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Does Organizational Culture Affect Employee's Readiness to Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices?

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Background/Purpose

The emergent trend toward the use of evidence-based practices in children’s mental health services has been gaining recognition (Barwick et al., 2005). The motivation for implementing evidence-based practices is to build quality and accountability in the delivery of mental health services. Children with emotional and behavioral disorders should be able to rely on receiving services that can accommodate their personal needs based on the best scientific evidence available. Most children who receive evidence-based treatment display significant progress and do so much more quickly than children that receive other non-evidence-based treatment or no treatment at all.

The importance of implementing evidence-based practice contains three important components that need to be considered. The three points focus on knowledge transfer, organizational change, and the science of implementation (Barwick et al., 2005). Knowledge transfer looks at the importance of active strategies, collaboration, leadership, and the power of sharing knowledge face-to-face. Organizational change studies readiness for change, planning and strategizing at all levels, and giving all stakeholders a voice and opportunity to help in the change process. Lastly, the science of implementation examines effective planning, includes all stakeholders, address barriers, and assess the important motivators, resources, and change factors (Barwick et al., 2005).

Fernbrook Family Center served as the representative of an agency that provides children’s mental health services. It is crucial for agencies who deliver mental health services to children to keep up with the best evidence-based practices and treatment available in order to provide the highest quality service that clients expect. The survey results will help Fernbrook build upon areas of strength and focus on areas of concern in order to deliver the most comprehensive evidence-based treatment available.

Methodology

This study used a convenience sampling of employees and organizational leaders at Fernbrook Family Center. The sampling frame was all 26 employees that are providing supervision or direct service to children and families. The research design to be used was a cross-sectional survey. The survey was developed by Children’s Mental Health Ontario. All employees of Fernbrook Family Center were presented with an informed consent letting them know that the survey was voluntary. The consent form and the survey was handed out during a staff meeting at which all the direct-care staff was in attendance. Finally, frequencies and descriptive factors were analyzed at along with a cross-sectional study to determine the relationship between organizational culture and employee readiness for change. Staff attributes and adequacy of resources were also examined.

Implications for Practice

The importance of implementing evidence-based practices to meet client needs and expectations is of great importance. Reducing the symptoms associated with mental illness is imperative for client success. Social workers need to better understand the importance of implementing evidence-based treatment into their practice in order to provide the highest quality services available. Currently, social workers are over-worked and carry case loads that make it challenging “if not unrealistic” for them to incorporate new methods of treatment. Providing evidence-based treatment requires appropriate tracking of client progress and possibly involves forcing workers to adapt an entirely new way of thinking regarding how they provide treatment. Social workers need to be given suitable resources in order to effectively put into practice more valuable and efficient treatment strategies. The delivery of mental health services should appropriately include humanistic values, ethical principles, and legal standards (Drake et al., 2001). It is imperative that mental health service providers deliver services that not only meet the specific needs of the clients, but also provide services that the clients expect. As social workers, it is crucial to make sure that clients are first and foremost when services are being considered. This forces social workers to always give careful and ethical consideration to their clients before implementing any new treatment strategy.

Findings

Adequacy of Resources is a common problem for all agencies. A majority of staff at Fernbrook (54.5%) identified a need for a larger support staff in order to meet the needs of the clients they are serving. Staffing concerns are hard for agencies to address, but a greater amount of staff would allow for the necessary flexibility to implement evidence-based practices.

- 72.7% of the staff either disagreed or strongly disagreed that Fernbrook has enough clinicians to meet current client needs
- 95.5% of the staff identified time as the largest barrier to accessing research-based knowledge

The Fernbrook employees identified a desire for more training. This is a positive for Fernbrook in that the employees are recognizing that they need more training and are reporting a desire to learn. However there is a concern about a lack of staff to support client needs.

Staff Attributes at Fernbrook rated high in adaptability, but are mixed regarding how they value and perceive opportunities for professional growth. Employees that do not value professional growth could be less likely to show investment in the implementation of evidence-based practices. Fernbrook should capitalize on the strong desire reported by the staff (95.5%) regarding their willingness to try something new and offer opportunities for more professional growth.

- 50% of the staff either agreed or strongly agreed that they read about new treatments or techniques each month
- 54.5% of the employees either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they read professional journals articles or books

Organizational Climate at Fernbrook is strong. The agency’s mission, staff cohesion, communication, and openness to change are positive agency attributes. The staff identified all of the mentioned areas as strengths of the agency.

- 100% of the staff either agreed or strongly agreed that mutual trust and cooperation among staff is strong
- 91% of the staff either agreed or strongly agreed that they feel comfortable asking questions and expressing concerns within the agency

The strong organizational climate is well positioned to adopt evidenced-based practices.

Recommendations

To successfully put more evidence-based practices into motion, Fernbrook will need to address the barriers identified by the staff in order to give them the flexibility and time needed for successful implementation. If the staff members do not feel they can take the time to effectively implement evidence-based practices, the treatment will not be provided with proper efficacy.

The one category needing attention to help Fernbrook improve the organizational climate is regards to the staff’s stress levels. The employees overwhelmingly identified stress as a major concern at Fernbrook. 54.6% of staff reported that pressures to do their job effectively and heavy workloads reduces program effectiveness. A majority of the survey participants (84.2%) reported that other staff show signs of stress and strain on the job.

Fernbrook Family Center needs to maintain their current levels of buy-in identified by the employees. This will help Fernbrook become more successful at implementing evidence-based programming to best serve the clients whom are currently receiving services and for future clients of the agency.

- References are available from the author upon request