The Association between Parental Perceptions of Children’s Residential Mental Health Treatment and the Parent-Child Relationship

Research Conducted By: Susanne E. Preston, PhD
INTRODUCTION

• Residential mental health treatment for children is increasing, potentially affecting the relationships within families.

• This research was conducted at a residential facility in the Southeastern United States to examine parental perceptions of children’s residential treatment, including how parents perceived the treatment to affect the parent-child relationship.
The purpose of the study was to examine the parental perspectives of the associations between the parent-child relationship and children’s residential mental health treatment.

The following specific aspects of the parent-child relationship were examined: parental support, satisfaction with parenting, parental involvement, communication, and limit setting.

The study investigated the following: Is there a significant change in the parent-child relationship for children ages 5-13 years old with emotional and behavioral disorders who have received residential treatment?
METHODS

• This researcher utilized a mixed-methods design. In the quantitative component of the study the researcher utilized paired samples t-tests, which indicated statistically significant changes on all scales measured, with varying effect sizes.

• Participants included the parents of children ages 5-13 who participated in a 12 week residential mental health treatment program. Seventy cases were examined (including 103 parents), from various ethnic backgrounds.

• Specifically, the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (Gerald, 2005) and the Index of Parental Attitudes (Hudson, 1993) were utilized.
METHODS

• In the qualitative component of the study the researcher examined the lived experience of a parent having a child participating in residential mental health treatment through a focus group interview. Six ethnically diverse parents who had children currently in various phases of the same residential treatment program participated.
• The following research questions were addressed:
• (1) Is there a significant change in perceptions of the parent-child relationship, as measured by the Index of Parental Attitudes at post-residential treatment for parents of children ages 5 to 13 with emotional and behavioral disorders?

• (2) Is there a significant change in perceptions of the parent-child relationship, as measured by the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory scales, at post-residential treatment for parents of children ages 5 to 13 with behavioral and emotional disorders?

• (3) What is the essence of the experience for a parent to have a child in residential mental health treatment, and how do parents perceive it to be experienced within the parent-child relationship?
METHODS
CONTINUED

• Research question 2 was broken into parts for further analysis:
  • (a) Is there a significant change in the level of support a parent perceives to be present, as measured by the Parental Support scale of the PCRI completed by the parents of children ages 5-13 with behavioral and emotional disorders at post-residential treatment?
  • (b) Is there a significant change in the degree of satisfaction with parenting that a parent perceives is present in the parent-child relationship, as measured by the Satisfaction with Parenting scale of the PCRI completed by the parents of children ages 5-13 with behavioral and emotional disorders at post-residential treatment?
  • (c) Is there a significant change in the amount of parental involvement that a parent perceives is present in their parent-child relationship, as measured by the Parental Involvement scale of the PCRI completed by the parents of children ages 5-13 with behavioral and emotional disorders at post-residential treatment?
  • (d) Is there a significant change in the communication in a parent child relationship, as measured by the Communication scale of the PCRI completed by the parents of children ages 5-13 with behavioral and emotional disorders at post-residential treatment?; and (e) Is there a significant change in the limit setting by a parent in a parent-child relationship, as measured by the Limit Setting scale of the PCRI completed by the parents of children ages 5-13 with behavioral and emotional disorders at post-residential treatment?
RESULTS

• The results of the quantitative study indicated parents perceived significantly less discord in the parent-child relationship and significantly greater levels of: support, satisfaction with parenting, involvement, positive communication, and limit setting after the child participated in residential treatment, as compared to before the child participated in residential treatment.

• The themes that emerged from the qualitative data included: Parental Involvement, Help for the Family, and Help for the Child.
• In the theme of Parental Involvement, subthemes included: Parent Support Groups, Parenting Classes, and Relief for Parents.

• Parents indicated the support groups offered by the residential center were extremely beneficial, but the parenting classes were not. Results indicate that it may be useful for residential treatment centers to include a support group offered to parents as part of the family treatment. Parents also indicated they felt a great sense of relief when their children were in treatment.
• In the theme of Help for the Child, subthemes included: Improvements in Interpersonal Relations, Peer Relationships, and Threat of Larger Consequences.

• Parents indicated their children had improved interpersonal relationships, and got along better with peers, during and after residential treatment. Parents reported they felt part of the children’s improvement was due to threats they made to the children that if the problems continued, the children would have larger consequences than residential treatment, such as jail.
In the theme of Help for the Family, subthemes included: Parent-Child Relationships, Sibling Relationships, and Hope for the Future. Parents indicated the child’s residential treatment was helpful for the entire family, and it resulted in improved parent-child relationships, as well as improved sibling relationships within the family. Parents reported the children’s participation in residential treatment gave them hope for a good future. Overall, the parents perceived the experience of having a child in residential treatment as a positive one for their family.
DISCUSSION

• These findings indicate children’s residential mental health treatment can be associated with parental perceptions of significantly positive changes in the parent-child relationship. This research helps to make the case for utilizing residential treatment as an option for children when families are in crisis.

• These results also indicate that it would be useful for residential treatment centers to have a support group and additional means of support offered for parents. They indicate residential treatment centers may want to revisit the usefulness of material presented in parenting classes, types of children they discuss, or ways in which material is presented. The results also indicate the usefulness of the possibility of further consequences as a motivating factor for children in residential treatment. Treatment centers could consider building into their programs a tour of juvenile detention or an alternative school.
REFERENCES
