Background

Research indicates that the majority of child welfare (CW)-involved families desire more support from professional services rather than less (Chapman et al., 2003); yet, they are more likely to receive support from other sources such as family and informal relationship supports (Keller & McDade, 2000). Additionally, satisfactions with supports is related to parenting outcomes (Melson, Ladd & Hus, 1993) and maternal depression (Reis, 2001).

Early Childhood Connections (ECC) is an evaluation of an innovative service model that connects CW-involved intact families with Parents as Teachers (PAT) and other professional agencies by removing access barriers through collaborations between CW and professional agencies.

Research Questions

1. What sources of support do primary caregivers find most helpful at baseline?
2. What sources of support are available to primary caregivers at baseline?
3. What are the baseline levels of depression in CW-involved primary caregivers?

Methods

Caregivers completed an hour long in-home interview focusing on parenting stress, child behaviors, depression, and sources of support. The final sample will include 150 caregivers. So far the consent rate for the study has been 96%. This poster presents preliminary data on 64 of the families consented with complete baseline interviews at the time of the post submission, fully collected, entered, and analyzed. Here, we present baseline results of an adapted version of the Family Support Scale (FSS) (Dunst, Jenkins, & Trivette, 1984), which indicates the helpfulness of 13 potential sources of support. We also present baseline data from the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) (Radloff, 1977), which groups scores into three categories: no depression, mild to moderate depression, and major depression (Zich et al., 1990).

The 64 consented caregivers are all female primary caregivers of children under 2½ with at least one report to CW. In this adapted version of the FSS, 11 supports were grouped into three categories: 1. professional services (daycare, Parents as Teachers, parenting groups/classes, professional agencies [including public health, social services, and mental health], preschools, and physicians) 2. family support (spouse/partner, parents, and relatives) 3. informal support (church and friends)

Results

1. Perceived helpfulness of sources of support available to primary caregivers at baseline

Professional services were most helpful (M=3.55), followed by family support (M=3.12), and informal support (M=2.52).

2. Availability of sources of supports to primary caregivers at baseline

Percent of participants reporting availability of support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAT</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Agencies</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting groups/classes</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daycare</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support-Partner</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Professional services were perceived as most helpful yet such services are not always consistently available to CW-involved families. In contrast, family and informal supports are more consistently available yet were perceived as less helpful.

Although 61% of CW-involved families reported involvement with PAT, this is due in part to the introduction of PAT workers to families as part of the intervention. It is estimated that only 12% of CW-involved families participate in PAT.

3. Primary caregivers’ depression levels at baseline

Scores on the CES-D range from 0 to 60. Scores between 16 and 26 traditionally indicate mild to moderate depression and scores over 27 indicate major depression (Zich et al., 1990). On average, participants in the sample scored in the mild to moderate depression range (M=20.34, SD=.56). Twenty caregivers reported no signs of depression, 31 reported mild to moderate depression, and 13 reported major depression.

Implications

Caregivers find support from professional services to be more helpful than support from family or informal supports.

The provision of innovative professional service models such as ECC, which can provide services to families much longer than CW, appears to be one way to increase utilization of professional supports, which may help improve outcomes for young children and their caregivers in CW.

In order to provide longer term sustained change, however, it will be necessary to understand how to build positive supports for CW-involved caregivers outside of formal support settings.

References