Oregon's Differential Response

Safe Children – Strong, Supported Families

Differential Response Defined

- An approach that allows child protective services to respond differently to **accepted** reports of child abuse and neglect, based on such factors as the type and severity of the alleged maltreatment, number and sources of previous reports, and willingness of the family to participate in services. *(American Humane Association)*
- A system of response to reports of abuse and neglect that contains at least two distinct response pathways. The term DR will be used to refer to the two-track system. *(Oregon)*

What is Differential Response?

- 2 Tracks: Alternative to traditional child protection investigative response
- Sets aside fault finding and ‘substantiation’ decision and Central Registry entries
- Typically applied to reports that do not allege serious and imminent harm
- Focus is more on assessing and ensuring child safety: less on investigative fact finding
- Allows families to receive agency funded services without formal determination of abuse/neglect
- Families may refuse services if children are safe

Common Principles of Traditional CPS and Differential Response

- Both focus on safety and well-being of the child
- Both promote permanency within the family
- Both recognize the authority of CPS to make decisions about removal, out of home placement and court involvement, when necessary
- Both acknowledge that other community services may be more appropriate than CPS intervention in some cases

Factors Considered in Track Assignment

- Severity of allegation
- Present or Probable Impending Danger
- Statutory limitations/requirements such as Karly's Law
- Ability to assure safety of child
- History of past reports

* See handout

Extended Follow-up Study of Minnesota's Family Assessment Response : Final Report (2006)

"FAR families continue to have fewer subsequent child maltreatment reports."

The approach to families under FAR–family friendly, non adversarial, participatory and voluntary-led to reduced levels of future reports, regardless of whether services were or were not offered.

Families that received the FAR approach had fewer new child abuse and neglect reports.

Families that received the FAR approach continued for longer periods of time without a new child abuse and neglect report.

Family Satisfaction

Caregiver attitudes were shown to be more positive under FAR than under the investigative approach.

Source:
Institute of Applied Research St. Louis, Missouri
Gary L. Siegel PhD and Tony Loman PhD

Extended Follow-up Study of Minnesota's Family Assessment Response : Final Report (2006)

"The FAR approach led consistently to increased services to families."

This was particularly the case with financially-related services – such as financial assistance, food services, clothing assistance, housing assistance, utilities assistance and job-related help.

Recurrence among FAR families that received services was significantly less than among control families that received services.

Removal and Placement

Subsequent removal and placement of children was reduced under FAR. This finding of the original 2004 evaluation was reconfirmed for the longer follow-up period.

Worker Responses

Most workers reported a positive or very positive attitude toward FAR. Most workers reported that it positively impacted their practice with families.

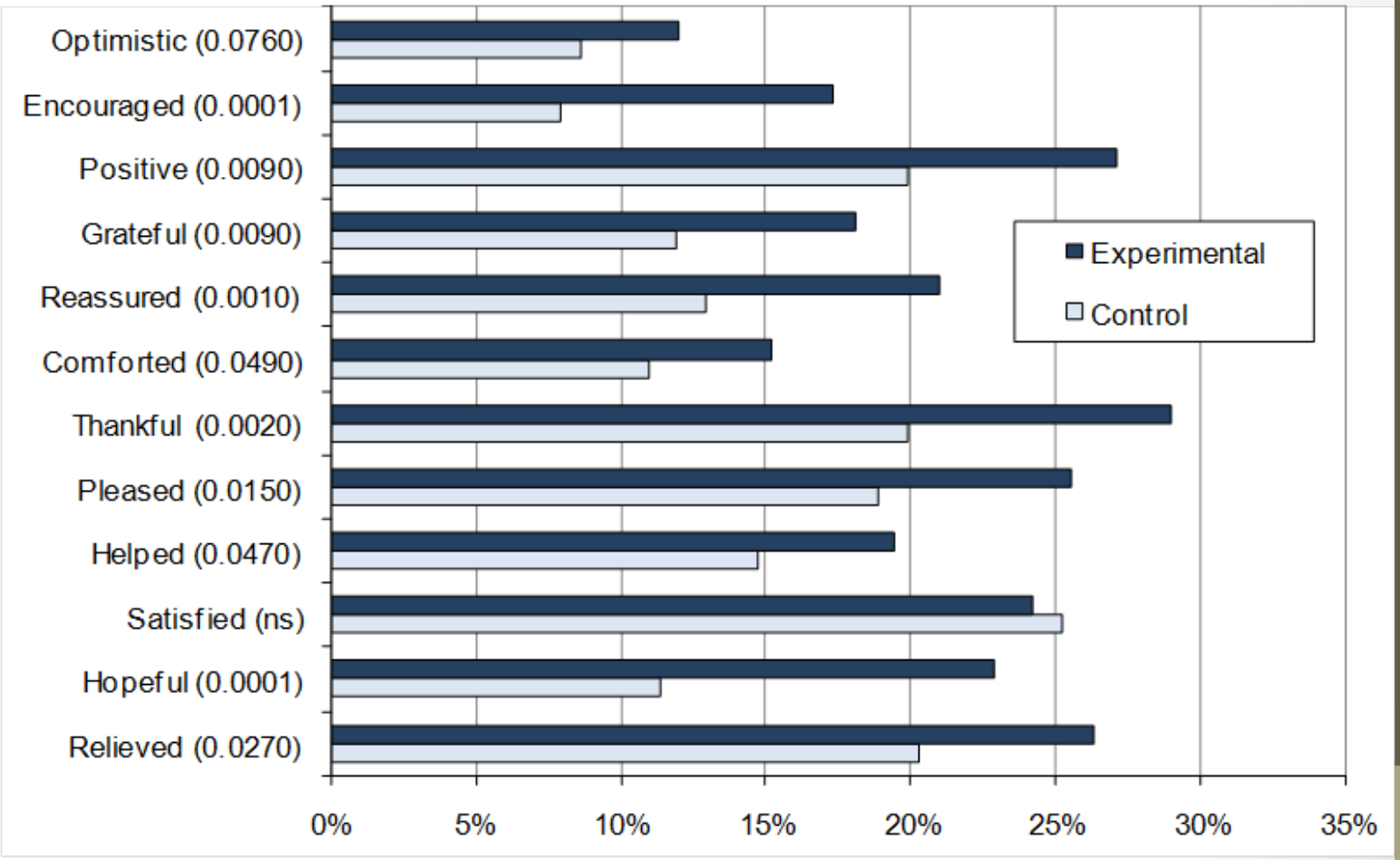
Source:
Institute of Applied Research St. Louis, Missouri
Gary L. Siegel PhD and Tony Loman PhD

Ohio Family Characteristics Alternative Response *

- High rates of unemployment, female-headed families, lower educational achievement were each associated with low income.
- Instability in housing was also found.
- Low-income families with these characteristics typically experience problems with:
  - unaffordable and unstable housing
  - utility payments, lack of furniture and appliances
  - unreliable transportation
  - occasionally lack of sufficient food and clothing
- About half of AR appropriate families had previous accepted reports of child maltreatment and one in every ten had a child placed in the past. A substantial portion were chronic CPS families.
- Reports of neglect most common

* All findings presented come from the *Ohio Alternative Response Evaluation: Final Report*, prepared by the Institute of Applied Research, released in May 2010. www.iarstl.org

First Visit: POSITIVE Emotions Reported by Families (Ohio)



Ohio: Other Important Findings

- Safety was NOT reduced
- Families reported more involvement in decision-making
- More use of concrete services
- Families reported services “really helped”
- Higher family satisfaction with worker
- More worker visits and contact with families and providers
- LESS subsequent reports
- LESS out of home placements and removals
- Cost- slightly more expensive, but potential to reduce long-term costs
- Higher job satisfaction for workers

Why Change Practice?

- Originally, these reports were handled by general child welfare programs…with a helping approach.
- Overtime, the "legalistic" aspects of reporting, investigation, substantiation, evidence, forensics, perpetrators, court involvement, central registry, etc. reinforced a more law enforcement orientation resulting in more adversarial, judgmental, and non helpful approaches with families.
- By 1990 the national Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect concluded that child maltreatment amounted to —a national emergency, and that the system the nation has devised to respond to child abuse and neglect is failing. (Loman, iarstl.org 2011)
- Some areas, like central registry entries, now have much greater impact on individuals than before yet…

Why Change Practice?

- We know that the process of substantiation or reaching a finding/disposition may lack precision and can be inequitable in its application and can have little to do with child safety or the actions taken by CPS
- Families report being fearful or upset when CPS intervenes…this can re-traumatize families who already have histories laced with trauma
- Within this atmosphere it can be difficult to approach families from a helping/problem solving approach while trying to overcome the stigma associated with CPS, although some staff are able to do it

Why Change Practice?

- Circumstances and needs of families differ and so should system's response.
- Majority of reports received today do not need adversarial approach or court-ordered interventions.
- Child protection intervention is governmental intrusion into private family life; level/type of intrusion should closely match presenting concern.
- Oregon found that the majority of Child Welfare cases involve neglect, children enter foster care at higher rates and stay longer due to neglect.
- We decided a different approach was needed with families experiencing neglect, including chronic neglect.

CPS Practice Today

A 2010 Study of CPS Investigations found :
(N=164 of 595)

- Do little to reduce primary issues that affect a persons ability to parent (social support, family functioning, poverty, maternal education and child behavior problems)
- Do not result in long-term improvement in family functioning or child behavior
- Found increased depression among mothers who had experienced 1 or more CPS investigations

"CPS investigation is not associated with improvements in common, modifiable risk factors…"

Dr. Kristin Campbell, MD
University of Utah

JAMA and Archives Journals (2010, October 4). Child maltreatment investigations not associated with improvements in household risk factors. *Science Daily*. Retrieved February 22, 2012, from http://www.sciencedaily.com

What Differential Response Will Look Like?

Alternative Track	Traditional Track
Comprehensive Safety Assessment on allegations of neglect and no serious or imminent harm	Comprehensive Safety Assessment on allegations of Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse and serious and imminent harm
Joint first contact with provider required (CPS conducts Comprehensive Assessment and Provider conducts Strengths and Needs Assessment)	Joint first contact with provider strongly encouraged (CPS conducts Comprehensive Assessment and Provider conducts Strengths and Needs Assessment)
No disposition/finding used	Disposition/finding required
No entry in Central Registry	Central Registry entry as indicated
Less adversarial approach based on identification of needs with family as partner	More investigatory approach based on fact finding

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