



**CHILDREN AND FAMILY
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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Children's Advocacy Centers and Research

A Review of What We Have Learned and a Look to the Future

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Today's Presenters

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Overview

- Brief description of Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs)
- Challenge of CAC research
- Review of research on CAC efficacy
- Brief overviews
 - Research on CAC practice
 - Basic research in CACs
- Future research prospects, including children's reaction to research



Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs)

- Multidisciplinary centers that provide a comprehensive and coordinated response in child abuse investigations
- Serve victims of sexual abuse, serious physical abuse, exploitation etc.
- Child forensic interviews in child-friendly facility – single interviewer
- Multidisciplinary team involved throughout, including witnessing forensic interview



CAC standards

- Multidisciplinary team (MDT)/joint investigation
- Forensic interviews
 - Child-focused setting
 - Trained interviewer
 - Legally sound and neutral
 - Coordinated to avoid duplicative interviews
- Provides or facilitates:
 - Medical exams
 - Mental health services
 - Victim support and advocacy
 - Case review
- Cultural competence and diversity

Disciplines represented on MDT (pt. 1)

Law enforcement	98.2
Child protection	97.7
Prosecutor	96.4
CAC staff	95.0
Forensic interviewer	88.3
Victim/witness advocate/assistant	86.5
Health professional	83.8
Mental health professional	91.0

Source: Whitcomb & Cross (2015) *Survey of CAC Directors*. Unpublished data



Disciplines represented on MDT (pt. 2)

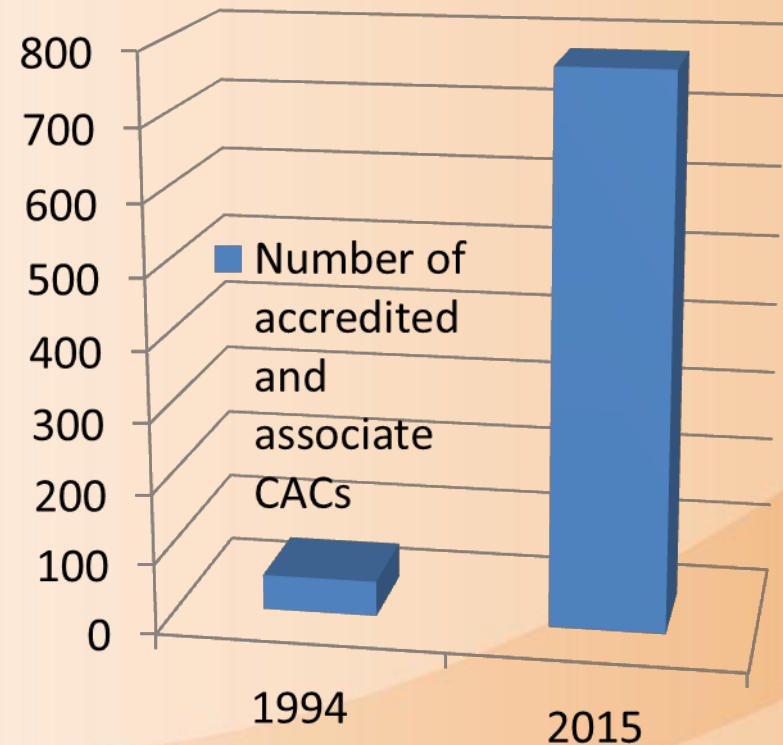
Juvenile court	38.3
Rape crisis counselor/advocate	27.9
DV counselor/advocate	22.5
Schools	17.6
Probation/parole	16.2
GAL/CASA	15.8
Sex offender treatment provider	6.3
Child's attorney	3.6



National Children's Alliance

- Membership organization of CACs
- Accredits member CACs
- Includes associate CACs not yet accredited
- Conduit for limited Federal funding of CACs

Growth of CACs





Challenges of research on CACs

- Multi-faceted intervention with various processes and outcomes
- Key CAC variables like *coordinated* and *child-focused* are difficult to measure
- Many CAC effects are indirect
- Difficult to find comparison groups
- CACs vary so much it is difficult to generalize
- Federal and foundation funding for research in CACs is difficult to obtain



Multi-Site CAC Evaluation

- Four CACs participating:
 - DCAC (Dallas, TX)
 - NCAC (Huntsville, AL)
 - LCC (Charleston, SC)
 - PCAC (Pittsburgh, PA)
- Comparison communities without a CAC from each state also participating
- Cases enrolled in the study 2002-2003



Data Collection Includes:

- Site visits and interviews with key informants
- Case information:
 - Case characteristics
 - Investigation procedures
 - Case outcomes
- Child and caregiver interviews:
 - Child well-being measures
 - Services provided to the family
 - Experiences with the investigation



Benefits of CACs: Findings from the Multi-site CAC Evaluation (from Cross et al., 2007, 2008)

	CAC communities	Comparison communities
More child-focused interview location	CAC facility 83%	CPS agency 22% Police agency 18% Home 16% School 10%
More coordinated investigations	81%	52%
More team interviews	28%	6%
More case reviews	56%	7%
More children received forensic medical examinations	48%	21%
More referrals for mental health services	60%	22%
Increased parent satisfaction	>70%	53%



Multi-Site Study:

Child Protection & Criminal Justice Outcomes

- Odds of child placement 2.1 times greater in CAC communities than non-CAC
- No differences from comparison in filing criminal charges in 3 CACs
- One CAC was more likely to file criminal than its comparison but also more likely to dismiss cases



Limited rigorous CAC research other than the Multi-Site Study

- National Children's Advocacy Center bibliography (2013) lists 15 CAC articles
- Herbert & Bromfield (in press) reviewed 27 CAC articles, theses and dissertations
- Most studies conducted between 2005 to 2009 – research has slowed down!
- Only a handful of studies with comparison groups



Mixed results from rigorous studies on criminal justice outcomes

Study	Finding
Joa & Edelson, 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Criminal charges filed more often with more counts in CAC than comparison• Convictions more likely in CAC cases
Wolfteich & Loggins, 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CAC did not differ from joint CPS-police team• Time to disposition less in CAC
Edinburgh, et al., 2008	No difference between CAC and comparison
Cross et al., 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3 CACs did not differ from comparison on cj outcomes• 1 CACs was more likely to file criminal charges but also more likely to dismiss cases
Walsh, et al., 2008	Time to disposition less in CAC than comparison
Miller & Rubin, 2009	Rate of felony prosecutions was 69% greater in district with expanded use of CACs than in comparison



Rigorous studies suggest impact of CACs on service delivery and police involvement

Number of Studies	Finding
3 studies	Medical examinations more likely in CACs vs. comparison
2 study	Referral to mental health services more likely in CACs
2 studies	Police more likely to be involved in investigations in CACs
1 study	Children in hospital-based CAC more likely to receive medical care than in non-CAC comparison



Pronounced Gaps in CAC Research

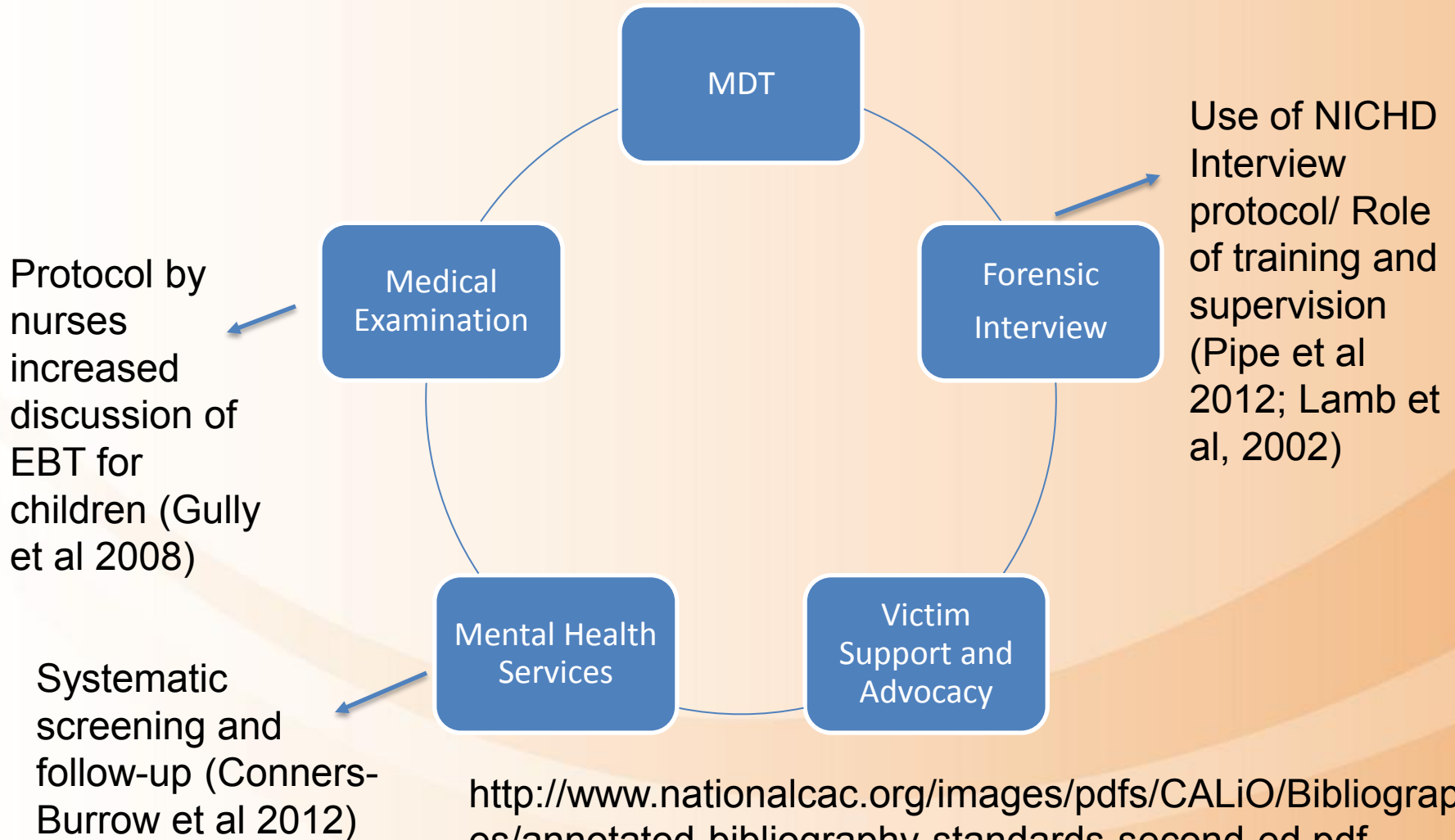
- Herbert & Bromfield (in press)
 - Needs more developed logic model
 - No consistent outcome measures
 - Very few CAC studies of child well-being or trauma
- No studies of victim advocacy
- No studies of police investigation



Questions for Future Efficacy Research

- CACs are gateway providers – but research does not appear to be capturing this. How do CACs increase access to services?
- What are the best practices of the core standards – especially victim advocates, MDT and involvement of law enforcement?
- What are the key outcomes to measure?

Research on CAC Practices





CACs as a venue for child maltreatment research

- CACs are an excellent venue for a wide range of research
- Over 30 studies on various topics have been conducted
- Some were offshoots of efficacy studies and some are purely basic research
- CACs should take pride in their contribution



Some of the topics studied in CACs

- Forensic interviewing
- Child disclosure
- Offender confession
- Medical examinations
- MDTs
- Prosecution
- Disposition times
- DV assessments
- Child psychotherapy
- Exploitation experiences
- Self blame
- Trauma symptoms
- Parent-child relationship
- Maternal support
- Multiple perpetrator cases
- Secondary trauma
- Prevention

Some examples of research conducted in CACs

Topic	Findings	CACs involved	Reference
Forensic interviewing	Children as young as 4 can provide significant details	Salt Lake City, UT	Lamb et al, 2003
Child disclosure	Girls, older victims at onset or at interview, and victims with caregiver support were more likely to disclose	Charleston, SC Pittsburgh, PA Dallas, TX Huntsville, AL	Lippert et al., 2009
Offender confession	30% confession rate, higher with younger offenders	Charleston, SC Pittsburgh, PA Dallas, TX Huntsville, AL	Lippert et al., 2010
Secondary traumatic stress	Lack of job support, and other factors predicted secondary stress	National survey of CAC forensic interviewers	Bpnach & Heckert, 2012
	Personal hx of trauma predicted secondary stress	Survey of therapists linked to CACs	Trippany et al. , 2003



CAC research continued

Topic	Findings	CACs involved	Reference
Medical exams	DNA documented in 27% of acute adolescent cases	St. Paul, MN	Edinburgh, et al.,
	Pediatricians varied in diagnosing exam results as normal, abnormal or indeterminate	Sample of CAC pediatricians	Starling et al., 2013
Therapy for victims	78% of CAC clinicians use trauma-focused CBT, though not every component	National survey of CAC clinicians	Allen & Johnson, 2012
Prevention	<i>Stewards of Children</i> impacted knowledge, attitudes, and preventive behaviors	Sample of child care professionals recruited through CACs	Rheingold et al., 2015



Children's Perception of Research

- A minority of children report being upset
National Survey of Children Exposed to
Violence Study (Finkelhor et al., 2014)
- 5% of youth aged 10 to 17 reported being at
all upset
0.8% reported being pretty or a lot upset
- Only 0.3% say would not participate again had
they known the questions



Children's Perception of Research

- 8% of children reported being upset in a large survey in the UK (Radford et al., 2013)
- 6% of children reported being upset in the National Survey of Adolescents Replication study (Zajac et al., 2011)



Perception of Research after Experiencing a CSA Investigation

- 77% of parents of children with a child sexual abuse investigation (N=46) said questions were not at all upsetting (Walsh et al., 2015)
- And 13% said they were a little upset
- All parents said yes – knowing now what was in the survey, they would still agree to participate
- All teens (N=11) said not at all upsetting and would participate again



How to Undertake CAC Research

- Make program evaluation and research a regular part of your organization
 - Build in research components into new and existing data systems
- Consider the benefits of student internships
- Be proactive – if you see a potential area for research, contact professionals/universities/organizations studying those topics



Summary and Discussion

- Need for more research on CAC/MDT response
- Need to clarify key outcomes and specific activities that lead to those outcomes
- Enormous opportunities for CACs



Contact us!

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