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The Arkansas Mentoring Family Service Workers Supervisors Project

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The evaluation plan for the Arkansas Mentoring Family Service Workers Supervisory Project has two components: a process evaluation and an outcome evaluation. In designing the evaluation, each of the four projects funded by the Southern Regional Quality Improvement Center for Child Protection is required to incorporate specific components (see Collins-Camargo et. al., this issue). A unique aspect of the Arkansas project is the use of mentors to improve supervisory practice and increase worker retention.

Process Evaluation

The process evaluation will assess treatment fidelity and the degree to which the intervention was implemented as designed. Both surveys and narrative reports by project leaders and the mentors will be used. In addition, observation and assessment will be conducted of all activities, including the two-day start up project training as well as the provision of formal regularly scheduled face-to-face individual supervisory sessions with protective service workers. Periodic review of supervisors' case review of their caseload will be conducted. Narratives from the mentors of observation of supervisors with their workers and documented periodic feedback from supervisees on the supervisory techniques will also be collected. Finally, an assessment of the on-line learning materials and group supervisory sessions will be conducted.

Outcome Evaluation

The outcome evaluation will determine the extent to which the intervention had an impact on three variables:

- Child protection worker practice in assessment and intervention with families;
- Preventable worker turnover; and,
- Client outcomes.

Experimental (Intervention) Group

Three Area Managers identified 20 of their supervisors who have been employed as a supervisor for more than one year supervising family service worker staff responsible for child maltreatment investigations and protective service cases.

Control (Comparison) Group

Thirty other supervisors in the state were identified as having the same experience as those of the intervention group.

Establishment of Baseline

The first step in the outcome evaluation will be to establish a baseline of current management practice. This will be accomplished through the administration of two survey instruments: 1) to DCFS supervisors with at least one year's supervisory experience, and, 2) to the Family Service Workers (FSW) and Family Service Worker Trainees (FSWT) that they supervise. These surveys will collect data on specific correlates and determinants related to work practices, worker satisfaction, and worker retention.

The supervisor survey will solicit information about supervisory characteristics (i.e. gender, age, years of employment, education, etc.), staffing patterns, general staff characteristics, recruitment and retention challenges, leadership and management practices and agency management practices. It will also contain open-ended questions to allow participants to provide additional perceptions, opinions, and insights not solicited in the survey instrument.

Supervisor level analysis will also attempt to identify baseline information on:

1. What are the characteristics of the DCFS offices selected for this study?
2. What are the characteristics and roles of the supervisors in these offices?
3. What are the staff characteristics, staffing patterns, and roles for these office?
4. What proportion of variability in annual turnover rates is associated with agency/office characteristics?

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5. What strategies are used to address retention challenges in the selected offices?
6. Does turnover vary depending on the use of certain intervention stratagies identified by supervisors?
7. What factors and changes do supervisors report as influencing retention outcomes?
8. What strategies do they recommend using to address retention challenges?
9. What assistance do supervisors need to improve retention in their offices?

The FSW and FSWT survey will solicit information about FSW and FSWT characteristics (i.e. gender, age, years of employment, education, etc.), case load patterns, organizational commitment, role experiences and expectations, satisfaction with supports and resources, supervisor characteristics, employment outlook, and organizational socialization. This survey also contained open-ended questions to allow participants to provide additional perceptions, opinions and insights not solicited in the survey instruments.

FSW/FSWT level analysis will also attempt to identify baseline information on:

1. What are the personal characteristics, job expectations, job atttitudes, and socialization experiences of newly hired FSWs?
2. What is the retention rate and length of stay rate for FSWTs?
3. What proportion of variability in turnover among newly hired FSWTs is accounted for by personal characteristics, work-related characteristics, and job characterisitics?
4. Why do FSWs leave? What could the agency do to make the job better?
5. What are the greatest training needs of newly hired FSWTs?
6. What are the most difficult parts of the job for FSWTs?

After establishment of the baseline, the survey instruments will be used six months after the project intervention has been implemented and annually thereafter. Changes in the dependent variables will be assessed as follows:

Worker Practice

The extent to which the intervention model influenced child protection worker practice in assessment and intervention with families will be assessed in a threefold manner.

1. Focus groups with intervention participants will be utilized to measure whether there has been an increase in the number of structured case reviews between supervisors and supervisees and to measure increased supervisor use of a case review instrument for structured case reviews;
2. Monthly COR reports will be utilized to measure the change in the number of clients successfully completing a case plan with the child's safety insured;
3. The survey instrument will incorporate the Self-Efficacy Assessment-Social Work (SEA-SW) questionnaire developed by Ellett (2001). This questionnaire asks respondents to make a judgement about the strength of their personal beliefs in their capabilities to complete various tasks. Changes in workers' self-efficacy over the life of the project will be measured.

Preventable Worker Turnover

Preventable worker turnover is defined as workers who leave the agency for reasons other than retirement, death, marriage/parenting, returning to school, or job move of a spouse/partner. Preventable worker turnover will be measured in both direct and indirect ways. Directly, it will be measured by data routinely collected by DCFS as well as analysis of exit interviews conducted by the agency. More indirectly, since preventable turnover is correlated with worker satisfaction, the latter will be measured by the survey instrument. Finally, the survey instrument will incorporate the Professional Organizational Culture Questionnaire (Ellett & Millar, 2001) and the Intent to Remain Employed - Child Welfare Questionnaire (Ellett & Millar, 2001).

Client Outcomes

Changes in client outcomes will be measured by utilizing data routinely collected by the agency. Specifically, the following client outcomes will be measured:

1. Change in repeat maltreatment reports during service delivery;
2. Change in the number of children who move to a higher level of care;
3. Change in the number of families who come back into the CPS system;

4. Change in client satisfaction with services as measured by a DCFS consumer survey.

A variety of statistical tools will be used to assess the differences between the control and experimental groups in each of the three dependent variables.

A key independent variable in the Arkansas project is the use of two mentors who will each work closely with ten of the supervisors in the experimental group. Please see the implementation article for a broader description of the mentors' role. Focus groups and survey data will be used to assess the specific impact of the mentor on the three dependent variables.

Controls

It is acknowledged that length of work experience may independently influence the supervisors' functioning with Family Service Workers (FSW) and Family Service Worker Trainees (FSWT). In order to control for this potential confound, supervisors will be clustered according to length of employment as a supervisor. Likewise, with respect to client outcomes, the degree of difficulty of serving a specific client may independently affect outcomes regardless of worker practice or supervisory activities. Assuming that length of time as a client of DCFS is a measurement of difficulty of serving, clients will be clustered along this dimension.

Conclusion

The evaluation plan for the Arkansas Mentoring Family Service Worker Supervisors Project utilizes both a process and outcome evaluation. The former will be used to assess and monitor treatment fidelity and the extent to which the intervention was implemented as planned. Surveys, observation, focus groups, and key informant interviews will be used to assess the two day training program, the use of the online tutorials, and the utilization of the mentors. The outcome evaluation will investigate three hypotheses common to all four funded projects and will use focus groups, a standardized survey instrument and data collected by DCFS.

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