



How parents suspected of child maltreatment change their cognition and behavior: A process model of outreach and child protection, generated via grounded theory

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ABSTRACT

Aim: Although considerable efforts have been made to improve relationships between professionals and parents suspected of child maltreatment, little research has been conducted to examine the ways in which parents escalate their negative cognition and behavior involving professionals. This study developed a model of parents' negative reinforcement of their cognitive behavior and the factors influencing reductions in this reinforcement.

Method: Interview data were collected from 21 parents, who had experienced outreach and child protection issues, and analyzed using the grounded theory approach.

Result: In the outreach phase, the analysis initially produced the negative image of help-seeking behavior category, followed by the dissatisfaction with outreach and reinforcement of negative cognition categories. In this phase, the analysis also identified the social support and support groups step as a means of reducing negative cognition. In contrast, in the child protection phase, the analysis produced the anger and psychological conflict with child protection services and unwilling consent categories. In this phase, the analysis also identified the psychoeducation and timely feedback step as an acceptable means of minimizing the escalation of negative cognition.

Conclusion: The hypothetical model revealed the ways in which parents changed their cognition and behavior and demonstrated the factors influencing reductions in the reinforcement of negative cognition and behavior. These results could be useful for practice in child maltreatment cases.

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1. Introduction

In the child abuse response field, one of the most difficult aspects is that parents show negative attitudes toward professionals and are likely to reject their support efforts. Professionals who provide outreach and child protection services are required to understand the ways in which parents experience interventions from outreach until child protection. To consider management in these difficult cases, previous studies have mainly been conducted using three approaches, including the perspectives of professionals, parents, and children's safety.

First, from the professionals' perspective, records historically show a consistent pattern of child protection as an intrusive, paternalistic, and traumatic experience for families (Cleaver & Freeman, 1995; Thoburn, Lewis, & Shemmings, 1995). The hierarchical context is characterized

by inadequate resources for agencies and families, and child protection systems tend to be over-organized because of fear of failure and dominated by the voices of researchers, policy makers, academics, and bureaucrats (Turnell, 2006). While these pressures could cause some workers to abandon their social work knowledge, skills, and values and adopt a more police-like role, research based on professionals' perspectives has indicated that they should show gentle and judicious use of power and focus on child safety with a humanistic attitude that stretches the traditional professional manner (de Boer & Coady, 2007; Palmer, Maiter, & Manji, 2006).

Second, studies examining parents' experiences have shown that parents felt misunderstood by caseworkers and had little opportunity to voice their opinions or challenge child protective services workers' preconceived views of their problems and family needs (Fisher, Marsh, & Phillips, 1986). In addition, holding stressed and distressed mothers responsible for remedying troublesome family circumstances is an insufficient response (Cameron & Hoy, 2003). Further, the less

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parents display help-seeking behavior, the lower their levels of motivation for receiving support and undergoing interventions (Maiter, Palmer, & Manji, 2003). On the other hand, as a positive side, research examining parental involvement in child welfare services could promote a transformative change process for agencies through individual partnerships and legitimate interventions (Fine and Mandell, 2003; Lalayants, 2015). Therefore, professionals can take certain steps to create a more inclusive process for families based on their profiles and conditions (Healy, Darlington, & Yellowlees, 2012; Van Houte, Bradt, Vandebroek, & Bouverne-De Bie, 2014).

Third, as a different perspective from the two previous research perspectives, others have suggested that professionals, such as family social and child protection workers, should focus on risks to children rather than building relationships with parents (Littlechild, 1998; Parton, 1997). The reason for this opinion is that numerous follow-up studies and child death reviews have shown that relationships with parents are a poor predictor of future maltreatment (Jellinek et al., 1992; Laming, 2003; Littel, 2001; Syakai Hosyo Shingikai Jidoubukai Jidou Gyakutai nado Yohogojirei no Kensyo ni kansuru Senmon linkai, 2015). Therefore, it is important that professionals focus on children's safety prior to building relationships with parents (Turnell & Edwards, 1999).

These studies, however, have mostly focused on relationships between parents and professionals after child protection. Additionally, they have not included both factors to reinforce and reduce parents' negative attitudes in one model. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a model that focuses on the context from before child protection until after child protection, considers child safety, and includes both factors that reinforce and reduce parents' negative attitude. In particular, if the model can incorporate scientifically standardized frameworks, such as a cognitive behavior perspective, it would be beneficial for both professionals and researchers. This is because these frameworks facilitate not only building practical models in the field but also subsequently evaluating the model in a standardized way. Specifically, the cognitive behavior perspective is widely utilized around the world and has been scientifically evaluated to improve the models. In fact, two qualitative studies recommended the application of motivational interviewing based on cognitive behavior theory in negotiations between parents and social workers (Forrester, McCambridge, Waissbein, Emlyn-Jones & Rollnick, 2008a,b). However, few studies about child abuse have been conducted to examine parents' cognitive behavioral processes.

Thus, this study aimed to create a preliminary model of parents' negative cognitions, emotions, bodily sensations, and behavior processes based on the cognitive behavior perspective, and to clarify what positive factors such as social supports can reduce them. The model targets the process in the context of outreach and child protection.

2. Materials and method

The study was approved by the ethics review board at the university with which five of the authors were affiliated. The study was conducted in accordance with the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Studies (COREQ), a 32-item checklist with the following three domains:

2.1. Domain 1: Research team and reflexivity

All interviews were conducted by the first author, a male clinical psychologist and cognitive behavior therapist with a Ph.D. His occupation involved four different jobs: temporary child social worker in a child guidance center, clinical psychologist in a psychiatry department, forensic interviewer in police offices, and university researcher. In addition, he had trained in qualitative research, specifically the grounded theory approach, for 13 years. Other researchers included a pediatrician with a Ph.D. and more than 10 years' experience of medicine and child abuse cases; a social worker with a Master of Social Work degree and

Ph.D. in public health and experience in child guidance centers; a psychiatrist who has been the member of a child protection team working against child abuse cases at a children's hospital; and four other psychiatrists with Ph.D. qualifications in medicine, working in the faculty of cognitive behavior therapy in the department of medicine. With respect to relationships with interviewees, the interviewer focused on creating a kind and courteous atmosphere and established relationships carefully using active listening skills, because all interviews involved first-time meetings. Prior to conducting the interviews, the interviewer sent emails, which included an overview of the study, an informed consent form, and a profile of the interviewer, to potential participants. As they attended the interviews after reading the study overview, all informants knew about the research goal and basic interview procedure prior to participating in the study.

2.2. Domain 2: Study design

To explain the study design, we briefly describe the Japanese child abuse response system. The system to cope with child abuse consists of a dual structure of child guidance centers, which are located in each prefecture and government-designated city, and child welfare services, which are located in each municipality (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2010). In Japan, the child guidance centers mainly provide outreach and child protection services. Conversely, the child welfare services employ outreach and social support services. However, this is not a differential response system and there were no call centers to receive reports of any suspected child abuse and neglect cases. Once they received reports about any suspected child abuse cases, the agencies that received the reports must investigate them (See Fig. 1). While both agencies must deal with and investigate any suspected child abuse cases in the outreach phase that responds to low-mild risk cases, only child guidance centers conduct child custody in the child protection phase that deals with severe risk cases, repeated, and/or cases that are becoming serious. Once child welfare services have identified cases as very severe, they send the cases to child guidance centers that deal with them in the child protection phase. Additionally, once child guidance centers have detected any severe risk when responding in the outreach phase, they would move to the child protection phase.

The study involved theoretical sampling and used the grounded theory approach as a theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Some studies have used the grounded theory approach to develop cognitive behavior models (Gannon, Rose, & Ward, 2008; Jones, Latchford, & Tober, 2015). In the grounded theory approach, theoretically sensitive participant selection is important because we need to build a conceptualized and formulated model as it emerges from the collected data.

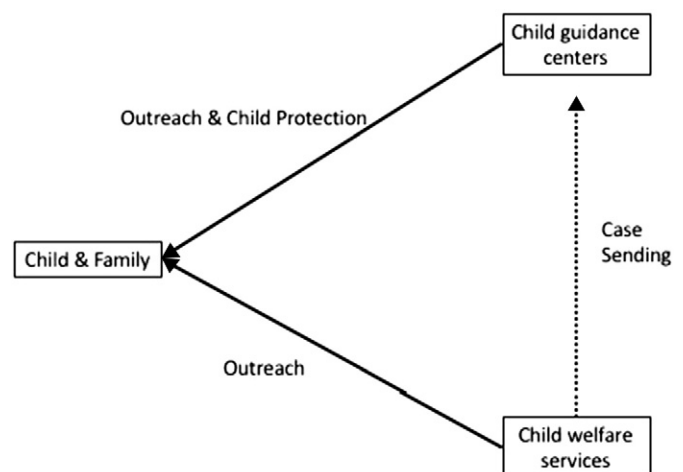


Fig. 1. Responding to suspected child abuse cases in Japan.

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