Closing the Implementation Gap in Mental Health Promotion: Translating policy and research into practice

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Focus on Implementation

• Importance advances in developing the research base for mental health promotion policy and practice interventions over the last 25 years

• The generation and use of evidence in implementing and sustaining effective mental health interventions is under-researched

• Bridge the gap between research and practice
  - translating from research to effective practice and from effective practice into research
Expanding the Evidence Base

• Developing effective policy and programme interventions is only the first step in improving mental health and wellbeing
  – transferring to real world settings and sustaining them is a long term process necessary for maximising population impact

• Phases of the diffusion process
  – Initial design - pilot testing, efficacy and effectiveness trials
  – Dissemination – how well information about the intervention and its value is known
  – Adoption – whether the intervention is taken up
  – Implementation – how well the intervention is conducted
  – Sustainability – whether the intervention is maintained over time
Expanding the Evidence Base

• Evaluation research to date has largely focused on initial design and intervention outcomes
  – paucity of data on the quality of implementation necessary for positive outcomes to be produced and sustained

• Emerging implementation science
  – science of adoption and implementation of evidence-based interventions that are scaled up
  – Type II translational research

• Expand the mental health promotion evidence base
  – guide the effective dissemination, adoption and sustainability of effective interventions across diverse cultural and economic settings
Closing the Implementation Gap

- The Implementation Gap (Fixsen & Blase, 2012)
  - what is adopted is not used with fidelity
  - what is used with fidelity is not sustained
  - what is used with fidelity is not at a scale or scope to make a critical difference

- Implementation Science (Fixsen et al., 2005; Greenhalgh et al., 2004)
  - determining how or why an intervention works
    - distinguish between ineffective interventions and effective interventions that are poorly implemented
Implementation is variable across settings and change agents and it affects outcomes. Unrealistic to expect the quantity or quality of implementation to be 100% (Durlak, 1998; Bumbarger and Perkins, 2008). Higher quality implementation leads to more positive outcomes (Durlak, 1998; Dane & Schneider, 1998; Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000; Mihalic et al., 2002). Durlak & DuPre (2008) – meta-analyses of 500 studies. Level of implementation affects outcomes. Mean effect sizes were 2-3 times higher when interventions are carefully implemented.
Formula for Implementation

Effective intervention x effective implementation  
= positive outcomes

but

1.00 x 0.00 = .000
Why Implementation Matters

- Determining how or why an intervention works
  - documenting actual implementation
  - assessing variability across change agents and settings
- Interpreting outcomes
  - distinguishing between ineffective interventions and effective interventions that are poorly implemented
- Providing feedback for quality improvement
- Advance knowledge on best practice for effective intervention adoption, replication and sustainability

(Durlak, 1998; Dane & Schneider, 1998; Mihalic et al., 2002; Domitrovich & Greenberg 2000; Durlak & DuPre, 2008)
Assessing Implementation

• Assessing both the quantity and quality of implementation
  – how the intervention is put into practice
  – how well each part is conducted
• Conditions necessary for successful implementation in the local context
• Generic processes that underpin effective planning and delivery from pre-adoption phases to sustainability
• Broader than programme fidelity and adaptation (Dane & Schneider, 1998)
Factors Influencing Programme Implementation

- Characteristics of the intervention
- Characteristics of the implementer
- Delivery system – organisational capacity
- Support system – training and technical assistance
- The setting or organisational context in which the intervention is being implemented
- Characteristics of the intervention recipients/participants
- Complex interaction of these factors

(Chen 1998; Fixsen et al., 2005; Greenberg et al., 2006; Greenhalgh et al., 2004)
Implementation Principles

• The content and structure of the intervention
  – theory and evidence base
  – identify core components
  – quality of materials
  – quality and structure of technical support
• The process of planning, implementation and training systems
• Implementation support system - facilitatory and inhibitory factors in the local setting or context
  – readiness, ecological fit, organisational support etc.
  (Barry & Jenkins, 2007; Barry, Domitrovich and Lara, 2005)
The Planning Process

- Assess local characteristics and resources
- Suitability of intervention model
- Participation of key stakeholders in decision-making
- Identify and communicate objectives and principles to key players
- Training and support systems
- Plan for sustainability
Delivery Phase

- Readiness to implement the intervention
- Organisational structures and policies
- Mobilisation of support
- Ecological fit of the intervention
- Cultural sensitivity
- Balancing fidelity with adaptation to the needs of the local site – innovation and drift
- Extent of participation
- Collaboration
- Implementation monitoring system
Stages of Implementation

- Exploration
- Installation
- Initial implementation
- Full implementation

- The ‘road building’ analogy (Fixsen & Blase, 2012)
- Content, context and capacity
Sustainability

- Few interventions are sustained over time regardless of their impact (Rogers, 2003)
- Sustainability requires system transformation
  - organisation and structural change
- Limited research on the factors that predict sustainability
- Sustainability is a change process that is multifaceted, ongoing and cyclical
- Critical to fostering effective sustainable practice change
Challenges of Evaluating Programme Implementation

• Implementing programmes in complex multi-level systems such as schools and communities
  – multifaceted interventions
  – broad goals with overlapping strategies
  – multiple strands operating at multiple levels
  – whole system approach

• How to capture the dynamic process of change and document synergistic impacts and outcomes

• The setting itself is the focus of the intervention
Challenges of Evaluating Programme Implementation

• Comprehensive evaluation system

• Assess the dynamics of the programme in action
  – the intervention as planned and as delivered

• Contextual factors - data on the barriers and facilitating factors encountered in planning and delivery in the local context

• Complex interaction of organisational factors (Fixsen et al., 2005; Greenhalgh et al., 2004)
Challenges of Evaluating Programme Implementation

- Principles of intervention delivery
  - delivering interventions in an empowering, collaborative and participatory manner

- Systematic study of planning and implementation
  - use of multiple methods and rigorous data

- Detecting intermediate level changes leading to ultimate outcomes

- Documenting organizational and structural change processes
The challenges

- Mental health promotion interventions - dynamic change in complex systems
  - change process at a whole system level
  - context, culture and organisational factors
- Process of change is not a linear process
  - multiple interdependent systems
- Limitations of the traditional research paradigm
  - complexity, rigour vs relevance, process versus package, systems change
- Support for systems research
  - systems thinking paradigm
The challenges

- Bridging the research and practice divide
  - collaboration with practitioners in documenting implementation across the stages of planning, initial implementation, full scale delivery and sustainability
  - evidence may lag behind innovative practice
- Use of pluralistic methods
  - knowledge base of intervention participants and implementers
  - rules of evidence at each stage of evidence building
- Collaborative, systematic and systems-based approach to documenting the implementation of effective practice in different contexts
- Generate contextually sensitive practice-based evidence
Reading


• Barry and Jenkins (2007) Implementing Mental Health Promotion. Chapter 2. Elsevier

