RCT examining the effectiveness of Family Mediation and ways to enhance the process

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Overview

- Separation & Adjustment
- Evidence Based Practice
- Enhancing Family Mediation
- Motivational Interviewing
- Coparenting Education Program
- Design & Update
In 2009-10, of the 5 million children aged 0-17 years, just over 1 million, or one in five (21%), had a natural parent living elsewhere. For four fifths (81%) of these children, the parent living elsewhere was their father.

Almost half of these children (48%) spent time with their other parent at least once per fortnight, while one quarter (24%) saw them less than once per year or never.

After separation single parent families are still the norm with 73% of these children living in one parent families, 14% lived in step families, and 11% lived in blended families.

(ABS 4102.0 - Australian Social Trends, March Quarter 2012)
Significance of Separation

**Societal:**
Approx. 6 Billion per Annum (Halford, 2012)
Impacts for: Education, Health, Policing, CSA, FDV, Centrelink, FRC’s, Support Services

**Family:**
Increase strain as resources are divided, loss of relationships, increased conflict, reduce parental capacity

**Individual:**
health problems, further relationship breakdown, risk of substance abuse, mental health

**For Children:**
Emotional & Behavioural Problems

**For Young People:**
School drop out, engaging with anti social peers, earlier sexual activity, experimentation with alcohol & drugs

**Long Term:** (Further Research) R’Ships, Employment, Health, Mental Health, Parenting
Family Law in Australia

Family Law change 2006 ➔ Mandatory FDR

- 45,000 Divorce Applications (Family Court Report 2012)
  - Children 49% Cases (ABS, 2011)
    - Amicable ?
      - Require FDR- 30% (AIFS, 2010)
      - Reach Agreement- 2/5 (AIFS, 2010)
  - No Children

Cohabiting Couples & Births to Unwed Mothers
Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) is an interdisciplinary approach to practice its basic principles are that all practical decisions made should 1) be based on research studies and 2) that these research studies are selected and interpreted according to some specific norms characteristic for EBP.

Empirically supported treatments (ESTs) are defined as "clearly specified interventions shown to be efficacious in controlled research with a delineated population" (Chambless & Hollon 1998). e.g. Medicare Funding provided to EST (Evidence Level 1).
Levels of Evidence

I  evidence obtained from a systematic review of all relevant randomised controlled trials. e.g. At least two independent randomised clinical trial which replicate findings of effectiveness (low chance for error).

II  evidence obtained from at least one properly designed randomised controlled trial.

III-1  evidence obtained from well-designed pseudo-randomised controlled trials (alternate allocation or some other method).

III-2  evidence obtained from comparative studies with concurrent controls and allocation not randomised (cohort studies), case control studies, or interrupted time series with a control group.

III-3  evidence obtained from comparative studies with historical control, two or more single-arm studies, or interrupted time series without a parallel control group.

IV  evidence obtained from case series, either post-test or pre-test and post-test.

These levels of evidence ratings have been adapted from US Preventive Services Task Force (1989), Guide to clinical preventive services: an assessment of the effectiveness of 169 interventions, (ed M Fisher), Williams and Williams, Baltimore, Appendix A, p388.
Why is Evidence / Research Important?

Level 1 = A Grade

Level 2 = B Grade

Level 3 = C Grade

Level 4 = D Grade

(Sackett’s, 1989)
FDR Research – No Empirical Evidence

- Lots of pre-post evaluation, qualitative, client satisfaction surveys.
- High client satisfaction, high initial rate of agreement, cheaper, quicker, reduced relitigation (Kelly, 2004)
- 1 RCT FDR > Court (Emery & Wyer, 1987)
- No empirical evidence on
  - Effective mediation processes
  - Long term efficacy of agreements
  - Links between process and outcomes.
### Comparison of Mediation Outcomes Across Five Studies

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- Feelings of trust toward mediator
- Mediator’s needs, goals satisfied
- Parties satisfied with mediation
- Settled in reasonable time
- Parties’ satisfaction with the process
- Mediator empathy
- Pressure to agree
- Satisfaction with mediator
- Interactional justice
- Procedural justice
- Clarity
- Satisfaction with mediation result
- Distributive justice
- Compliance to agreement
- Improved current relationship
- Prevention of future dispute
- Relationship change
- Conflict resolved
Research: Mediators

- Assessment
- Information & Referral
- Case Management
- Support
- Facilitator

- Are there Practitioner Difference?
Research: Client Outcomes
Enhanced Mediation

Integration of Evidence Based Practice to Enhance the Mediation Process

* Clients
* Mediators

Improved outcomes for separated families.
Enhanced Mediation: Research Design

* RCT comparing 3 conditions

**Standard**
- $n = 60$ dyads
- Normal FDR

**FDR + MI**
- $n = 60$ dyads
- Training FDRP’s: motivational interviewing

**FDR + MI + Skills**
- $n = 60$ dyads
- Client’s: Coparenting Education Program

MI Study

Coparenting Study
Why MI?

A collaborative, person-centered form of guiding used to elicit and strengthen motivation for change.

- Numerous RCT’s
- Used in a variety of settings
- Effective in 1-2 sessions
- Active Ingredients of MI consistent with Mediation
Common Elements of Mediation & MI

Mediator skills

- Client Centred
- Active Listening
- Neutral and Impartial
- Child Centred
- Procedural Fairness
- Use of Micro Skills
- Future Focussed
- Interest Based Negotiation
- Reality Testing
- Explore Options
- Facilitate negotiation
- Normalise

Motivational Interviewing Skills

- Client Centred
- Active Listening
- Empathy
- Simple reflections
- Complex reflections
- Open questions
- Exploring ambivalence
- Future focus
- Identifying desire for change
- Identifying actions for change
- Identifying reasons for change
- Identifying need for change
* Introductory MI workshop and process training

* Skills training/coaching

* Feedback

* Ongoing assessment/coding and support
Coparenting Programs

Affiliated with Family Courts in 46 States in the USA
Attendance required by legislation in 27 States

★ Different Programs: parenting skills, didactic information based education, interactive problems solving, and combinations of these (Braver et al, 1996)

★ Several RCT’s, results vary, overall positive outcomes which are enduring (Pruett & Baker, 2010; Wolchik, et al, 2002)
Why Education and Skills Training

- Some evidence of effectiveness with separated parents, good evidence for use with couples & other areas such as mental health, healthcare.
- Practical for Separated Parents
- Continues the focus on Children
- Encourages Cooperative Coparenting
Co-Parenting Education Program

Education and Skills Training

Module 1: Managing Emotions

Module 2: Managing Communication

Module 3: Managing Conflict

Module 4: Managing Relationships (Coparenting & Parenting)
Project Update

* Data for Time 1: 100 individuals collected to date
* Data for Time 2: completion 2013
* Data for Time 3: 6 months post time 2

Option to continue research with funding
There is currently a lack of empirical evidence to support Family Mediation: the process, the mediators practice and client outcomes.

Further A Grade research is needed to ensure growth within service delivery.

Our research is a study aims to enhance the family mediation process using evidenced based practice: to further develop mediator skills and develop clients skills in maintaining cooperative coparenting relationships.

Improved outcomes for separated families must be the continue focus of research within the family mediation field.