Background

Prevention programs are critical to reduce child maltreatment. Program effectiveness is determined by:
- Validity of underlying program theory.
- Fidelity of implementation.

Research has shown that:
- Fidelity varies across program sites using the same model.
- The implementation system influences fidelity.

The First Steps (FS) program:
- Is a universal, primary prevention program targeted to parents of newborns.
- Developed by Prevent Child Abuse Georgia in 1984. Aims to strengthen family protective factors.

Methods

- Design: Cross-sectional study of 21 FS program sites across Georgia.
- Service Fidelity:
  - Data Source: FS Program MIS Data.
  - Indicators: Frequency of initial and follow-up contacts; Mode of contacts; Referrals to community resources.
- Implementation System:
  - Sample: FS Site Leaders.
  - Data Source: Semi-structured interviews with site leaders.
  - Indicators: Adherence to implementation system component standards for: supervision practices, program staffing, staff training, program evaluation, and community linkages.

Objectives

1. Describe service fidelity across FS program sites.
2. Describe each site’s implementation system.
3. Test association of service fidelity with the implementation system.

Results

Objective 1 - Service Fidelity By Site

- Standard 1: Families should be referred to needed community resources during initial visits.
- Nearly all sites met this standard.

Objective 2 - Implementation System

- Most sites met or partially met the model standards for implementation system components.

Objective 3 - Association of Implementation System with Service Fidelity

- Few sites met this standard. Sites varied greatly in how quickly they made the follow-up contact.

Conclusions and Implications

- Understanding the relationship between service fidelity and implementation systems is necessary to advance programs for child maltreatment prevention.
- Service fidelity varied across FS program sites.
- Adherence to implementation system component standards varied across FS program sites.
- Not using volunteers for follow-up calls appears to be associated with better fidelity, especially with indicators about frequency and mode of follow-up contacts.