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# Measuring Consumer Satisfaction in Family Preservation Services: Identifying Instrument Domains

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Stephen A. Kapp and Rebecca H. Vela

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*Measuring consumer satisfaction in the social services has become an important source of feedback for the improvement of service delivery. Consumer satisfaction has recently been incorporated into family preservation evaluation. This article reviews instruments used to measure consumer satisfaction in family preservation services and other related areas. Trends in current practice are examined and instrument dimensions are identified. Finally, some recommendations are made about the application of consumer satisfaction measurement in family preservation services.*

As social workers, we acknowledge that client input helps us to assess the effectiveness of the services we provide. Knowing how consumers are coping after our intervention and whether our services are making an impact are valuable components of evaluation research with future implications for program planning and development. Likewise, knowing whether consumers are satisfied and to what degree they are satisfied is useful information that can contribute to the improvement of programs and the delivery of services. In addition, having information about the effectiveness of our programs facilitates addressing questions posed to us by legislators, public officials, funding sources, and the general public (Damkot, Pandiani & Gordon, 1983).

The field of consumer satisfaction has grown rapidly in the past two decades providing researchers, program evaluators, administrators, and practitioners with a variety of instruments with which to measure client satisfaction. In the last decade, technology has provided researchers with the means to reduce the time involved in the collection of data, provide greater anonymity to respondents, and offer almost instant analysis of data. These two factors, then, facilitate and encourage consumer-based research in the social services.

Faced with the task of measuring client satisfaction in family preservation services as part of a university-state contract, the purposes of our investigation were to understand the state of consumer satisfaction in family preservation, identify trends, select helpful tools and ideas, and share our findings with an interested audience.



An initial review of article titles and abstracts in the social work literature database revealed that client satisfaction in family preservation services is not a well developed area; therefore, we reviewed the literature with the following goals in mind: (a) collect samples of instruments used for measuring consumer satisfaction with family preservation clients or samples of instruments that could be modified for the purpose of measuring such services, (b) examine trends in this type of measurement, and (c) identify dimensions of consumer satisfaction in family preservation services. This article then describes instruments used to date to measure client satisfaction in family preservation services (FPS) and in related areas. We examine trends in current practice and offer suggestions regarding client satisfaction domains for inclusion in data collection and measurement instruments.

### **Consumer Satisfaction Instruments in Family Preservation Services: A Brief Background**

Until recently, family preservation evaluation research did not include measuring consumer satisfaction with services. In family preservation services as well as in other human services, public social service agencies are not typically supported economically by clients (Reid & Gundlach, 1983), and therefore agencies lack the incentive to measure client satisfaction. This may have been one of the reasons for the lack of consumer satisfaction measurement. Secondly, public social service entities tend to "maintain a monopoly over the services they deliver" (Giordano, 1977, p.35) causing consumers to have little or no choice among service providers, and in this situation, it seems unnecessary to know whether clients are satisfied with the services. Additionally, "perhaps...the low value placed on client judgment" (Russell, 1990, p.43) may contribute to the lack of interest in consumer satisfaction in FPS. Finally, in a situation where resources for evaluation are limited, researchers may be less likely to focus on the undeveloped realm of consumer satisfaction measures when funding tends to focus on outcomes, not determined by consumer input, as accepted measures of effectiveness. This is especially true when there is, at best, a tentative relationship between consumer satisfaction and outcomes (Denner & Halprin, 1974(a); Larsen et al., 1979; Lebow, 1982). All of these factors have contributed to the lack of emphasis on client satisfaction. On the other hand, Magura and Moses (1984) point out that as resources in child protective services decrease and the demands for provider accountability increase, it would behoove agencies to rely "on feedback from clients, who certainly are in a good position to know whether and how they have been helped" (Magura & Moses, 1984, p.100).

One of the earliest attempts to measure consumer satisfaction in the area of family preservation was made in the mid-1980s (Hayes & Joseph, 1985). Mail and telephone surveys were employed by Hayes and Joseph to determine client satisfaction with family-based services (FBS). Pecora and his colleagues (1991) found that the few FBS programs



who were engaged in gathering client satisfaction data were using this information informally to gauge client satisfaction rather than as a formal component of program evaluation. Pecora, et al., also pointed out that most of the instruments utilized in consumer satisfaction up to that time tended to consist of global measures of client satisfaction and lacked specific questions or items that were behaviorally anchored. They suggested that "developing more objective outcome measures that focus[ed] on specific areas of child, parent, or family functioning" (p.277) might improve satisfaction outcome studies. Consistent with these types of suggestions, we reviewed some recent applications of client satisfaction measurement.

### **A Review of Selected Consumer Satisfaction Instruments**

An initial search for general information on client satisfaction was undertaken. Databases storing articles in peer-reviewed journals in social work, the human services, health, psychology, mental health, and program evaluation covering the period between 1970 and 1997 were searched by one of the authors. From the vast number of articles located, 47 were selected for their relevancy to the area of interest. Two unpublished reports on mental health consumer satisfaction that were brought to our attention by colleagues were included in the review. Four on-line sources and four journal articles on touch-screen surveys were reviewed as well. Although these did not concern human services specifically, the authors were exploring the possible feasibility of utilizing the latest electronic devices in measuring consumer satisfaction. The total number of articles reviewed was 57. Of these, 14 described survey instruments and included information on the use of the instrument and psychometric properties, if the latter were available. These instruments ranged from a generic form of client satisfaction, e.g., Client Satisfaction Questionnaire and its various versions (Larsen et al., 1979; Nguyen et al., 1983; Roberts & Attkisson, 1983) to measuring satisfaction with parent education, e.g., Parent Education Satisfaction Scale (Poertner, 1985).

A second search for instruments used specifically to measure client satisfaction with family-based or home-based (sometimes also referred to as intensive family preservation) services and/or closely related services was carried out. The social work and child welfare related literature yielded the following: two FPS question guides for qualitative research projects (one a journal article, the other a dissertation); one interview instrument geared for child protective services clients in which consumer satisfaction was a component of the instrument (in a book); one quantitatively measured instrument on consumer satisfaction with social services (in a journal). The literature yielded a total of four instruments on consumer satisfaction with family preservation services, children's protective services, and social services in general. Contacts with the following institutions yielded five additional instruments: School of Social Welfare, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS; Behavioral



Science Institute (BSI), Seattle, WA; Research and Training Center for Children's Mental Health, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL; The Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago and (working jointly with) Westat, Inc., Rockville, MD. Of the published studies evaluating family preservation services that were reviewed, only one study included a consumer satisfaction component (Pecora et al., 1991). In this study, the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, based on the BSI/ Homebuilder's instrument, was utilized. As stated earlier, we reviewed instruments found in the literature or brought to our attention by colleagues and associates; therefore, it is possible that not all instruments of this kind have been included in this review.

A brief profile of the consumer satisfaction instruments reviewed follows. They have been grouped into two categories: Family Preservation and Traditional Family-Based and Social Service Instruments. The instruments in the latter category were included in the review because they are related to our area of interest and because, in the light of the scarcity of FPS instruments, we were open to the possibility of their adaptability (with some modification). Of the nine instruments, reliability has been established for only two—Magura and Moses' *The Parent Outcome Interview* and Reid and Gundlach's *Measurement Scale of Consumer Satisfaction with Social Services*, both non-FPS instruments. (See Tables 1. and 2. for a more detailed description of all the instruments.)

### **Family Preservation Instruments**

***Behavioral Science Institute/Homebuilders.*** The BSI's Homebuilders (1996) program uses a 12-item instrument consisting of closed and open-ended questions covering case outcomes, therapist competency and availability, goals, and a final open-ended question for additional comments.

***Consumer Satisfaction Survey of Washington State.*** This 11-item instrument (State of Washington, 1997) is based on the BSI/Homebuilders survey and consists primarily of closed-ended questions covering outcomes, therapist competency and availability, satisfaction with services, and a final section for comments.

***Family Preservation Services - Client Satisfaction Questionnaire, State of Kansas.*** A survey developed by the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare (1997) for use by the State of Kansas, the 19-item Client Satisfaction Questionnaire consists primarily of closed-ended questions covering therapist/worker competency, sensitivity and availability, and satisfaction with the services, the agency, and the therapist/social worker. Two final open-ended questions address the most helpful thing about having received family

preservation services and suggestions for changes or additions to services. A Spanish translation of the instrument is available.

***National Evaluation of Family Services, Caretaker Interview - Interim.*** As this article is being prepared, a national evaluation of family services is being undertaken by Westat, Inc. of Rockville, MD, The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, and the James Bell Associates in Arlington, VA (1997) under a federal grant administered by the Department of Health and Human Services. The evaluation is being carried out in four states: Kentucky, Tennessee, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The interim interview instrument includes a group of 12 questions (#33- #44) that may be categorized as client satisfaction items and address worker competence in terms of communication, availability, assistance with accessing services, and counseling as well as services, outcomes, goals, household repairs and safety.

***Family Preservation Services interview guide.*** Keaney (1994) developed an interview guide for surveying parents who had received both child protective services and home-based family preservation services (FPS). The face-to-face interviews were guided by the following three questions:

- (1) What are the parents' perceptions of the use of authority in protective service,
- (2) What are the qualities in the approach of the FPS and the protective workers to the families that the parents identified as helpful and unhelpful, and
- (3) What are the parents' views and experience with service continuity? (p.105)

***Question guide for parents'/primary caretakers' views of family-centered, home-based service.*** Coleman and Collins (1997) developed a question guide for interviewing parents and primary caretakers on their views of family-centered, home-based services. The following three open-ended questions guided the interview:

- (1) What was the most helpful in your counseling with (Therapist)?
- (2) What did not help, or what did you dislike about counseling?



**Table 1. Characteristics of Consumer Satisfaction Survey Instruments in Family Preservation and Related Fields**

<b>Instrument &amp; Type</b>	<b>No. &amp; Type of Items</b>	<b>Outcome Items</b>	<b>Worker/ Therapist</b>	<b>Agency/ Program</b>
<u>Family Preservation Instruments</u>				
BSI/HOMEBUILDERS, self-administered	12 items: 9 closed-ended with space for comments, 3 open-ended; yes/no to a 5-level response set; 1 allows a neutral response	7 items re: Use/Prac, Progress, Cont. Use, Therapist Conseq., Resid., Prog. Help, Before-After	4 items	1 item
Consumer Satisfaction Survey of Washington State, self-administered	11 items: 10 closed-ended, 1 labeled "comments;" 5-level response set with a neutral response choice for 5; yes/no & N/A for 1 item	2 items re: Before-After, Goals	6 items	1 item
Family Preservation Services - Client Satisfaction Questionnaire, State of Kansas, self-administered	19 items: 17 closed-ended, 2 open-ended; 5-level response set with a "No Opinion" option	None	14 items	None
Nat'l Evaluation of Family Services, Caretaker Interview - Interim, direct face-to-face	12 closed-ended, in the client satisfaction section; 5-level and 3-level response sets and yes/no	2 items re: Goals and Better	6 items	2 items

Instrument & Type	No. & Type of Items	Outcome Items	Worker/Therapist	Agency/Program
Family Preservation Services Interview guide (Keaney), direct face-to-face	3 main guiding open-ended, semi-structured questions	None	Addresses qualities in worker's approach	Addresses qualities in the FPS approach
Question guide for parents'/primary caretakers' views of family-centered, home-based service (Coleman & Collins), direct, face-to-face	3 main guiding open-ended, semi-structured questions	Re: Probl. After	Asks what was most helpful in consumer's counseling with their therapist	None
<u>Traditional Family-based and Social Service Instruments</u>				
The Parent Outcome Interview (Magura & Moses), direct, face-to-face	85 main questions with follow-up questions	10 items re: Before-After, Resid., Coping Skills, Sch/Social Better	27 items	10 items
Measurement scale of consumer satisfaction with social services (Reid & Gundlach), self-administered	35 closed-ended; 5-level response set ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 5	2 items re: Better	18 items	13 items



Instrument & Type	No. & Type of Items	Outcome Items	Worker/ Therapist	Agency/ Program
Parent Satisfaction questionnaire (Johnson & Hall), self-administered	30 close-ended; 4-level response set ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4) with no neutral choice	6 items re: Probl. After, Understand, Coping Skills, Access	13 items	3 items

**Abbreviations Key for Outcome Items:** **Access**—Client's learning to access needed services as a result of program/intervention. **Before-After**—Comparison of present family situation to commencement of work with program. **Better**—Things and/or life have gotten better since using agency services. **Cont. Use**—Continued use of skills learned. **Coping Skills**—Client's learning coping skills & handling of child's problem as a result of services. **Goals**—Extent to which identified goals were met. **Probl. After**—Asks what happened with respect to the problems after FPS. **Prog. Help**—Helpfulness of program/services. **Progress**—Progress made on goal. **Resid.**—Residence/location of children at termination of services. **Sch/Social**—Client's handling of school and social situations better as a result of services. **Therapist Conseq.**—Therapist actions which had consequences. **Understand**—Client's understanding of child's problem as a result of services. **Use/Prac**—Useful or practical things family worked on.

**Table 2. Emerging Domains in Consumer Satisfaction Survey Instruments in Family Preservation and Related Fields**

Instrument & Type	No. & Type of Items	Client Empowerment Items	Cultural Competency Items	Strength Approach Items
<u>Family Preservation Instruments</u>				
BSI/HOMEBUILDERS, self-administered	12 items: 9 closed-ended with space for comments, 3 open-ended; yes/no to a 5-level response set; 1 allows a neutral response	None	1 item	None
Consumer Satisfaction Survey of Washington State, self-administered	11 items: 10 closed-ended, 1 labeled "comments;" 5-level response set with a neutral response choice for 5; yes/no & N/A for 1 item	1 item	1 item	1 item
Family Preservation Services - Client Satisfaction Questionnaire, State of Kansas, self-administered	19 items: 17 closed-ended, 2 open-ended; 5-level response set with a "No Opinion" option	1 item	1 item	2 items
Nat'l Evaluation of Family Services, Caretaker Interview - Interim, direct face-to-face	12 closed-ended, in the client satisfaction section; 5-level and 3-level response sets and yes/no	1 item	None	1 item

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<b>Instrument &amp; Type</b>	<b>No. &amp; Type of Items</b>	<b>Client Empowerment Items</b>	<b>Cultural Competency Items</b>	<b>Strength Approach Items</b>
Family Preservation Services Interview guide (Keaney), direct face-to-face	3 main guiding open-ended, semi-structured questions	None	None	None
Question guide for parents'/primary caretakers' views of family-centered, home-based service (Coleman & Collins), direct, face-to-face	3 main guiding open-ended, semi-structured questions	None	None	None
<u>Traditional Family-based and Social Service Instruments</u>				
The Parent Outcome Interview (Magura & Moses), direct, face-to-face	85 main questions with follow-up questions	1 item	None	2 items
Measurement scale of consumer satisfaction with social services (Reid & Gundlach), self-administered	35 closed-ended; 5-level response set ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 5	<b>None</b>	None	None
Parent Satisfaction questionnaire (Johnson & Hall), self-administered	30 close-ended; 4-level response set ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4) with no neutral choice	2 items	7 items	1 item

- (3) After family preservation services, what happened with respect to the problems you were experiencing?

### Traditional Family-Based and Social Service Instruments

**The Parent Outcome Interview.** Magura and Moses (1986) from the Child Welfare League of America developed an 85-question interview instrument to use with clients receiving traditional child protective services. The items consist of both closed-ended and open-ended questions with most containing sub-questions or follow-up questions covering outcomes and worker competency. Reliability reported ( $R = .31$ ,  $\alpha = .84$ ) was based on the internal consistency measure of change ratings. The instrument has been found to have construct validity (mean  $\gamma = .35$  for all domains) which indicates "a moderate tendency toward positive change ratings when more services have been received" (Magura & Moses, 1986, p.237). When the average change measures were compared to those of the Child Well-Being Scale, the convergent validity was low ( $R = .11$ ) "indicating that measuring case change by interview and by the scales yields different results" (p.239). Face validity was intuited (problem areas were categorized by content analysis) but not formally examined.

**Measurement scale of consumer satisfaction with social services.** Reid and Gundlach (1983) developed a 34-item scale to measure client satisfaction with social services. The closed-ended items cover worker competency, agency-related activities, and outcomes. Reid and Gundlach found the scale to be reliable ( $\lambda = .995$ ).

**Parent satisfaction questionnaire.** Developed by Johnson and Hall (1992), the Parent Satisfaction questionnaire is a 30-item scale consisting of closed-ended questions covering outcomes, worker competency, sensitivity, program/treatment effectiveness, agency availability and cost.

### Findings

As indicated earlier, this review was done from an exploratory perspective. We were interested in discovering and describing the existing methods of measuring consumer satisfaction in family preservation services. However, in an attempt to give some structure to our investigation, we evaluated the nine instruments using the following criteria: length; types of questions (i.e., structured/unstructured); self administered or interview format; psychometric properties; and themes/domains. From the first literature review involving general client satisfaction instruments, we noted that some common categories in consumer satisfaction instruments tended to be Accessibility, Helpfulness, Respect, Availability,



Continuity of Care or Service, Resource Availability, Resource Accessibility, and Outcomes. We looked for these categories and remained alert for others that might emerge during our review of the selected nine instruments.

Noting that some of the categories concerned the actions and/or attributes of the professional helper (e.g., accessibility, helpfulness, respect, availability), we decided to collapse these into one general category: worker/therapist competency. The categories termed continuity of care or service, resource availability, and resource accessibility were grouped into a second category we called agency/program quality. We adopted the outcomes category as named. The three categories—worker/therapist competency, agency/program quality, and outcomes—were the three dimensions that dominated the items in the nine instruments reviewed and solicited the majority of the information sought from respondents.

Under worker/therapist competency, issues related to availability, helpfulness, respect, confidentiality/privacy, communication (including ability to listen and understand), responsiveness (including prompt response to phone calls and messages), accessibility during a crisis or emergency, appropriate referrals, and facilitation of needed services were addressed. The agency/program domain addressed issues regarding the services, helpfulness of the program, availability and accessibility of the agency, the atmosphere of the agency, whether acceptance was felt by the client and whether consumer would refer friends to the agency. Outcome items addressed the following issues: progress made on goals, extent to which goals were met, useful or practical things family worked on, coping skills learned and handling of child's problem as a result of services, continued use of skills learned, residence/location of children, comparison of present family situation to situation prior to services (i.e., what happened with respect to the problem after FPS), helpfulness of program, client's improved handling of school and social situations as a result of services, client's learning to access needed services as a result of program/intervention.

As we studied the items in the nine instruments, we noted an emerging theme of empowerment-based statements and questions. This worker/therapist attitude or approach had not been observed in the general client satisfaction literature, and, therefore, no category as such existed in the literature reviewed. Of the nine selected instruments, we noted that five included client empowerment items. The Parent Satisfaction questionnaire contained two client empowerment items; one empowerment item was found in each of the remaining instruments (Consumer Satisfaction Survey of Washington State, the State of Kansas Family Preservation Services – Client Satisfaction Questionnaire, the National Evaluation of Family Services–Caretaker Interview, and the Parent Outcome Interview). Empowerment items asked (1) whether the consumer's opinion had been sought regarding the problem and the



services wanted; (2) about the amount of involvement or inclusion of the consumer in making a service plan and setting goals; (3) whether the consumer was included in making decisions about the children; (4) what the family had tried to do in the past about the problem.

Closely related to empowerment, another category of strengths-based items was noted in five of the instruments. The State of Kansas Family Preservation Services-Client Satisfaction Questionnaire and the Parent Outcome Interview each contained two items written from the strengths approach. The Consumer Satisfaction Survey of Washington State, the National Evaluation of Family Services-Caretaker Interview, and the Parent Satisfaction questionnaire each included one strengths-based item. Strengths approach items asked (1) whether the worker gave the consumer hope or confidence that progress could be made, or reviewed the progress being made by the consumer; (2) whether the worker helped the consumer to see his/her good points as well as his/her problems; (3) whether the worker recognized what the consumer is good at doing; (4) whether the worker focused on the strengths and successes of the consumer's family. Strengths approach items of this nature did not appear in the general client satisfaction instruments.

Another emerging theme noted was cultural competence. While researchers discussed the implications of cultural diversity and cultural sensitivity in measuring client satisfaction (Ellmer & Olbrisch, 1983) and tested an instrument that had been translated into Spanish (Roberts & Attkisson, 1983), general client satisfaction instruments did not include items related to cultural competency. Items related to cultural competency appeared in four of the instruments reviewed. Three of the instruments (BSI/Homebuilders, Consumer Satisfaction Survey of Washington State, and the State of Kansas Family Preservation Services-Client Satisfaction Questionnaire) included one item addressing cultural competence; the fourth instrument (Parent Satisfaction questionnaire) addressed this issue in seven of the items. The presence of cultural sensitivity and competency on the part of the worker or staff was sought through items that addressed (1) respect for and understanding of the consumer's cultural beliefs and values, (2) the consumer's level of comfort in talking about what his or her culture and race had to do with the present situation, (3) whether the services received had been offered in the language preferred by the consumer, (4) whether the language spoken by the worker had interfered with the consumer's receipt of services, (5) whether having a worker of a different race/ethnicity from the consumer's had interfered with the outcome of consumer's situation, and (6) whether the consumer considered it important to have a worker of the same ethnic background as the consumer.



### Discussion and Recommendation

We looked at the instruments within the context of an administrative application, that is, how well and how expeditiously the instrument can be utilized in reporting on-going feedback to administrators and supervisors about how services are being not only delivered but also received by consumers. From the viewpoint of management application, we found several instruments that contained aspects that we deemed useful for management application, but we did not find one instrument that satisfied every aspect.

For our application, qualitative methods were not a viable option; however, in some cases, agencies may want to carry out qualitative studies in order to get as clear a picture as possible of their clients' level and areas of satisfaction. This would require specialized interviewer training, and the data collection/analysis tasks would involve considerable time. Depending on the number of clients interviewed and the basis of selection of the participants, it may be difficult to develop a representative sample, and thus generalizability would be limited. For our administrative application, the practice and service delivery dimensions are identifiable; however, if the domains were to appear unclear to others, or other issues warranted an exploratory approach, we would suggest a consideration of the Coleman and Collins' and Keaney's format. Also, in some cases, qualitative research may be used on a small scale to supplement on-going quantitative research (e.g., focus groups, in-depth interviewing). For the present, however, we find that an instrument amenable to measurement on a large scale and timely feedback may be more appropriate, though not as rich in information as qualitative interviewing might offer.

Three of the instruments reviewed—The Parent Outcome Interview, the National Evaluation of Family Services Caretaker Interview, and the Measurement Scale of Consumer Satisfaction with Social Services—are not FPS-specific. As mentioned earlier, they were reviewed in light of the scarcity of FPS instruments, and we wanted to see if they could be modified to acquire a FPS focus. The first two require a face-to-face interview, and again, this demands time and trained staff that few agencies may be able to afford. In addition, these instruments are lengthy and only a select number of items can be classified as measuring client satisfaction. To modify these would break the integrity of the larger survey of which they are a part. The third instrument is too general for our purposes and too many changes would need to be made to adapt it to FPS. In addition, to modify it to this degree would jeopardize its psychometric properties. It covers three out of the five domains and may be viewed as lengthy (34 items) by some.

Johnson and Hall's Parent Satisfaction questionnaire is not an FPS-specific instrument, but it was developed for use in the Alternatives to Residential Treatment Study. This instrument

covers all six domains (including 7 items on cultural competence); its questions are balanced in terms of being positively and negatively phrased; the response choices are consistent throughout ('strongly disagree,' 'somewhat disagree,' 'somewhat agree,' and 'strongly agree'); it is self-administered and simple to score. We endorse the approach utilized to cover critical domains, provide balanced responses, and offer simplicity in its administration and scoring.

The strengths of the BSI/ Homebuilders instrument are that it is self-administered, emphasizes outcomes (seven outcome items), and includes an open-ended question at the end. Some redeeming features of the Washington State instrument are that it is self-administered, covers all six domains, the responses are anchored on a five-point scale, and it is clearly worded to let the consumer know that it is measuring levels of satisfaction with services. We liked the length of the Kansas instrument (19 items) and that it includes two open-ended questions and seventeen items anchored on a five-point scale with consistent response choices, i.e., 'always,' 'usually,' 'sometimes,' 'rarely,' and 'never' and, therefore, easy to score.

As can be seen from the above descriptions, none of the instruments would be deemed as the "perfect" instrument in terms of construction and management utilization for measuring consumer satisfaction in family preservation services. Several come close and, with modifications, may be transformed into useful, low-cost, and expeditiously administered and scored instruments.

After reviewing these instruments, we suggest a "hybrid" approach combining the attributes of some of the instruments. This hybrid might look something like this: it would have between 18 and 24 items; the items would be balanced in terms of positively and negatively phrased statements (or questions); several items would be phrased to clearly indicate that satisfaction with services is being sought; all six domains would be addressed, with at least two or more items covering each of them; the responses would be anchored on a four or a five-point scale; it would be a self-administered survey that could be done over the telephone so as to increase the response rate; and the last item or two would be open-ended questions. Some of the survey items would be composed based on consumers' responses to the interview questions from the qualitative studies described earlier. An instrument that combines these features would best begin to meet the needs of this administrative application.



## Conclusion

Consumer satisfaction clearly represents an emerging body of research in family preservation services. As with many developing fields, the role of research in the practice of developing consumer satisfaction instruments appears to be in its initial stages. The psychometric properties of satisfaction instruments were discussed in only a small minority of the selections in our review. This could be due to a lack of resources allocated to empirical assessment and the newness of this area of research. In the absence of this information, an assessment of the various instruments' value is incomplete. It is conceivable, however, that as this area of research evolves, the reliability and validity of the instruments will become routine in the evaluation of FPS consumer satisfaction instruments. This is critical for using these instruments at the individual clinical and/or program level.

Once the reliability and validity of the instruments are established, then discussions can focus on the items or domains that seem to be more sensitive to consumer issues. For further explanation on testing instruments for validity and reliability, see DeVellis (1991). Attention can also be devoted to areas that appear to be most closely linked to other measures of outcomes, for example, families staying together after the completion of services.

Our review yielded little information around the implementation of these instruments. The limited discussion is partially due to the format of some of the material. Many of the entries in our review included only the instrument with no discussion. Nevertheless, as researchers currently struggling to develop a viable consumer satisfaction strategy, a review of the learning related to mail, phone, and other methods of survey administration would be helpful. The routine discussion of these trends would facilitate greater collaboration among researchers pursuing similar goals.

Although the instruments were rarely evaluated empirically, there did seem to be some apparent strategies for selecting items for inclusion in the surveys. One approach attempted to assess the degree to which family preservation practitioners were utilizing sound practice principles ranging from treating consumers with respect to providing effective services. These items seem to have potential to direct supervision and provide useful feedback about actual practice. Another set of issues was related to competency at the agency level, and a third set of issues dealt with the effectiveness of the services as they related to outcomes for the consumers of the services.

It was interesting to note that the concepts related to worker competence seemed to resemble solid practice principles that would be viable in most family service settings. There were, however, a few items succinctly targeted at family preservation principles, i.e., provision

of concrete services (housing, food, transportation), intensive clinical services, amount and intensity of services. At the outcome level, there were outcomes related to families staying together that seemed to be easily identifiable with family preservation.

Although the last portion of this paper focused on the administrative utility of consumer satisfaction, the instruments in this review have relevance to many types of FPS practice. Each of these different types of information seems to have the potential to provide valuable feedback to the practitioners, administrators, and researchers committed to providing effective family preservation services. At the worker and agency level, routine information would allow the two groups to assess and compare their ability to provide competent services. The outcome information would also allow the professionals at all organizational levels to determine the effectiveness of their services, generally and by specific population groups, i.e., single parents, specific ethnic groups, etc. Additionally, this information has immense potential for promoting the value of these services to key constituent groups like funders, referral sources, judges, and other community agencies. Finally, this information has immense potential for contributing to the understanding of the relationship between consumer satisfaction and its component parts and other measures of input, process, and outcome.

Consumer satisfaction in FPS is an emerging field of evaluation committed to assessing the key dimensions of its services—from competent practice to effectiveness for its consumers. Some newer arenas of practice are being added to the realm of domains, like cultural competence and consumer empowerment. Although empirical assessment of reliability and validity is presently rare in this arena, there is some degree of hope that as these measures continue to be developed and improved, these types of evaluations will become more commonplace. As this occurs, the potential of the measures we reviewed will expand. Many items were targeted to specific dimensions of practice, which is useful for evaluating worker competency and integrity of services. Other items aimed at consumer satisfaction with the family preservation models are critical to program level evaluations. As more and more of the instruments are empirically assessed and improved, there is a great potential for using consumer satisfaction information to assess, monitor, and improve the implementation of family preservation.

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