

WestEd CHVP External Evaluation Issue Brief #5: Home Visitor Service Delivery Challenges

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Beginning in 2012, the WestEd California Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) external evaluation team collected information through focus groups, online surveys, and interviews with home visitors and their supervising staff in eight counties in California. This issue brief highlights the significant challenges home visitors face in their line of work according to home visitors themselves and the program administrators who support them.

Critical Service Delivery Issues

- ❖ The majority of home visiting programs that exist in the United States target highly vulnerable, at-risk families living in fragile situations.
- ❖ Families receiving home visiting services have a need for positive emotional experiences, especially when their past experiences with relationships have been negative and difficult.
- ❖ Research indicates that the quality of the relationship between the home visitor and the caregiver has a significant impact upon the efficacy of home visiting.
- ❖ Home visitors must be nonjudgmental, flexible, consistent, and nurturing in working with very young children and families.
- ❖ Because of the high needs and intensity of services required by families living with multiple challenges and risks, home visiting programs must provide an intensive, well-coordinated and highly specialized range of services. This intensive approach can be extremely challenging for service providers, program administrators, and researchers trying to deliver the services and to document child and family outcomes.

Stressors Impacting Home Visitors

- ❖ Lack of community resources to support basic family needs (e.g., food, housing, transportation)
- ❖ Limited access to mental health consultation and services to support home visitors in meeting needs of family members
- ❖ Difficulties in convincing parents to modify behaviors that they do not see as problematic
- ❖ Long drives, heavy traffic, and unreliable agency transportation systems
- ❖ High caseloads of families with multiple risks
- ❖ Burdensome levels of paperwork and documentation
- ❖ High rates of mobility and attrition in families served
- ❖ Unsafe neighborhoods and homes

Successes Seen in Home Visiting Work

- ❖ Decreased social isolation in families
- ❖ Improved parenting skills and positive attitudes towards parenting
- ❖ Safer home environments
- ❖ Improved maternal self-esteem and self-efficacy
- ❖ Decreased rates of interpersonal violence
- ❖ Improved child health, development, and well-being
- ❖ Improved family relationships

What Is Needed By All Home Visitors?

- ❖ Regular reflective practice facilitation from an experienced and well-seasoned supervisor
- ❖ Informal support from peers and colleagues
- ❖ On-going assistance with professional boundaries
- ❖ On-going training and opportunities for scenario-based learning
- ❖ Interdisciplinary case conferencing
- ❖ Accessible mental health consultation
- ❖ Safety protocols for both crises and day-to-day situations
- ❖ Help with managing an appropriate ratio of extremely intense and high needs cases along with low intensity “easy” cases
- ❖ Appropriate breaks, timeouts, retreats, opportunities for celebrating their hard work
- ❖ Peer and supervisor support—a place to calm down at the end of the day and to “vent” with trusted colleagues about the day’s stressors can be crucial in staff retention and is an important part of organizational support that is generally overlooked

Implications

Despite its challenges, home visiting targeting new parents provides a critical opportunity for intervention as the family is often most open to change and to services on behalf of the baby. Although the work can be lonely and difficult, most home visitors do an amazing job and remain focused on the important long-term value of the development of trusting and caring relationships that create ripples in family lives.

For more information on the WestEd MIECHV External Evaluation, contact Karen Moran Finello (Principal Investigator) at kfinell@wested.org.