



# DATA TRENDS: #113 March 2005

Summaries of research on mental health services for children and adolescents and their families



## Assessing Strengths-Based Delivery of Services for Children and Families

**Source:** Green, B. L., McAllister, C. L., Tarte, J. M. (2004). The Strengths-Based Practices Inventory: A tool for measuring strengths-based service delivery in early childhood and family support programs. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 85, 3, 326-334

The adoption of strengths-based approaches is widely discussed as a way of improving services for children and families. This article presents two studies of the 16-item Strengths-Based Practices Inventory (SBPI). Study one describes the development of the SBPI, and study two tests the SBPI and program outcomes in Head Start Settings. Programs interested in implementing strengths-based models are faced with many options for changing their practice. The development of tools to measure the implementation of strengths-based practices can help programs to monitor their own service delivery process, as well as helping researchers better understand the mechanisms through which programs have their effects on families.

### The development of the SBPI (Study 1)

A review of the literature revealed ten principles of strengths-based practice (“empowering approach, cultural competence, relationships within families, relationships with other families, partnership with staff, community orientation, knowledge of community providers, family centered, goal oriented, and individualized” p. 328). The researchers, together with program staff with relevant experience, generated a pool of 50 items, five items for each of these ten domains. A total of 275 parents, from three Early Head Start programs, completed this rating scale as part of a confidential structured interview. At two sites, parents provided ratings of the Early Head Start program, which has an explicit strengths-based model. At the third site, the scale was completed at enrollment, and thus parents rated their past contact with a variety of other programs. Participating parents fell below the federal poverty standard, were pregnant or had a child under 1 year of age, and were predominately female (99%), African-American (70%) and single (68%).

The psychometric properties of the scale were examined using these parent-report data. Data analyses identified four reliable subscales (empowerment approach, cultural competence, staff-sensitivity-knowledge, relationship-supportive). Overall, parents reported implementation of an empowerment approach (e.g. program staff help me to see strengths in myself I didn't know I had) and of staff sensitivity-knowledge (e.g. program staff know about other programs I can use if I need them), in comparison to measures of cultural competency (e.g. program staff encourage me to learn about my culture and history) and of relationship-supportive practice (e.g. program staff encourage me to share my knowledge with other parents). In addition, comparison of programs with relatively ‘high’ or ‘low’ endorsement of a strengths-based model, based on data from parents who rated programs other than Early Head Start (n=68), indicated that the SBPI is sensitive to inter-program differences. Overall, these findings suggest the SBPI might assist programs interested in strengths-based approaches in identifying areas for development.

### Strengths-Based Practices and Program Outcomes (Study 2)

The extent to which the adoption of strengths-based approaches affects practice and outcomes for children and families is a central question for this field. The researchers hypothesized that strengths-based practices would be positively associated with parent engagement in program services (based on staff ratings of engagement, and parent reports of frequency of home visits), efficacy (ratings on the Parent Empowerment Scale<sup>1</sup>), social support (satisfaction with support, subscale from the Arizona Social Support Interview<sup>2</sup>), competence in parenting (Parenting Competence Scale<sup>3</sup>) and quality of the home environment (Home Observation Measure of the Environment; H.O.M.E.<sup>4</sup>). The research found a number of significant

relationships between SBPI and these variables. For example, parents who reported more use of strengths-based practices reported higher levels of social support. In addition, parents who reported greater use of an empowerment approach and more cultural competency (SBPI subscales) were also rated as more engaged by providers. Time 1 results, after approximately 12 months in the program, found no significant relationship between SBPI scores and measures on the Parenting Competence and H.O.M.E. scales. However, approximately one year later, parents who reported higher levels of an empowerment approach and more relationship-supportive practices were also more likely to report feeling competent as a parent, and to receive higher H.O.M.E. scores indicating a more positive environment for children's development.

## Conclusions

This article makes an important contribution to efforts to conceptualize and test a model of strengths-based approaches to service delivery. As the authors note, further research is required to examine the impact of reciprocal relationships between families and program staff, and to gain a better understanding of strengths-based practices in different contexts. The results also indicate that longitudinal research is necessary to demonstrate the effects of strengths-based practices on more distal outcomes, such as child level changes.

## References

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- 3 Kazak, A. & Linney, J.A. (1983). Coping and life change in the single parent family. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 11, 207-220.
- 4 Bradley, R. H., Caldwell, B. (1984). The relation of infants' home environments to achievement test performance in the first grade: A follow-up study. *Child Development*, 55, 3, 803-809.