



Parental Mental Illness: Research Projects at the UMMS Center for Mental Health Services Research

The Center for Mental Health Services Research at the University of Massachusetts Medical School is conducting a series of research projects to describe the experiences and meet the needs of parents with mental illness and their families. A Statewide Advisory Group with consumer, provider, policymaker, and research representatives has informed these projects and provided input at all levels. Participants include representatives from Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, Employment Options, Inc., The Jonathan Cole Resource Center, the Parent Advocacy League, and the Massachusetts Mental Health Legal Advisors.

Promising Family-Centered Practices: The Invisible Children's Project

The Invisible Children's Project in Orange County, New York, is a nationally recognized program designed to support parents who have a diagnosis of serious mental illness in their efforts to be the best parents possible, to prevent children at risk from developing more serious behavioral and emotional difficulties, and to keep families together whenever possible. This SAMHSA/CMHS funded evaluation examines the impact of the Invisible Children's Project on families' services use and experiences, and service costs. Goals include: describing families referred to the Invisible Children's Project with respect to the functioning of all family members and their service use; developing a strategy for categorizing family-centered services including collaboration with other local agencies; assessing client-related outcomes such as hospitalization, employment status, residential stability, parenting skills, child adjustment; and, comparing the costs of the Invisible Children's Project to costs of traditional mental health and child welfare services. This evaluation will describe innovative family-centered case management services, the experiences of family members, benefits and costs.

Promising Practices for Parents with Mental Illness

This SAMHSA/CMHS funded research describes programs throughout the country that respond to and serve families where a parent has a mental illness. Phase I of the research involved a national survey identifying and interviewing providers known to work with parents with mental illness. Phase II involved two to three day site visits to five selected programs. A National Advisory Group for Parents with Mental Illness and their Families assisted in the selection criteria. Programs differed by geographic location, program history and development, theoretical orientation, funding streams, target populations, program goals, and outcomes. Logic models were developed with program staff to describe the programs and facilitate future program evaluation.

Worcester County Women's Study

Sponsored by SAMHSA, the Worcester County Women's Study is a two-phase, multi-site study aimed at improving services for women dealing with co-occurring mental health and substance use issues and histories of violence. Phase I involved the development of integrated, trauma-informed and gender-specific treatment programs for women at 14 sites throughout the country. The University of Massachusetts Medical School Center for Mental Health Services Research became involved during Phase II of the study. For this phase, nine of the initial 14 sites were chosen to fully implement integrated services programs and compare outcomes for women receiving services in these settings to those receiving "services as usual." In addition, a cost analysis will be conducted.

Worcester Homeless Families Health and Support Project

(Dr. Nicholson is Co-PI with Linda Weinreb, M.D., Department of Family and Community Medicine)

This project is part of a SAMHSA multi-site initiative to evaluate services and supports for families dealing with homelessness. The Worcester program, located at the Family Health Center, is a family-centered, strengths-based intensive set of acute services for women with multiple vulnerabilities – mental illness, substance abuse, physical health issues – and their children, with the capacity for long-term follow-up. SAMHSA is providing 3 years of targeted capacity expansion funding to UMMS and the Family Health Center, in partnership with the Worcester Department of Public Health, to add providers to the multidisciplinary Homeless Families team.

For more information about parents with mental illness and resources for families, please contact the Program for Parenting Well, University of Massachusetts Medical School, Center for Mental Health Services Research, Department of Psychiatry, 55 Lake Avenue North, Worcester, MA 01655. We can also be reached via phone (508-856-8722) or email at www.parentingwell.org.