

Parents Served by Assertive Community Treatment: A Needs Based Assessment

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Abstract

Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) represents an effective treatment for individuals with severe mental illness. Though studies estimate roughly half of all people with severe mental illness are parents, little is known about consumers receiving ACT services who are parents. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to 1) estimate the prevalence of parent ACT consumers, 2) identify current ACT team policies and services for parent consumers, and 3) examine the perspective of parent consumers served by ACT teams. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed via two studies.

In study 1, 82 ACT providers from 76 teams in the US and Canada were surveyed. Providers estimated roughly 21.6% of ACT consumers were parents. Only 46.3% of providers reported formally asking consumers about parental status and 20.7% of providers belonged to ACT teams that offer services designed for parent consumers. The majority of providers (75.6%) reported negative or mixed attitudes about parents with severe mental illness. In study 2, seventeen parents receiving ACT services were interviewed. All parents endorsed positive attitudes about parenting, though most (76.5%) also identified negative aspects of parenting. Almost all parents (88.2%) reported loss of custody at least once. Parents expressed interest in parent-focused treatment services like family therapy, parenting skills, communication skills training, and peer support groups. Regarding satisfaction with ACT services, most parents with adult children (87.5%) reported no unmet parent-related needs and high satisfaction (4.63 of 5) with ACT services, whereas parents with young children (77.8%) reported unmet parenting needs and low satisfaction (3.78 of 5) with ACT services. Thus, results indicate the ACT treatment model may not be adequately serving parents with young, dependent children. Overall, findings suggest the need for more focus on parents with severe mental illness, including formal identification of parental status and parent-related treatment services and support.

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