EVALUATING OHIO START
AN INTERVENTION TO SUPPORT SUBSTANCE-ABUSING FAMILIES IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

OBJECTIVES

- Understand how substance use—especially the use of opioids and heroin—is related to involvement in the child welfare system
- Assess what programs work when trying to reduce substance use-related child maltreatment
- Examine what elements are most important for parents to regain sobriety, maintain treatment, and reduce future recurrence of child abuse and neglect
- Understand risk and protective factors that lead to the most serious child welfare situations

Background of the Problem

The United States is in the midst of an opioid epidemic. Drug overdose is now the leading cause of accidental death for adults in the US. In Ohio, rates of heroin-related deaths increased by 50% in just three years from 2013 to 2015. An innocent victim of the epidemic is the children of substance-abusing parents.

For children involved with the child welfare system,

- Heroin use is associated with lower rates of reunification compared to alcohol use and longer stays in out-of-home care.
- Among mothers in an opiate treatment program in Sydney, Australia, over 60% had been reported to child protection and over 30% had at least one child in out of home care due to maltreatment.

The opioid epidemic is significantly impacting Ohio’s child protection system. Since 2010, when the epidemic was just beginning to take root, there has been an 11% increase in children taken into agency custody.

In Ohio,

- 50% of children taken into state custody due to child abuse and neglect had parents with drug use as a safety concern.
- 1/3 had a parent currently using opiates at the time of the removal.

The current opioid problem in the United States appears to be disproportionately affecting rural areas, yet we know very little about how rural counties are coping with this epidemic.

Ohio START Sobriety, Treatment and Reducing Trauma

- The Ohio Attorney General’s Office is providing $3.5 million to public child welfare agencies in 14 southern Ohio counties
- START supports families with co-occurring substance abuse and child maltreatment
- Parents will receive enhanced services, such as recovery coaches
- Children will receive additional trauma services
EVALUATING OHIO START

The role of Ohio State’s College of Social Work

CSW will evaluate the effectiveness of Ohio START by:

- Examining what elements are most successful in parents regaining sobriety and maintaining treatment to reduce future recurrence of child abuse or neglect.
- Identifying improvements to the well-being of the children affected by parental opioid use.
- Understanding risk and protective factors that lead to most serious child welfare outcomes.
- Assisting in identifying and developing additional partnerships to sustain these community-level efforts.

Expected Outcomes

- Reduce length of stay in out-of-home placements for children
- Increase rates of reunification (i.e. reuniting children with their birth families)
- Reduce re-referrals for child maltreatment investigations

Rate of Naloxone Administration per 1,000 People by Block Group

Fairfield and Pickaway County

2003

2015

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

Drs. Bridget Freisthler, Katie Maguire-Jack, Alicia Bunger and Susan Yoon are directly involved in evaluating the effectiveness of Ohio START. Drs. Freisthler, Maguire-Jack and Yoon have an expertise in the field of child abuse and neglect. Additionally, Dr. Freisthler brings years of research experience in drug and alcohol misuse (particularly marijuana and opiates). Dr. Bunger is an expert in organizations and systems, and focuses her analyses on the child welfare population.

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ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The Ohio State University College of Social Work has faculty expertise in child welfare and drug misuse prevention. The college is at the forefront in the fight against the opioid epidemic in Ohio with multiple research collaborations, grants, and community partnerships.

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