



Keys to Integrating Relationship Education into Safety-Net Delivery Systems



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Abstract

Integrating relationship education into safety-net services can strengthen relationships and promote self-sufficiency. Using the child welfare training evaluation model and a mixed-methods approach, we explored participants' relationship education integration after attending a training on relationship education. Agency leadership and support from other agencies were primary factors in moving forward to integrate relationship education into services.

Background

- Integrating healthy marriage and relationship education (relationship education) into safety-net services can influence the families that are served.
- Many service providers are unfamiliar with how relationship education can strengthen relationships and promote self-sufficiency (Antle et al., 2010; Arnold et al., 2016).
- Studies suggest that new skills and concepts are integrated into safety-net services when staff have high personal initiative and support from agency leadership (e.g., Arnold et al., 2016; Futris et al., 2015).
- The processes for how these changes occur are not well understood.
- It is unclear how the transfer of learning can be supported when initiative and agency assistance are low.
- The purpose of this study is to explore participants' implementation of relationship education and the pathways of change within their agencies following a training.

**Integrate,
Educate,
Motivate!**



The Training: Integration Institutes

The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families developed and implemented a one-day training with facilitators, during which they presented the research and relevance of relationship education skills and facilitated action planning to integrate relationship education into service at three levels.



Methods

A mixed-methods approach was taken in order to explore participants' implementation of relationship education and the pathways of change within their agencies following the training.

- Analyses were conducted with Stata 15 (StataCorp, 2017) and grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

Procedures: Qualitative and quantitative data were collected with hardcopy forms. Follow-up interviews were conducted 45 and 90 days post-training.

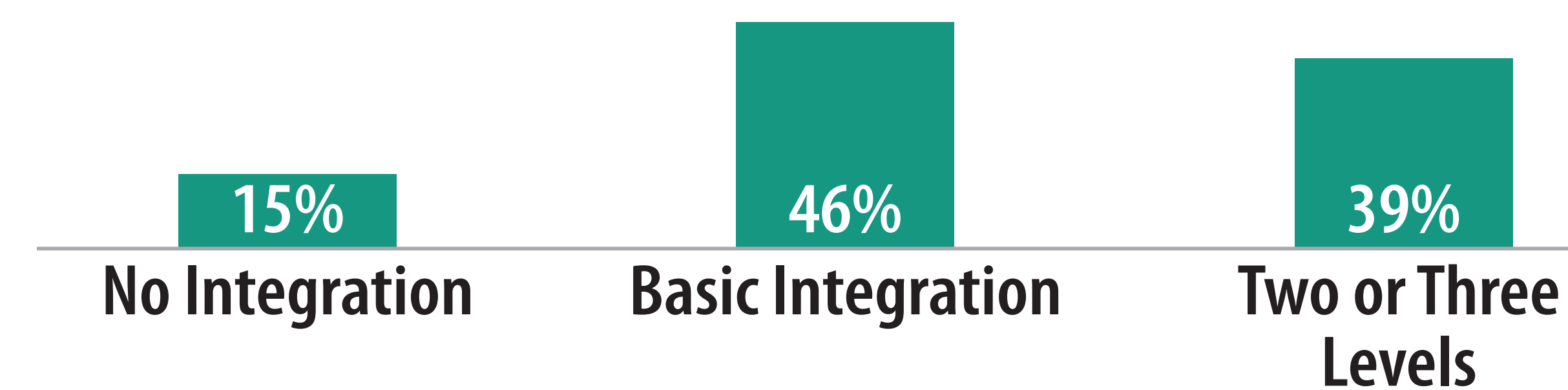
Sample

Subsample of participants from 23 states (n=139) who attended a training during 2015–2017 and participated in follow-up phone interviews.

Measures

- Integration Efforts
- Leadership (supervisor supportiveness)
- Personal Readiness
- Agency Readiness
- Technical Assistance

Findings



Levels of Integration Achieved

- Participants who self-identified as leadership or reported that their leadership would support integration were more likely to exhibit higher levels of integration ($r=0.20$, $p<.05$, and $r=0.23$, $p<.05$, respectively).
- Higher agency and personal readiness were also correlated with higher levels of integration (agency: $r=0.21$, $p<.05$; personal: $r=0.21$, $p<.05$).
- Many participants noted that immediate leadership was supportive and have taken steps to integrate relationship education.
- Barriers to integration came in many forms, with senior leadership facing competing priorities.

"I shared it with my Director of the Office of Prevention and Family Support. . . We talked about some suggestions that I had to incorporate relationship education into some of the other work that we're doing for some other federal grants, and she was on board with that..."
– Training Participant

Conclusions

This study highlights the drivers of integration within agencies, including support from leadership, agency and personal readiness, and technical assistance.

Implications

- Integration was enhanced through forming additional partnerships and seeking technical assistance.
- Innovative technical assistance that promotes change within agencies, such as virtual training and specific resources designed to translate research to practice, moved agencies towards integration.
- Research focusing on the mechanics of technical assistance can provide knowledge that guides others' efforts to best support stakeholders' integration efforts.