

PARENT ENGAGEMENT *DURING* HOME VISITS: LEARNING FROM HOME VISITOR EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES

Actively engaging parents *during* home visits is essential for motivating parents to learn new concepts and modify their behaviors. Existing home visiting research pays minimal attention to parent engagement beyond documenting the number of home visits completed and length of program enrollment (dosage). In a recent review of implementation studies in home visiting, only 5 of the 178 reviewed studies (roughly 3%) reported on engagement outside of dosage¹. Additionally, while home visitors receive training and professional development on a broad range of topics, it is not clear if they receive sufficient training on engaging and motivating parents during home visits.

Through the Home Visiting Applied Research Collaborative (HARC), a mixed methods study was completed to assess current home visiting program infrastructure to prepare and support home visitors in promoting parent engagement. The study was designed to fill gaps in existing research on how home visiting programs support staff to successfully engage parents during home visit sessions. It addressed three questions:

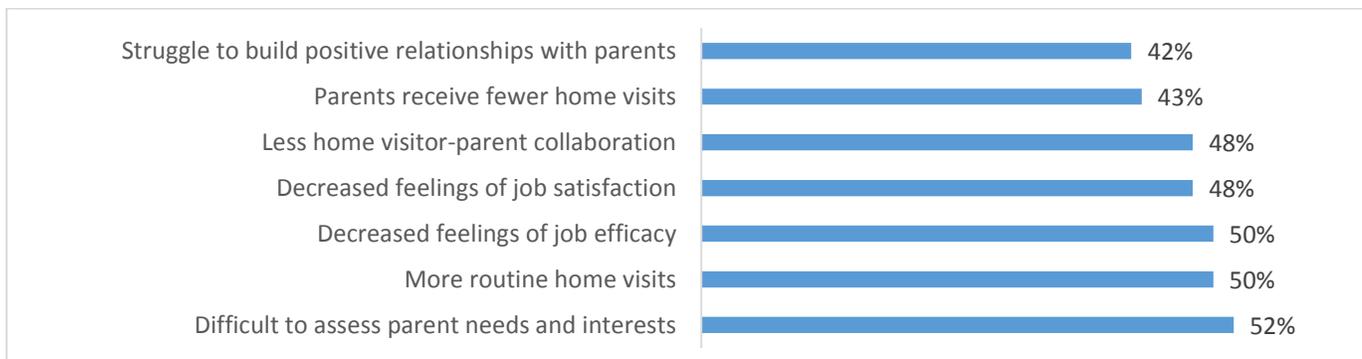
1. How do home visitors feel parent engagement in visits impacts their work?
2. How do home visitors describe and rate their training in parent engagement?
3. How do home visiting programs monitor parent engagement during visits?

*Parent Engagement: For the purposes of this study, parent engagement is defined as the extent of **active** parent interest and involvement during individual home visit sessions.*

HOME VISITOR PERSPECTIVES IN RELATION TO IMPACT OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Home visitors were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements regarding how low-engaged parents impact their work. The statements include various topic areas relevant to home visiting, including: (1) building relationships with parents, (2) program dosage, (3) program fidelity, (4) home visitor job satisfaction, and (5) home visitor-parent collaboration. Figure 1 shows statements home visitors agreed or strongly agreed with.

Figure 1. Percentage of Home Visitors Agreeing with Statements about Impact of Low Parent Engagement



In interviews, home visitors elaborated on how their approach changed when working with low engaged families. For example, having to focus on a parent's low engagement often took away from a focus on other topics. Additionally, home visitors reinforced that low parent engagement negatively impacts their feelings of job efficacy and satisfaction.

"Those are the days where you come and you think I don't really make a difference in anyone's life, why do I bother? Especially since you don't get paid anything doing home visits."

"We have an outline of what we are supposed to do during a session and when clients aren't engaged we have to change it and take breaks and have other conversations and it can take away from the content and the reason I am there."

¹ Paulsell, D., Del Gross, P. & Supplee, L. (2014). Supporting replication and scale-up of evidence-based home visiting programs: assessing the implementation knowledge base. *American Journal of Public Health, 104*(9).

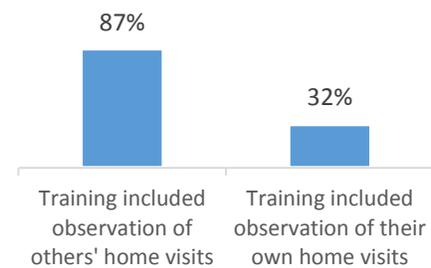
HOME VISITOR TRAINING AND SUPERVISION: PROMOTING PARENT ENGAGEMENT

A majority of home visitors (93%) indicated they receive training on engaging parents, both formal and informal. When asked to rate the quality of the training they received, a quarter of home visitors rated their training as excellent. However, only 32% of home visitors indicated that training included observations and feedback of their own home visits.

Despite noting in surveys that they received training, home visitors struggled during interviews to describe what this training looked like. When described, the training was either tangentially related to promoting parent engagement or was “on the job” or reactionary to a current problem. Most home visitors surveyed (80%) reported a continued need for training on parent engagement.

Home visitors were also asked about how often supervision focuses on parent engagement. While most home visitors do receive regular individual supervision at least monthly (73%), over half (58%) indicated that this supervision rarely or only sometimes focuses on parent engagement.

Figure 2: Use of Observation in Training



PROGRAM MONITORING OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Home visitors reported on how often their home visits are observed to monitor parent engagement. Most home visitors (77%) are observed on their home visits at least once a year. Of these home visitors, 73% reported that a formal observation tool or checklist is used. Although most home visitors report results are discussed in individual supervision, only a quarter of home visitors receive summary reports of the observations. For some home visitors (15%), results are either kept in a family or supervision file or it is simply not known how results are used.

While survey responses suggest that home visit observation is used to monitor parent engagement, no interviewed home visitor specifically discussed observation as a method for monitoring parent engagement. During interviews, home visitors indicated that their program had no method of monitoring engagement, or that program monitoring involved structural engagement measures such as program dosage and enrollment length, or proxy measures of engagement, such as family completion of goals or parent satisfaction surveys. No home visitor discussed measures directly assessing parent engagement during actual home visit sessions.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Study findings indicate that parent engagement can be a challenging topic for home visitors, one that a majority report a continued need for training. Programs should provide more intensive home visitor training on recognizing and promoting active parent engagement during home visits. This training should include observations and targeted feedback of home visitors' practice during home visits, given that other research suggests this is a highly effective training method². Regular time should be set aside during supervision sessions to allow home visitors to reflect on parent engagement and develop strategies for motivating parents to actively engage in home visit activities and content, using observation when possible. Direct observation of home visits that specifically focus on engagement can also help programs to develop early warning systems of program drop out and address signs of disengagement before the intervention window closes.

METHODS

Study included a 30-minute web-based survey of home visitors (n=116) from forty HARC home visiting programs. The qualitative component of the study included in-depth semi-structured phone interviews with 16 participants in the web-based survey. For additional information, contact Mariel Sparr at sparr@jrbassoc.com

² Pianta et al. (2014). Dose-response relations between teachers' exposure to components of professional development and increases in quality of their interactions with children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29(4), 499-508.

