Children and Youth Services Review

Implementing the Crossover Youth Practice Model in diverse contexts: Child welfare and juvenile justice professionals' experiences of multisystem collaborations ☆

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ABSTRACT

This study takes advantage of a unique opportunity to observe structural and psychosocial processes of multisystem collaborations primarily from the perspectives of professionals attempting to bring about change in practice with crossover youth. The involvement of maltreated youth in the juvenile justice system is a persistent problem that can compound vulnerable youths' risks for problematic developmental outcomes. Youth outcomes may be improved when professionals in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems communicate and collaborate more effectively in case assessment, planning and management. The Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM) is an attempt to translate these and other research findings into practice largely through multisystem collaborations. This study presents an approximately two year-long, ethnographic inquiry into professionals' experiences of CYPM implementation in five diverse counties in a Midwestern state. During individual interviews, participants consistently described structural changes involving improved service provision to youth and families, and procedures and legal mandates for sharing information across departments. They also discussed psychosocial changes including improved professional support, strengthened relationships with other professionals and positive shifts in their ways of thinking and feeling about youth and their families. Participants also experienced implementation challenges including inadequate support and training of front line workers, distinguishing core features of the multifaceted model, and some issues in engaging families and key community stakeholders. Comparative case analyses across five counties suggest that systems change processes vary across and within local contexts. Implications for the implementation of systems change practice models in diverse contexts with professionals serving in various roles are discussed.

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1. Introduction

This study examines professionals' experiences implementing the Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM) in five counties in a Midwestern state. For the purpose of the current study, "crossover youth" are broadly defined as maltreated youth who have engaged in delinquency (Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, 2012). Most crossover youth (92%) are first involved in the child welfare system and then the juvenile justice system (Huang, Ryan, & Herz, 2012). Overall, maltreated youth are at a 47% greater risk for becoming involved in delinquency than youth from the general population (Ryan & Testa, 2005). The dual involvement of

youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems is a persistent problem which can compound vulnerable youths' risks for problematic developmental outcomes (e.g., Morris & Freundlich, 2004; Ross, 2009). The CYPM is a conceptual model and guide to systems change through strengthened collaborations, especially between child welfare and juvenile justice system professionals, in order to improve outcomes for crossover youth.

1.1. Overview of the problem

Crossover youth are of particular concern to child welfare, juvenile justice and other professionals because of their risks for problematic developmental outcomes. Involvement in the child welfare system can place vulnerable youth at further risk for psychosocial problems (e.g., Dworsky & Courtney, 2010; Goerge et al., 2002; Myers, 2011). Involvement in the juvenile justice system can further compound their risks, for instance, through exposure to delinquent peers and stigmatization (e.g. Chapin & Griffin, 2005; Redding, Lexcen, & Ryan, 2005).

In addition, youth involved in the child welfare system generally receive harsher treatment within the juvenile justice system. For example, they are more likely than their counterparts not involved in the child welfare system to be placed in a group home or correctional facility instead of receiving probation (Ryan, Herz, Hernandez, & Marshall, 2007). Given their multiple risks, it is not surprising that a significant number of crossover youth have mental health, educational and vocational problems (e.g. Herz, Ryan, & Bilchik, 2010; Dworsky & Courtney, 2010; Goerge et al., 2002; Myers, 2011). In addition, youth with maltreatment histories who become involved in the juvenile justice system are at higher risk for reoffending than their counterparts without maltreatment histories (Halemba, Siegel, Lord, & Zawacki, 2004; Herz et al., 2010; Huang et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 2007). Clearly, there is a need for effective approaches aimed at changing negative trajectories and supporting the positive development of crossover youth.

Research increasingly points to the importance of designing comprehensive, integrated approaches for crossover youth (e.g., Cusick, Goerge, & Bell, 2009; Munson & Freundlich, 2005). Such approaches typically involve multisystem collaborations, minimally between child welfare and juvenile justice professionals, but also law enforcement, education, behavioral health, and court personnel. Such collaboration can reduce unnecessary detention of foster youth who are arrested for misdemeanors and less serious felonies (e.g., Conger & Ross, 2006); more comprehensively address their needs, for example, through coordinated case planning and supervision (e.g., Herz & Ryan, 2008; Nash & Bilchik, 2009; Siegel & Lord, 2005; Wiig & Tuell, 2004/ 2008); and may reduce recidivism (e.g., Huang et al., 2012). Yet services to crossover youth and their families typically are provided in a divided manner by multiple child-serving systems, each with its own complexities, language, expectations and sometimes conflicting responses to youth (Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, 2012). In many jurisdictions the implementation of an integrated, comprehensive approach to crossover youth and their families requires substantial systems change before recent research on crossover youth may be translated into practice.

1.2. Overview of the CYPM[1]

The designers of the CYPM were informed by empirical research on dually involved youth (e.g., Wiig & Tuell, 2004/2008), and systems change perspectives (e.g., Kotter, 1996; Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler, 2008). The original target population for the model was youth who are concurrently involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and their families. The overarching aim is to minimize these youths' involvement in the juvenile justice system, primarily through earlier and more appropriate intervention, and increased family engagement. At the time of this writing, the CYPM had been implemented in 45 jurisdictions in 14 states (Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, 2012).

The CYPM is implemented in three phases. These three phases are intended to lead professionals through a series of key decision points beginning at the arrest and identification of crossover youth through final case closure. Phase I focuses on arrest, identification of crossover youth, and decisions regarding detention and charges. Primary goals include the early identification of crossover youth and, when appropriate, diversion of child welfare-involved youth from juvenile justice system involvement. Practices at this phase may include the development of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) and information sharing

protocols to specify how client information data bases can be shared between child welfare and juvenile justice systems to identify child welfare-involved youth as soon as they have contact with the juvenile justice system. They also may include diversion meetings with youth, family members, juvenile justice and child welfare professionals.

Phase II focuses on dual-system case assessment and planning after a youth is formally involved in both systems. Practices at this phase include joint case assessment and planning by a multi-disciplinary team minimally including a child welfare social worker and juvenile justice professional, and preferably the youth and family members. Practices also may include consolidated court processing to handle delinquency and dependency hearings together, joint referrals to community service providers, and placement decisions which reduce the use of out-of-home placement, especially group care.

Phase III focuses on on-going case management and planning for case closure. Practices at this phase include regular information sharing between the child welfare and juvenile justice professionals. Practices also focus on planning for permanency including the partnering of child welfare and juvenile justice systems professionals around securing any necessary ongoing mental health, employment, housing, health care, and education support.

Family engagement is fundamental to the CYPM. Families who are engaged early in the intervention process are more likely to participate in services, stay in contact with their workers and achieve their goals (Christensen & Antle, 2004). In order to facilitate family engagement, child welfare and juvenile justice system workers meet together with the family including any friends, members of community groups or other collateral family partners, to explore how they will work together, and support family participation in all phases of the CYPM (Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, 2012).

Evidence based practice is another central feature of the CYPM. Professionals at each implementation site are supported in the collection and analysis of outcome data. A number of internal reports have been generated from the original 13 implementation sites suggesting that fewer youth are crossing over from child welfare to juvenile justice system involvement, and those who do cross over are less extensively involved. They also suggest reductions in congregate placements and recidivism, and improvements in permanency planning, contact with family and other supportive adults, and youth involvement in prosocial activities (Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, 2012). To date, external evaluations of the CYPM have not been published in peer reviewed journals.

1.3. Theoretical perspective and methodological approach

This study is informed by an integration of systems change and sociocultural perspectives. Both systems change (e.g., Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, 2012) and sociocultural researchers (e.g., Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1962; Wertsch, 1991) are broadly concerned with understanding the processes through which systems are maintained and changed. Many systems change researchers focus on structural processes involving law, policy and administration. Many sociocultural researchers focus on psychosocial processes maintained and elaborated through the everyday experiences and routine practices of individuals with various social positions within particular contexts. Integration of systems change and sociocultural perspectives allows for the simultaneous analysis of structural and psychosocial processes involved in systems change and stability.

We view child welfare and juvenile justice systems as cultural systems. Like other cultural systems they have structural processes involving change and stability of official hierarchies, administrative structures, and formal policies. Cultural systems also include psychosocial processes involving individuals' values and understanding, and relationships between individuals maintained and elaborated through routine social interactions. Cultural systems are received from those who have come before us, for example, previous organizational leaders, policy makers,

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[1] The Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) at Georgetown University developed and published the CYPM in 2009. The primary source used to inform the development of the CYPM was a research compendium authored by Herz and Ryan (2008) and the "Multi-systems Integration Breakthrough Series Collaborative" conducted in 2008 and 2009 in seven jurisdictions across the country. The CYPM guide was authored by Macon Stewart, Lorrie Lutz and Denise Herz (CJJR) with contributions from Lyman Legters (Casey Family Programs).