



Report 3-2004

February 2004

A Preliminary Evaluation of the Missouri Family Development Training and Credentialing Program (MOFDC)

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Introduction and Background

In this brief, we present preliminary findings from a quantitative evaluation of the Missouri Family Development Training and Credentialing Program (MO FDC). The MO FDC is designed to reorient human service practice to the family support approach. It is part of a growing nationwide movement whose goal is to empower both workers and families, and which recognizes the need for credentialing or certification of direct human service providers (Dean, 1998; Sexton, Lobman, Constans, Snyder, & Ernest 1997). Based on a curriculum developed at Cornell University, *Empowerment Skills for Family Workers, 2nd Edition* (Forest, 2003), it is in place in 14 other states including: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Washington. The FDC is increasingly regarded nationwide as the most comprehensive credentialing program for family support workers.

The University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) Family Studies Program leads the implementation of the FDC Program in Missouri, organizing a partnership of educational institutions, state agencies, not-for-profit organizations, agency coalitions, frontline workers and families throughout the state. The MO FDC classes occur at local sites throughout the state by facilitators who have completed an application process and have attended the MO FDC Facilitators Institute held by UMKC. The facilitators return to their local communities and offer the classes to frontline family workers. After the successful completion of 90 hours of community-based, interagency instruction, as well as a standardized exam and portfolio review completed by UMKC, class participants earn The Missouri Family Development Credential from the UMKC Family Studies Program.

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While at least 15 states offer the FDC Program, to our knowledge there have been qualitative evaluations of only two: the New York and Missouri Programs. The NYS FDC Program evaluation (Crane, 1999 & 2000) found workers who completed the FDC report: (1) increased self-esteem, confidence, and assertiveness in helping families as well as in setting their own goals for higher education and career path; (2) improved communication and relationship skills in professional lives with families and co-workers, as well as in their personal lives; and (3) increased knowledge and use of empowerment-based family support skills in working with families. Supervisors of these workers reported higher staff morale and lower turnover.

Results from a small focus group of Missouri FDC recipients support the findings of the NYS qualitative evaluation by attributing to the FDC training program: (1) a new ability to take care of themselves, avoid burnout, and to set limits with clients; (2) being more organized and focused in their work; (3) an increased skill in communication with clients, coworkers and supervisors; and (4) a new feeling of respect from coworkers, supervisors, and colleagues that followed the receipt of the MO Family Development Credential (McCarthy & Smith 2003).

While these results are informative, the number of respondents studied was very small. Larger sample sizes are needed to better understand any effects of the program. To our knowledge, there has been no prior quantitative evaluation of this program in any state. Here we present preliminary results from the state of Missouri.

Sample and Methods

During 2002 and 2003, survey data were collected prior to the beginning the FDC classes from 48 FDC participants. After the completion of the class, which varied from six to nine months, we gathered post-training data from the same individuals. We received post-training information from 39 FDC (81% response rate) participants. Additionally, we collected identical information from a comparison group of front line family workers not enrolled in the FDC program. Members of the comparison group (n=53) completed pre-test surveys, and 39 (74%) completed the post-test instrument. Information from this group is critical since any findings of change in the treatment group could be attributed to numerous external factors, such as the changing economy and state fiscal crisis occurring as we collected data. By having the comparison group, who also faced many of the same challenges, we can better isolate any findings from the FDC program itself.

Data examined in this brief come from respondents in St. Louis, Kansas City, Hannibal, Moberly, Springfield and West Plains, and Washington County. Thus, numerous areas of the state are represented and we have information from both large metropolitan areas as well as much smaller communities.

The written survey instrument took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The variables of interest represent topics found to be important to the well-being of frontline family workers in the prior FDC evaluations and other studies exploring the job experiences of human service workers.

Turnover is a huge issue for frontline workers; the average cost of replacing one \$8.00/hour frontline worker is \$5,500 (Sasha Corporation, 2003). It is of particular concern for frontline

human service workers as continuity of care for the families and individuals seeking help is critical for the best assistance possible. Thus, we ascertain whether an individual has the same job post-test as at the time of the pre-test.

We also collected information relating to global self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), and self-mastery (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978), as well as job related attitudes, such as professional self-esteem, and satisfaction with work conditions. Additionally, information relating to overall job satisfaction, and how the worker views her or his job relative to other jobs was also determined from the survey.

Finally, basic demographic data, such as age, marital status, education, income, and time in current job and current field was also collected.

Results

Table 1 describes the respondents and notes any key differences between the treatment and comparison groups. Overall all, respondents had a mean age of almost 44 and had substantial (11) years of experience, particularly in their field, if not in the current job. This may be in contrast to FDC participants enrolled in other state programs. Respondents were also asked to rate their job, relative to an “average job” which rated a 100 (Table 2). Participants in the FDC program rated their jobs much higher than those in the comparison group at Time 1. However, there were no significant differences between the groups on hours worked, years in field, years in job, job ratings, job flexibility, age, or marital status.

There appear to be some differences among the two groups, which could affect outcomes. First, those in the treatment group are slightly less likely to be employed by a government agency, although the percent employed by nonprofits is similar. Although FDC participants are more likely to be high school graduates, a smaller percentage have at least a college degree, relative to the comparison group. Thus, 96 percent of those in the treatment group had completed high school, relative to only 90 percent in the comparison group. However, just over 64 percent of those in the treatment group had a college degree or some graduate school, compared to almost 78 percent of those in the comparison group. Income also varied between the groups, with those in the comparison group reporting a higher mean income although the difference was not significant.

Outcomes

In order to understand the effects of the program, we assessed whether there were differences between the groups on change from Time 1 to Time 2 in the following outcomes: global self-esteem, mastery, job satisfaction, and worker turnover.

Because of the many pre-test differences between the groups, we chose to estimate a series of multivariate regression models predicting change in the various domains. In each of these models, we controlled for age of the respondent, education level, time in current job, job rating,

reported job flexibility, hours worked per week and marital status². Additionally, we included a dummy variable noting the treatment or comparison group.

We found significant differences for two of the outcomes examined. Specifically, participants in the FDC program were significantly more likely to report a greater increase in global self-esteem as well as greater increase in overall sense of mastery.

We did not find any significant differences related to either job turnover or job satisfaction between the two groups. For the former, greater time is likely needed to truly assess the important issues of job stability and turnover.

Although these results are early, and limited to two cohorts of classes in Missouri, the findings are promising. Data collection is ongoing and we look forward to increasing our sample size as more participants complete the MO FDC Program. We are encouraged that this study contributes to overall research and literature about empowerment-based family support work.

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² We had originally included income in the model. However, many respondents did not answer this question, and it significantly lowers the number of respondents in the model. Additionally, results were similar with and without this variable included.

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Table 1

Descriptive Information on Employment and Educational Outcomes

Key Variable	Treatment Group		Comparison Group	
	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents
Place of Employment				
Government	33.0%	16	44.0%	23
Non profit	54.0%	26	54.0%	29
For profit	4.0%	2	2.0%	1
Other	8.0%	4	0.0%	0
Totals	99.0%	48	100.0%	53
Education Level				
High school graduate	4.2%	2	9.6%	5
Some college	31.3%	15	13.5%	7
College graduate	33.3%	16	46.2%	24
Post college	31.2%	15	30.7%	16
Totals	100.0%	48	100%	52

Table 2

Descriptive Information for Other Control Variables

Key Variable	Treatment Group	Comparison Group	Average
Median household income	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$35,000
Mean household income	\$38,637	\$45,372	\$42,126
Age in Years	44.8	42.5	43.7
Years in current job	5.1	4	4.5
Years in current field	11.9	9.7	10.8
Hours worked per week	41.9	40	40.9
Percent married	50%	54%	52%
Reported job flexibility (0-100 scale)	65.9	66.8	66.4
Job rating (0-200 scale)	158.4	134.5	145.8

Suggested Citation

Mosley, J. & Smith, D. B. (2004). *A preliminary evaluation of the Missouri Family Development Training and Credentialing Program (MOFDC)*. Retrieved [Month, Day, Year], from University of Missouri – Columbia, Institute of Public Policy Web site: <http://www.truman.missouri.edu/ipp/publications/briefs.html>