Introduction

Collaboration between social and health service providers and diverse families has been a central concern in the field of early intervention for several years. As many practices have moved towards family-centred services, the need for personnel and families to work collaboratively has become increasingly apparent. Understanding is needed now about how to promote this collaboration effectively.

Aim

The aim of this systematic review was to examine and summarize intervention studies that have included an intervention that promotes collaboration among child-service professionals or between families with 0–8 year-old children.

Search Strategy

This was a systematic review using the standard Cochrane collaboration methodology. Literature searches of various databases were performed to identify intervention studies published from 2000 through to May 2008.

Selection Criteria

Two authors assessed the search results to identify studies that described best practices or interventions to promote collaboration between child service professionals and child rearing families. They included:

- experimental studies
- observational studies with or without control group
- qualitative studies
- meta-analyses
- systematic reviews

Studies had to meet criteria for cultural adequacy and methodological quality.

Data Collection and Analysis

The methodological quality of the studies was assessed independently by two review authors using standard measures (e.g. Quality Criteria Checklist). Levels of evidence were used to grade the strength of the available evidence. It was not possible to perform meta-analyses because of the heterogeneity of the selected studies.

Results

Of the 1205 titles identified through the search strategy, 103 studies met the inclusion criteria. The studies were very heterogeneous in terms of interventions, participants, and measuring instruments. Only 16 of the 103 studies were of good methodological quality. In this review, the most studies were targeted at collaboration between children/families and professionals and less than the previous professional’s reciprocal collaboration.

Conclusions

The review produced information on cooperation interventions used by service providers in the field of health care, social care and education. The current evidence base is too heterogeneous and sparse to be able to draw conclusions on the overall effectiveness of interventions aimed at cooperation. Further high quality studies examining the effectiveness of cooperation interventions are required.

Cooperation interventions were targeted:

- At community settings or at the level of the service system (n= 31) e.g. through the implementation of quality criteria, integration of services
- At professionals (n= 23) e.g. through consultations, team-working, and naming coordinators
- At children and families (n= 49) e.g. through educating and training parents, groups for parents, a child reward system, home visits

Correspondence to:
Research Professor Marja-Leena Perälä
National Institute for Health and Welfare
marja-leena.perala@thl.fi

Senior Researcher Nina Halme
National Institute for Health and Welfare
nina.halme@thl.fi