

A Review of Parental Engagement in Parenting Interventions and Strategies to Promote it.

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1.1 Aim

The aim of this article is to review the factors related to parental engagement with interventions and to describe strategies and implications for improving engagement with parenting interventions. Several policy and practice implications are identified: (1) Poor parental engagement may threaten or compromise the capacity of parenting programmes to deliver valued outcomes; (2) Agencies delivering parenting services need a proactive engagement strategy, which includes strategies to prevent drop-out, as well as strategies to actively respond to parental disengagement; (3) Research is needed to test the efficacy and robustness of different engagement enhancement strategies.

2.1 Summary and conclusions

Much of the research focusing on engagement and attrition in intervention research and service utilisation has focused on sociodemographic factors. While such factors have demonstrated impact on engagement, they cannot be easily changed, and as such are not particularly useful in terms of designing approaches to enhance engagement and reduce non-completion. Furthermore, knowledge that a particular demographic factor impacts on engagement provides no information on the mechanisms that are operating. The mechanisms driving engagement are important to examine in order to develop effective, theoretically-driven, practical strategies for reducing non-completion in clinical practice. It is not possible to change an individual's marital status, however, it may be possible to reduce social isolation and enhance self-efficacy and motivation, if these are operating mechanisms. Factors such as single parenthood and other sociodemographic factors serve as marker variables. Cognitive, affective and motivational factors, which are modifiable, are proposed to mediate the relationship between these marker variables and engagement attrition.

The extent to which a parenting intervention engages a parent so that they can complete a parenting programme is likely to be directly related to the level of costs and benefits a parent derives from the intervention. Investment of research effort to improve parental engagement is likely to have a high yield in terms of programme efficiency, utility and costs effectiveness.

3.1 Practical implications

Research on parental engagement has demonstrated that it is a complex multifaceted phenomenon that has important implications for how parenting services are funded and delivered.

1. *Poor parental engagement may threaten or compromise the capacity of parenting programmes to deliver valued outcomes.* Funders of prevention, early intervention and treatment parenting programmes that purport to have wide population reach should examine whether programmes seeking support have an explicit, viable engagement strategy to optimize parental engagement and programme completion.
2. *Agencies delivering parenting services need a proactive engagement strategy.* A blend of preventive and responsive strategies is needed to optimise programme engagement and completion. For example, active pursuit of clients who do not attend sessions may facilitate engagement and attendance.
3. *Research is needed to test the efficacy and robustness of different engagement enhancement strategies.* The experimental manipulations of variables hypothesized to be linked to parental engagement will provide the strongest evidence concerning what works to increase engagement in "high-risk for drop-out" groups.