




SPR 18th Annual Meeting

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ID# 66

Location: Mt. Elbert (Atrium Tower/2nd Floor)

Time of Presentation: Jun 02 1:15 PM - 2:45 PM

Category/Theme: Effectiveness Trials

Intervention Effects on Social Support in Family Groups

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Building social support among families, particularly around issues related to parenting and child rearing, is one of the central aims of many group-based family interventions. The theoretical model of such interventions is that sustained change in parenting (and ultimately child behavior) is enhanced when parents are embedded within a network of on-going social support. Few studies, however, have evaluated the extent to which participation in such interventions leads to greater social connections. The present study collected social network data on parents participating in family groups that were part of the SAFEChildren effectiveness trial. Social support requested and received was measured three times over the course of the family groups. These analyses examine whether group participation was related to increased use of social support.

Families participating in the intervention provided data regarding social networks and support three times over the course of the 16-session intervention. Participants were asked to report the following about each of their co-participants: (1) how likely they were to contact that participant for help with a parenting problem, (2) how likely they were to contact that participant for other help, (3) how likely they were to speak to that participant at a school function or other social function, and (4) how much actual contact they had with the other participant over the preceding two weeks.

We fit a series of multilevel models to evaluate changes in social support among family group members. Parents who knew other group members before the groups were more likely to contact other participants for help with a parenting issue. Controlling for previous contact, growth in likelihood that parents would contact other participants for help with a parenting issue was significantly stronger among those who knew fewer group members prior to the intervention ($\beta = 0.25$, $t(657) = 2.60$, $p < .05$). There also was growth in actual interactions outside of group among those who did not know participants well prior to the beginning of intervention ($\beta = 0.21$, $t(756) = 2.52$, $p < .05$).

These results suggest that the groups may have had their intended effects on social support among group members. Additional analyses will test whether variations in group network processes are related to changes in the broader social networks of group participants and whether the group process changes may mediate intervention effects on the broader social networks of participants.