

***Children, Courts and Conflict:
Current Research and
Applications for Practice***

Marsha Kline Pruett, Ph.D., M.S.L.

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Connecticut Judiciary, Family Services

Court Support Services Division

Stephen Grant
Debra Kulak
Kathryn Ceruti
Joseph DiTunno

Triaging Family Court Services

An intake Screen and system of triage
designed by AFCC:

Peter Salem, Executive Director, AFCC
Janet R. Johnston, Ph.D.
Andrew Schepard, J.D.
Robin Deutsch, Ph.D.

Intake Screen

Pre-Screen

- No universal screening tool for Family Services
- Two available services
 - Mediation
 - Comprehensive Evaluation (CE)

Post Screen

- Universal screen used by Family Services
- Four available services
 - Mediation
 - CE
 - IFE
 - CRC

Evaluation Questions

- How does the screen work?
- Are the screens being used consistently and similarly across districts?
- Are the new services being utilized?

Evaluation Questions

Has the Screen/New Services improved the court process for families in terms of...

- Higher Agreement/Settlement Rates?
- Lower Rates of Return to Court (within 1 year)?
- Less time in service and/or system?

Evaluation Questions

- What can we learn from the Intake Screen about vulnerable populations...?
 - High Conflict Families?
 - DV and Child Abuse?
 - Unmarried?
 - Pro Se

Sample

<p><u>Control Group</u></p> <p>(N=1,097 families)</p> <p>Referred for service between Jan 1 – June 30, 2004</p> <p>1 year before change in services and Screen</p>	<p><u>Experimental Group</u></p> <p>(N=1,261 families)</p> <p>Referred for service between Jan 1– June 30, 2006</p> <p>1 year after introduction of new services and Screen</p>
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Data Sources

- Screen instrument
- CMIS – CSSD systemwide database
- Court Records – computer and file
- Supervisor surveys
- Cost analysis: counselor input

Evaluation Plan

<p><u>Qualitative Assessment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correlations between Screen questions and service selection • Extent of Implementation • Disposition of cases into various services 	<p><u>Outcomes Evaluation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement Rates • Return Rates • Time in Service • Motions filed • Costs Analysis
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Establishing the Screen's Validity

- Associations exist between each category and overall category ratings

The screen had good face validity, with expected relationships between items in a category and the overall category.

Qualitative Assessment Item to Category Correlations

- Family conflict most highly associated with a) no. times family had been in court, b) prior involvement with CSSD services.
- The strongest correlate of parent communication category was level of cooperation.
- Mental health and domestic violence issues highly related to complexity of case.
- Disparity of facts/views resulted most often in comprehensive evaluations being ordered.

Correlations between Screen questions and Service selection

- Correlated categories and individual questions to service selections
High Association: *Disparity of views* and CE
- Examined conflict items and service selection
Conflict, as compared to *Cooperation*, had a weaker association with Mediation

Implementation Fidelity and Quality

- 200 Screens selected randomly, checking for
- missing data by item and location
 - deviations (Screen outcomes vs. counselor selection) by
 - Category (conflict, cooperation, disparity, etc.)
 - Location
 - Direction (high or low)
- Findings
- No systematic differences in missing data
 - Deviations did not warrant concern or additional training

Disposition of All Cases into Service

Control Group	Service	Experimental Group
62%	Mediation	31% ↓31%
38%	CE	40% ↑2%
n/a	IFE	14%
n/a	CRC	15%

The drop in Mediation is equally divided between IFE and CRC.

Supervisor Surveys

- Conducted...
 - Beginning of implementation - April, 2005
 - 3 years later - April, 2008
- Examined...
 - Type of supervision and monitoring
 - Extent of satisfaction or dissatisfaction
 - Difficulty in implementing
 - Training needs

Outcomes Evaluation Agreement Rates

Control Group		Experimental Group
67%	Initial Service**	74% ↑7%
68%	All Services**	74% ↑6%
67%	Mediation***	79% ↑12%
68%	CE	69%
n/a	CRC	77%
n/a	IFE	72%

Agreement Rates increased overall and for Mediation.

Return Rates

Control Group		Experimental Group
24%	Overall***	14% ↓10%
29%	Mediation***	15% ↓14%
12%	CE	12%
n/a	CRC	17%
n/a	IFE	12%

Return Rates dropped

Time in Service

Control Group		Experimental Group
61 days	Initial service	69 days ↑ 8 days*
85 days	2 nd Service	65 days ↓ 20 days

It took a little longer to get families through their initial service, but the returnees found the process more streamlined.

*Accounted for by non-agreers

Completing Service in Timely Fashion

Control Group		Experimental Group
Peaked 6+ mo.	CEs	Peaked 4-5 mo.

Length of Time between Services

Control Group		Experimental Group
14%	6 Month Standard for Return	42%

Quick Returns

Control Group	Within one month	Experimental Group
35%	Overall	12%
48%	Non-Agreers	29%
24%	Agreers	5%

Motions Analysis

- Based on 1,830 cases
- 5,819 distinguishable motions were filed by the families in the sample
- The data were collected from individual case docket files, in which 21 specific types of child and non-child related motions were identified.

Variables: Child-related Motions

- Custody & Access CR
- Custody
- Visit
- Visit/custody
- Other CR
- CR Evaluation
- CR Therapy
- CR R/Os
- Appoint GAL
- General CR
- Referral to Family Services

Number of Motions

- The proportion of cases with 1+ motions = for control and experimental (65%) groups.
- Average no. of motions filed = for control and experimental groups (5 per case).

The screen and new services did not change the legal culture in any significant way.

- Largest Number of motions filed for any case....

Control group = 25
 Experimental group = 15

Child-related Motions: Outcomes

CR motions ↓ 3%

- custody motions dropped 5%
- motions for child-related orders for therapy dropped 1% (sig.)

Judicial Involvement

Judicial input did not change with the advent of the screen and new services.

BUT among those motions that did have judges' input...E < C group for

- ❖ Average number of CR motions filed overall
- ❖ Custody and access motions

Cost Analysis

Control Group		Experimental Group
2004 \$1.77 mil.	Costs	2004 \$1.66 mil.
		2007 \$1.33 mil.

Highlight Summary of Outcomes

- Return rates cut in half
- Agreement rates up 5%
- Returnees benefit from a shorter 2nd service
- Fewer Quick Returns (< 1 mo.)
- Fewer Child related Motions
- Court time and costs are favorably impacted

The group differences pertain to Mediation and the new services, IFE and CRC

Vulnerable Populations
High Conflict Families

Variables:

- *Current Level of Conflict (CLC)*
- *Communication/Cooperation (C/C)*
- *Level of Dangerousness*
- *Level of Disparity*
- *Domestic Violence (DV) Concern*

High Conflict Families

Scales:

- *Conflict Scale*
- *Non-violent/Violent Conflict Scales*
- *Post-Service Conflict*

High Conflict Families

- More intensive service referrals when...
Higher conflict (factor)
Disparity of views

Rates of high conflict similar to national studies (about 10%)

High Conflict Families

- Agreement rates drop as conflict (measured various ways) increases
- Return rates correlated with DV Concerns

Post-service Conflict

- Experimental group < Control group for Post-service Conflict (motions filed) among Mediating families
- No group differences in Post-service Conflict by Settlement or Return Rates

Vulnerable Populations
Domestic Violence

- *DV Concerns (past and present)*
- *DV Events*
- *Legal/medical Responses*

DV Results

- 46% reported DV a concern (**note)
- When 1 partner concerned and 1 not →88% CE
- Weapon in present/recent past → 100% CE
- Concern ≠ Events (1/3 overlap)
- Overlap higher as events more recent and persistent
- Most parents (75%) with legal/medical responses, past and present, have present DV concerns.
- Agreement rates not impacted

Vulnerable Populations
Child Abuse Concerns

- 64%; DV and CA co-occurred in more than half of cases
- More likely referred for CEs unless in treatment, Mediation most common service referral
- Agreement rates not impacted by presence, timing (past or present), or extent of acknowledgement of CA concerns.

Vulnerable Populations
Never Marrieds

- 36% of sample
- Referred similarly to Mediation and CEs
- Referred to CRCs half as often as IFEs
- Agreement rates higher and return rates lower for Exp. group (= marrieds)

Vulnerable Populations
Pro Se Families

2 lawyers	25%
2 pro se 50% NM vs.35% M	40%
1 lawyer 1 pro se	35%

Pro Se Families

- Agreement rates
Exp. > Control groups: two lawyer (9%) and one lawyer / one pro se (8%)
- Dual pro se complete Mediation in 7 days less time in Exp. Group
- No relationship between legal representation and return rates.

Highlight Summary for Vulnerable Populations

- Screen provides valuable information about conflict, DV, child abuse, etc.
- Screen and new services are as effective for unmarrieds as marrieds and pro ses as represented parties, with some additional modest benefits accruing

Final Thoughts

- New screen and services have undoubtedly made a positive impact on the quality of family services provided by the Connecticut Support Services Division of the CT Judiciary
- Screen = multi-purpose tool used for quality assurance and outcome assessment