Discovering What We Know – Innovations in Family Synthesis Research
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Mixed Methods Synthesis of Research on Childhood Chronic Conditions and Family
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Greetings from Our Research Team at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Background

- **Synthesis research** – summary of all pertinent studies on a specific question or topic
  - Contributes to evidence-based practice & knowledge development
  - Multiple approaches (e.g., systematic review, meta-analysis, mixed-methods)
  - Importance of a sound research plan
    - Problem formulation
    - Literature searching
    - Data extraction
    - Data evaluation
    - Data analysis & interpretation


Family Synthesis Research

- **Sufficient body of research for undertaking syntheses in multiple areas of health-related family research**

- **Key issues**
  - Determining the conceptual domain of interest - what will “count” as a family study for the synthesis?
  - Specifying the breadth of interest within the conceptual domain – Are there limits on the family domain of interest?
Purpose

- Examine the conceptual and pragmatic challenges of family synthesis research
- Describe a framework for delimiting the family domain of interest
  - Establishing feasibility
  - Assessing topical salience
  - Assessing level of relevance

Basis for Framework Development

- Mixed Methods Synthesis of Research on Childhood Chronic Conditions and Family
  (1R01NR012445, 09/01/11 - 06/30/16)

- Map the relationships found among family system, family member, condition management, demographic, & healthcare system variables

- Describe the nature of interventions involving families of children with CPCs and their effects on child and family outcomes.
Delimiting the Target Sample in Family Research

- **Phase 1 – Develop initial conceptualization of family research domain of interest**
  - Conduct **scoping study** to examine the volume of research addressing aims (feasibility);
  - Categorize **topical focus** of research (delimiting conceptual boundaries)

- **Phase 2 – Refine conceptualization and specify search criteria**
  - Define **levels of relevance** across topical areas (positioning of family)
  - **Assess relevance** of search yields (sample selection)

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Phase 1: Scoping Study – feasibility

- **Method**
  - Guided by definition family used in proposal
  - Published 2000-2010
  - 10 data bases searched
  - Comparison of yields using different search terms (general vs. condition-specific search terms)

- **Outcome**
  - Identified ≈ 900 English language research reports
  - Evidence of a sufficient body of evidence to address research aims
  - Further refinement of search strategies & targets

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Phase 1: Scoping Study – conceptual boundaries

- **Method**
  - Sub-sample of scoping study
    - ≈300 reports of qualitative & quantitative research
    - ≈35 reports of intervention studies
  - Extraction of information using a structured template
    - Qualitative/quantitative reports: Aims, sample, design, measures/themes
    - Intervention reports: Also included intervention profile

- **Outcome**
  - Topical map of content relevant to proposed aims
  - Delimitation of initial conception boundaries of synthesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topical Category</th>
<th>Example Areas of Inquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family system functioning</td>
<td>• Family relationships (e.g., satisfaction, attachment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Family structure (e.g., division of labor, routines)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Family processes (e.g., communication, conflict)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affected child functioning</td>
<td>• Health status (e.g., general health, condition control)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wellbeing and functioning (e.g., quality of life)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family member functioning (parents, siblings)</td>
<td>• Wellbeing and functioning (e.g. quality of life)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Performance of parenting role (e.g., parenting stress)</td>
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<td>Condition management &amp; control</td>
<td>• Symptom management</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Regimen management (e.g., adherence, monitoring)</td>
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</table>
Reviewer Response to Addition of Scoping Study in Resubmission

- **First submission**
  “The proposed research questions and guiding framework contain a plethora of variable/constructs. Although a “scoping study was performed, it only addressed the number of reports that included family as a variable or topic” (reviewer #3)

- **Resubmission**
  “The initial search provides data that confirms the study database is sufficiently large to move forward with the project” (reviewer #1).

  “Preliminary investigations have been utilized to design the study and provide key feasibility data” (reviewer #3).

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Phase 2: Addressing a Pragmatic Challenge

- More potentially relevant reports than resources
- **Screened ≈ 40,000; identified 3716 “potentially relevant” reports based on fit with topical categories; budgeted for final sample of 800
- Variation across reports in how family variables/factors positioned
  - Focus of study (e.g., relationship of family functioning and parenting competence to child adaptation)
  - Minor aspect of study (e.g., family income a covariate in analysis)
Phase 2: Assessing Level of Relevance

- Identified three relevance levels based on study aims
  - **High Relevance**: Addressed families' efforts to manage the condition, family functioning, performance of family roles, or family members' perceptions of family life.
    - Descriptive
    - Relationship testing
  - **Low Relevance**: Did not address relationship of family or parenting variables to child functioning or condition management (e.g. studies of health care utilization)
  - **Qualified Relevance**: Consistent with initial conceptualization of family research, but retained only if reporting a relationship among family system, family member & condition management variables.

Phase 2 – Examples of Qualified Relevance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Included studies of ...</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The relationship between parents quality of life &amp; children’s quality of life</td>
<td>The quality of life of parents of children with a chronic condition &amp; parents of healthy children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship of differences between parents and children’s perceptions of the seriousness of the condition and treatment adherence.</td>
<td>Comparisons of parents’ and children’s perceptions of the condition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship between family SES and parenting self-efficacy.</td>
<td>Descriptions of the demographic characteristics of families of children with a chronic condition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase 2: Make Final Sample Decisions

- Based on assessment of conceptual fit and level of relevance
  - Included all high relevance reports
  - Excluded all low relevance reports
  - Included qualified relevance reports addressing relationships among family system, family member, & condition management variables.

- Final sample (including update sample)
  NEED NUMBERS

Discussion

- Advantages of 2-phase process
  - Systematically addresses both conceptual and pragmatic issues
    - Scoping study to expand or further limit initial conceptualization of domain of interest
    - Relevance assessment to refine conceptualization & sample selection criteria
    - Provides replicable, systematic strategy for managing conceptual boundaries & size of final sample.

- Application of the framework
  - Levels of relevance could vary across synthesis studies
  - Important to link relevance assessment to study aims
  - If scoping study reveals low volume of eligible reports, relevance assessment may not be necessary
Questions