September 1995

The Return to Family Intervention in Youth Services: A Juvenile Justice Case Study

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After more than a decade of relative neglect, youth services policymakers in the late 1980s began targeting the family as a primary focus of intervention in the response to a range of deviant behavior. One recent example of this return to family intervention has been a renewed emphasis on family services in juvenile courts and juvenile justice agencies. This case study describes one attempt to implement a new "family-focused" intervention approach as part of a larger return to treatment-oriented probation services in an urban juvenile justice system. Based on interviews and participant observation data gathered during a nine month field study in a Florida county, this paper describes ideological resistance, role conflict, and the informal adaptations of delinquency case managers in response to the new demands of this agenda. Implications for implementation of such policies in juvenile justice and other social service organizations, as well as conceptual questions about the logic and efficacy of the family focus policy itself, are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the scientific study of social problems, researchers interested in adolescent deviant behavior have focused on the family as an important causal variable (Wilkinson, 1974; Rothman, 1980). Similarly, social service administrators and policymakers charged with responding to youth problems such as drug abuse, mental illness, and delinquency have also identified the family as a primary target of intervention.

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The relative intensity of both researcher and administrator emphasis on the family in different historical eras appears to have been influenced as much by cultural and political trends as by new empirical findings or new evidence of the policy efficacy of family-focused intervention (e.g., Wilkinson, 1974; Wilson, 1987). During the 1970s, for example, interest in families among poverty researchers declined based in part on a critical reaction to culture of poverty theories (Lewis, 1966; Banfield, 1970) and a questioning of culturally biased intervention models (see Baratz and Baratz, 1970; Ryan, 1971). By the late 1980s, researchers and policymakers had again become interested in the family. Today, an expanding emphasis on family policy and intervention strategies appears grounded in an increasing national concern about the vulnerability of the traditional family unit in urban, underclass neighborhoods (Wilson, 1987; Sullivan, 1989), as well as a renewed academic interest in troubled or "dysfunctional" families (e.g., Van Voorhis et al, 1988; Forsythe, 1992).

Generally, compared with the 1960s and 70s, research and theory focused on families appears to be less grounded in deficit assumptions (e.g., Lewis, 1966; Banfield, 1970), more culturally sensitive, and more attuned to resiliency and collective coping strategies within a community and economic context (e.g., Sullivan, 1989; Jarrett, 1994). Current policy discussions also place more emphasis on strengthening, revitalizing and restoring families that are now depicted as distressed and temporarily disorganized, rather than burdened with cultural deficiencies (e.g., Forsythe, 1992; Wright & Wright, 1994). But while there is little disagreement about the general importance of the family in the response to youth deviance, questions remain about the larger policy assumptions underlying various intervention approaches (Howard, 1994; AuClaire & Schwartz, 1986; Wells, 1994). In addition, family services are implemented in the context of bureaucratic and ideological structures which impose limits on administrator and staff creativity and flexibility. Rigid agency and service system mandates, restrictive staff role definitions, and inflexible funding categories (e.g., Meyers, 1993), as well as professional disagreements about the proper role and scope of family intervention, may present formidable obstacles to service delivery. Together, these ideological and bureaucratic limitations provide

cause for concern about the capacity of existing social service agencies and systems to effectively implement new family intervention initiatives and programs.

Recent efforts to initiate family services in juvenile justice systems appear to be a case in point. This paper presents exploratory findings from field research which examined one juvenile justice system's effort to implement a "family-focus" approach to juvenile probation. Based on informal interviews, participant observation, and document analysis in an urban county in the State of Florida, this paper has two overall purposes. First, we wish to describe the early stages of implementation of the family-focus initiative as perceived and experienced by juvenile justice case managers, their immediate supervisors, and local administrators. Qualitative data are used to examine such issues as divergence in professional orientation and role conflict associated with the new family intervention policy. Second, we hope to raise general concerns about the formulation and implementation of similar policy in juvenile justice and youth services.

The Florida experience and the experience of this urban county is similar to that of juvenile justice systems which adopted an enforcement and control emphasis for probation in the 1980s and are now attempting to revitalize a treatment approach geared specifically to increased intervention with families. As a case study in the general implementation of family intervention policy in youth services, the juvenile justice system is somewhat unique in that its mandate also includes public safety and sanctioning goals, as well as treatment and service objectives. However, juvenile justice agencies are also typical of social service bureaucracies primarily grounded in an individual treatment intervention logic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the complexities of initiating family services policy in juvenile probation and the case manager's role in its implementation requires an examination of juvenile justice ideologies and professional orientations which define the role of the family in delinquent behavior. It also requires an understanding of the unique organizational context of juvenile probation and the dynamics and contingencies that may facilitate or impede implementation of new intervention approaches in these settings.

Juvenile Probation and the Juvenile Court

As a core component of the juvenile court treatment ideology, probation was historically viewed as an extension of the judge's mandate to prescribe individualized services and assistance in the "best interests" of juvenile offenders (Whitehead and Lab, 1990).[1] Although the reality of probation's control and enforcement function has always been apparent, an individual treatment ethic emphasizing counselling, service brokerage, advocacy and intervention in home or school conflicts has dominated probation work (e.g., Glaser, 1964; Conrad, 1982).

By the mid 1980s, broader transformations in social services policy and practice, a more punitive national political climate, a distrust of community based interventions in criminal justice (e.g., Rossum, Koller, and Manfredi, 1987), and the "just deserts" philosophy (Von Hirsch, 1976) had begun to influence juvenile probation. In addition, juvenile probation departments seemed to be increasingly affected by the more punitive control and enforcement focus of adult probation and by new surveillance technologies such as electronic monitoring and new supervision modalities such as intensive probation (Clear, 1991; Byrne, Lurgio and Petersilia,1992).[2] The impact of these influences was to challenge the previously unquestioned dominance of the treatment model in juvenile probation and encourage policymaker and administrator support for a surveillance-focused, or "sanction enforcement" agenda (Conrad, 1982).

Although this agenda remains dominant, the 1990s has witnessed a resurgence of practitioner and policymaker support for treatment as the guiding focus of juvenile community supervision. Arguments in favor of "revitalizing" or "reaffirming" the treatment model have become more intense in recent years (e.g., Palmer, 1992; McAllair, 1993), and according to some observers, are now filtering into policy and reinforcing the latent beliefs of many juvenile justice professionals in the efficacy of rehabilitative services (Palmer, 1992).[3] One important feature of this apparent rebirth of a treatment focus for juvenile probation appears to be a renewed emphasis on expanding the role of probation to include more direct and intensive work with families.

Family vs. Individual Intervention with Offenders

Since the founding of the juvenile court, the family has been viewed as the institution most responsible for delinquent behavior (Platt, 1977; Rothman, 1980). The justification for court intervention, based on the concept of *parens patriae*, was both an indictment of certain families as inadequate (especially poor and immigrant families) and an affirmation of the family's vital role in exercising "wholesome restraint" over children and youth (Commonwealth v. Fisher, 1905; Whitehead and Lab, 1990). In assessment investigations, early juvenile court judges required probation officers to compile an array of facts pertaining to the family including, as one judge noted, "the character of the parents and their capability for governing and supporting the child" (Rothman, 1980: 218).

There are a number of examples of a revitalization of interest in a family intervention focus for juvenile justice policy and practice (Sweet, 1991; Wood, 1990; Wright & Wright, 1994). New family intervention programs include a variety of parent training and family behavior modification approaches (Patterson and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984), family preservation (Henggeler, Melton & Smith, 1992), "home builders" (Forsythe, 1992), and a variety of crisis intervention and family treatment or "family systems" programs (McGaha and Fournier, 1987). In addition, more specialized family intervention units are now appearing in some juvenile courts, and there has been a renewed interest in the family court model as an administrative structure for integrating casework with delinquents, child welfare, child support and other functions (Rubin and Flango, 1992). National juvenile justice policy statements are beginning to cite family intervention as a renewed priority (e.g., Sweet, 1991; Wilson and Howell, 1993), and more training workshops for probation and parole professionals are being devoted to family services topics. Finally, delinquency researchers and theorists have become more interested in the family—albeit from new perspectives such as the role of abuse, family systems analysis, and differential oppression (Widom, 1992; Henggeler, Melton and Smith, 1992; Regoli and Hewitt, 1994; Van Voorhis et al., 1988).

But while some of these studies—especially program evalua-
tions of parental training and systems approaches—seem to have
gained the attention of policymakers (e.g., Wilson and Howell,
1993; Wright & Wright, 1994), thus far, implementation of fam-
ily intervention in the juvenile justice context does not appear
to be research-based or theoretically grounded (c.f., AuClaire &
Schwartz, 1986). In addition, mechanisms for integrating a family
focus into traditional probation and parole agendas are not well
developed and family intervention themes are not well artic-
ulated in the broader community supervision mission of most
juvenile justice systems. As Whitehead and Lab (1990: 374) ob-
serve in reference to probation, "what was once a rather clear
institution for supplementing parental concern by means of adult
advice and psychological/social work skill has become a matter
of controversy."[4] Thus, although a number of commentators have
suggested that probation and community supervision in juvenile
justice should give highest priority to intensive work with fami-
lies (Wood, 1990; McGaha and Fournier, 1987), such a focus may
be expected to provide significant challenges for those who must
implement family intervention policies.

Policy Implementation and Organizational Constraint

Although the current study was not designed to test spe-
cific hypotheses, two general bodies of literature—sociological
case studies of probation and parole decisionmaking and policy
implementation theory and research—provided guidelines and
sensitizing concepts for analyzing the transition from a sanction
enforcement to a family-focus model for probation. First, previ-
ous sociological case studies of probation and parole agencies
offer an important frame of reference for analyzing the social
organization of case work with offenders (e.g., McCleary, 1978;
Needleman, 1981; Jacobs, 1990). Generally, this literature sug-
gests that social control bureaucracies demand accommodation
to what staff may view as "impossible" demands and may en-
courage informal and sometimes dysfunctional adaptations in
work routines which mitigate against meaningful and effective
intervention with offenders.

Second, the policy implementation literature (e.g., Goggin et
al., 1990; Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1981) provides insight into

factors that may facilitate or impede system and agency movement toward the family focus. More specifically, theory and research on bureaucratic bargaining (Pfeffer and Selznik, 1978), "top down" reform efforts relying on hierarchical directives rather than "backward mapping" or "bottom-up" approaches (Elmore, 1978; Knott and Miller, 1987), and role expectations in organizations (e.g., Lipsky, 1980; Zurcher, 1983) are pertinent to the concerns of this study and may help to interpret both cultural and structural organizational resistance in the transition to a family-focus agenda. Also useful in understanding the implementation context is the conceptualization of social service professionals as "street level bureaucrats" (SLBs) who work in task environments often characterized by limited resources, ambitious and often poorly specified goals, and the sometimes conflicting demands of administrators and clients (Lipsky, 1980). In Lipsky's view, "although they are normally regarded as low level employees," the actions of SLBs ultimately define policy and constrain or facilitate implementation as they continuously adapt organizational mandates and modify policy goals to limit demands, control clients, ration services and generally manage work (Meyers, 1993).

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection and Sampling

The current study was conducted as part of a local process evaluation of juvenile justice case management services. The qualitative portion of this evaluation was based on a nine month field study which employed participant observation, informal interviews, document analysis, and an ethnographic perspective (Johnson, 1990; Patton,1990). The overall goal of the field study was to develop a holistic understanding of the family focus initiative and gain better insight into case managers' and their supervisors' "street level" perceptions of the initiative and their adaptations to new mandates in the implementation process. While this experiential perspective is frequently missing from accounts of the implementation process, case studies of criminal justice organizations which do provide the "thick" description needed to gain this perspective (Bruyn, 1963) have not for the most part

focused on policy implementation (e.g., McCleary, 1978; Needleman; 1981).

Data collection was conducted in case manager and supervisor offices, juvenile court, and a variety of field settings. The researchers interviewed 10 of the 11 case management supervisors in the three regional offices and over 40 of the 76 total case managers. A sample of case managers were also accompanied on more than 20 field visits. In addition, the researchers attended numerous staff meetings in the individual case management units as well as district-wide meetings. All of the interview and observational data presented in this paper were collected by the co-authors of this paper, a white 41 year old male and a white 32 year old female. With few exceptions, the researchers worked independently in conducting the fieldwork.

The Policy Context: Implementing the Family Focus in a
Juvenile Justice System

Following a ten year emphasis on surveillance and sanction enforcement-focused probation (known as "community control"), the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS), the agency responsible for services and supervision of delinquent youth, was assigned a treatment and rehabilitation mandate by the legislature as part of the Florida Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 1990 (Florida Statute, Chapter 39). The new legislation was the culmination of several years effort by youth advocates to improve the image of juvenile justice and build consensus around the need for better assessment and services for youth entering the system. The emergence and passage of the legislation at this particular time was the result of a combination of factors including a political climate favorable to progressive reform, the decision of several senior legislators to make juvenile justice reform a personal crusade, and general policymaker sentiment to resolve costly lawsuits against the department and avoid further litigation (Schwartz, Barton & Orlando, 1991).

Consistent with national trends described earlier, the state's implementation protocol for family intervention with delinquents that eventually emerged was not clearly grounded in research or theoretical literature. Rather, after two years of a slow transition from a bifurcated intake and probation system for community supervision of delinquents to a case management approach

to probation, a newly appointed state juvenile justice director within HRS concluded that case managers should spend a much greater proportion of their time in direct field contact with youth and families.[5] To communicate the importance of family contact, HRS headquarters issued a policy directive which required that each case manager devote a minimum of 24 hours per week to direct contact with youth and families in settings outside the office. While this contact standard was to be used in performance evaluations, local HRS districts were allowed substantial discretion in how these directives would be implemented, monitored, and enforced and in deciding what kinds of encounters could be counted as "contacts" (i.e. phone calls, collateral contacts with school counselors and teachers, travel time) for purposes of monitoring compliance. The Juvenile Justice Manager (JJM) in the local District studied in this research chose to place maximum emphasis on direct family intervention by adopting a strict, literal interpretation of the 24 hour rule. Administrative staff in the Central District Office were then instructed to develop and implement strict procedures for monitoring case manager and case management unit compliance with the quantitative standard.

A quantitative analysis of the effectiveness of the family focus initiative's implementation based on aggregation of contact data from mandatory timesheets revealed that field contact hours with offenders and families increased only slightly, to an average of three hours per week, from an average of less than one hour, over a period of approximately nine months (Nyhan, 1993). From monthly examination of this quantitative data, District administrators concluded that case managers and supervisors were resisting the transition to family focus simply because they had become comfortable with office work and were "lazy." One emerging hypothesis of the qualitative study, however, was that more complex factors—including case managers' street knowledge of situational contingencies (Lipsky, 1980) and their perceptions of restrictions on their professional discretion (c.f. Needleman, 1981)—might be important sources of resistance.

FINDINGS

Overall, District managers, supervisors, and staff agreed that the family played an important causal role in delinquent behavior

and merited the attention of case managers. Beyond this general agreement, there was little consensus about the relative importance of working directly with families and the most effective techniques for doing so. Three broad implementation issues confronted District office administrators in their efforts to make the transition from offender to family focused case management.

First, differences in ideology and professional orientation associated with a tension between the sanction enforcement focus and values tied to the reemergence of the treatment/services emphasis weakened commitment of some staff to family focus and seemed to exaggerate the intensity of normally anticipated resistance to change. In particular, case managers and supervisors comfortable with the sanction enforcement model resisted the family focus initiative based largely on objections to new, and what they viewed as inappropriate, job demands associated with this agenda and on feelings of role conflict. Second, more complex issues associated with managing the transition process emerged as a result of conflicting policy implementation goals, staff resistance to monitoring efforts, and bureaucratic bargaining and adaption by case managers and supervisors. Third, these adaptations, which appeared to be a result of management's continued efforts to enforce compliance with the quantitative standard, led to several unintended consequences. These consequences in turn point to larger policy and management issues regarding integration of family intervention with agency and system goals and with an overall mission for juvenile justice reform.

Professional Ideology, Control, and Role Conflict

While the first few months of family focus implementation witnessed a great deal of general opposition, it was possible to distinguish two ideological "camps" among supervisors and case managers. The first camp, a small group who seemed to share some background experience in child welfare protective services, foster care, or related fields and who generally held social work or family counseling degrees, supported family focus in principle. Generally, the professional careers and belief systems of these staff had been built around family work. Family focus *supporters* told interviewers that they had always conducted a significant amount of their work in the home and were comfortable with this emphasis. Most endorsed what one supporter called "womb

to tomb" case management in which one worker was assigned responsibility for one family. However, even these supporters expressed frustration with the approach to implementing family focus.

The second camp, a much larger group more likely to have begun their careers in juvenile justice and to share a probation rather than social work focus, opposed the concept in principle, arguing that a family focus, even if it were possible to implement, would be ineffective and/or inappropriate. This group expressed significant doubts about the practicality of working with families and providing useful assistance in the home setting. The *opponents* of the family focus concept made several arguments which reflected an ideological adherence or professional orientation to the sanction enforcement focus for probation. Essentially, these arguments centered around four value differences between the sanction enforcement orientation and the emerging treatment emphasis based on field services to families. These differences include: locus of accountability and responsibility; case manager control in the office vs. home environment; appropriateness of family intervention for the delinquent population; and role conflict and competing demands.

Locus of Accountability. In the "old" days, according to veteran supervisors and case managers, the expectation was that youth were responsible for meeting probation staff in the office or courthouse rather than waiting for case managers to arrange meetings in the home.

> The judges then were much more strict and let the kids know they had to be here [in the office]. There were kids packed into the halls at the courthouse with their families waiting to see their counsellors. Kids would show up here for their meetings. We got a lot of business done that way.
>
> Before, the kids were responsible for coming in to see the counsellor and the judges let them know they had to show up, *or else*. Now we have to go out and find them . . . they're not accountable to anybody.

Moreover, under the sanction enforcement emphasis, accountability for crime typically lay completely with the offender. For those who maintain this orientation, the delinquent youth is the preferred target of intervention.

> The *kids* are the ones who will get in trouble in court [if they reoffend or if sanctions aren't completed], not the family. And if a kid goes out and kills someone or commits a serious crime, you can bet nobody will care that the counsellor did all this great work with the family.
>
> At first I had the expectation that the kids were like those in foster care. I assumed that they came from abusive and dysfunctional family backgrounds. I was really surprised..it's *not* the family. The problem here is the *kid*.

Case Manager Control. For opponents of the family focus emphasis, the office setting provided a measure of control not possible to obtain in the frequently "chaotic" home environment. Visiting the home regularly was viewed as an unwise and ineffective use of time. The office environment, on the other hand, was said to instill discipline and respect for authority.

> It's easier to get youth and families to talk outside the home. Often we get more productive contact done in the office, because at home it's hard to separate them [the youth and the family].
>
> It's loud and disorderly in these homes. It's difficult doing business and keeping the counselor in control long enough to get things done when confronted with so many distractions.
>
> I think it is important to visit the family—we need to know *where the home is* and what the environment looks like—but usually, once is enough—we don't need to keep going back there.
>
> In the old days [the early 1980s], kids on probation were required to attend court-ordered group therapy at HRS offices. Kids had to behave according to strict rules [e.g., they were not allowed to swear or fight] during the hour or two they were in the group sessions. Requiring this behavior in the office had to have some spillover effect on their behavior at home and at school. If you can behave by some rules here, you can at school too.

Appropriateness. A concern addressed by several more experienced case managers and supervisors was the appropriateness of the family focus for serious offenders—especially older adolescents with chronic, sometimes violent histories. These offenders were believed to require more restrictive, if not punitive, options.

> The program office is out of touch with the nature of offenders we are dealing with. Offenders today are different from the offender of 10 years ago and are not appropriate for family focus.

> Family focus won't work for these kids who are all carrying guns now or [who are] in families where there is no hope; maybe they all need to be in Boot Camps or in independent living [for older youths].

Some argued that family focus should be applied selectively, rather than generally, and that it might be appropriate for youth:

> . . . about 12 to 14 and under. Once they're about 16, they're not family members anymore anyway and the school has given up on them. What's the point of trying to deal with the family? We're not like PSI [protective services] where the families are a threat to the kids. These kids are a threat to their families . . . they're as afraid of their kids as everybody else.

Role Conflict. Even some supporters of family focus agreed with opponents that District managers had yet to define the parameters of family focus or to clarify when these interventions were and *were not* appropriate. In the case of "dysfunctional" families, several case managers argued that family interventions yielded few benefits.

> I would have to raise the parents first. There just isn't enough time and resources, so I focus on the client. The client is my primary responsibility.

Opponents of family focus also argued that there had been no "trade-offs" for the extra responsibilities this new emphasis entailed:

> Nothing else [responsibilities] has been taken away, but now they [case managers] must also deal with the needs of the family. We still have the victims calling us everyday for restitution . . . they don't care if we've done all this good work with families.

Many requirements associated with the sanction enforcement role remained (see Maupin, 1993). In addition to paperwork demands, large caseloads in some units, and the significant demands on time of court hearings, case managers also reported that it was often necessary to complete reports and other "office work" associated with case management (including new family focus monitoring forms) in their homes after hours. Some case managers believed that family work was reducing their effectiveness in these other tasks. Others simply expressed displeasure at

"being forced" to visit the home. More than anything else, op-
ponents of family focus expressed frustration with the demands
of a new and unfamiliar role that was linked to ambiguous and
conflicting supervision goals. As one supervisor noted:

> Case managers *were* expected to be reporters of behavior, but now
> they're expected to be agents of change. Most don't want to be
> responsible for a kid's behavior or responsible for this change. For
> years they were told that they were to be like adult community
> control officers . . . expected to focus on sanction enforcement and
> (on) reporting clients as soon as they reoffended. Now they're being
> torn in different directions.

Not unlike other policy contexts, some of this role and ideo-
logical conflict seemed to be imbedded in the policy itself (e.g.,
Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1981). The remainder of this paper
briefly describes how this conflict played out in the early stages
of the implementation process.

Reaction, Bargaining, and Adaptation

As Lipsky (1980) has observed, the contingencies which poli-
cymakers and managers regard as inducements or constraints in
the implementation context may be very different than those im-
pacting street level bureaucrats (SLBs). For this reason, both incen-
tive structures and the gap between top administrators, middle
management, and line staff may result in unexpected responses
from staff such that: "The policies that result from routine treat-
ment are often biased in ways unintended by the agencies whose
policies are being implemented or are antithetical to some of their
objectives (Lipsky, 1980:84)". In this case, the discretion of front-
line case managers and mid-level supervisors become a critical
contingency in implementation.

From the District administrators' perspective, the 24 hour
standard and strict monitoring procedures were necessary to force
most workers to alter their office-bound routines. While this study
provides no conclusive evidence to confirm or refute this belief,
what *is* suggested from our interviews and observations is that the
contact requirement failed to anticipate street level organizational
contingencies surrounding juvenile justice case management (c.f.,

Meyers, 1993) or the power of line staff to make, break, or distort policy (Lipsky, 1980). The answers to questions regarding the key determinants of policy compliance (e.g., skill and commitment of implementers, Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1981; clarity and communication of policies and standards, Van Horn and Van Meter, 1982) can be found in the perceptions of implementing agents and the informal culture of the street level environment.

From their perspective, case managers faced several practical difficulties in their attempts to adapt work schedules to comply with the 24 hour contact standard. The difficulties most commonly reported to the researchers and observed on field visits included: scheduling and arranging home visits; coping with extensive travel time; locating youths and families (often families had moved or were not at home when case managers visited); resistant families; and "chaotic" home environments which provided unique challenges to conducting casework. As a result, case managers, like the parole officers studied by McCleary (1978), learned to cut corners as a coping tactic. Contrary to the unit supervisors in McCleary's research however, most supervisors in the present study sided with their workers. In opposing the performance standards as a serious affront to their integrity as professionals—as well as an "impossible" requirement—several supervisors even appeared to lead the opposition of their staff.

In this way, supervisors began to negotiate the limits of the new family focused role with District managers. Generally, supervisors responded to mandates which restricted their discretion to manage workloads by exercising discretion *not to* encourage, monitor, and/or sanction staff in efforts to implement or resist implementation of family focus. Specifically, most neither supported nor disciplined staff, and few "coached" case managers on how to maximize compliance with the standard without violating the spirit of family focus. Moreover, many supervisors adjusted to what they viewed as impossible demands by ignoring or even encouraging staff adaptations that clearly ran counter to the intent of the family-focused initiative. Few seemed clear about what case managers should try to accomplish in the home. When asked what she wanted case managers to accomplish on home visits, for example, one of the more experienced supervisors responded, "I

just tell them to fill out their forms (e.g., required assessment in-
struments, consent waivers)." More in line with the old sanction-
focused school, one supervisor insisted that the "important thing"
(in home visits) is to go over the court requirements and "stick
to the court order . . . make sure they are doing their [community
service] hours, going to school, abiding by other sanctions, and
not committing new offenses." Such an emphasis clearly targets
the youth rather than the family and seems otherwise contrary to
the holistic intervention approach associated with family focus
(e.g., Forsythe, 1992).

Defeating the Goals of Family Focus: Unintended Consequences

Since open opposition to the 24-hour contact standard itself as
a tool for implementation was viewed as dangerous by supervi-
sors and staff (in numerous meetings with the District Adminis-
trator, supervisors and case managers expressed no opposition to
the standard), adaptations were primarily subversive in nature.
"A lot of workers play games to get their hours in," said one
case manager who reported that at least one worker had been
"getting in time with her clients by driving them around on stops
to see *other* clients." Some case managers reported that colleagues
manipulated time sheets, and that others met the standard by
spending most of their time with "easy" kids or predictable fam-
ilies. In addition, since driving time was not counted as contact
time, some case managers focused on clients that they were able
to locate with a minimum of difficulty.

Several counsellors told us that they felt forced to act contrary
to their professional judgement and in some cases had to neglect
or ignore principles of good case management (e.g., service bro-
kerage, assessment, collateral contacts with school personnel).
Few incentives remained for case work that did not involve direct
contact, and for many workers, disincentives prohibited using
discretion to employ other methods.

> 24 hours a week of client visitation is not worthwhile. If my kids are
> in programs and are doing what they are supposed to be doing, all
> they need is a phone call.
>   Some kids need close supervision and you need to spend time
> with them. With other kids you need to check on them every week,
> but they are doing what they are supposed to be doing. There is a

lot of pressure to spend 24 hours in the field, but it is a waste of time. More time is needed to coordinate services, to get kids in programs. There is not enough time for resource development—which takes a long time if you're trying to get community groups to work with your kid.

Some kids I need to see every week, but with others I could send a Fax to FOSI [the Florida Ocean and Sciences Institute day program]. Now I drive just to get my hours. I guess they want us to start having lunch with these kids.

You could spend lots of time with a client without doing a proper needs assessment. You will not move them one step forward. What good does family contact do if you don't have time to make a referral . . . we're supposed to be getting services for them (families and kids), but I spend so much time driving I don't have enough time anymore to arrange for referrals. You can spend lots of time without any quality.

The 24 hour standard also seemed to alter the logic used by some workers to schedule and execute home visits. One supervisor told us that "most case managers (now) prefer to call in advance to make sure that the kid will be home in order to *make sure they get the contact hours*" (unless the case manager) "believes a kid is trying to avoid us and then we might want to surprise him." Clearly, the disincentive for making surprise visits (or for tracking a youth who is avoiding supervision) could be viewed as counterproductive if one of the goals of home visits is client monitoring. Whether monitoring and surveillance (generally associated with the sanction enforcement focus) is, or should be, a goal of these family focus visits was never clarified by the District office. One could argue, however, that if one goal is to observe normal interaction in the family and to try to bring about change in this interaction, unannounced visits would be necessary.

Perhaps the most significant and unfortunate unintended consequence of the performance standard was its tendency to create (or increase) opposition to the family focus concept itself and to deflect attention from its substantive meaning. Overall, the researchers heard little discussion of the *quality* of contact desired in family focus; virtually all discussion was focused on *quantity*. When asked for a definition of family focus, some made vague references to "involving the family a lot more" or "meeting them

more often," but most workers first mentioned the 24-hour con-
tact rule and clearly equated the standard and the family focus
initiative.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As policymakers are again embracing a renewed emphasis
on family intervention, there has been much discussion of new
program alternatives and "best practices" (eg., Wright & Wright,
1994), but little critical examination of the implications of the
family agenda for larger systemic and policy issues (e.g., Wells,
1994). Little attention has been paid to the structural and proce-
dural complexity involved in redirecting services to families in
organizations in which staff are comfortable with work routines
organized around responsibility for individual clients. Based on
exploratory interview and observational data, this research doc-
uments an urban juvenile justice bureacracy's initial attempt to
make the transition from youth-centered to family-centered inter-
vention. While tentative, the interpretation in this case study of
organizational contradictions and unintended consequences that
resulted from implementation focused on policy mandates may
provide a benchmark for examining similar transition efforts.

Limitations and Implications for Implementation Research

As a case study in the implementation process, this research
has several limitations. For example, this effort to describe and
document one phase and selected aspects of implementation of
the family focus initiative does not take account of other features
of the implementation environment and other contingencies in
what is often a complex process (e.g., Goggin et. al., 1990). While
we examined ideological orientation and commitment of street
level staff to the implementation process and the informal adap-
tations of supervisors and case managers to new policies and
enforcement procedures, other critical features of implementation
such as the clarity of the policy and adequacy of the enforcement
process (Van Horn and Van Meter, 1981) received only superficial
attention.

In addition, this study does not permit us to draw conclusions
about the validity of claims by case managers and supervisors that

they were overworked and overwhelmed by the new require-
ments. Nor are we able to determine the extent to which resis-
tance to implementation of monitoring procedures and perfor-
mance standards was primarily a function of concern about loss
of professional discretion or was primarily based on opposition
to monitoring of *any kind* and to being held accountable for one's
work. Future research on implementation of similar initiatives
may benefit from a focus on these issues, as well as an empha-
sis on patterns of communication in similar youth social service
organizations and the impact of these patterns on implementation
and the response of staff to performance standards.[6]

There are, however, several key findings that add to previous
research and tend to confirm key propositions from the imple-
mentation literature. First, ideological disagreement with the fam-
ily focus initiative increased the level of opposition for case man-
agers and supervisors who had been socialized into a sanction en-
forcement focus. In addition, case managers and their supervisors
experienced role conflict related to the need to balance conflicting
demands (e.g., paperwork vs. time with families) in attempting to
make the transition between the divergent policy mandates of the
sanction enforcement and family intervention agendas. Second,
these initial effects of the transition process can be understood in
the context of policy implementation perspectives which question
the efficacy of top down management approaches to organiza-
tional reform and point to inherent weaknesses in what Elmore
(1978) has referred to as the "bureaucratic process model" of
implementation (Knott and Miller, 1990). The top down approach,
which in this case utilized quantitative performance standards to
ensure that case managers spent greater proportions of their time
with families, failed to accomplish implementation objectives and
led to significant opposition. Viewed by case managers and su-
pervisors as an unwarranted infringement on their professional
discretion, this approach led to defiance by SLBs in response to
efforts to limit their autonomy to manage their work environ-
ment (Lipsky, 1980) and had several unintended consequences.[7]
Whether or not such results could be anticipated in every case, it
is clear that staff and supervisor involvement in designing both
policies and monitoring standards may improve prospects for

successful implementation of reforms involving systemic changes in service protocols (see Maupin, 1993).[8]

Systemic and Social Policy Implications

Because it is clear that the family focus initiative in this jurisdiction was not reflective of theoretically-grounded and research-based "best practice" in family intervention services, the primary importance of this case study is its implications for organizational resistance to change in social service bureaucracies. Beyond management and implementation issues, however, the current exploratory study has several policy implications for assessing the role of family intervention in juvenile justice and youth services systems.

Overall, while few would argue with the need for juvenile probation to return to an emphasis on rehabilitative and field-focused family intervention, a probation focus on families raises a number of questions. Some of these were articulated by the ideological dissenters among case managers and their supervisors in this study who expressed concerns about: the applicability of family focus to *all* families (including dysfunctional and/or abusive families of older youths); the importance of the family in delinquency causation in all cases; and trade-offs between family work vs. intervention with offenders, victims, and community groups. Such questions may arise in part because family oriented intervention practices in some agencies and systems have thus far been discussed and implemented in a policy vacuum. As a result, intervention techniques are not linked to goals that flow out of an overall mission, and performance standards are therefore likely to be viewed as meaningless or arbitrary. Questions not addressed by social service managers about the rationales for new techniques and priorities among competing responsibilities (e.g., family work vs. paperwork) are sure to be raised in opposition by street level bureaucrats who must alter work routines to carry out reforms, and role conflict should be an anticipated outcome.

From a juvenile justice systems perspective, such questions suggest the need for placement of a family focus in the context of an overall mission that links family intervention with sanctioning, public safety, and rehabilitative objectives of interventions

with delinquent youth. A more holistic and "balanced" approach that would include families, as well as other community "customers" (e.g., victims) of juvenile justice, as targets of intervention (Maloney, Romig and Armstrong, 1988; Bazemore, 1992) would provide one such context and a alternative mission.

From a larger youth social services perspective, the one policy vacuum surrounding the renewed focus on family intervention appears to be a social structural and economic one. In part, the difficulties in intervening with families experiencing economic and other forms of stress resulting from poverty and neighborhood disorganization and obstacles to implementing even well planned and widely supported youth service and development interventions are a result of broader social structural forces (e.g., Wilson, 1987). In this larger context, family interventions which attempt to expand the scope of influence beyond a focus on "problem youth" may be targeting individuals who are themselves *almost as vulnerable* to these forces (i.e., parents). Economic and social isolation in urban neighborhoods may place limits on the ability of families under such stress take advantage of assistance intended to strengthen capacity to supervise and nurture adolescent children. The family focus, while an apparent improvement over clinical approaches which isolate youth for treatment and services, fails in this regard to also target community institutions such as schools and local economic institutions in an effort to create new, more empowering roles for youth and impoverished adults. As two of the strongest advocates of a family focus approach in juvenile justice observe:

> . . . the interaction between parents and children takes place in a broader social and cultural environment. Schools, workplace, community organizations, child care facilities, and health care systems play important roles in developmental processes. (Wright & Wright, 1994: pp. 191)

Failure to take account of these forces that impinge on families of delinquents and other youth-at-risk may exacerbate tendencies of administrators and policymakers to blame families (see Ryan, 1971)—or to blame direct service staff when such interventions fail to accomplish intended objectives.

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Notes

1. Although the proportion of youths now placed out of home in commitment and residential programs has increased in recent years (Butts and Poe, 1993), probation remains the most frequently used disposition in juvenile courts. Approximately 57% of all juveniles formally adjudicated in juvenile court are placed under some form of probation supervision (Butts and Poe, 1993; Whitehead and Lab, 1990).

2. Signs of these changes in juvenile probation (and in juvenile aftercare) were numerous and included changes in local and state juvenile probation policy, formation of specialized units and programs designated as "sanction enforcement units", "tracker programs", "surveillance units" and "intensive supervision programs" (Armstrong, 1992), and in some states, replacement of the term "probation" with terms borrowed from adult probation such as "community control."

3. Some of this movement toward renewed interest in treatment has been subtle and evidence of a shift in focus is anecdotal. Keynote speeches, conference workshops at professional meetings, and trade journals in the late 1980s, for example, which began to feature such topics as "revitalizing treatment" and "treatment is alive and well," explicitly questioned the limitations of the surveillance, enforcement and sanction focus and challenged research suggesting that treatment doesn't work (e.g., Martinson, 1974; Lab and Whitehead, 1988).

4. An irony of juvenile court ideology is that families are often blamed for delinquency, but interventions and resources are directed almost exclusively at young people. Moreover, the juvenile court has historically done little to strengthen the family's capacity to nurture and supervise, and parents have had few if any rights in the disposition of their children (Lab and Whitehead, 1990). As a result of the vague historical mandate of the juvenile court as both welfare and justice institution, juvenile justice professionals have historically experienced ambivalence about the treatment/services vs. surveillance/enforcement components of their role (Rothman, 1980; Lab & Whitehead, 1990).

5. We appreciate the admonition of an anonymous reviewer that it is important not to equate *family intervention* with *contact* or *home visits.* Although less than

ideal implementation in this study does not permit a fair assessment of the feasibility or effectiveness of a more complete model of family intervention (e.g., family systems), it does allow us to examine obstacles to implementing a perhaps not atypical, family intervention intiative in a large, bureaucratic social services agency. As part of the transition in probation services to a case management system, the job title of probation staff was changed from "community control officer" or "intake officer" to "case manager." The new case management postition integrated probation and intake functions.

6. One important limit to effective two-way communication of standards not explored in this paper, for example, is the power of organizational climate and organizational culture (Shein, 1986) in stifling creative dissent over standards that are perceived by staff as impossible. On the other hand, an organizational development alternative to the bureaucratic process model of implementation (Elmore, 1978) might encourage open discussion of policy clarity and possible contradictions, as well as allow ideological disagreement and feelings of role conflict to surface on the front end (Maupin, 1993).

7. The contrast between such efforts to control discretion among juvenile justice workers, many of whom held advanced college degrees, and recent efforts to *maximize* discretion and encourage field level problem solving among police officers (e.g., Moore and Stephens, 1991), many of whom have only high school diplomas or their equivalent, is instructive.

8. Advocates of new, more inclusive and empowering management techniques for human services such as total quality management (TQM) (e.g., Deming, 1980; Martin, 1993), might view the general failure of implementation described here as a predictable and inevitable result of top-down management protocols (Knott & Miller, 1987).