

The role of contracts for bridging child welfare and behavioral health organizations with the implementation of a cross-system collaborative intervention.

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BACKGROUND

Ohio START (Sobriety, Treatment and Reducing Trauma) is an evidence-informed intervention designed to support families facing co-occurring substance use disorder and child maltreatment.

Ohio START implementation depends on cross-system collaboration between county-level public children service agencies and behavioral health providers.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study focuses on the role of contracts (formal arrangements) for “bridging” two different service systems together.

Contracts are written formalized agreements establish the structure and process for collaboration

Contracts specify how these agencies will work together, share goals, and performance expectations. They have potential to support strong collaboration needed to implement models like **Ohio START**.

We assessed the specificity and quality of contracts to identify factors associated with collaboration strength during implementation.

DATA SOURCES & ANALYSIS

Contract Data

We analyzed contracts ($n=105$) from 32 Ohio county agencies from 2015 – 2021. These contracts reflect counties from Cohort 1 and Cohort 2.

Using a deductive coding approach informed by the **Ohio START** Practice Manual, we reviewed all contracts to identify the presence, usage, and meaning of concepts related to the specification of collaborative service delivery during implementation.

We identified four high-level codes for our analysis in NVivo: Presence/Usage of Collaborative Language; Information Exchange; Funding and Resources for Sustainability; and Accountability. Using an inductive coding approach, we identified sub-codes (a-d) for each high-level code to identify emerging themes that support collaboration.

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|--|---|
| <p>1. Presence & Usage of Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> a. Purpose & Mission (Goals-Values) <input type="radio"/> b. Roles & Responsibilities <input type="radio"/> c. Other | <p>3. Funding & Sustainability for Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> a. Budget Amount & Source <input type="radio"/> b. IT Infrastructure & Support <input type="radio"/> c. Training & Development |
| <p>2. Information Exchange for Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> a. Type of Information <input type="radio"/> b. Method of Sharing <input type="radio"/> c. Frequency of Sharing | <p>4. Accountability for Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> a. Shared Roles & Responsibilities <input type="radio"/> b. Monitoring & Evaluation <input type="radio"/> c. Sanctions & Termination <input type="radio"/> d. Joint Target Outcomes |

Survey Data

We supplemented the contract data with survey data collected from county-level public children service agencies ($n=85$).

We administered the Wilder Collaborative Factory Inventory (WCFI) to assess the overall strength of collaboration. WCFI assesses 20 factors that impact a successful collaboration. These factors are organized into six categories: environment, membership, processes and structure, communication, purpose, and resources needed for collaboration.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

Results from the WCFI support the findings from the contract data.

Counties with more precise, detailed, and encompassing contracts indicate higher levels of contract quality and specificity. These counties also scored higher on WCFI for collaboration strength.

WCFI scores indicate that counties from both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 show signs of collaboration strengths but also areas for improvement. Overall, Cohort 1 showed slightly more collaboration strength than Cohort 2.

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

Findings contribute to our understanding of strategies that may be used to support high quality contracts, collaboration, and implementation of cross-system interventions.

For researchers, there is a need for more systematic assessments of the extent to which bridging factors identified in our study are linked to more distal implementation, service delivery, and client outcomes.

For practitioners, the strength of these collaborations could be improved by the inclusion and refinement of several contractual factors:

- Precise language around collaboration and partnerships
- Clarification on roles and responsibilities
- Clear methods for information-sharing (e.g., data-sharing, client progress reports, invoicing)
- Identified resources (personnel, funding, IT)
- Performance measurement for service delivery activities

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OhioSTART Cohorts 1 and 2

