



## **Research Studies on the Family Development Credential® Program**

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Numerous studies conducted by scholars at several universities have demonstrated the effectiveness of the Family Development Credential Program. Highlights of FDC research include:

- Stress and self-care among frontline family development workers in a strengths-based training program
- Family Development Credential Training Impact on Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Human Service Workers.
- The effects of a strengths-based family development training on family workers' approach to diverse families.
- The effects of Family Development Credential training on workplace culture and client experience
- The Family Development Credential Program: A Synthesis of Outcome Research on an Empowerment Based Human Service Training Program
- Mothers Overcoming Barriers of Poverty: The Significance of a Relationship with a Credentialed Coach
- Change in Frontline Family Workers' Burnout and Job Satisfaction: Evaluating the Missouri Family Development Credential Program.
- Changes in Frontline Family Workers: Results From The Missouri Family Development Credential Program Evaluation
- How do Families Coached by FDC Workers Set and Reach Goals?
- The Perceived Impact of Strengths-based Family Worker Training: Workers' Learning that Helped Empower Families.
- A Preliminary Evaluation of the Missouri Family Development Training and Credentialing Program (MOFDC)
- Preparing Human Service Workers to Implement Welfare Reform: Establishing the Family Development Credential in a Human Services Agency
- The Impact of a Training Intervention among Social Service Workers in Selected Head Start Programs in New York City: Implications for Staff Development and Program Practice
- Building a Theory of Change and a Logic Model for an Empowerment-based Family Support Training and Credentialing Program

**Mavridis, C., Harkness, S., Super, C.M., & Liu, J.L. (2017).** Stress and self-care among frontline family development workers in a strengths-based training program. Poster presented at the Biennial Meetings of the Society for Psychological Anthropology, New Orleans, March 9-12.

Workers providing direct services to clients with complex needs experience a high degree of stress that can lead to burnout and job-leaving, but there is little research examining their perceptions of stress and self-care. Prior research indicates those with moderate levels of stress are most likely to be able to utilize and benefit from interventions. This study involved thematic analysis of reflective portfolios produced by 99 frontline workers in an intensive training on family empowerment that included promoting workers' own awareness and skills of self-care (the "Family Development Credential"). Data were collected in a larger study on culture and climate in agencies (Super & Harkness, 2008-2011). We coded for stressors, unmet needs, and self-care practices. At the group level, the most common stressors were related to workload and client problems. Unmet needs focused on achieving work/family balance and organization. Self-care consisted mostly of "mindfulness" activities done at work. When workers were grouped by number of stressors, there was a highly significant curvilinear relationship between total stressors and total self-care practices. Those discussing fewer stressors (here, 0-1) discussed fewer self-care practices, but interestingly, so did those mentioning more stressors (3+). Those whose stress was in the "middle" range (2 mentioned) reported the most self-care practices. These findings suggest that those who experience a greater number of distinct stressors may be too overwhelmed to incorporate self-care into their daily routines. Indeed, workers with the most stressors also discussed the most "unmet" self-care needs. These findings inform interventions that should target such workers who may be at special risk of burnout and job-leaving.

**Smith, Deborah B. & Nancy E. Day. (2015).** Family Development Credential Training Impact on Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Human Service Workers. *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration*, 38(3), 316-348.

The Family Development Credential (FDC) Training offers an innovative interagency training for human service workers within a community. We use a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the impact of FDC on work-related self-efficacy beliefs. Quantitative data found FDC participants increased their levels of positive self-efficacy beliefs and had no change in negative self-efficacy beliefs; a comparison group saw no change in positive self-efficacy beliefs but increased their levels of negative self-efficacy beliefs. Qualitative data indicated training increased work-related self-efficacy beliefs. Overall, findings suggest that FDC training improved self-efficacy in human service workers and that no training allowed negative self-efficacy beliefs to grow.

**Liu, J. L., Super, C. M., Harkness, S., & Mavridis, C. J. (2014).** *The effects of a strengths-based family development training on family workers' approach to diverse families.* Poster Presented at Biannual Meeting of the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development, Shanghai, July 8-12.

In conducting family work with increasingly diverse populations, frontline workers need to create a collaborative environment in which they are culturally sensitive and responsive to clients' ethno theories, expressed goals and needs. The Family Development Credential ©, or FDC<sup>1</sup>, an 80-hour training program plus supervised applications, was developed in the U.S. in the 1990s as part of a growing human services movement towards family empowerment. The present study of two Community Action Program agencies in Connecticut, U.S.A., examines whether workers' ideas and practices related to families became more open to diversity, and relatedly, whether work climate became more supportive of family-centered ideas and practices following a large FDC training initiative.

#### Methods:

Outcome measures are drawn from a standardized questionnaire administered to all staff pre- and post-training (baseline, n=329 and post-training n=293; time interval=2 years). Qualitative data on organization climate come from semi-structured interviews with senior and middle management post-training (n=13). In addition, a final essay produced by FDC trainees as part of their course portfolio (here, n=42) was coded for changes in thought and behavior related to oneself as a worker, to one's co-workers and to one's clients.

#### Results:

Four aspects of workplace climate were identified through factor analysis of the questionnaire results. Pre- and post-results indicate a small ( $\eta^2 = .01$ ) but significant ( $p = .02$ ) reduction in perceptions of pressure for conformity and constraints on creative initiatives, by both supervisors and direct service providers.

Worker's essays reveal two major themes. First, nearly 70 percent of workers discussed personal transformation, specifically in the professional role. Workers expressed more open attitudes towards clients and their goals, and reported specific new behaviors to help clients achieve those goals. Second, more than 60 percent of workers observed positive changes in the thinking and behavior of clients—thinking which enabled clients to feel more confident in their abilities to pursue their chosen goals. These changes are echoed in leaders' interviews, which describe positive effects of FDC at the level of individual workers (e.g., more positive interactions with clients) and the agency as it becomes an environment more supportive of family-centered work.

Results indicate that strengths-based training for family workers can result in significant, positive changes in openness to diverse family needs and goals, and in related practices. As immigration, urbanization, and social change present family workers with an increased diversity of clients, fostering openness and flexibility in services and relationships are of increased importance.

**Mavridis, C., J., Super, C. M., Harkness, S., & Liu, J.-L. (2013).** The effects of Family Development Credential training on workplace culture and client experience. Poster presented at *Health, Workplace, and Environment: Cultivating Connections Conference*, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT. October 17.

This study of two Community Action Programs (CAPs) examines whether work climate and client experience improved following a major family-empowerment training initiative known as 'FDC' or the Family Development Credential. Outcome measures are drawn from a standardized questionnaire ( $n \sim 350$ ) administered to all staff and employees pre- and post-training; focus groups with agency clients pre- and post-training; and semi-structured interviews with senior and middle management post-training. In addition, a final essay produced by FDC trainees as part of their course portfolio was coded for thinking and behavior related to co-workers and clients.

Thematic analysis of focus groups indicates that clients held a consistently positive view of the agency and its staff across the three years of evaluation. Trainee portfolio essays reveal increased awareness and appreciation of a strengths-based approach to family work, and successful implementation of specific concepts and skills learned in FDC. Questionnaire results suggest that FDC training is accompanied by a significant reduction in staff feeling pressured to conform and, concomitantly, feeling greater freedom to be responsive and creative when working with clients and in supervision. Post-training interviews with leaders indicate positive effects of FDC at the level of individuals and the agency as a whole. Leaders reported improved quality of interactions between staff and clients as well as increased networking among staff from different departments.

These results indicate that strengths-based training for family workers can result in significant, positive changes in workplace culture and climate. If and how these changes translate into improved service to client families require further study.

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**Hewitt, N. M., Crane, B., & Mooney B. (2010).** The family development credential program: A synthesis of outcome research on an empowerment based human service training program. *Family in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 91, 1.

Movement toward strengths-based, empowerment-oriented practice requires changes in perspective for both practitioners and agencies. A training program addressing those challenges is the Family Development Credential (FDC), implemented in 19 states across the United States since its creation by Cornell University for New York State in 1996. FDC is an interagency, locally based professional development program by which human service workers can become more empowered themselves while simultaneously learning knowledge, skills, and values associated with key tenets of empowerment practice. This article provides (a) a description of the programmatic model, (b) analysis of 11 known FDC evaluation studies, (c) synthesis of research findings in 4 outcome areas, and (d) elucidation of a future research agenda for the program including promising theoretical lenses.

**Forest, C. (2009).** Mothers overcoming barriers of poverty: The significance of a relationship with a credentialed coach. *Cornell University Doctoral Dissertation*.

This study examined how 25 randomly selected rural and urban mothers living in poverty in the United States and their 10 Cornell-credentialed workers ("coaches") used healthy mother-coach relationships grounded in the Family Development Credential (FDC) process to identify, address, and resolve societal and personal barriers to family self-reliance. The study looked at (1) barriers mothers encountered and the methods used to overcome them, (2) how mothers and workers perceived the meaning and significance of their relationship, and (3) aspects of this relationship that empowered mothers to pursue goals for a better life. Data from separate mother/coach interviews were developed into "practitioner profiles," then combined into "profile pairs," using a new methodological approach emerging from this study.

Initially, mothers' ability to set and pursue goals was limited by personal and environmental factors, including chaos. The study found that the mother-coach relationship appeared to reduce these barriers. One mechanism for this appears to have been supportive, critically reflective dialogue between mothers and coaches, which appears to have been associated with mothers' goal-oriented transformative learning. Recommendations include updates of the FDC curriculum, which was accomplished in 2014.

**Smith, Deborah B. (2009).** Change in Frontline Family Workers' Burnout and Job Satisfaction: Evaluating the Missouri Family Development Credential Program. *Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education*, 12, 51-60.

Frontline family workers have stressful jobs. Empowering workers to create partnerships with families they assist as well as assigning responsibilities to both worker and family members may relieve some burden. Results from the Missouri Family Development Credential (MO FDC) Program evaluation indicate mostly positive impacts for workers (N=229). Analyses of pre- and post-training data collection indicate statistically-significant increases in MO FDC participants' feelings of mastery, professional self-

esteem as well as statistically-significant decreases in levels of burnout (but also job satisfaction and feeling fairly paid for their work). When assessing differences in change scores between MO FDC participants and a comparison group of similar workers, the benefits of participating in the MO FDC appear. MO FDC participants report statistically significant increases in global self-esteem ( $p<.05$ ), feelings of mastery ( $p<.01$ ) and professional self-esteem ( $p<.01$ ) change scores while the comparison group's scores decrease. Results also find MO FDC participants decrease feelings of burnout while the comparison group feel more burnt-out ( $p<.05$ ) over time. Training and labor market implications of these results are considered.

The purposes of this report are twofold. We first review the literature on factors related to job satisfaction and feelings of burnout among frontline family workers. We then describe the background, implementation, and evaluation of The Missouri Family Development Credential (MO FDC) Program, a strengths-based, capacity-building program which educates frontline social service workers to create partnerships with families they assist by assigning responsibilities to both worker and family members thereby relieving some of the burden of the job. The program evaluation measures the impact on workers' attitudes toward themselves and their jobs using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Themes from two focus groups ( $n=13$ ) find the benefits of participating in the MO FDC Program include: new abilities to set boundaries with clients and combat burnout; increased feelings of confidence to do their job; positive social support among frontline workers who attended the program together; and increased skill in communication with clients, coworkers, supervisors, and their own family members. We use a quasi-experimental research design to gather quantitative data from additional program participants as well as a comparison group of other social service workers who had not taken part in the program; total sample size is 229. We find significant differences in the amount of change experienced by the two groups. MO FDC Program participants report increases on measures of global self-esteem, mastery, and professional self-esteem between the start and finish of the program while the comparison group's scores actually decrease. At the conclusion of the program participants report a decrease in feelings of burnout while the comparison group feels more burnt out. There are no significant differences in change over time on job satisfaction or sensitivity to disclosure issues. These evaluation results suggest that workers do gain new skills and abilities through their participation in the MO FDC Program. However, in the case of communication skills, the lack of significant difference between the two groups in the quantitative data suggests the MO FDC Program may have just reinforced the value of knowledge and skills common to all social service workers rather than teaching entirely new skills and techniques. In addition, the lack of demonstrable increase in job satisfaction or decrease in turnover may cause an employer to think twice about providing the means for a worker to participate in the program.

**Forest, C. (2008).** How do families coached by FDC workers set and reach goals? *Cornell University Dept. of Human Development & Family Studies, Ithaca, NY.*

Two sites (NYC and rural upstate) with strong FDC programs were selected. From each, workers were randomly selected, then three eligible family members from each worker's caseload were randomly selected then invited to participate. Families eligible for study if they: met with FDC worker three times, set a major goal and smaller goals, and completed goal-setting plans with the worker. Ten workers who earned credentials during 2004 plus 25 families they coach were interviewed. The final family sample included 25 families (11 rural, 14 urban). Participants in the study ranged in age from 18 to 74 and represented diverse race, ethnicities, and family compositions. Seventy-five percent of families who participated had a yearly income under \$20,000. In-depth interviews were conducted with each. The study showed:

- 1) Families reported that learning to set goals was a key skill in building their sense of greater self-reliance.

- 2) Families perceived receiving information and encouragement from workers was critical to reaching their goals.
- 3) Workers reported that using family development skills had changed how they perceived and worked with families.
- 4) The majority of families who participated in the study had experienced circumstances consistent with Garbarino's definition of "socially toxic environments", in that they had experienced at least one of the following: physical, verbal or sexual abuse, foster care placement, psychiatric illness, unemployment, illiteracy, alcoholism, incarceration, substance abuse or homelessness
- 5) Family members reported there were significant differences in their relationships with family development workers as compared with other agency workers. These included:

#### Family development workers:

- Confirmed what families were doing was right
- Were the first ones to ask what a family's goal was
- Explained things that family members felt other workers wouldn't
- Teach families what they need to know to do on their own
- Demonstrated genuine concern and empathy
- Were non-judgmental
- Providing consistent encouragement
- Conveyed respect and followed up
- Had a persona of genuine openness and had patience

#### Other workers:

- Families perceived other workers felt they were lazy
- Were judgmental about what families said they needed
- Gave short-term intensive support then never followed up
- Had personas that they were better than families

**Palmer-House, K. (2008).** The perceived impact of strengths-based training: Workers' learning that helped empower families. *Families in society: The journal of contemporary social services*, 89 (3), 428-436.

This qualitative case study explored perceptions of family workers trained in strengths-based family support to better understand what and how they learned that helped empower families. Fifteen workers participated from agencies with Head Start and Family Development Credential Programs. Agency supervisors referred workers who were considered effective at helping families reach goals of self-reliance. Workers completed a *Definitions of Empowerment* survey and participated in semi-structured interviews. Twenty-five family members who worked with workers also participated in brief interviews. The central research question of this study was, "What and how do family workers learn that helps empower families?"

Data analysis uncovered workers' perceptions of knowledge, skills, learning strategies, and factors that affected their abilities to help empower families. Workers reported they learned knowledge and skills in three areas: attending (listening, empathy and mutually respectful relationships), processing (goal-setting, advocating, and recognizing strengths), and meaning-making (understanding diversity and the roles of the family and worker in family support). Differences in workers' processing and meaning-making skills appeared to be associated with their length of experience.

Workers perceived they learned through life experiences, professional practice, strengths-based training, and workplace support networks. Differences in their perceptions suggested increased abilities developed

through experience. Workers perceived legislative reforms, outcomes measures, and performance-based funding hindered their abilities in three ways: 1) created a “disconnect between approach and practice; 2) increased demand for workers’ services with fewer resources, and 3) undermined the effectiveness of family support work. They perceived supervisors, co-workers, mentors, and professional groups contributed to their occupational efficacy. However, the types and roles of workers’ support networks varied over the duration of employment.

Findings suggested workers perceived paradigm shifts in learning over the duration of employment that were associated with three stages of learning: 1) Socialization (learning to implement strengths-based practice; 2) Internalization (resolving dissonance about limitations in their abilities to mediate barriers to family empowerment) and 3) Identification (recognizing tacit assumptions and viewing empowerment as a contextual experience shaped by culture, experience, and outside influences). Recommendations were developed for family workers, agency leaders, educators of family workers, and curriculum developers to enhance workers’ learning opportunities.

**Mosley, J. & Smith, D. B. (2004).** A preliminary evaluation of the Missouri family development training and credentialing program (MOFDC). *University of Missouri-Kansas City Family Studies Program*.

In this brief, we present preliminary findings from a quantitative evaluation of the Missouri Family Development Training and Credentialing Program (MO FDC). The MO FDC is designed to reorient human service practice to the family support approach. It is part of a growing nationwide movement whose goal is to empower both workers and families, and which recognizes the need for credentialing or certification of direct human service providers (Forest, 1998; Sexton, Lobman, Constans, Snyder, & Ernest 1997). Based on a curriculum developed at Cornell University, *Empowerment Skills for Family Workers, 2nd Edition* (Forest, 2003), it is in place in 14 other states including: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Washington. The FDC is increasingly regarded nationwide as the most comprehensive credentialing program for family support workers.

The University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) Family Studies Program leads the implementation of the FDC Program in Missouri, organizing a partnership of educational institutions, state agencies, not-for-profit organizations, agency coalitions, frontline workers and families throughout the state. The MO FDC classes occur at local sites throughout the state by facilitators who have completed an application process and have attended the MO FDC Facilitators Institute held by UMKC. The facilitators return to their local communities and offer the classes to frontline family workers. After the successful completion of 90 hours of community-based, interagency instruction, as well as a standardized exam and portfolio review completed by UMKC, class participants earn The Missouri Family Development Credential from the UMKC Family Studies Program.

While at least 15 states offer the FDC Program, to our knowledge there have been qualitative evaluations of only two: the New York and Missouri Programs. The NYS FDC Program evaluation (Crane, 1999 & 2000) found workers who completed the FDC report: (1) increased self-esteem, confidence, and assertiveness in helping families as well as in setting their own goals for higher education and career path; (2) improved communication and relationship skills in professional lives with families and co-workers, as well as in their personal lives; and (3) increased knowledge and use of empowerment-based family support skills in working with families. Supervisors of these workers reported higher staff morale and lower turnover.

Results from a small focus group of Missouri FDC recipients support the findings of the NYS qualitative evaluation by attributing to the FDC training program: (1) a new ability to take care of themselves, avoid burnout, and to set limits with clients; (2) being more organized and focused in their work; (3) an

increased skill in communication with clients, coworkers and supervisors; and (4) a new feeling of respect from coworkers, supervisors, and colleagues that followed the receipt of the MO Family Development Credential (McCarthy & Smith 2003).

While these results are informative, the number of respondents studied was small. Larger sample sizes are needed to better understand any effects of the program. To our knowledge, there has been no prior quantitative evaluation of this program in any state. Here we present preliminary results from the state of Missouri.

**Svihula, J. & Austin, M. J. (2004).** Preparing human service workers to implement welfare reform: Establishing the family development credential in a human services agency. In M. J. Austin (Ed.), *Changing welfare services: Case studies of local welfare reform programs* (317–338). New York: Haworth Press.

The need to empower families in their quest toward self-reliance has become critical in the wake of welfare reform. In 1996, the president signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) into law and fundamentally restructured the nation's safety net for low-income families with children. PRWORA gave states broad authority to restructure welfare programs within the confines of strict time limits and work participation requirements. The employment philosophy of WorkFirst has encouraged those with job skills to find work but has left behind individuals with multiple barriers to self-sufficiency. In an attempt to assist hard-to-place individuals, many states have sought to link agencies and programs to expand the range and availability of support services such as transportation, child care, housing, substance abuse services, and domestic violence services (Trutko, Pindus, and Barnow, 1999). Other states have integrated their programs into one-stop career centers which might include employment services, education, and other services (Martinson, 1999). The new strategies have created a need for strength-based, interdisciplinary service delivery approaches to replace the traditional entitlement/problem-based system.

This case study describes an approach taken by a county human service agency to train human service workers in collaborative case management to deliver strength-based services within a new interdisciplinary system. It begins with a brief literature review of strength-based, interdisciplinary service delivery and the history of the training model developed by Cornell University for New York State. It then focuses on the start-up and implementation of the family development credential (FDC) in San Mateo County, California. The final sections identify the strengths and challenges that emerged as well as the lessons learned from the process.

**Smith, T. W. (2003).** The impact of a training intervention among social service workers in selected head start programs in New York City: Implications for staff development and program practice. *Dissertation Research: Teachers College, Columbia University*.

Research has neglected to document the link between training of social services workers who are Head Start's primary front-line staff and quality outcomes for themselves and the families who utilized this federally-funded program that was established to provide comprehensive services for society's most impoverished.

The purpose of this study is to show that the social services staff, with appropriate training, can demonstrate the types of skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to support families in their efforts to become less dependent on society or dependency-inducing programs. This means that social services staff, after undergoing training, will treat the families as partners, encouraging them to accept themselves and make their own decisions based on their strengths instead of what workers want for them.



A quasi-experimental design was utilized in this study. Two groups, an experimental and control group participated in the study. Each group consisted of seven social services workers who were more alike than dissimilar representing seven Head Start centers in impoverished communities located in New York City. Data were collected from a variety of sources that included pre and post-questionnaires, surveys, observations and program documents. Analysis focused on comparing the two groups on specific dimensions by using a model of program evaluation that measured communication skills, job-related knowledge, and attitudes toward the families that utilized Head Start services.

Findings revealed that the workers who participated in the training intervention had benefited. Their communication skills, attitudes toward families, and knowledge of resources in the respective communities were enhanced. However, the success of the training could be attributed to a number of variables that included organizational support, the trainees, trainers, training program selected and the training methodology that incorporated adult learning theories. Hence, the study is significant to the field of adult learning and human development because of its emphasis on staff development and potential outcomes for staff, families and possibly communities.

A copy of this dissertation is available through UMI Proquest/Digital Dissertations at [wwwlib.umi.com/dissertations](http://wwwlib.umi.com/dissertations) (Publication No. AAT 30911305). For more information, please contact Dr. Watson Smith at [TWSMITH@ccbq.org](mailto:TWSMITH@ccbq.org).

**Crane, B. (2000).** *Building a theory of change and a logic model for an empowerment-based family support training and credentialing program.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.

Elucidation of a program's theory of change is an important first step in theory-based evaluation of multi-level effects in comprehensive, interagency programs. An interpretivist, participatory research design was used to illuminate the program theory of the New York State Family Development Training and Credentialing (FDC) Program, a community-based, family support training and credentialing program for frontline workers. The FDC program, which teaches a strengths-based, empowerment model of practice, has the capacity to produce effects at many levels—for workers/trainees themselves, the people they work with, their agencies, and their communities.

Qualitative data gathered from a purposive sample of program participants and other stakeholders were used to construct a logic model to present and discuss key components of the FDC with an emphasis on outcomes, including examples of how they were experienced by program stakeholders. Also presented are key elements of the change process, the connections between program activities and outcomes. Factors such as mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation stand out as important mediators of change.

This study is an example of how practitioner research can play an important role in theory-based evaluation as a method for construct development. The constructs identified as steps in the change process can be used to develop measurable indicators to assess the degree to which these changes are occurring in a more representative sample. The findings may also contribute to improved implementation of the program at the local and statewide level, as well as in other states where the program is being replicated.