

## Literature Review of Empirical Studies on Systems and Service Utilization: Summary of Findings and Recommendations

This fact sheet presents a summary of major findings and recommendations from two literature reviews of the empirical literature conducted related to systems of service delivery and service utilization related to young children with challenging behavior. These literature syntheses were conducted in 2002 by the Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior funded by a grant from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), U.S. Department of Education to the University of South Florida. The complete reports can be found at [www.challengingbehavior.org](http://www.challengingbehavior.org).

### Systems of Service Delivery Review

*We found little empirical research of the effectiveness of systems of service delivery for young children with or at risk of challenging behavior.* In the absence of empirical research on systems of service delivery for this population, we summarized the empirical literature on: 1) empirical data on prevention and intervention *programs* that have implications for systems and that have data on their effects on children's social/emotional development and/or challenging behavior, and 2) by *components of systems* of service delivery: comprehensiveness and individualization, family support, collaboration and coordination, eligibility and access, finance, and work force. Finally, the synthesis included findings from the review of consensus documents that recommend systems or systems components for effectively promoting social- emotional development or addressing challenging behavior in young children.

### Findings and recommendations:

- Systems must facilitate and support a comprehensive array of services from prevention to intensive intervention.

- Systems must support the delivery of high quality services. The quality of early education and care environments is strongly related to the development of social competence.
- Evidence-based programs and system components need to be brought to scale nationally and systems implemented to support them.
- Systems must be comprehensive and provide individualized service in order to address the complex and varied needs of children and families. Services should be individualized related to child and family needs, culture and language.
- In the absence of one comprehensive service delivery system, systems must be developed from interlocking and interconnected services and programs into a system of care.
- Systems should be family-centered.
- The early care and education, mental health, health and child welfare work force must be skilled in evidence-based promotion, prevention and intervention strategies.
- Agencies currently involved in children's social and emotional development and challenging behavior (IES, OSEP, NIMH, ACYF, SAMHSA, MCH, etc.), should launch a collaborative, multi-year effort to study the development and implementation of systems of care for children ages birth to six years that promote the social and emotional well being of children and families and support the use of evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies with children and families.
- The science of promotion, prevention, and intervention efforts has not expanded far beyond the development of model demonstration programs. Research efforts must examine the transportability of evidence-based practice to usual care settings.
- Descriptive studies are needed that document what services and systems are currently available and used by young children and their families, what are the strengths and weakness of these as described by key stakeholders, families and providers, and what data are available that document behavioral outcomes for children.
- Research efforts should seek to identify the specific program and system features needed to optimally intervene with young children who are having problem behavior such as resources, staff ratios, background and training, collaboration with experts, time, family involvement and interagency collaboration.

## **Service Utilization Review**

These conclusions are based on little data, so it is important to recognize them as tentative. There is insufficient evidence to draw very definite conclusions. The gaps in knowledge are glaring and will require a concerted research effort over many years to fill in the blanks so more reasoned and effective policies and procedures can be enacted and implemented on a national basis.

## **Findings and recommendations:**

- Medicaid screening and identification services are mandated for all eligible young children, including those with challenging behavior. However, fewer than 1/3 of the eligible children receive a full EPSDT screen and even fewer receive a screen that includes behavioral health.

- Pediatricians correctly identify and appropriately respond to only a small portion (estimates range from 17% to 40%) of young children with challenging behavior.
- Training and the use of special screening tools seems to improve the pediatricians ability to accurately screen for problems among young children with challenging behavior.
- Significant barriers to identification and referral of young children with challenging behavior exist in the medical profession.
- "Model" programs exist that take a more proactive and evidence-based approach to screening and referral for preschool children with challenging behavior
- Large numbers of young children are served in early care and education programs that provide opportunities for screening and identification. Children with challenging behavior can be identified among those in preschool environments.
- Substantial numbers of young children are served in early care settings that may not provide systematic screening.
- Biases may exist in identification and referral systems for young children with challenging behavior.
- Many young children are served by state Child Welfare Systems.
- Mental health systems for very young children are almost non-existent.
- While the IDEA Part C and Part B programs are a primary resource for identifying young children with suspected disabilities, including behavior challenges, the effectiveness of these systems in identifying young children with challenging behavior is unknown.
- Young children use mental health services at rates lower than projected need.
- Few behavioral health services are being delivered to young children through Medicaid.
- Service utilization for young children with challenging behavior is mostly governed by medical professionals.
- There is a high need for Head Start mental health services but resources are not always available to meet the need.
- Children in child welfare systems, foster care in particular, utilize a disproportionate share of the mental health services available to young children with challenging behavior.
- Family factors, education, race, income, geography, and categorical labeling impact the availability of services and utilization of services for young children with disabilities including those with challenging behavior
- Children with disabilities, including those with challenging behavior, may receive low rates of service and often do not receive all recommended services.
- Family-centered practices and a broader approach to young children with challenging behavior are needed in child care systems.
- Screening and identification of young children with challenging behavior needs to be based on a growing body of literature that relates problems of early childhood development with later behavioral health problems. In this way, screening can more effectively and efficiently identify those problems most predictive of later, more severe challenging behaviors.
- There is a need for longitudinal research, retrospective and prospective, that carefully charts the development of challenging behaviors in the preschool years and research to evaluate screening systems that are practical for use at a community level and in primary health care settings and are attuned to the needs of families.
- Research is needed to establish systems for identifying and replicating evidence-based programs.

- Research is needed to establish effective policies with regard to federal and state funding and regulation of systems for screening, identification, referral, and supports and services for children with challenging behavior. For example, natural variations in current policies can be evaluated through careful research to discover which approaches (or components of approaches) are most useful for helping young children with challenging behavior.
- Further research is needed to assess the degree of implementation of current policies designed to help young children with challenging behavior including research to obtain information from families with children with challenging behavior concerning their experiences in seeking help in order to develop screening, referral, and access processes that meet the needs and preferences of families, including families from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

### **References**

Smith, B. & Fox, L. (2002). *Systems of Service Delivery: A Synthesis of Evidence Relevant to Young Children at Risk for or Who Have Challenging Behavior*. Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior.  
[www.challengingbehavior.org](http://www.challengingbehavior.org)

Powell, D., Fixsen, D. & Dunlap, G. (2002). *Pathways to Service Utilization: A Synthesis of Evidence Relevant to Young Children with Challenging Behavior*. Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior.  
[www.challengingbehavior.org](http://www.challengingbehavior.org)