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Abstract Title

Do Families of Children Who Screen Positive for Developmental Delays Benefit from Family Mental Health Interventions?

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Background

Building Emotional Awareness and Mental Health (BEAM) is an effective 12-week app-based mental health and parenting program. However, whether families of children with developmental delays (DDs) respond differently to BEAM is unknown.

Objective

The current study compared families of children with and without DDs on: (1) pre-intervention sociodemographic characteristics, mental health characteristics, and poverty-related stressors, and (2) pre-to-post symptom change across an implementation trial of BEAM, delivered in Manitoba between 2023-2025 to parents with children ages 24-71 months.

Methods

Parents were grouped based on their child's developmental status into 'screen positive' (SP) or 'screen negative' (SN) for DDs using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3), a standardized parent-report measure of child development. Baseline differences and pre-to-post change in parent and child mental health and parenting outcomes were assessed using mixed-effects regression, adjusted for theoretically-relevant covariates of income, marital status, and concurrent mental health service use.

Results

A total 274 BEAM participants completed the ASQ-3. 204 SN (74.50%) and 70 SP children (25.50%) were

identified ($M_{age}=43.19$ months, $SD_{age}=13.03$). At pre-intervention, the SP group experienced higher levels of poverty-related stressors and child behaviour concerns. In both unadjusted and adjusted models, all outcomes improved from pre-to-post BEAM for both groups. Rate of improvement did not differ between groups ($p's > .05$). After covariate adjustments, harsh parenting was the only outcome with higher pre- and post-intervention levels for the SP group ($b = .35$, 95% CI [.05, .65], $p = .021$).

Conclusion

BEAM was associated with improvements in mental health, parenting and child behaviour concerns from pre-to-post, with no evidence of differential improvements as a function of DD status. These families may benefit from additional parenting practice support. Overall, these findings suggest that family mental health interventions, like BEAM, are beneficial for families of children with DDs.