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Commentary: Empirically Validated Treatments and Child Clinical Interventions

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1.1 Background

Over the past three decades, cognitive-behaviour therapists have developed a variety of well validated intervention for assisting children and adolescents with behavioural and emotional problems, and for assisting their parents and teachers. Neville King (1997) urges the Australian Association for Cognitive and Behaviour Therapy (AACBT) to be more proactive in the promotion of empirically validated treatments.

2.1 Improving Access to Effective Interventions

The Western Australian Child Health Survey (Zubrick & Silbern, 1994) showed that only 2% of children with identifiable behavioural or emotional disturbance received treatment from mental health specialists. This poor access to effective treatment is influenced by several factors.

3.1 Lack of Services for Rural, Indigenous, and Minority Groups

There has been little research examining the specific problems of these groups. The low participation rate of minorities in clinical trials evaluating psychological treatments justifies caution in concluding that existing treatments are effective with these populations.

4.1 Minimal Systematic Attention to Prevention Initiatives

The wide spread nature of the behavioural and emotional problems in children argues for a preventively focused population perspective which aims to provide psychologically sound information to parents and other carers on how to promote children's development and on the prevention and management of behavioural and developmental problems.

5.1 The Need for Disciplinary Approaches

All professional working with children need better training in delivering empirically validated treatments. A major challenge for behaviour therapists is to develop a cost-effective, competency based training programs relevant to other disciplines to ensure that well validated treatments are available in the community.

6.1 Research into Effective Dissemination

There is a need for research examining the role of training and supervisor process which affect adoption and innovation.

7.1 Summary and Implications

This commentary argues that empirically validated treatments for child and youth behavior and emotional difficulties are available, but they are relatively inaccessible to the vast majority of Australian children and their families. Although effective interventions have been developed, few children receive these services. There are many children who have identifiable problems or who are at increased risk for psychosocial problems whose needs have not been adequately addressed by either the research or the professional community. A comprehensive, preventively focused clinical science of prevention is needed to improve the reach and impact of psychological services for children. The successful promotion of empirically validated interventions is a major challenge for behavior therapists. There is a great deal of work to be done to ensure these treatments are available to the public. Efforts to foster professional help development through workshops and the like must be seen in a broader context of systems change that is required to both initiate and maintain change in professional practices.

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