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RESEARCH & TRAINING CENTER FOR PATHWAYS TO POSITIVE FUTURES

## Understanding Caregiver Strain among Parents of Transition-Aged Young People

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# Purpose

- Examine the extent to which caregiver strain differs for parents of transition-aged youth compared to other age groups
- Explore whether predictors of caregiver strain vary across age groups
- Preliminarily explore whether the relationship between caregiver strain and service use differed for transition-aged youth



# Caregiver Strain

Caregiver strain refers to the adverse impact and additional difficulties associated with the demands of caring for a child with emotional and behavioral challenges.

- Objective strain – observable events experienced by the family
- Subjective externalized strain – anger, embarrassment and resentment
- Subjective internalized strain - worry, sadness, guilt, fatigue



# Predictors of Caregiver Strain

- Research has found
  - Child clinical severity is positively related to caregiver strain
  - Caregivers of older children report more strain
  - African-American caregivers tend to report less objective caregiver strain
  - Findings on demographic variables are mixed
    - Higher caregiver education has sometimes been found to be related to higher strain



# Caregiver Strain and Service Use

- Caregiver strain is associated with child/youth service utilization patterns
- Children of caregivers who report greater strain are more likely to
  - Receive any service
  - Use more services
  - Experience residential care
- Findings differ by dimension of strain
  - Subjective externalized strain is associated with less service use



# Caregiver Strain and Service Use

Given that

- Subjective-externalized strain is associated with less service involvement

AND

- Caregivers of older children report greater subjective-externalized strain

We wondered whether exploration of the caregiver strain among parents of transition-aged youth could help explain the role of subjective-externalized strain in service use.





# Methods

- Sample
  - 767 families enrolled in systems of care across the US
  - Randomly selected from the national evaluation
  - Children/youth were grouped by age
    - Middle childhood: 6-10 years old
    - Pre-teen/Early adolescence: 11-15 years old
    - Transition-aged: 16-21 years old
  - Caregiver respondents
  - For service use analysis, we oversampled children who received no services



# Methods

- Data collection
  - Prediction of caregiver strain
    - Baseline data collected within 30 days of family entering system of care
  - Prediction of service use
    - Baseline and six-month follow up
    - Caregiver report of service use



# Methods

- Analyses
  - Bivariate analyses to test group differences
    - One-way ANOVA for continuous predictor variables
    - $\chi^2$  to test difference for categorical predictor variables
  - Regression analysis with model-building
    - Standard regression to predict caregiver strain
    - Logistic regression to predict use of any service in previous six months



# Methods

- Child measures
  - Columbia Impairment Scale (CIS) – social functioning
  - Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) – symptom severity
    - Internalizing
    - Externalizing
  - Age, gender
- Family measures
  - Family Life Questionnaire (FLQ) – family interactions
  - Household income (10 levels)
- Caregiver measures
  - Caregiver Strain Questionnaire (CGSQ) – scores range from 1-5
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Race



# Sample Characteristics

| Characteristics                | Age Groups             |                         |                         |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
|                                | 6-10<br><i>N</i> = 287 | 11-15<br><i>N</i> = 345 | 16-21<br><i>N</i> = 135 |
|                                | <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) | <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )  | <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )  |
| Caregiver age***               | 37.2 (9.2)             | 42.3 (9.3)              | 45.4 (9.9)              |
| # Children in home***          | 2.7 (1.4)              | 2.5 (1.6)               | 2.1 (1.2)               |
| Household income**             | 4.6 (2.5)              | 4.4 (2.4)               | 5.2 (2.6)               |
|                                | %                      | (%)                     | (%)                     |
| Caregiver is African-American* | 20%                    | 29%                     | 26%                     |
| Caregiver is female            | 93%                    | 90%                     | 87%                     |
| Child is a boy**               | 71%                    | 67%                     | 55%                     |

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$



# Predictor Variables by Age Group

|                             | Age Groups             |                         |                         |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
|                             | 6-10<br><i>N</i> = 287 | 11-15<br><i>N</i> = 345 | 16-21<br><i>N</i> = 135 |
| Characteristics             | <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) | <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )  | <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )  |
| Social functioning          | 23.4 (10.3)            | 23.6 (10.7)             | 21.8 (11.22)            |
| Internalizing symptoms      | 66.1 (9.8)             | 64.6 (10.4)             | 64.7 (10.7)             |
| Externalizing symptoms***   | 71.1 (10.0)            | 69.1 (9.3)              | 67.2 (10.5)             |
| Family interactions**       | 3.5 (.72)              | 3.3 (.72)               | 3.3 (.72)               |
| Objective strain            | 2.8 (1.1)              | 2.7 (1.1)               | 2.6 (1.1)               |
| Subj-externalized strain*** | 2.3 (.98)              | 2.5 (.98)               | 2.5 (1.1)               |
| Subj-internalized strain    | 3.6 (.97)              | 3.6 (1.0)               | 3.5 (1.0)               |

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$



# Predicting Caregiver Strain: Child Age Groups

|                           | Caregiver Strain      |                       |                       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|                           | Obj                   | Subj-Ext              | Subj-Int              |
| Predictors/Model fit      | Adj $R^2 = .52^{***}$ | Adj $R^2 = .34^{***}$ | Adj $R^2 = .41^{***}$ |
| Social functioning        | +                     | +                     | +                     |
| Internalizing symptoms    | +                     | -                     | +                     |
| Externalizing symptoms    | +                     | +                     | +                     |
| Family interactions       |                       | -                     | -                     |
| Household income          |                       |                       |                       |
| Caregiver age             |                       |                       |                       |
| Caregiver education       | +                     |                       |                       |
| Caregiver gender          |                       |                       |                       |
| Caregiver is African-Amer | -                     |                       |                       |
| Child is 6-10 years old   |                       | -                     |                       |
| Child is 11-15 years old  |                       |                       |                       |



# Predicting Objective Caregiver Strain: Child Age Comparisons

|                           | Age Groups        |                       |                       |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|                           | 6-10              | 11-15                 | 16-21                 |
| Predictors/Model fit      | Adj $R^2 = .52^*$ | Adj $R^2 = .49^{***}$ | Adj $R^2 = .52^{***}$ |
| Social functioning        | +                 | +                     | +                     |
| Internalizing symptoms    |                   | +                     |                       |
| Externalizing symptoms    | +                 | +                     | +                     |
| Family interactions       |                   |                       |                       |
| Household income          |                   |                       |                       |
| Caregiver age             |                   |                       |                       |
| Caregiver education       | +                 | +                     |                       |
| Caregiver gender          |                   |                       |                       |
| Caregiver is African-Amer | -                 |                       |                       |





# Predicting Subjective-Externalized Strain: Child Age Comparisons

|                           | Age Groups            |                       |                       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|                           | 6-10                  | 11-15                 | 16-21                 |
| Predictors/Model fit      | Adj $R^2 = .29^{***}$ | Adj $R^2 = .32^{***}$ | Adj $R^2 = .41^{***}$ |
| Social functioning        | +                     | +                     | +                     |
| Internalizing symptoms    | -                     |                       | -                     |
| Externalizing symptoms    | +                     | +                     | +                     |
| Family interactions       | -                     | -                     | -                     |
| Household income          |                       |                       |                       |
| Caregiver age             |                       |                       |                       |
| Caregiver education       |                       |                       |                       |
| Caregiver gender          |                       |                       |                       |
| Caregiver is African-Amer |                       |                       |                       |



# Predicting Subjective-Internalized Strain: Child Age Comparisons

|                           | Age Groups            |                       |                       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|                           | 6-10                  | 11-15                 | 16-21                 |
| Predictors/Model fit      | Adj $R^2 = .29^{***}$ | Adj $R^2 = .32^{***}$ | Adj $R^2 = .41^{***}$ |
| Social functioning        | +                     | +                     | +                     |
| Internalizing symptoms    |                       |                       | +                     |
| Externalizing symptoms    | +                     | +                     | +                     |
| Family interactions       | -                     | -                     | -                     |
| Household income          |                       |                       |                       |
| Caregiver age             |                       |                       |                       |
| Caregiver education       |                       |                       |                       |
| Caregiver gender          |                       |                       |                       |
| Caregiver is African-Amer |                       |                       |                       |



# Predicting Service Use: Child Age Groups

|                                | Any Service Use        |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Predictors/Model fit           | $\chi^2 = 66.65^{***}$ |
| Child is 6-10 years old        | -                      |
| Child is 11-15 years old       |                        |
| Social functioning             |                        |
| Internalizing symptoms         |                        |
| Externalizing symptoms         |                        |
| Objective strain               | +                      |
| Subjective-externalized strain | -                      |
| Subjective-internalized strain | +                      |
| Child gender                   |                        |
| Household income               |                        |
| Caregiver education            |                        |



# Predicting Service Use: Child Age Groups

|                                | Ages 6-10 | Ages 11-15             | Ages 16-21             |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Predictors/Model fit           | NS        | $\chi^2 = 36.60^{***}$ | $\chi^2 = 15.61^{***}$ |
| Social functioning             |           | +                      |                        |
| Internalizing symptoms         |           |                        |                        |
| Externalizing symptoms         |           |                        |                        |
| Objective strain               |           | +                      | +                      |
| Subjective-externalized strain |           | -                      | -                      |
| Subjective-internalized strain |           |                        |                        |
| Child gender                   |           |                        |                        |
| Household income               |           |                        |                        |
| Caregiver education            |           |                        |                        |



# Summary: Caregiver Strain

- The only age-related difference in caregiver strain was for the youngest group
  - Caregivers of young children reported less subjective-externalized strain
  - No differences were found between the two older age groups
- Greater severity of child externalizing symptoms and more impaired social functioning were related to greater strain
- Findings for child internalizing symptoms were mixed
  - Positively related to objective strain among caregivers of pre-teen/early adolescent group
  - Negatively related to subjective-externalized strain among caregivers of children middle childhood and transition-aged
  - Positively related to subjective-externalized strain among caregivers of children middle childhood and transition-aged



## Summary: Service Use

- Being African-American was associated with less objective caregiver strain
  - But only among caregivers of the youngest group
- Children in the youngest group were least likely to receive a service in the previous six months
- Caregiver strain was related to use of any service for older children
  - Objective strain and subjective-internalized strain were associated with greater likelihood of use
  - Subjective-externalized strain was associated with less likelihood of use
- Social functioning was the only child clinical variable that predicted use of any service and only for pre-teen group



# Discussion

- Findings similar for pre-teen/young adolescents
  - Caregiver strain greater in these groups
  - Greater objective strain associated with greater likelihood of service use
  - Greater subjective-externalized strain associated with lower likelihood of service use
- Being African-American was only related to service use among younger children
- Caregiver strain remains a problem for families of older children
- Family interactions are more problematic for this group of families



# Discussion

- These findings suggest that families of older children
  - Have different experiences
  - Influence service use differently
- Optimal role of families needs careful consideration
  - Pathways to Positive Futures has started this conversation  
(see [http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/Webinar\\_Family-Support-09-29-15.pdf](http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/Webinar_Family-Support-09-29-15.pdf))
- Supporting families could reduce strain and improve interactions among families of older children
  - Would help maintain connections with families as young people prepare to leave home and become more independent





# Limitations

- Caregiver was only respondent
- This was a served population so service use findings may differ from population receiving no services
- Need to consider the impact of oversampling children who received no services
- Sample of transition-aged youth likely includes young people with a history of emotional and behavioral challenges AND those with later onset



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