

National Child Welfare Outcomes Indicator Matrix (NOM)

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Evidence-Based Management

The National Child Welfare Outcomes Indicator Matrix² (NOM) was developed through a series of consultations initiated by the Provincial and Territorial Directors of Child Welfare and Human Resources Development Canada. It provides a framework for tracking outcomes for children and families receiving youth protection services that can be used as a common set of indicators across Canadian jurisdictions. The NOM is designed to reflect the complex balance that youth protection authorities maintain between a child's immediate need for protection, long-term requirement for a nurturing and stable home, the family's potential for growth, and the community's capacity to meet a child's needs. The NOM includes four nested domains: **child safety, child well-being, permanence, and family and community support**. There are ten indicators within these domains that were selected on the basis of information that could be feasibly documented using readily available non-identifying aggregated client data. The NOM working group is in the process of refining the indicators, and while the data collection process is ongoing, there are no official results to report as of yet.

Batshaw Youth and Family Centres and the McGill Centre for Research on Children and Families have been focusing on several of these indicators, in some cases using revised measurements, by extracting data from PIJ. Many of these indicators will be discussed in more detail in future editions of In the Know.

NOM ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK



The NOM is intended for use by managers to enhance decision-making, programming, and policy development, rather than to guide individual clinical decision-making. Together these indicators provide an overview of the complex issues common to families involved with Canadian youth protection services, and should not be examined in isolation.

SAFETY

Recurrence of Maltreatment

Rates of recurrence are a key indicator of how successfully youth protection and community services have protected children from further abuse or neglect. The NOM and Batshaw measure of recurrence of service is the proportion of children who are investigated as a result of a new allegation of abuse or neglect within one year following closure of their youth protection file.

Serious Injuries and Deaths

While serious injuries and death are relatively rare tragedies for children in the youth protection system, careful reviews and systematic tracking and monitoring are required. The 2008 Canadian Incidence Study physical harm codes provide a simple checklist for describing the type and severity of injuries. For each type of injury the CIS measures severity according to whether the child required medical care. The NOM measure for child death is the percentage of children who die while in the care of child welfare services, distinguishing between natural, accidental, or undetermined causes of death as well as suicide or homicide. Batshaw has not yet begun focusing on this indicator.

WELL-BEING

School Performance

How well children perform at school is a key indicator of their well-being and cognitive functioning. The NOM and Batshaw measure documents the school performance of children in out-of-home care by tracking the proportion of these children who are at least one year behind their age-appropriate grade level. At Batshaw we are also tracking grade level for children receiving services at home.

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¹ Based on the March, 2009 Draft document authored by Nico Trocmé, Bruce MacLaurin, Barbara Fallon, Aron Shlonsky, Meghan Mulcahy, & Tony Esposito.
² Trocmé, N., Nutter, B., MacLaurin B., & Fallon, B. (1999). Child welfare outcome indicator matrix. <http://www.mcgill.ca/files/crcf/OutcomesIndicatorMatrix.pdf>

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Child Behavior

Children with emotional and behavioral problems tend to spend longer periods of time in care, experience more placement disruptions, and are less likely to be reunified with their family of origin. The NOM has not yet begun collecting data in this area, but a four-stage strategy is suggested for monitoring outcomes related to child emotional and behavioral problems: (1) document the specific problems identified in children using CIS 2008 codes; (2) track the proportion of children with emotional and behavioral problems who are referred to specialized services; (3) document the service completion rates; and (4) report on rates of improvement as documented by the specialized services. At Batshaw we are tracking the proportion of youth charged under the Youth Criminal Justice Act as one indicator of behavioral problems.

PERMANENCE

Out-of-Home Placement

While out-of-home placement is necessary for children whose security and developmental needs cannot be met at home, considerable effort is made to avoid the disruption and potential trauma of unnecessary placement. The NOM and Batshaw track placements that occur within 3 years from the point that a child starts receiving youth protection services.

Moves in Care

While some placement changes may be beneficial, multiple and unplanned placements have been associated with negative outcomes for children including increased behavior problems and poor academic performance. The NOM indicator tracks over a fiscal year the number of placement changes experienced by children placed in out-of-home care. At Batshaw we track moves over a 3-year period.

Permanency Status

Lasting reunification with family is the primary goal for most children placed in out-of-home care, and a majority of children will return home within less than a year of initial placement. However, for some children reunification is not possible and stable alternatives such as permanent foster care, relative care or adoption must be pursued. The NOM and Batshaw measure for time in temporary care tracks children forward 3 years from the

initial placement and counts the number of cumulative days in care.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Family Moves

When families move, youth protection services are able to track this indicator of family stability by retaining information on previous addresses. Changes in postal code could be used to approximate the distance between old and new addresses, an indicator of the likely social disruption associated with moves. The NOM housing indicator measures the percentage of families receiving services that move at least once during the fiscal year. Batshaw is starting to test the reliability of address change data, but a final decision on the use of this information has not yet been made.

Parenting

Improvement in parent functioning is associated with a reduced risk of recurrent maltreatment as well as better long-term outcomes for children. The NOM has not yet begun collecting data in this area, but a 4-stage strategy has been developed using standardized measures of parental functioning: (1) Document the specific problems facing parents using CIS 2008 parent checklist and national norms; (2) track the proportion of parents with problems who are referred to specialized services; (3) service completion rates; and (4) report on rates of improvement as documented by the specialized services. Batshaw has not yet begun collecting this data.

Ethno-cultural Placement Matching

The NOM measure tracks the percentage of Aboriginal children in care placed with at least one Aboriginal caregiver. This indicator can be further explored by differentiating children placed in kinship care and those receiving services from Aboriginal child welfare agencies. Youth protection agencies serving other significant ethno-cultural or faith communities may apply this measurement approach to define groups for which similar placement matching issues arise. Batshaw has not yet begun collecting this data. **ITK**

For more information, you may go to: <http://www.mcgill.ca/files/crcf/OutcomesIndicatorMatrix.pdf>



Disorganized attachment: an exploration of attachment-based interventions in application to child protection

The following is a summary of an Independent Study Project completed by Alicia Boatswain-Kyte for the McGill University Masters in Social Work program.

The ability to form and maintain relationships is necessary for basic human survival, yet this process is not instinctual. Attachment theory was constructed to explain how social experiences in early infancy influence the development of healthy or problematic aspects of personality that affect future relationships. An “attachment bond” is described as an enduring emotional relationship with a specific person that brings comfort and security. The loss or *threat of loss* of the bond is predicted to produce feelings of intense distress or maladjustment.

There are four types of attachment: secure, insecure avoidant, insecure ambivalent and disorganized attachment. Of particular concern is disorganized attachment, which hypothesizes that the primary attachment figure is both a source of comfort *and* threat. The child’s attachment system appears activated, but cannot express itself in clear behavioral ways, exhibiting an approach-avoidance dilemma. Disorganized attachment is most commonly found in children of high-risk groups such as those who have been maltreated, are from low socio-economic status, or whose parents have experienced unresolved trauma. This past trauma disrupts the capacity of the parent to focus on their care-giving role, triggering memories from their own traumatic childhood. The caregiver is not just frightening to the child, but is frightened themselves.

The lack of healthy attachment between a parent and child has been linked to serious consequences that may include failure to thrive, decreased mental development, conduct disorder, anxiety/depression, social aggression, borderline personality disorder, and deficits in social skills. The more frequently a child experiences the breakdown or failure of attachments the more severe the symptoms are likely to be. Moreover, the younger the child when attachment breaks down, the more disturbed the child may be - possibly embarking on a trajectory for future psychopathological dysfunction.

Research has shown that children in foster care often suffer from developmental delays and severe behavior problems that contribute to repeated displacements within the

foster family network. Many children returned to their birth families develop further behavior difficulties for multiple reasons such as disenfranchised grief, rejection, and anger that may result in re-placement involving introduction to a new foster family. These children are at high risk for attachment disorders because of their initial exposure to a dysfunctional environment, the separation from this environment, and subsequent placement(s) in care. They may develop the incapacity to trust adults who really do want to care for them, posing a major problem for a future secure and healthy placement.

Many intervention programs use attachment theory as their model, some of which were examined by the author, including permanency planning, pre-school programs, and nurse-home visitation programs. Findings suggest that permanency planning options help to reduce risk of attachment disorders in children by fostering stable environments in which strong attachment links can be formed and maintained. Successful pre-school programs are those that address the relationship between mother and child through parental psychotherapy programs and psycho-educational parenting intervention. Attachment-based interventions can also be instituted in a preventative manner. Nurse-home visitation programs, wherein mothers are visited during pregnancy through to the child’s second birthday, are geared to improving pregnancy outcomes, promoting children’s health and development, and to strengthening the economic self-sufficiency of families. Modifying maternal behavior through education and planning in turn enhances the care given to the child after birth.

Evidence-based approaches in attachment theory are needed when applying child protection services to treat abusive or neglectful families, and should be incorporated in any program development. While the study of attachment-based interventions is at an early stage of development, with few programs meeting strict standards of evidence, the positive gains from these interventions far exceed those of regular psychosocial community services. Implementation of these approaches should take place at crucial points of services in hospitals, schools and child protection agencies. **ITK**



Quebec Research on Attachment

Prepared by: *Lise Milne*, Coordinator of the EBM Project

Considering the prevalence of disorganized child–parent attachment relationships among maltreating parents and the predictive role such relationships play in long-term child adaptation, Québec researchers Tarabulsy et al. (2008) believe that interventions with this population should focus primarily on changing the patterns of parent–child interaction. Moss et al. (2008) built on existing findings by integrating practices reported in several studies to devise a highly structured, short-term attachment-based prevention program. The pretest–posttest randomized design included 80 parents of children ages 12 months to 5 years followed for child abuse or neglect under Québec Youth Protection services. The treatment group received eight weekly 1.5 hour home visits, during which they participated in interactive mother–child activities followed by video feedback sessions. The study revealed significant, positive changes for parental sensitivity and changes toward security and away from disorganization for those in the intervention group, providing further evidence for the use of a relationship-based intervention model when working with maltreating families.

Did you know...?

- All Batshaw clinical staff are invited to attend a presentation by **Nico Trocmé and Claude Laurendeau** on *Evidence-Based Management on June 18th at 9:30 a.m. in the 6 Weredale Auditorium*. We hope to see you there!
- The McGill Centre for Research on Children and Families would like to thank all who attended the Research Seminar presentations this season, contributing to their overall success. The next season resumes in September.
- Two surveys are currently underway in BYFC; one which is designed to describe our clientele in Neglect as a step to developing our Program on Neglect (leader: Susan Gallo, Manager in Professional Services); the other is a Client satisfaction Survey with a focus on Intervention Planning for clients receiving services in the community (leader: Steven Abrams, Manager in Professional Services).

- All material featured in *In the Know* is available in Batshaw's library. For complete copies of any material please contact Janet Sand at janet_sand@ssss.gouv.qc.ca
- Have you read any interesting and relevant articles or books recently? Let us know and we may include it in a future edition - lise.milne@mcgill.ca
- If you have any comments or questions about *In the Know*, you may direct them to Claude_laurendeau@ssss.gouv.qc.ca. We welcome your feedback!

