Background

The Institute for Translational Research in Children’s Mental Health (ITR) partnered with the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) to plan for and develop training materials related to children’s mental health for child protection professionals. Currently, a wide range of training formats are utilized in Minnesota to deliver content to the child protection workforce. Some of these formats include fact sheets, online modules, as well as in-person trainings and seminars. Yet it remains largely unknown which formats are most effective in reaching these busy professionals.

In an effort to better serve state, county, and tribal child protection professionals, listening sessions (focus groups) were designed and implemented to solicit feedback about the type of children’s mental health information that would be most useful. Additionally, the present study sought to identify the resources currently available to welfare workers and to ascertain the most effective means to deliver additional resources.

Results

Participant responses were organized into three areas: Existing Resources, Content Delivery Preferences, and Content of Interest (Figures 2-4).

Current Resources

Current resources (Figure 2), as described by participants, were categorized into four main themes: in-person workshops, trainings, and conferences; person to person and collaborative resources; websites and other online resources; and print resources. Participants identified regional differences in access to high quality resources.

Content Delivery Preferences

Participant responses about content delivery preferences (Figure 3) suggested that these resources should be offered in a variety of modalities rather than any one specific format. In addition, participants identified a number of features that they seek in resource materials such as practicality and information tailored to the work of child protection.

Content of Interest

Analysis of participant responses related to content of interest (Figure 4) revealed a need for additional resources and training opportunities focused on issues including medical information and medications, culture and diversity, trauma and Adverse Child Experiences, problem behaviors, whole family and intergenerational issues, specific diagnoses, and DSM 5. Participants also identified areas of content specific to a region or group. Foster parents were interested in resources related to mental health and the well-being of the whole family. Participants in rural Minnesota requested resources for addressing children’s mental health needs with limited resources and specialized staff.

Methods and Participants

In summer of 2015, eleven focus groups were conducted across the state of Minnesota (Figure 1) with a total of 93 child welfare professionals and foster parents. Sessions included nine participants on average, and lasted approximately 60 minutes. Content analysis was used to identify key patterns and themes that arose during the focus groups.

The target populations for nine of the listening sessions (1-8 & 11) were child welfare workers (n=55) and supervisors (n=31) with varying levels of experience in their field. The target population for the two remaining listening sessions (9 & 10) was foster parents (n=7). The range of experience in child welfare among participants was three months to 37 years and 15 years on average.

The majority of workers reported positions within ongoing child protection. Several other positions were identified including a truancy officer, social services department coordinator, guardian ad litem, parent support outreach coordinator, juvenile probation worker, corrections worker, foster care licensor, and child care licensor. Thirty-nine participants identified themselves as working specifically within child protection while nineteen reported working in the field of mental health.

Selected Citations

