



Using Needs Assessment Research to Identify Service Gaps: Understanding the Coping Strategies of Children from Divorced Families

Combined *Children, Youth & Family Services and Research* Network

Date: 27 October 2011 • **Time:** 1.45pm – 5pm
Venue: NCSS Auditorium



Opening Address by

Ms Ang Bee Lian

CEO

National Council of Social Service

What is Research?

- Research is a more systematic and objective way of collecting and making sense of information.
- Research benefits practice and policy.
- Research should inform practice.

Research is not that difficult if we begin by focusing on 3 motivational drivers:

- a) Determination to start
- b) Desire to learn through training
- c) Perseverance to complete

Importance of research to inform practice

To advance in our practice and service delivery, it is important that research should inform what we do, how we go about doing it and how we can improve the outcomes for those whom we serve.

- Whether our programs have been effective or have met the intended objectives?
- Formulation of best practice for efficacious treatment and intervention for societal problems.
- How each program or modality fair against another?

Share our work to advance practice

- Build upon past explorations and advance the research through deeper investigation.
- Over time build up a stronger and deeper body of knowledge and understanding about what works, what works better under what circumstances and what good questions are worth further investigation.

Today is a good day to begin!

**Good research after all
begins with that good
question.**

Presentation by

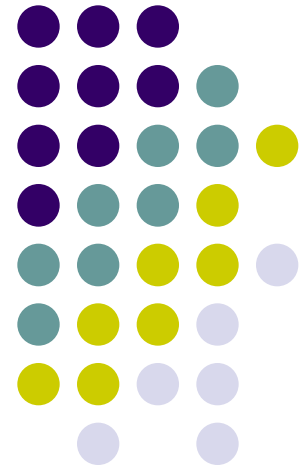
Dr Katijah Dawood

Centre for Family Harmony

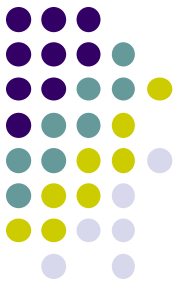
Using Needs Assessment Research to Identify Service Gaps: Understanding the Coping Strategies of Children from Divorced Families

A Research Study by
SOMC (Centre for Family Harmony)

Funded By:
National Council of Social Services
&
Singapore Totalisator Board

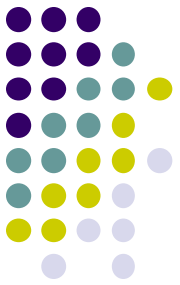


Why Research?



Research ...is a means of gaining knowledge and in social work practice, we really need the knowledge we can muster if we are to be optimally responsible to ourselves, our clients and our agencies

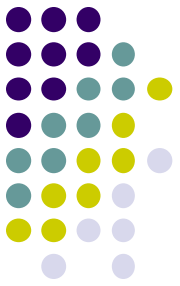
Marlow C R (2005)



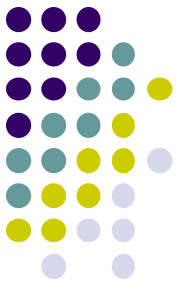
“Custody and care of the children are, by their nature, the most intractable of post-divorce problems.”

**Chief Justice Chan Sek Keong
Keynote Address
The Subordinate Courts Workplan 2011**

Key Research Questions



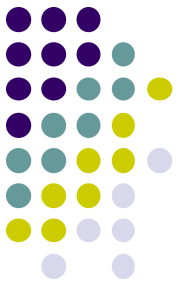
- Factors that supported children in access sessions
- Factors at the child, parental, family, and community level that helped the child cope



Methodology

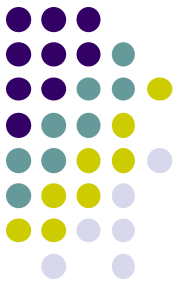
- Quantitative
 - 100 Closed Cases (Case Records)
 - SPSS

- Qualitative
 - 5 interviews (Initial 20)
 - Themes



Independent Variables

- Gender
- Age
- Socio Economic Status
- Number of Siblings
- Gender of Visiting Parents
- Parent-Child Separation & Lapse in Contact

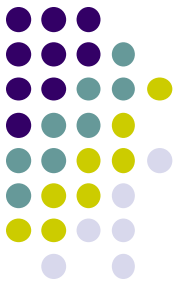


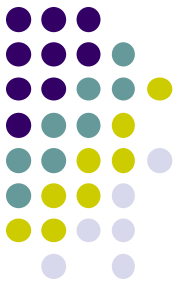
Intervening Variables

- Risk Factors – Family Violence and Psychiatric Illness
- Parenting Style
- Stress Level of Parents
- Formal Support

Dependent Variables

- Child Behaviour
- Parent-Child Relationship



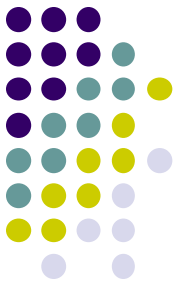


Key Findings

- VPs parenting abilities play a significant role
- CPs support is critical for children's attitude during access

- Children's Competence Helped Cope Better
- Friends
- Teachers
- School work
- Relationship with Parents
- Grandparents
- Counselling
- Court Services

Strengthening Protective Factors



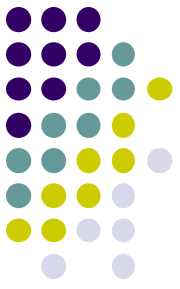
Interests / Hobbies

- Greater involvement in school activities such as CCA
- Introduction to new activities and hobbies at the community level
- Encouragement and procurement assistance of part-time jobs by FSCs or CDCs

Social

- Create a school buddy system for children going through divorce if deemed necessary
- Strengthen existing ties with religious groups such as church, temples or mosques

Strengthening Protective Factors



School/Academic Level

- Schools to identify special needs of children going through divorce, respond with support and additional tutoring if necessary.
- Facilitate access and subsidies to existing tutorial programs such as STEP and Project TEACH at self help organisations, Student care centres and others.

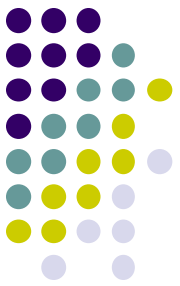
Strengthening Protective Factors



Services By Social Service Agencies

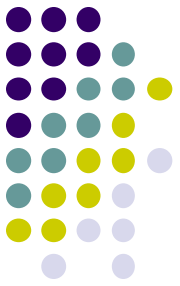
- To enhance CP-child relationship
- Counselling sessions for CP-child
- To enhance VP-child relationship
- Family counselling
- Structured activities
- Parenting workshops
- To increase extended family support
- Identify supportive extended family members - may not be household members
- Aging caregivers may need special assistance to cope with day to day child rearing tasks
- To increase teacher/role model support
- Sensitivity training for form teachers in schools
- Access to Big brother/big sister or mentoring programs at self-help groups and other organizations.

Recommendations



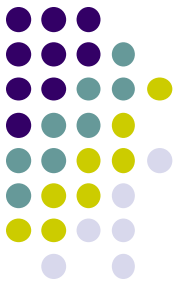
- Children who may have experienced family violence and internalising behaviour are better not to be referred to the Centre. Instead, they could be referred for specialist help before access is considered
- VPs and CPs who are unable to understand their children's behaviour attend parenting workshops to build on their knowledge and skills before access is ordered or when access is difficult.
- Children to attend group sessions when they exhibit externalising behaviour to work on appropriate expression of negative feelings. They could be further supported through individual counselling
- Co-parenting intervention for highly acrimonious parents
- Involvement of extended family members when they play a significant role in children's well being
- Support for extended family members if necessary

Future Research



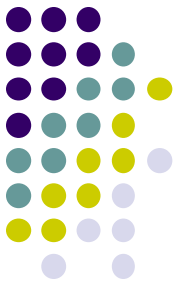
- Further research may yield more areas to support practitioners
- Length of separation and lapse of contact has not yielded significant results. However, this area need to be further studied to see if there are differences in children's behaviour or early involvement of parents supports children's well-being. For instance, parents can be informed of their negative behaviour that may impact on children's coping abilities
- Parenting styles of VPs have also not shown significant correlations. A more reliable instrument may yield findings as parenting style do have an impact on the way VPs guide and discipline their children

Limitations



- This study is limited as the quantitative study used data from reports by different Case workers. Future studies could be more rigorous using a sample from the Courts with structured questionnaires, including open ended questions.
- While the qualitative study was very useful in understanding children's experiences, it was a biased sample as only parents whose children benefited from counselling at the Centres agreed to participate. It will be useful to explore a study with the Courts with a random sample.
- It is also proposed parents and extended family members are interviewed for better understanding of stressors before, during and after divorce

Acknowledgements



- Children who have spent time with us to provide an insight into their world to help understand the various factors mitigating the effect of divorce and supporting contact with their parents
- Parents who have consented for their children to participate in the study
- Our Consultant, Peter NewCombe who dutifully and enthusiastically guided us through the analysis
- Research Assistants without whom this study would not have been possible:
 - i) Fiona K (from September to December 2009)
 - ii) Low Ann Gee (from March to December 2010)
 - iii) Kanak M (January to March 2011)
- National Council of Social Service, Voluntary Capability Fund
- Singapore Totalisator Board
- Assalam Family Support Centre and HELP Family Service Centre for checking with their clients for participation in the qualitative study



Presentation by

Dr Justin Lee

*Research & Strategy Department
National Council of Social Service*



Pilot Needs Assessment Project

27 Oct 2011

- 1. Needs Identification**
- 2. Services Review & Programme Evaluation**
- 3. Needs Prioritisation**
- 4. Develop Services and Programmes**

Objective

1. To determine the *nature, size* and *trends* of the problems/needs faced by clients we want to serve
2. To arrive at actionable insights to these problems so as to determine what strategic interventions are plausible as solutions

How to Do Needs Assessment?

1. Environmental Scan

- a) media & government reports
- b) research findings

2. Trend & Statistical Analysis

- a) social indicators and demographics
- b) prevalence rate
- c) distribution of the problem

3. Comparative Needs Analysis

- a) benchmarking
- b) professional and expert norms

4. Research Projects

- a) client needs assessment
- b) community needs assessment

- **Research Consultation & Methodological Support**
- **Publication Opportunities**
- **Funding for VWOs (Tote Board)**

Pilot Needs Assessment Project

Role Delineation

VWO	NCSS
Write up research proposal for application	Provide consultation on research design
Collect data	Advice on interviewing techniques, design of survey questionnaire, etc
Co-analyse data	Co-analyse data
Co-write the report	Co-write the report
	Source for publication channels

Spectrum of Research Projects VWOs can do

1. **Needs assessments** to understand client and community needs
2. **Programme evaluations** to determine the performance and efficacy of their services
3. **Review service models and assessment tools** to determine what works
4. **Literature review and environmental scan** of innovative practices and programmes to see what we can learn from others
5. **Thematic research** beyond substantive domain issues

- **Journal Database Subscriptions**
 - Trial subscription
- **Research Gateway**
 - Articles to be fully downloadable
 - Links to research resources
- **SSTI Research Courses**
 - Quantitative
 - Qualitative



Thank You!