................... 99
Joan Sykora
Chapter 2: Parent and Caregiver Issues ......................................................... 103

Symposium: Poverty Status and Custody: Associations
with Children’s Mental Health Outcomes ...................................................... 105

Chair: Ann Webb Price

Family Resources and Children’s Strengths: Do Families Matter? .................. 105
  Ann Webb Price, Phyllis Gyamfi, Andrew Pope, Tracey Lockaby

The Effects of Low-Income Status on Children’s Emotional
and Behavioral Problems: Implications for Welfare Reform ....................... 111
  Phyllis Gyamfi, John W. Gilford, Tracey Lockaby

The Moderating Effects of Resources and Risk Factors on Families
Caring for Children with Serious Emotional Disturbance .................................. 117
  Ann Webb Price, Rachel Askew

Caregiver Strain Among Single-Mother, Grandparent,
and Two-parent Caregivers ............................................................................... 121
  Bhuvana Sukumar, Brigitte Manteuffel, Robin Soler, Gina Sgro

More than Money: Do Family Resources Predict Caregiver Strain? ................. 127
  Michael Pullmann, Paula Savage, Nancy Koroloff

Maternal Behavior and Biological Influences on Birth Outcomes:
Implications for Children’s Mental Health ...................................................... 131
  Katherine A. Best, Roger A. Boothroyd

Topical Discussion Overview: Integrating Services for Parents
and Children in Three SAMHSA-funded Multi-Site Initiatives ....................... 137
  Judith Katz-Leavy, Patricia Sabry, Eileen O’Brien, Kana Enomoto Cheryl Kennedy,
  Linda Weinreb, Joanne Nicholson

Parents with Mental Illness and Their Children: Elements
of Evidence-based Practices ............................................................................. 141
  Joanne Nicholson, Beth R. Hinden, Kathleen Biebel, Judith Katz-Leavy

Caregiver Perception of Services and Children’s Mental Health
Outcomes: Are They Related? .......................................................................... 145
  Molly Brunk, Kim Innes, J. Randy Koch

Assessment of Caregiver Service Experience at the Practice Level
in System-of-care and Comparison Communities .......................................... 153
  Brigitte Manteuffel, Liz S. Grossman, Rachel Askew

The Child and Family Experience of the Mental Health System
Study at Nine Months ...................................................................................... 157
  Kathleen Lazear, Robert M. Friedman, Eloise Boterf, Sharon Lardieri, Kristina Chambers

The Relationship Between Caretaker’s Perceptions and Children’s
Self-Perceptions of Their Strengths ................................................................. 161
  Phillip Friedman, Virginia Weaver, Karen A. Friedman

Out of Sight, Out of Mind? Perspectives on Parent-Child Contact
During Residential Treatment .......................................................................... 165
  Adjoa D. Robinson, Michael Pullmann, Pauline Jivanjee, Barbara Friesen Jean M. Kruzich

Caregiver’s Level of Trust in Their Children’s Health Care Providers ............... 171
  Huey Jen Chen, Roger A. Boothroyd
**Family Members as Evaluators:**

**Preliminary Results of a Training Curriculum** .......................................................... 177  
Nancy Koroloff, Trina W. Osher, Kathryn Schutte, Adjoa Robinson

**Results from a Randomized Trial of a Family Support and Education Program** .......................................................... 181  
Henry T. Ireys, Katherine A. DeVet, Diane Sakwa, Dominique Charlot-Swilley

**Examining Parent Support Group Members’ Satisfaction with Their Group** .......................................................... 185  
Janis Gerkensmeyer, Nicole Rozek, Aggie Smolecki, Naheed Meghani, Nancy Rose-Balamut, Brenda Hamilton

**Chapter 3: Education** ......................................................................191

**Symposium: School-wide Systems of Positive Behavioral Support: Promoting the Mental Health of all Students, Including Those with SED** .......................................................... 193  
Chair: Lucille Eber

- **Building School Capacity to Support all Students through School-wide Positive Behavior Systems** .......................................................... 193  
  Lucille Eber, Teri Palmer

- **A School-based Wraparound Example: Outcomes and Processes** .......................................................... 196  
  Debra Pacchiano, Lucille Eber, Laura Devine-Johnston

- **Behavior Support Plans for Students with or At-risk of Emotional/Behavioral Challenges** .......................................................... 199  
  Vestena Robbins, Lucille Eber, Laura Devine-Johnston

- **Building Bridges of Support in Eastern Kentucky: Outcomes for Students Receiving School-Based Wraparound** .......................................................... 202  
  Vestena Robbins, Kari Collins

**Urban School and Community Study: School Reform and Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disabilities and Their Families** .......................................................... 207  
Krista Kutash, Albert J. Duchnowski, Nancy Lynn

**Characteristics and Funding of School Mental Health Services: A National Survey** .............................................................................. 213  
Judith L. Teich, Mary Rollefson

**Using Educational Test Scores to Evaluate Children’s Services** .......................................................... 217  
John A. Pandiani, Monica M. Simon, Steven M. Banks

**Teacher’s Attitudes Toward Children with Serious Emotional Disturbance** .......................................................... 221  
Scott W. Minor, Shawn Acheson, Harrison Kane, Erin Calahan, Kristen Leverentz, Amy Pasden, Melanie Wegener

**Can We Foster Resilience? An Evaluation of a Prevention Program for Preschoolers** .......................................................... 225  
Paul LeBuffe
Symposium: Evaluating Program Effectiveness in the Safe Schools Healthy Students Initiative ................................................................. 229
Chair: Oliver T. Massey

Symposium Introduction ............................................................................................................. 229
Oliver T. Massey

The Impact of Coordinated Community Mental Health Services: Safe Schools/Healthy Students .............................................................. 230
Sharon Telleen, Young O. Rhee Kim, Helen Stewart-Nava, Susan Maher

Results of a Longitudinal School-Based Intervention Study .................................................. 233
Michael Boroughs, Oliver T. Massey, Kathleen Armstrong

Student Perceptions of School Safety in the Omnibus Survey .................................................. 237
Kelli Henson, Kathleen H. Armstrong, Oliver T. Massey

Safety in Schools: Staff Perceptions .......................................................................................... 240
Gina Santoro, Kathleen H. Armstrong, Oliver T. Massey

Understanding School Safety: A Qualitative Inquiry ............................................................... 242
Angela Perry, Michael Boroughs, Kathleen H. Armstrong, Oliver T Massey

Discussion ...................................................................................................................................... 245
Kathleen H. Armstrong

Evaluation Activities at a Summer Camp for Youth Experiencing Homelessness ............................................................... 247
Laura A. Nabors, Heather D. Lehmkuhl

Chapter 4: Child Welfare and Medicaid .............................................................................. 251

Models for Understanding the Implementation of the Welfare Transition Program in Florida ........................................................................ 253
Angela Gómez, Jessica Pearlman

Mental Health Services Utilization by Maltreated Children: Research Findings and Recommendations .............................................................. 257
Marlys M. Staudt

Mental Health Outcomes from a Randomized Experiment within Connecticut’s Child Welfare System .............................................................. 261
E. Wayne Holden, Tim Connors, Susan Rousseau O’Connell, Gary Blau, Dorian Long, Donna Hoff, Daphne McDonald

Placement Movement in Out-Of-Home Care: Patterns and Predictors ...................................... 265
Sigrid James, John Landsverk

Transitioning from Foster Care to Adoption: Service Utilization for High Risk Children .......... 271
Jill Waterman, Susan Edelstein, Jill Walker, Dorli Burge, Sheryl Kataoka

Co-morbidity Among Children with Disabilities ........................................................................ 275
Roger A. Boothroyd, Mary I. Armstrong

Medicaid Managed and Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders ........................................ 281
Lisa Ruble, Craig Anne Heflinger, J. William Renfrew, Dana Robson
Chapter 5: Cultural Competence ................................................................. 285

Assessment in Systems of Care: A Concept Mapping Alternative .................. 287
Tamara S. Davis, Beth Ann Rodriguez, Frances Barraza, Toni K. Johnson

American Indian Cultural Identity Insignificant Resiliency Factor
in Face of Trauma .................................................................................................. 291
Catherine Woodstock Striley, Eddie Brown, Arlene Rubin Stiffman, Emily Ostmann

Symposium: The American Indian Multisector Help Inquiry (AIMHI) ............... 291
Chair: Arlene Rubin Stiffman

American Indian Teens: Southwestern Urban and Reservation Youth’s
Need for Services and Who They Turn to for Help ............................................ 295
Arlene Rubin Stiffman, Eddie F. Brown, Catherine Woodstock Striley,
Gordon E. Limb, Emily Ostmann

American Indian Teen’s Functioning Predicts Teen Desire for Talking About,
and Receiving Services ......................................................................................... 297
Catherine Woodstock Striley, Arlene Stiffman, Emily Ostman, Eddie F. Brown

The Impact of Out-of-Home Placement on American Indian Teens’ Drug Use
and Service Utilization ......................................................................................... 298
Gordon Limb, Eddie F. Brown, Arlene Stiffman, Catherine Woodstock Striley,
Emily L. Ostmann

Research Solutions for Cultural and Human Subjects Issues
Concerning American Indian Youth ......................................................................... 299
Arlene Rubin Stiffman, Eddie F. Brown, Catherine Woodstock Striley,
Gordon E. Limb, Emily Ostmann

Symposium Overview: Strengths of African-American Families:
Identifying and Building on African-American Families Strengths .................... 303
Author: Richard Briscoe, Presenters: Gwen McClain, Rev. James Favorite,
Flossie Brooks, Robert Hill

Symposium Overview: Developing a Strengths-Based Instrument
for African-American Children and Families ...................................................... 307
Richard Briscoe, Aaron Smith, Ruby Joseph, Joko Sengova Gwen McClain, Robert Hill
**Chapter 6: Service Access and Utilization** ........................................... 315

*Pre-Schoolers Using Mental Health Services: Evidence from a National Survey* ........................................................................................................... 317
  Kathleen J. Pottick, Lynn A. Warner, Ronald W. Manderscheid, Rhonda Elhosseiny

*The Transition Years: Mental Health Service Utilization in Late Adolescence* ................................................................................................. 323
  William D. Voss, Roger A. Boothroyd, Paul G. Stiles

*Topical Discussion Overview: Children with Mental Health Problems: Stuck In All the Wrong Places* ............................................................. 327
  Susan P. Leviton

**Chapter 7: Juvenile Justice, Substance Abuse, and Youth Violence** .......................................................... 333

*Longitudinal Patterns of Juvenile and Adult Offending in Youth in the Mental Health System* ................................................................. 335
  Maryann Davis, Steven Banks, Ann Vander Stoep

*Juvenile Justice Referrals of Hispanic Youth into Systems of Care* .................................................................................................................. 341
  Eileen Franco, Robin Soler

*Delinquent and Substance Use Behaviors Among Children Involved in Systems of Care* ............................................................................. 345
  Debra Phan, Qualandria Bell

*A National Profile of Youth with Dual Diagnosis in Mental Health Care* ...................................................................................................... 349
  Lynn A. Warner, Kathleen J. Pottick, Ronald W. Manderscheid

*Comparison of Youth with Co-occurring Substance Abuse Disorders to Other Youth* ................................................................. 355
  Ana Maria Brannan, Craig Anne Heflinger

*System of Care and Youth Violence: A Multi-method Examination of Youth and Family Progress* .......................................................... 359
  Carol MacKinnon-Lewis, James M. Frabutt, Margaret B. Arbuckle,
  Kevin Weissman, Heather L. Smith

*System of Care and Youth Violence: Challenge and Change at the System Level* .................................................................................. 363
  Margaret B. Arbuckle, James M. Frabutt, Carol MacKinnon-Lewis
Chapter 8: Adolescence ................................................................. 367

An Assessment of the Needs of Young Adolescents
Utilizing A Resilience Framework ................................................................. 369
Katherine A. Best, Robert Friedman, Judith Jetson, Brian T. Gaunt

Relationship Between Perceived Adolescent Competencies
and Global Self Concept .............................................................................. 375
Virginia Weaver, Phillip Friedman, Karen A. Friedman

Measuring Progress and Difficulty of Youth and Young Adults
in their Transition to Independence ............................................................ 379
Elizabeth Granucci, David Baker, Hewitt “Rusty” B. Clark

Chapter 9: Residential Care and the Use of Medication.............. 383

Medication Use for Children in Systems of Care .............................................. 385
E. Wayne Holden, Robert L. Stephens, Tim Connor, Andrew Pope

Differences in Psychotropic Use in Residential Treatment
Across Four States .......................................................................................... 389
Purva H. Rawal, John S. Lyons, Matthew F. Shaw

Perceptions of PRN Psychotropic Medications
by Hospitalized Child and Adolescent Recipients ........................................ 393
Theodore A. Petti, Kimberly Stigler, Sabrina Dumlao, Jamie Gardner-Haycox

Assessing Quality Assurance of Residential Treatment Centers
for Foster Care Children ............................................................................. 399
Thomas W. Pavkov, Ira S. Lourie, Richard W. Hug
Chapter 10: Assessment Systems .......................................................401

Symposium: Using the CAFAS to Promote and Evaluate Evidence-Based Interventions and Implement Systems of Care for Youth with SED ............................................................... 403

Chair: Kay Hodges

Ontario’s Screening and Outcome Assessment Initiative: Lessons in Implementation and Organizational Change ................................................................. 403
Melanie A. Barwick, Katherine Boydell, H. Bruce Ferguson, Charles E. Cunningham

CAFAS Statewide Initiative: Tracking Progress During Treatment to Encourage Evidence-Based Interventions ......................................................... 408
Kay Hodges, Yange Xue, Jim Wotring, Jocee Chamberlain, Anita Mummineni

Addressing Mental Health Concerns In Early Childhood: A System for Early Identification and Evaluating Effectiveness ............................................. 410
Rick Loseth, Sara Carlson, Janae Lucht, Chris O. Schmid

MST and the CAFAS: Measuring Treatment Success ........................................... 413
Jane Timmons-Mitchell, Monica M. Bender

CAFAS Outcomes for a School-Based Intensive Mental Health Program .................. 415
Eric M. Vernberg, Joseph E. Nyre, Richard W. Puddy, Anne Jacobs, Michael C. Roberts

Fidelity to the Wraparound Process and its Association with Outcomes ............. 419
Eric J. Bruns, John D. Burchard, Jesse Suter, Michelle D. Force, Eileen Dakan

Children with Reported Histories of Sexual Abuse: Utilizing Multiple Perspectives to Understand Clinical and Psychosocial Profiles ............................................. 425
Michele Ybarra, Christine Walrath, E. Wayne Holden, Qinghong Liao, Rolando Santiago, Phil Leaf,

The Use of Concept Mapping to Build a Shared Service Strategy .................................. 429
Svetlana Yampolskaya, Teresa M. Nesman

A Knowledge Transfer Infrastructure for Screening and Outcome Measurement in Children’s Mental Health .............................................................. 435
Melanie A. Barwick, Katherine A. Boydell, H. Bruce Ferguson, Charles E. Cunningham, Alexander Greer, Barbara Everett, Sherry Sklar, Sheila Weinstock

Using Outcome Data to Inform Practice ................................................................. 441
Kendra Ray Stewart, Benjamin M. Ogles

Brief Symposium: A Strengths-Based Tool to Guide Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Provide Accountability within Systems of Care .................................................. 445
Chair: John S. Lyons

A Needs-Based Planning Study for Children’s Services In New York State .................. 445
John S. Lyons, Linda Rosenberg

Improving Quality in Systems of Care: Treatment Fidelity and the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Measure .............................................. 448
Mary Beth Rauktis, Dave Sliefert

Initial Outcomes for the Mental Health Juvenile Justice Initiative in Illinois ............. 451
Gene Griffin, Sharon Quintenz
Chapter 11: Instrumentation and Statistical Technologies ........457

OLS vs. HLM: The Significance of Method for Understanding Ethnic Differences in A&D Service Referrals ................................................................. 459
Carolyn S. Breda

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS) ................................................................................................. 467
Qinghong Liao, E. Wayne Holden, Michael Epstein

Case-Mix Adjustment of the Children’s Functional Assessment Rating Scale (CFARS) ............................................................................................... 471
Michael G. Dow, Timothy L. Boaz, John C. Ward

Symposium: Toward an Understanding of the Processes and Outcomes of Mental Health Treatment for Adolescents................................. 475
Chair: James M. Robbins

Empirically-Derived Functioning Scales from the Adolescent Treatment Outcomes Module (ATOM) ................................................................. 475
James M. Robbins, Susan Philips, Teresa L. Kramer, Terri L. Miller, Barbara J. Burns

An Exploration of Models for Adjusting Mental Health Treatment Outcomes for Adolescents ................................................................. 479
Susan D. Phillips, Teresa L. Kramer, Scott N. Compton, Barbara J. Burns, James M. Robbins

Quality of Mental Health Care for Depressed Adolescents ................................................. 483
Teresa L. Kramer, Terri L. Miller, Susan D. Phillips, James Robbins M., Barbara J. Burns

Processes of Adolescent Mental Health Care: Demographic Variations and Relation to Outcomes ................................................................. 485
Terri L. Miller, Teresa L. Kramer, James M. Robbins, Susan D. Phillips, Barbara J. Burns

The Ohio Scales Youth Form: A Self-Report Outcome Measure for Young Children ................................................................. 491
Kathy Dowell, Benjamin Ogles

Author Index ................................................................................................................. 495