

Theory meets practice: A qualitative investigation of community mental health workers' understanding of evidence-based practices and programs

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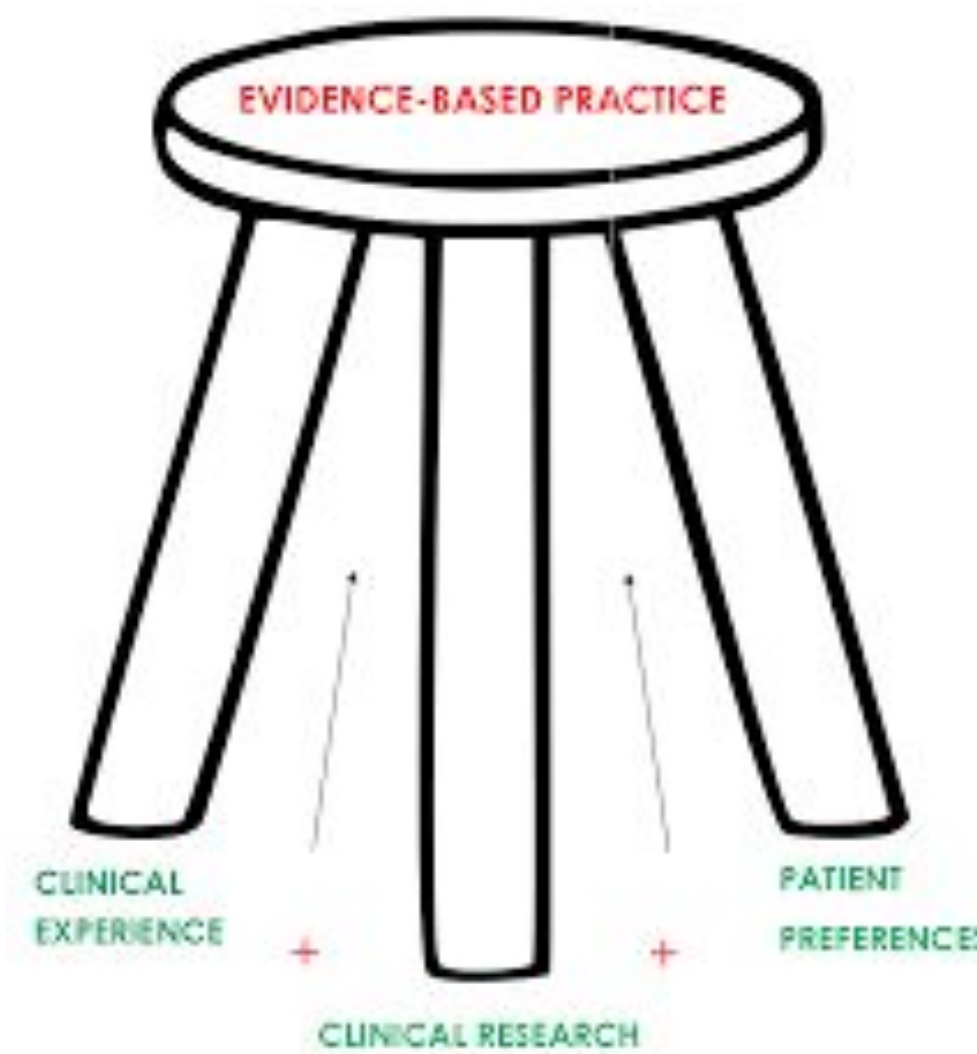
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Rationale

- Promoting healthy child development is key to preventing and mitigating numerous medical and mental health disorders
 - Significantly impacted by the availability and quality of mental health services and community support available to families
- Numerous Evidence Based Practices and Programs (EBPP) in mental health care exist for children and families, however broad dissemination of EBPP is challenging
- Implementation science is advancing the methods and strategies used to facilitate systematic initiation and sustainability of EBPs to improve the overall quality of health services in real-world settings (Eccles & Mittman, 2006)
- Community-Based Organizations (CBO) capacity to contribute to implementation science is crucial since CBOs offer a unique and essential perspective in the mission to translation knowledge to practice (Kothari & Armstrong, 2011)
- Expanding implementation science capacity among CBOs will:
 - Enable CBOs to have a more active role in expanding upon available EBPs for their clients
 - Further bridge the gap between research and real-world practice
 - Ensure children and families have the tools and knowledge to have productive and healthy lives

Methodology

- 18 participants (11 clinicians, 4 supervisors, and 3 administrators)
- Recruited from 3 CBOs in Oregon and Washington who offer services to families with children
- 15 female, 3 male; 72.2% White, 27.8% Hispanic/Latinx, 5.6% Asian
- 67% of participants had Master's Degree
- Examined community mental health organization worker's perspectives of EBPP through structured interviews (N=12) and focus groups (N=2)
- Asked questions investigating CMO worker's understanding of EBPP and Attitudes about EBPP
- Each interview transcript was coded by two researchers to ensure agreement of themes



Evidence-based practice is the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture and preferences. (American Psychological Association, 2021)

Results

Understanding of EBPP:

- Conducted a frequency count of participants understanding of EBPP based on the APA definition
 - 18 participants identified the empirical basis of EBPP
 - 1 participant identified clinician's judgment
 - 1 participant identified patient characteristics/culture/preferences

"It means taking the scientific data and research on interventions coupled with cultural and individual identity characteristics and finding where those two things intercept and practicing based on that."

"Evidence-based means that it has there's been some research about the practices and there has been sufficient evidence to show that it's beneficial to people."

Attitudes about EBPP:

- Positive attitudes about EBPP:
 - Empirical basis
 - Ethical practice
 - Structure

"Some of the other benefits are really being able to be transparent with clients about the risks and benefits potentially of services and when I know that something has been researched and who it's been researched for, I can much more easily and much more confidently talk about 'If you choose this method, this is the outcome that we're expecting to see...' and provides me some structure of like this is what it should look like and if it's not going that way, I need to divert and try something different."

Negative attitudes about EBPP:

- Gaps in research/literature
- Lack of cultural considerations
- EBPP does not encourage development of clinical judgment
- Misunderstanding of EBPP

"I think there's always gaps in the research, and so I don't know that we can always be 100% adherent, especially when there are like diverse groups of people who have been under-researched and under-studied and we don't know a lot about what works best with those folks and so I'm hoping that as time goes on we just keep adding to the literature more diverse ways with more diverse populations."

"I do think that sometimes it can be used as a buzzword that people want to just throw around to say like, Oh, well, we're doing evidence-based practice and just kind of wanted to say that as a blanket statement. Without really diving into everything that it means and how that's with the work we do."

Discussion

- All 18 participants were able to identify the empirical aspect of EBPP, but only one participant was able to identify clinician's judgment and personal characteristics
- The empirical basis of EBPP was widely found to be a positive attribute, with participants explaining the utility of having a literature base to fall back on when needed
- Several participants associated EBPP with ethical practice due to the reduction of bias and the tools provided for ethical practice
- The structure provided by EBPP supports organizations and clinicians and is especially useful to new practitioners
- However, the structure provided by EBPP was sometimes described as too rigid; some participants found that reliance on EBPP structure does not encourage development of clinician's judgment
- There are gaps in our research base disproportionately impacting minority populations
- Many participants acknowledged the lack of cultural consideration in evidence-based programs; however, the majority of participants did not identify personal characteristics as a component of EBPP when asked
- Several participants acknowledged that the term evidence-based practice is often used as a buzzword by organizations and practitioners without full understanding of what evidence-based practices mean.
 - This acknowledgement of the wide misunderstanding about evidence-based practices was an interesting finding, especially considering so few participants were able to accurately define EBPP when asked.

References available through QR code:

