Tailoring Interventions for Families At-Risk:  
A Research Synthesis  
Alana G. Schnitz, Anna Wallisch & Judith Carta

Introduction

- Hart & Resley (1995) indicated that by age 4, children in poverty hear approximately 30 million fewer words than children in professional households.
- Family risk factors associated with poverty have been shown to affect how parents interact with their young children and set the stage for later development (Pungello et al., 2010; Schiefe, Mullis, & Shriner, 2008).
- Many of these risks associated with poverty can directly influence how parents interact with children, interventions aimed at enhancing parent responsiveness have often tailored their interventions to address risk factors or consider risks in their design.
- Despite the importance of increasing engagement of high-risk families in language promotion interventions, there is a paucity of empirical literature examining factors related to parents’ engagement and participation in these interventions.

- The purpose of this summative review was to examine what is known about family risk factors and how they are related to parents' engagement and implementation of interventions for preventing the word gap.

Research Questions

- How do family risk factors influence parents’ ability to engage, implement or actively participate in language interventions for their children?
- How do family risk factors moderate the impact of language-promoting interventions on young children’s outcomes?
- How have interventions for promoting children’s language been tailored specifically to address or accommodate family risk factors?
- How have risk factors affected recruitment and engagement of families’ participation in language-promoting intervention research?

Methods

- Inclusion criteria: 1. selected participants based on having a risk factor (e.g., poverty, parental substance abuse, intellectual disability, teen parent, child abuse, child neglect, or a combination) 2. included risk as a moderator of parent or child language outcomes or used the risk variable to tailor the intervention 3. included a parent or relative as the Interventionist 4. included children birth to 5 years 5. was a language based intervention

Risk Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Families by Study</th>
<th>No delay</th>
<th>Poverty (25)</th>
<th>Multicase (13)</th>
<th>Speech Language delay (2)</th>
<th>Very Low Birth Weight (1)</th>
<th>Down Syndrome (1)</th>
<th>Developmental disabilities (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant Demographics</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quality Analysis

- Summary: While we know very little about how risks affected impact of the intervention on child outcomes (only 5 studies), results point to low parental education levels/reading proficiency as key variables; other risk factors explored include poverty and health.
- 28 studies tailored interventions for family risks; 3 reported they tailored, but did not describe how; we know little about how tailoring affects adherence or outcomes.
- Some studies got feedback from families on how to tailor interventions
- Only 1 article described how family risk factors affected recruitment 5 articles described how risk factors affected parents’ engagement in the intervention.

Implications for Practice and Research Practice

- Family risks may affect children’s language outcomes directly—through the influence they have on the parents’ interactions with their children, but also risks can affect how well and how often parents engage with intervention and other program supports for their child and family.

Discussion

- Programs and practitioners need to consider family risks in the supports they provide for parents to address their risks (like mental health, availability/referral to health services); and how to intensify interventions so that families have adequate opportunities to learn and become fluent in the interventions.
- Programs should find ways to reach out to families with risk who may be reluctant to become involved in interventions.
- Programs need to understand that families in poverty may face several barriers to accessing and sustaining their involvement. Programs need to find ways to help families address those barriers.

Research

- How to tailor intervention and whether tailoring makes a difference
- Learn about whether tailoring affects parents’ skill in engagement and fidelity of their implementation
- Need to see if tailoring can be a scalable aspect of interventions.