



RESEARCH BRIEF

EPIC PROGRAM

ENHANCING PERMANENCY IN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Background of the Program

Enhancing Permanency in Children and Families (EPIC) is a program that uses evidence-based and evidence-informed practices to reduce child abuse and neglect among families involved with the child welfare system who have substance use problems. This program is being developed through a collaboration of The Ohio State University College of Social Work, Fairfield County Job and Family Services, and Pickaway County Job and Family Services.

According to the Public Children's Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO), 79% of families involved with Fairfield County Children Services and 67% of families involved with Pickaway County Children Services have substance use

problems. Both are higher than the statewide average of 50%.^{1,5} These rates are concerning because parental substance misuse is associated with children's experiences of physical abuse and neglect.² Consequently, children exposed to substance misuse have a higher likelihood of a variety of physical, psychological and cognitive problems.^{3,4}

With recent increases in rates of investigations for child maltreatment and a sharp rise in the number of children placed in out-of-home-care, the child welfare system in Ohio is overwhelmed from responding to abuse and neglect due to the increased use of opioids.



OBJECTIVES

EPIC is designed to holistically address substance misuse and associated parenting needs for child welfare families. The overall goals of the program are:

- *Increase timely access to services among substances-abusing parents involved in the child welfare system*
- *Enhance child safety and improve permanency in Fairfield and Pickaway Counties.*
- *Increase child, parent, and caregiver well-being*

Current Collaborators

Child Welfare

- ◆ Fairfield County Job and Family Services
- ◆ Pickaway County Job and Family Services

Behavioral Health

- ◆ Integrated Services for Behavioral Health
- ◆ OhioGuidestone
- ◆ The Recovery Center
- ◆ Berger Health Partners

Courts

- ◆ Fairfield County Juvenile Courts
- ◆ Pickaway County Juvenile Courts

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Meeting our Objectives using Evidence-Based/Informed Programs

1. Family treatment drug court (FTDC) including medication-assisted treatment (MAT): FTDCs are designed to enhance communication and collaboration between the court, child welfare caseworkers, and substance abuse treatment systems to address parents' unique treatment needs. Children whose parents participate in FTDC spend less time in out-of-home placements and parents in FTDC are more likely to reunify with their children. EPIC families will receive incentives to participate in FTDC. Additionally, families who participate in FTDC will be prioritized for MAT, which utilizes behavioral therapy and medication to address the underlying causes of dependency while reducing cravings and withdrawal symptoms.

2. Peer recovery supporters: Peer recovery supporters mentor parents through the recovery process. The use of peer recovery supporters has been shown to have great success in improving access to substance use treatment and decreasing the amount of time children spend in out-of-home care. Through EPIC, peer recovery supporters will make weekly home visits with child welfare caseworkers and substance use treatment providers.

3. Parenting support for kinship caregivers: For children placed with relatives, EPIC provides additional parenting supports based on the Nurturing Parenting Program. This program teaches caregivers empathy toward children's needs, alternatives to corporal punishment, and appropriate parent-child roles. Relative caregivers will also receive additional training and resources to help them talk to children who have witnessed substance misuse, especially parental overdoses.

Expected Outcomes

EPIC is intended to be a long-term and critical component in the fight against the opioid epidemic in Ohio. This partnership will help build infrastructure and a system of care for substance abusing parents in the child welfare system. We hope to learn the most effective strategies for increasing timely access to services, enhancing child safety and permanency and increasing parent, child and caregiver well-being. By fostering collaborations with County children services, behavioral health experts and County juvenile courts we hope to enhance the sustainability of EPIC.



References

- ¹Public Children's Services Association of Ohio. (2017a). The Opioid Epidemic's Impact on Children's Services in Ohio. Columbus, OH: Public Children's Services Association of Ohio. Retrieved from: <http://www.pcsao.org/pdf/advocacy/OpioidBriefingSlides.pdf> on April 2, 2017.
- ²Kelleher, K., Chaffin, M., Holleberg, J., & Fischer, E. (1994) Alcohol & drug disorders among physically abusive & neglectful parents in a community-based sample. *American Journal of Public Health*, 84, 1586-1590.
- ³Sedlak, A.J., Mettenburg, J., Basena, M., Petta, I., McPherson, K., Greene, A., & Li, S. (2010). Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4): Report to Congress. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.
- ⁴Smith, V.C. & Wilson, C.R. (2016). Families affected by parental substance use. *Pediatrics*, 138(2), e2016575.
- ⁵Public Children Services Association of Ohio. (2017b). PCSAO Factbook, 2016-2017, 13th Edition. Columbus, OH: Public Children Services Association of Ohio.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

Drs. Bridget Freisthler, Katie Maguire-Jack, and Elinam Dellor are directly involved in the conception, implementation and evaluation of the effectiveness of EPIC. They have extensive experience in the field of child abuse and neglect, and have led large scale interventions in the past. Dr. Freisthler is an expert in drug and alcohol misuse (particularly marijuana and opiates) and how the substance use environment contributes to child maltreatment. Dr. Maguire-Jack has extensive experience leading and conducting evaluations related to child maltreatment prevention. Dr. Dellor brings expertise in the mental, cognitive and psychological consequences of childhood trauma.

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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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