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Abstract Title

Supporting Mental Health for Families of Children Receiving Neurodevelopmental Services: An Integrated Knowledge Exchange Protocol

Background

Approximately 7–14% of Canadian children are diagnosed with neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs), including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). Early intervention and support are critical as NDD assessment and intervention pathways are complex and characterized by lengthy waitlists. Without timely support, families often experience elevated levels of parental distress, increasing the risk for children to develop serious mental disorders and subsequent academic, social, and physical health impairments.

Objective

Co-designed by parents and clinicians, the BEAM (Building Emotional Awareness and Mental Health) Program is an app-based platform connecting parents with expert-led psychoeducational videos, psychologist-supervised peer coaching, community forums, symptom tracking, and health systems navigation. Several previous clinical trials have demonstrated significant reductions in parent depression, suicidality, anxiety, and harsh practices. The current version of BEAM has not been evaluated in the context of families with neurodiverse children.

Methods

To begin addressing this gap, we conducted an Integrated Knowledge Exchange (iKX) drawing on the diverse perspectives of parents with lived experience and specialized service providers representing Clinical Health Psychology, Shared Health Child & Youth Treatment Services, and St. Amant. Funded through ENRRICH Theme, the iKX engaged 16 participants across two focus group sessions to (1) identify the priorities and barriers for NDD families, and (2) assess the feasibility and acceptability of BEAM within each organization's service pathway.

Results

Qualitative data from the iKX is being analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis approach to identify emergent themes.

Conclusion

These findings will inform the current development of the protocol for a randomized controlled trial (RCT) assessing the current version of BEAM's effectiveness for families of children with NDDs, funded by the Kids Brain Health Network. A second iKX will involve health systems personnel and program participants to evaluate implementation outcomes, along with suggesting opportunities for improvements in content and delivery.

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