

An Overview of Social Work Intervention Outcomes

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Presented at the Inaugural Symposium of the
National Association of Social Workers
Social Work Policy Institute
November 16, 2010

***Social Work Research & Comparative
Effectiveness Research (CER): A Research
Symposium to Strengthen the Connection***

An Overview of Social Work Intervention Outcomes

1

- Highlight EDAC Findings about General Effectiveness of Social Work Intervention

2

- Summarize Campbell Collaboration Systematic Review Findings about Social Work Effectiveness in Specific Social Work Intervention Areas

3

- Illustrate Growth in Number of RCTs 1990 to 2008

Evidence Database on Aging Care (EDAC)

New York Academy of Medicine
Social Work Leadership Institute
Funded by Atlantic Philanthropies

The following section pertaining to EDAC is adapted, updated & revised from:

*What Can Be Concluded from General Reviews of
Social Work Effectiveness?*

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Presented 11th Annual European Inter-Centre Network
for the Evaluation of Social Work Practice
September 24, 2008

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Available at <http://www.searchedac.org/resources.php>

Evidence Database on Aging Care (EDAC)

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- Designed to provide access to available evidence on social work intervention outcomes particularly as related to serving the aging population.
- The targeted user audiences are public policy makers, academics, researchers, students, clinicians, & advocacy groups
- The database is designed to include published articles reporting findings regarding the outcomes of psychosocial interventions relevant to answering questions about the outcomes of social work interventions with older adults.
- The database is designed around specific topics which shape the contents of the database (e.g. care coordination for older adults).
- Database URL: <http://www.searchedac.org/search.php>



Reviews of Social Work Practice

General Effectiveness

- EDAC includes descriptive information & citations for general reviews of social work intervention outcomes published as journal articles since 1990.
- Reviews examine what is known as of the publication date about the overall effectiveness of social work intervention.
- The database includes these review articles as well as most of the published articles reporting primary studies identified in the review articles.
- 375 studies examined from 7 reviews

Review Articles

- Reid, W. J., Kenaley, B. D., & Colvin, J. (2004). Do some interventions work better than others? - A review of comparative social work experiments. *Social Work Research*, 28(2), 71-81
- Gorey, K. M., Thyer, B. A., & Pawluck, D. E. (1998). Differential effectiveness of prevalent social work practice models: A meta-analysis. *Social Work*, 43(3), 269-278
- Grenier, A. M., & Gorey, K. M. (1998). The effectiveness of social work with older people and their families: A meta-analysis of conference proceedings. *Social Work Research*, 22(1), 60-64.
- Reid, W. J. (1997). Evaluating the dodo's verdict: Do all interventions have equivalent outcomes? *Social Work Research*, 21(1), 5-16.
- de Smidt, G. A., & Gorey, K. M. (1997). Unpublished social work research: Systematic replication of a recent meta-analysis of published intervention effectiveness research. *Social Work Research*
- Gorey, K. M. (1996). Effectiveness of social work intervention research: Internal versus external evaluations. *Social Work Research*
- Macdonald, G. M., Sheldon, B., Gillespie, J. (1992). Contemporary studies of the effectiveness of social work. *British Journal of Social Work*

What Makes Post-1990 Reviews of Social Work Effectiveness Different from Pre-1990 Reviews?

- Some use meta-analysis
- Moderator variables are examined
- Publication bias is explored
- Investigator bias (internal vs. external) examined
- Questions of differential effects are examined:
 - Do outcomes vary by intervention method?
 - Do outcomes vary by social problem?
 - Do outcomes vary by population characteristics?
- A wider net is cast to include studies with a wide range of designs
- Many more studies are available including many RCTs using comparative effectiveness designs

What can be concluded from post-1990 reviews?

- There is now a **large body of evidence supporting the effectiveness of a wide range of social work interventions** with a wide range of social problems & populations
- On average it is reasonable to conclude that approximately **2/3 of clients served by social workers benefit in measurable ways**
- These **positive outcomes remain** even after controlling for publication (“file-drawer bias”) & investigator bias
- Many studies have contrasted alternative interventions using some form of comparison group design permitting conclusions about relative effectiveness
 - Theoretical orientation **does not account** for differential outcomes (Reid, 1997; Gorey, Thyer, & Pawluck, 1998)
 - **Differential intervention outcomes have been found** when contrasting **alternate interventions & specifying target problem or condition** (Reid, 1997; Reid, Kenaley, & Colvin, 2004) or target system (Gorey, Thyer, & Pawluck, 1998)
 - Role of **common factors** was diminished by **departures of most social work programs from traditional psychotherapeutic models** (Reid, Kenaley, & Colvin, 2004)
- A full analysis of each of these review articles is available on the EDAC web site <http://www.searchedac.org/search.php>

What can be concluded from post-1990 reviews?

- Few studies have used designs or measures that examine cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit questions & such questions remain unanswered for the most part
- *Findings are sufficiently encouraging to recommend that promising social work interventions with **specific social problems** & **specific populations** be more carefully studied with particular attention to questions of **cost-effectiveness***

Specification of Differential Effectiveness Should Now be Focus Using Comparative Effectiveness Strategies

- What **intervention**?
- For what **problem, condition, population**?
- Under what **circumstances**?
- Has what **effect (benefits & harms)**?
- **Comparative experimental designs** can be used effectively to answer these questions (Reid, et al., 2004)
- **Systematic reviews** are needed to identify what works & what remains unknown such as conducted by Campbell Collaboration

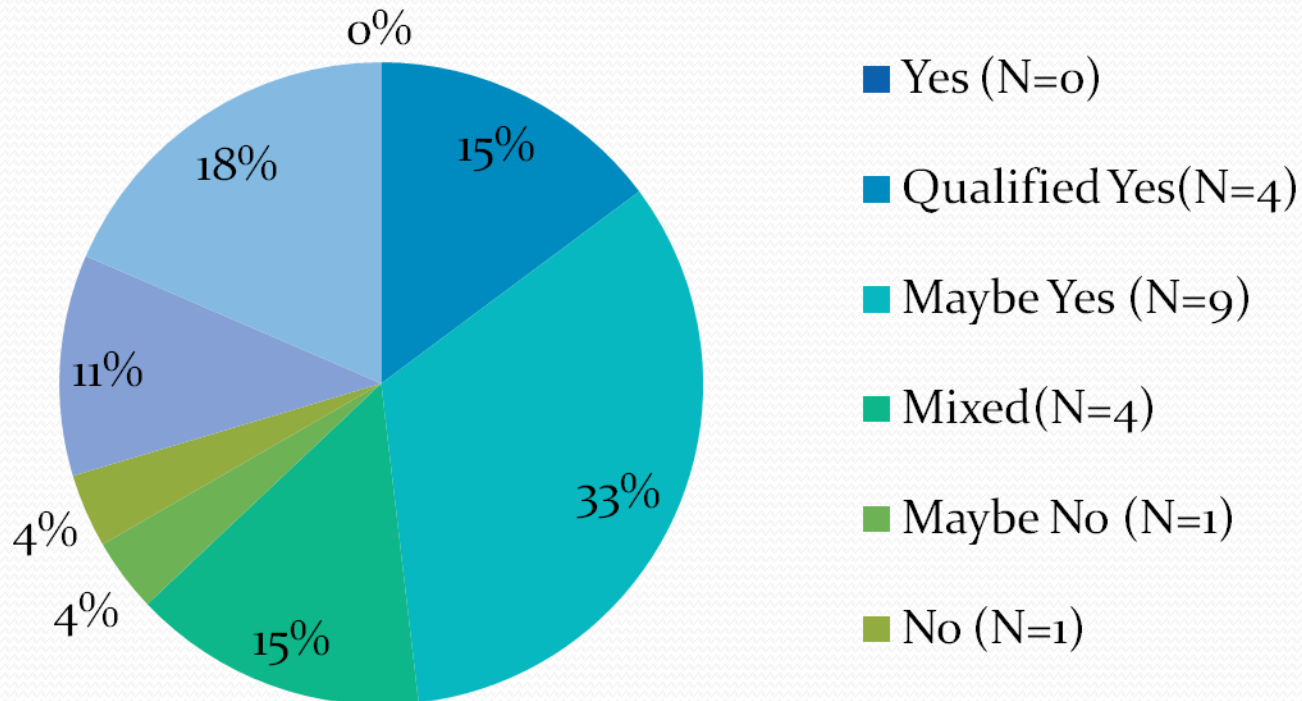
Campbell Collaboration Library

- Social & human services entries = 148
- Social Welfare Coordinating Group = 27 reviews

England	16
Norway	3
USA	3
Northern Ireland	2
Australia	1
Canada	1
Sweden	1

Outcomes of Completed Systematic Reviews by Campbell Collaboration Social Welfare/Social Work Group

Number of Reviews with Hypotheses Supported “Yes”





Outcomes:
Yes the Intervention Shown to be Effective

- To date **none** of completed Campbell Collaboration systematic reviews have reported **unqualified support** for effectiveness of intervention examined

Outcomes:

Yes, Intervention Shown to be Effective but with Qualifications

- Cognitive-behavioral treatment for antisocial behavior in youth in residential treatment
 - compared with usual care only but not alternate treatments
- Work programs for welfare recipients
 - limited generalizability (& small effect sizes)
- Kinship care for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children removed from the home
 - but weak methodologies
- Parent-training programs for improving maternal psychosocial health
 - but insufficient evidence to compare differential outcomes among theoretically different programs

Outcomes: Maybe Yes

- Cognitive-behavioral interventions for children who have been sexually abused
 - Small effect sizes
- Personal assistance for adults with both physical & intellectual impairments; for adults with physical impairments; for children & adolescents with intellectual impairments; for non-demented older adults (65+) with impairments (4 reviews)
 - Probably has some benefits for some recipients but some prefer other models of care; cost savings unknown
- Exercise to improve self-esteem in children & young people
 - No long term outcome measures & trials small scale
- Group-based parent-training programs for improving emotional & behavioral adjustment in 0-3 year old children
 - Little long term outcome data available to support primary prevention
- Individual & group based parenting for improving psychosocial outcomes for teenage parents & their children
 - Small number of included studies, use of a restricted number of outcomes measures., methodological deficiencies
- School feeding for improving physical & psychosocial health of disadvantaged elementary school children
 - Outcomes varied by income level of countries studied

Outcomes:

No evidence of Effectiveness Among Studies Conducted

- Behavioral and cognitive behavioral training interventions for assisting foster carers in the management of difficult behavior
 - Results of 6 studies reviewed suggest little evidence of effect

Outcomes: **Maybe No**

- Multi-systemic therapy for social, emotional, & behavioral problems in children & adolescents aged 10-17
 - 8 RCTs conducted in 3 countries indicate it is premature to draw conclusions about effectiveness of MST compared with other services; results inconsistent across studies varying in quality & context. No information about effects compared with no treatment. Unclear whether MST has clinically significant advantages over other services

Outcomes: Mixed

- Interventions intended to reduce pregnancy-related outcomes among adolescents
 - Results varied by intervention type, population, relative dearth of evidence re comparative effectiveness
- School-based education programs for prevention of child sexual abuse
 - Short-term gains reported but harms also reported & lack of evidence re long term outcomes
- Speech & language therapy interventions for children with primary speech & language delay or disorder
 - Outcomes vary by area of difficulty & method of delivery.
- Treatment foster care for improving outcomes in children & young people
 - Some evidence of positive outcomes on clinically meaningful measures, but questionable generalizability, issues of investigator bias, concern about cost, lack of comparative effectiveness data

Outcomes: **Insufficient Evidence**

- Financial benefits for child health & well-being in low income or socially disadvantaged families in developed world countries
- Opportunities provision for preventing youth gang involvement for children & young people (7-16)
- Cognitive behavioral therapy for men who physically abuse their female partner

Outcomes: No Evidence

- Interventions for learning disabled sex offenders
- Independent living programs for improving outcomes for young people leaving the care system
- Personal assistance for children and adolescents (0-18) with both physical & intellectual impairments
- Personal assistance for children & adolescents (0-18) with physical impairments
- Cognitive-behavioral interventions for preventing youth gang involvement for children & young people (7-16)

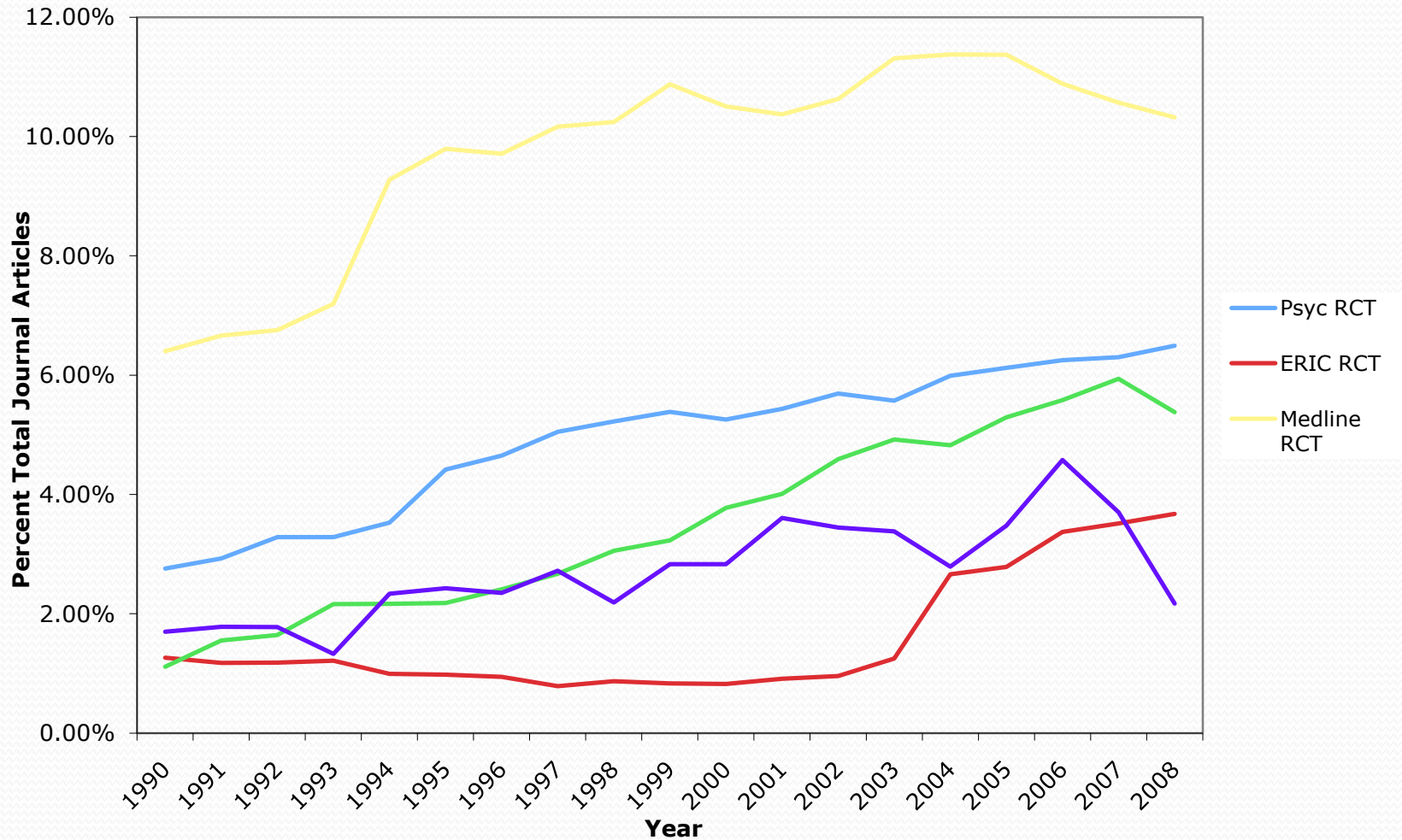
Conclusions from Campbell Reviews

- No interventions found to provide unqualified evidence of effectiveness
- All reviews concluded that there is a need for additional comparative research before unqualified conclusions can be drawn
- None of the reviews addressed questions of cost-effectiveness/cost-benefit
- Few USA based reviews (n=3)
All other reviews UK/Commonwealth or Scandinavia based

Many Sources for Additional Social Work Relevant Systematic Reviews

- Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality, Effective Health Care Program
- American College of Physicians. Evidence-based Medicine Reviews (EBMR)
- American College of Physicians. Physician's Information and Education Resource (PIER)
- BMJ Publishing Group. Clinical Evidence
- California Evidence-based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC)
- Campbell Collaboration Library of Systematic Reviews
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Guide to Community Preventive Services
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. HIV/AIDS Prevention Research Synthesis (PRS)
- Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV) Information Clearinghouse
- Cochrane Collaboration Library
- Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre)
- Johanna Briggs Institute (Australia)
- National Guideline Clearinghouse
- National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. National Health Service (NHS)
- Promising Practices Network (PPN)
- Research in Practice (RIP)
- Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE). Social Care Online
- UpToDate
- U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. What Works Clearinghouse

'RCT' Hits



This figure is reproduced with permission from: Shlonsky, A., Fuller-Thomson, E. and Baker, T. (working paper). Avoiding the Avalanche: Improving Search Strategies for Evidence through the Use of Methodological Filters. University of Toronto, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work.

Question:

What type & amount of evidence is needed to establish an intervention as evidence based?

- What designs are acceptable?
- How many studies are needed?
- How many & what type of replications needed?
- What effect sizes are necessary?

Conclusions:

Social Work Now Well Positioned to Engage In & Benefit from Comparative Effectiveness Research

- Reviews of recent social work intervention outcomes in general show that approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of clients benefit in measurable ways from services received
- Comparative effectiveness research has been underway in social work for several decades
- High quality systematic reviews of comparative effectiveness social work research are beginning to be conducted by groups such as the international Campbell Collaboration.
- Relatively few Campbell Collaboration “like” reviews have been conducted to date due in part to limited resources (available scientists & funds) & recency of these efforts
- The good news is that for first time an international body of scientists has been established to conduct high quality, unbiased reviews in social work, education, & criminal justice similar to those conducted in health care by well established & respected Cochrane Collaboration
- Many Groups now conducting & publishing social work relevant research reviews although evidence & review standards vary considerably
- Reviews to date point to need for more outcomes research in nearly all areas of social work intervention
- The number & percent of RCTs being conducted since 1990 increasing in education, medicine, nursing, & psychology but what about social work?
- Great need for well focused controlled studies of social work outcomes as well as ongoing systematic reviews