

Family Involvement in Evaluation: Evaluator Perspectives



Presenter:
Pauline Jivanjee, Ph.D.

Contributors:
Kathryn Schutte, M.S.
Adjoa Robinson, M.S.W.
Nancy Koroloff, Ph.D.

Research and Training Center on Family Support and
Children's Mental Health

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Research and Training Center
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Preliminary findings of an evaluator survey



Purpose:

To identify strategies that promote collaborative relationships in evaluation teams.

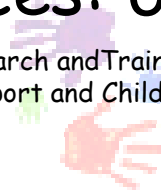
Method:

1. Identified evaluators who are (or have been) working with family members on evaluation teams, through:
 - Nomination by key informants
 - Snowball sampling
2. Telephone or face-to-face interviews with open-ended qualitative questions
3. Taped and transcribed interviews, analyzed for themes


Demographics

- 18 evaluators from all areas of the U.S.
- Educational level:

Ph.D.:	13	ABD:	2
Masters:	2	Bachelors:	1
- 14 female, 4 male
- Mean age: 41.8 (range 28-66)
- Mean year's working in CMH: 13.5 (range 3-30)
- Personal or family experience as a consumer of mental health services: 66%



Activities of family members on evaluation teams



- Help with the development of projects

"When she came on board we were at the phase of kind of designing the study. She helped give ideas for that."

- Develop instruments/surveys

"Families truly participated in the process of developing the instrument to measure strengths and needs."

Activities of family members on evaluation teams

- Collect data

"Primarily data collection, with opportunities for them to report data to the consortium."


- Train other family evaluators

"She does training for data collectors."

- Participate in the decision making

"I have a family member who is the co-director of the evaluation with me."

Activities of family members on evaluation teams




- Assist with analysis of data

"...mostly she's been involved with qualitative analysis and she's done a lot of that, looking at open ended questions pulling out themes some of that kind of stuff. So she sits in all of our staff meetings..."

- Assist with the interpretation of results

" We talk about preliminary results and interact with them about, "What is important here? What do we need to explore more deeply? Who needs this information?"

Activities of family members on evaluation teams



- Present data
 - " We also always had family members presenting evaluation information with us at national and local presentation formats."
- Help with dissemination of results
 - "...family members are particularly involved in initial dissemination efforts and training efforts around what the evaluation is for, what kind of data is being collected, has been collected, and what is it showing."

Benefits of having family members on evaluation teams



- Overall benefits

"It is ultimately useful - takes persistence and patience to get there, but it does make a difference in the information, much richer experience."

- Data collection

"I think families appreciate being interviewed by somebody who has also had some problems. They don't feel like they are being scrutinized or looked down upon as I think they could easily be with a graduate student."

Benefits of having family members on evaluation teams

- Interpretation of data


"She is so helpful in providing perspective."

"... learned that data means nothing without family interpretation."

- Presentations:


"As it turns out, [family member]'s contribution was the single most important piece of it [the presentation] being relevant or engaging."

Evaluators were not trained to work with family members




“This is very different from my training... Nothing about family involvement. Even in qualitative research there was an emphasis on objectivity. Nothing about partnering.”

Institutional/system barriers to family involvement in evaluation teams



- Hiring based on “academic” qualifications
“Experience as a parent doesn’t count. There are pay and equity problems.”
- Concerns about “objectivity”
“The main issue is the perception of objectivity.”

Institutional/system barriers (cont.)



- Scheduling challenges


"Professionals have difficulty scheduling meetings around parents' schedules."

- Status differences

"Another barrier is... getting parents treated with respect, trying to get respect equalized. It's still very hierarchical with parents at the bottom."

"The team always accorded her high status, but the other systems didn't do that."

Institutional/system barriers (cont.)



- Getting adequate salaries

"We say on one hand that we value families as much as the work of professionals, but we never pay them as much... it's hard to pay them what they are worth."

- Getting fast reimbursement of expenses

"Family members can't afford to put travel expenses on a credit card and need funds for child care."

Other barriers



- Need for family members to acquire technical skills to do the job.

“She was really helpful in the early stages, but when the data began to come in, after about 18 months, it became apparent that technical skills were needed and she had not learned them.”
- Conflict re: family members wanting to use preliminary data for advocacy

“One person who first had the job...frustration at seeing the data and not being able to be an advocate... need to accept a slower pace of change.”

Other barriers



- Evaluator needs to anticipate stress created by dissonance between advocate and evaluator roles.

"She could see problems, but couldn't see how to fix them... I didn't anticipate and help her to manage the stress... If I was doing it over, I would set up support on a regular basis to talk about stress and how to manage it."

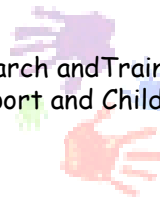
"We took a lot of the grunt work, entering data, elevated [the family member] to a higher status, but she needed to be a team member. It made her role less meaningful."

Other barriers

- Hesitation about getting involved in research and evaluation

"Trust is a primary factor. Am I coming in to use them or help them in some way?"

"They had really been burned by research...by perspectives that were misinformed, by results that were meaningless."

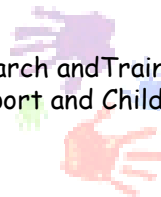


Other barriers

- Wider community does not value family member role

"There are tensions with providers. She is a professional. Providers tend to see her more as a consumer and therefore irrational."

"Major challenge - respect from everyone who is not a family member. Even from other family members as they become more "expert."



Effective strategies for family member-evaluator collaboration

- Appreciating strengths

"Emphasizing knowledge they are bringing because it's very intimidating for some family members to become involved in an academic institution - emphasizing what they bring that we don't have."

- Working as a team

"Team orientation. Trying to share information ultimately to influence a better mental health system. All team members' names are on reports - we don't specify titles - that helps."

Effective strategies for family member-evaluator collaboration

- Flexibility

“We have a very flexible work environment... a culture of working 40 hours, but not specific hours.”

“You have to be a very flexible employer. With children receiving services, sometimes things come up. ”

Effective strategies for family member-evaluator collaboration

- Providing on-the-job training and other training opportunities.

"[Family member] had to learn on the job because she had no training... That's why the Federation trainings are so important. We paid for them to go because I didn't have time to teach."

"In retrospect, if we'd realized ahead of time, she could have taken courses along the way, so she'd have been ready for it."

Effective strategies for family member-evaluator collaboration



- Promoting a culture of mutual learning.

“Being open to learning in a bi-directional manner...learning from each other.”

- Open communication, especially about differences in perspectives.

“Importance of open communication... regarding the frustrations on the project of working together.”

Training strategies for evaluators



- Information about what others have done

"If there is a sort of compilation of effective strategies, it would be wonderful if that were in some way included in the evaluation training that the national evaluation team does."

"Personally I would like lessons learned and suggestions from those who have done it. What they did, how they were trained, different roles family members have served, who to talk to..."

Training strategies for evaluators



- Joint trainings with family members

"Would like to be a part of something like the Federation's training, especially if it was hands-on, practical, concrete strategies, tools, strategies, and philosophy, importance of avoiding hierarchies."

"Had requested the Federation of Families evaluation training to have shared experiences with [family member]... Understand the reasons about making trainings "safe." But there have been great opportunities when we went to trainings together."

Training strategies for evaluators



- Learning from family evaluator partnerships

"Panel discussion on how to manage stress for family members associated with interviewing and data analysis."


"Conference calls for new grantee sites - would have been very useful to go through these kinds of questions... Not to be competitive, but to share learning."

How to get information out to family-friendly audiences




- Conference presentation and journal articles
 - "Would like to see family/professional evaluation as a topic, as a main theme. Bringing parents in to present findings and data."
 - "Conferences, journal articles, to get information out to evaluators..."
- Web resources
 - "Evaluators need a how-to guidebook with examples of what other folks have done. Make it available on the web and listservs."

How to get information out to non family-friendly audiences



- Conference presentation and journal articles
 - "Need to think about where academics get their information. American Evaluation Association, national education and mental health conferences."
 - "In academia, ultimately it would be nice if the more rigorous, empirically-based journals of mental health services research or psychological methods, more highbrow journals would publish information using these methods - to get past speaking to the chorus."

How to get information out to non family-friendly audiences



- Teach in university classes

" Has heard about some courses...Parents coming into classes to teach and having students come to their house to observe."

"Curriculum is a really important piece. One hour is not enough in a graduate course. There should be whole courses in participatory evaluation. Most people doing evaluation are going to have to work with stakeholders... Making it part of the curriculum and/or electives in college."

Implications of these preliminary findings:



- Professional curriculum for evaluators needs to include content on working with family members.
- Need opportunities for evaluators to learn from evaluators and family members who have already worked together.

Questions for the audience



- Any other kinds of experiences of family-evaluator partnerships?
- Advice about developing training for evaluators:
 - Content of training materials?
 - Training methods/process?