



WOOD'S HOMES

SERVING CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

**Through the Lens of Domestic
Violence: An Evaluation of a Promising
Intervention with Challenging
Adolescent Males and their Families**

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Background

- There is now a body of literature that describes the developmental impact of domestic violence on children and program efforts to intervene
- National longitudinal studies are underway to track many facets of child functioning
- In Canada, Child Welfare Services are recognizing the impact of domestic violence as a significant child protection concern

Background (Cont.)

- In Alberta, recent changes to the Child Welfare legislation recognize witnessing domestic violence as a form of child maltreatment
- We are starting to understand the “adversity package”, child maltreatment, poverty and other family pressures
- Much work has yet to be done to develop effectiveness measures including program evaluations

Introduction

- Wood's Homes is a comprehensive mental health treatment center offering a broad range of residential, clinical, educational and community services to children, adolescents and young adults and their families
- We are located in Calgary, Alberta and accredited by the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation

Introduction (Cont.)

- The Habitat Program is an 8 bed intensive residential treatment program for adolescent boys (ages 12-17) and their families offering direct intervention targeted at domestic violence trauma and child maltreatment issues
- 55 youth and families have been served since its inception
- The youth have witnessed domestic violence, have significant child protection involvement and demonstrate severe conduct difficulties

Introduction (Cont.)

- Conflict with the law, peer difficulties, school difficulties, addiction issues, family and placement breakdown are prevalent
- Significant academic and social gaps are present
- Families have struggled with intergenerational issues of family violence and poverty in many cases

Key Stages in Program Development

- 1997 – Key Staff, with Women’s shelter experience, recognized recurring patterns in youth diagnosed as conduct disordered with domestic violence histories. Program development initiated
- 1999 – Program began as a pilot project with the support of Alberta Children’s Services, Calgary Region on a Fee for Service basis

Key Stages in Program Development (Cont.)

- 2001 – Workshop describing program approach given at the International Conference on Children exposed to Domestic Violence in London, Ontario. The program was honored with the “Dare to Dream” Award
- 2002 – Program Accredited with Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation
- 2002 – Program approach documented and accepted for publication Journal of Child and Youth Care Work, Volume 17, 2002

Key Stages in Program Development (Cont.)

- 2003 – Child Maltreatment Intervention Evaluation grant secured from the Center of Excellence for Child Welfare
- 2004 – Evaluation began
- 2005 – Mid-term evaluation report completed

Program Intervention Description

Purpose:

- To assist youth to explore experiences of violence and abuse while challenging their own patterns of violent behavior
- To assist families to deal with residual affects of domestic violence and heal from past trauma

Program Intervention Description

Treatment Foundations:

- To help the family and adolescent acknowledge the history with violence and its connection to the current behavioral and emotional difficulties
- To reduce negative and violent patterns of interaction and work to resolve the residual issues of domestic violence for all family members
- To assist the adolescent to develop greater self control and less destructive ways of coping

Program Intervention Description

Treatment Foundations:

- To develop a sense of personal agency and greater control of important aspects of life
- To assist all family members to develop a capacity for forgiveness and recovery
- To support academic success as a cornerstone to success in life

The Evaluation Study

Purpose of the Evaluation:

To examine the effects of interventions carried out by the Habitat Program

Funder:

A Child Maltreatment Intervention Evaluation Grant for 2003 – 2005 was secured from the Center for Excellence in Child Welfare, University of Toronto. Funding is provided by Health Canada

The Evaluation Study (Cont.)

Research Team:

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Evaluation Focus

1. Determining if the intervention contributes to a shift in focus of control around violent behavior for youth
2. Determining if addressing underlying trauma contributes to a reduction in the youth's violent and impulsive behavior
3. Determining if there is an increase in adolescent developmental progress

Evaluation Focus (Cont.)

4. Determining if the family develops awareness of the residual effects of domestic violence
5. Determining if the intervention contributes to an increase in family and community safety after discharge

Method:

- This evaluation study uses a comparison group pre-test – post-test design that compares an intervention group with a comparison group on a number of defined measurements
- Measurement occurred on three occasions, just prior to treatment, after a treatment interval of 8 - 10 months and 6 months after treatment
- Comparing key differences on participant profiles

Measures:

1. Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2).
2. Nowicki – Strickland Locus of Control Scale (N-SLCS)
3. Child and Adolescent Functional Scale (CAFAS).
4. Trauma Checklist for Adults
5. Trauma Checklist for Adolescents
6. Salzingers' Family Interaction Interview (Semi-structured)

Comparison Group

The comparison group is comprised of families who present with crisis, in a Crisis Residential service of Wood's Homes.

These families all have male adolescent members and identify domestic violence issues as problematic.

They are at various stages of readiness for intervention and are invited to participate in the evaluation after a brief (3 – 5 days) residential period

Research Objectives

- Evaluate the effectiveness of a promising program
- Develop capacity within service providers for conducting research
- Establishing partnerships between practitioners and researchers

What is Success

- Increased personal responsibility taking
- Significant decreases in maladaptive behavior
- School attainment improves at a rate greater than one grade level per year
- Increased awareness of effects of domestic violence on all family members
- Youth, families and case workers express satisfaction with treatment outcomes

Results to date

- 7 families from the intervention group and 5 comparison families have completed the pre-test instruments. 4 families from the intervention have completed post test instruments

Results to date (Cont.)

Preliminary Themes:

1. Measurement related to internal locus of control looks reasonably flat
2. There are significant reductions in the adolescent males violent and impulsive behavior
3. Developmental progress is clearly noted in gains academically and socially in the intervention group

Results to date (Cont.)

4. Families report “new language” for talking about Domestic Violence and some increase in awareness of the residual effects. Issues related to minimization remain
5. Follow up related to an increase in family and community safety after discharge is not yet available
6. Comparison families have been difficult to engage in the evaluation process

Lessons we are learning

- The past, the present and the future...or time as a variable is also a challenging dimension. While we may have assumed domestic violence is stopped, on - going domestic violence is evident in many cases and secrecy is pervasive. Safety issues remain for the families. While we are focused on measuring change, the families reality appears to be one of coping with on-going issues on the road to taking further steps to eliminate abuse

Lessons we are learning (Cont.)

- Mothers are the most often to report the families experience and the most active treatment participants. While not a dimension of the evaluation, maternal reports of high levels of satisfaction with family therapy, family support and parenting education are of note. In hindsight, this may have been a variable to concentrate on more

Lessons we are learning (Cont.)

- For these families, intergenerational family violence issues are present. Our focus on nuclear families may not be enough to understand the demands of change for the nuclear family. This may have also been a relevant variable for evaluation

Lessons we are Learning (Cont.)

- Poverty issues are immediate and affect treatment, as well as, study participation
- Gains in academic and social development can be attributed to enriched programming directed at gaps.

Lessons we are Learning (Cont.)

- Difficulty generating comparison families appears to relate to reluctance to commit over time to discuss family violence
- The isolation of relevant variables for measurement is a daunting undertaking. While behavioral change is evident, accounting for this change is complex