Engaging Parents to Improve Child Behavioral Health

Patricia (Trish) Kohl, PhD
January 25, 2022
Agenda

• Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic and children’s mental health
• Behavioral health interventions
• Service delivery via virtual platforms
• Engaging parents in BHIs
• Policy and practice recommendations
Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
In United States as of January 24, 2022

Confirmed Cases: 69,727,991
Deaths: 858,470

Source: https://covid19.who.int/
Global Public Health Crisis
Worldwide Numbers as of January 24, 2022

349,641,119 Confirmed Cases
5,551,314 Deaths

Source: https://covid19.who.int/
Mitigation Efforts

School Closures

Stay at Home Orders

Masks

Social Distancing
Children and Youth Mental Health In COVID

**US**

14% of children have worsening behavioral health\(^1\)

**Globally\(^2\)**

- **25%** Depression
- **20%** Anxiety
Mental Health Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic in Children/Adolescents in Germany³

• National representative sample (n=1586)
• Compared multiple well-being outcomes in COVID to pre-COVID
• 2/3 of children/youth were highly burdened by COVID
• Significantly worse HRQoL, emotional problems, anxiety, conduct problems
• More than half found homeschooling during Pandemic challenging
• 83% had fewer social contacts during Pandemic
• 2/5 felt relationship with peers were impaired
Psychological Impact of Natural Disasters

- Children and families may experience…
  - life-threatening personal experiences
  - loss of loved ones
  - loss of property
  - disruption of daily routines
  - disrupted expectations for the future
  - a variety of post-disaster adversities
  - enormous economic impact

Modified from National Child Traumatic Stress Network flyer on *Psychological Impact of Tsunamis*
Toxic Stress Response

Positive
Brief increases in heart rate, mild elevations in stress hormone levels

Tolerable
Serious, temporary stress response buffered by supportive relationships

Toxic Stress
Prolonged activation of stress response systems in absence of protective relationships

What is “Toxic Stress”? 

• Toxic stress refers to strong, frequent, and/or prolonged activation of the body’s stress-response systems to major adverse experiences—such as extreme poverty, recurrent physical and/or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, severe maternal depression, parental substance abuse, and household chaos—in the absence of the buffering protection of adult support.\(^4\)
Psychological Distress of Parents in COVID

In mid-2020, 27% of parents reported worsening mental health for themselves and for their children. 1 in 10 parents reported worsening mental health for themselves and for their children.
We must also attend to the needs of parent!
Parental Resilience

• The capacity of parents to deliver a competent and quality level of parenting to children despite the presence of risk factors\(^5\)
• Ability to cope with everyday stressors \textit{and occasional crisis}.
• Being able to ask for help.
Intervening to address child behavioral health

Parent Management Training

• PMT, behavior parent training, parent mediated treatment
• Interventions where parents’ behaviors are targeted for change
  – Effective with children 4-12 years old
• Most empirically supported means to intervene to reduce child behavior problems\textsuperscript{6}
Train parents to change response to their children’s behavior

- Participation in PMT
- Improved parenting skills
- Increased parenting efficacy
- Improved child behavior outcomes

Intermediary Outcomes
PMT: Targeted Outcomes

Parenting Behaviors/Attitudes
• Discipline strategies
• Child abuse potential
• Parental self-efficacy
• Parental stress
• Parental attributes and expectations

Child Outcomes
• Non-compliance and oppositional behavior
• Difficulty controlling behavior
• Acting out
• Aggressive behavior
• Impulsivity
Examples of Models with Demonstrated Effectiveness

- Parent Child Interaction Therapy
  - [http://www.pcit.org/](http://www.pcit.org/)
- Triple P (Positive Parenting Program)
- Incredible Years
Gaps in Mental Health Services

- There are interventions with demonstrated effectiveness to reduce child behavior problems, and enhance parents behaviors and attitude
- Pre-pandemic, many children and youth in need of mental health services did not receive them
- This gap has gotten wider during COVID
Harnessing Technology

Telehealth/Virtual Service Delivery

• Social distancing and lockdowns have increased use of telemedicine and other virtual platforms
• Interventions typically done in person have been adapted to be delivered virtually – with good results
Parent Child Interaction Therapy

• Focuses on two basic interactions:
  – Child-directed interaction (CDI):
    • Resembles play therapy
    • parents engage their child in a play situation with the goal of strengthening the parent–child relationship;
  – Parent-directed interaction (PDI)
    • Resembles clinical behavior therapy
    • Parents learn to use specific behavior management techniques as they play with their child.

The two phases of the intervention are delivered sequentially with progress to PDI contingent upon mastery of CDI skills and completion of the entire PCIT program contingent upon mastery of PDI skills.
PCIT

- Therapists coach parents during interactions with their child to teach new parenting skills.
- PCIT is designed to be an office-based intervention with the therapist observing the parent–child interaction from behind a two-way mirror communicating with the parent through an ear piece (California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse, 2008).
- Skills designed to
  • strengthen the parent–child bond,
  • decrease harsh and ineffective discipline control tactics,
  • improve child social skills and cooperation,
  • reduce child negative or maladaptive behaviors. The average length of treatment is between 12 and 14 weeks.8
Internet Delivery Parent Child Interaction Therapy (i-PCIT)\textsuperscript{9}

- There were randomized control trials being conducted Pre-COVID
- Seen as a means to overcome barriers to access to mental health treatment
- What is needed:
  - Computer in therapists office
  - Computer in family’s home
  - High speed internet connectivity in both sites
  - Wireless earpiece for parent
  - Webconferencing app
PCIT-ED$^{10}$

- Added module for emotion development to treat depression
- Fewer evidence based interventions to treat depression in early childhood – There is a critical need to develop evidence
- Participants in PCIT-ED showed significantly better improvements in internalizing behaviors, depression and anxiety
Engaging Parents in Virtual Interventions

• Potential barriers:
  – Service reimbursement
  – Concern over quality of parent therapist relationship
  – Ability to build trust remotely

• Strategies
  – Orientation to the technology
  – Increase parental support
  – Peer support from other parent
  – Address multiple stressors
Policy and Practice Recommendations Moving Forward

• More research to determine if school closures actually mitigated the transmission of COVID
• Economic recovery packages should address the social determinants of health that put some groups of individuals at greater risk of contracting COVID and experiencing the associated psychological consequences
• Continue use of virtual mental health service delivery
• Continue increased flexibility in insurance coverage of telemedicine
• Self-care of our health and mental health providers
References


Thank You!