
Full Implementation of the Family Violence Option in North Carolina

by
Dean Duncan
and
Michelle Dylan

Jordan Institute for Families
School of Social Work
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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Introduction

The Federal Rules and Regulations regarding PWRORA state that states may elect to run a special program for victims of domestic violence and as part of that program waive one or more of the standard program requirements, such as participation in work activities. This is called the Family Violence Option and it requires that states screen and identify individuals receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families who have a history of domestic violence, refer these individuals to the appropriate services, and provide waivers when deemed necessary.

North Carolina adopted the Family Violence Option to assist Work First participants who are or have been victims of family violence. The Work First Manual states:

Violence in the family is a substantial barrier to self-sufficiency for many people, including some Work First participants. Family violence is defined as verbal, sexual, emotional, psychological and/or physical abuse between or among family members or intimate partners. Recognizing the impact that violence can have upon individuals and families, workers must assure that all individuals seeking assistance are given the opportunity and services necessary to address the violence.

The Option provides an opportunity for a waiver of one or more Work First requirements. Counties screen all applicants for Work First to assess whether they are eligible for the Family Violence Option. With the Option the Division of Social Services seeks to heighten awareness of family violence and provide the means and impetus to develop appropriate methods for dealing with it. The Jordan Institute for Families, contracting with the Division of Social Services, sought to understand how this Option was being implemented at the local level.

Methods

In order to better understand the implementation of the Family Violence Option two surveys were conducted. The first asked questions of six pilot counties and the results of that effort are outlined in a separate report. The second interview was administered to a representative sample of counties (a DSS representative from each sampled county was interviewed). The data presented here are the result of 27 interviews with 27 counties. All of the interviewees' titles fell under the general description of "Work First Program Supervisor". The counties were chosen from the three size categorizations determined by the state (small, medium and large). Ten counties from each category were randomly sampled. Three counties were not interviewed because of difficulty in contacting them within the allotted interview period.

Findings¹

The Screening Process

For the most part, counties use the screening tool provided by the state to assess domestic violence. Three of the counties interviewed have their own tool. The degree to which counties spent time focusing on the possibility of domestic violence varied. Some counties have their income maintenance/eligibility or intake workers do the *initial* screening and refer clients to domestic violence service providers while other counties conducted a *series* of interviews in which they discuss domestic violence with the client. The state provides the option of using only a notification form or using it as well as a more in-depth screening form. In general, counties do a cursory screening for domestic violence and if there is disclosure they refer clients to other agencies. These screenings are done on an ongoing basis, not just at intake.

Who Conducts the Screenings?

Typically, eligibility workers conduct the domestic violence screening, although in three counties the Qualified Substance Abuse Professionals (QSAP) regularly did screening. In four counties a social worker, who was not the eligibility worker, or the vocational rehabilitation counselor, conducted the screening. Two of the twenty-seven counties interviewed have a domestic violence caseworker in the agency who does the screening, while two others said they were planning on hiring a domestic violence specialist.

Screening Tools

Most counties are using the DSS-6966 Form (Notification of the Family Violence Option) and/or the DSS-6968 Form (Screening for Domestic Violence) provided by the state. A number of counties mentioned that they would like to revamp these forms. As mentioned above, only two counties have their own form and one incorporates domestic violence issues into multiple parts of the intake process. (See Appendix A for sample screening and assessment forms.)

Timing of Screening

The vast majority of the counties state they screen upon intake and at re-certification. Many of these counties also said that they are always on the lookout for potential barriers caused by domestic violence. The counties that do not screen at re-certification said that workers keep an eye out for signs of domestic violence. Many stated that they rarely have anyone disclose incidents of domestic violence in the initial interview but that it takes multiple visits and development of a rapport with the worker before domestic violence issues are discussed openly by clients.

¹ See Appendix A for summary table of findings.

Training

All of the counties reported having had the initial training from the state. Some received additional training from their local domestic violence agency. A number of counties stated that as part of their overall training, workers receive information on domestic violence and that QSAPs, because of their position, get continuous training which includes training on family violence issues.

Staff Turnover

Approximately one quarter of the counties said they did not have high staff turnover while the other half said they did. Several of those with high staff turnover reported little staff change since this policy was implemented.

History of Screening and Service Provision

Counties reported that screening has been on going for between 1 to 3 years with 1.5 years being the most common response. All of the agencies interviewed stated that they had been making referrals long before the policy went into effect but that the policy formalized the process and includes resources that enable DSS to pay for services offered by outside agencies.

Services Provided

Domestic violence victims are referred to agencies which specialize in issues of family violence. (In all but 2 counties interviewed there was a shelter in the county, those without shelters referred clients to service providers in adjoining counties.) From these organizations they receive shelter, family, mental health and substance abuse counseling, court advocacy, and relocation assistance. A number of DSS offices also provide services such as emergency housing, rental assistance, case management, child care,

transportation, legal assistance and employment services to victims of domestic violence. The degree to which outside agencies and DSS provide these services varies by county. In some, the domestic violence organization provides all of the services, but in most counties some services are provided by DSS and some are provided by the outside agency. All of the DSS offices have contact and a referral records with their local domestic violence agency.

Case Management

Most counties reported that the only way families experiencing violence are handled differently is that they are eligible for the work requirement waiver. However, few counties reported having issued waivers. Typically, those who disclose incidents of domestic violence are motivated to be self-sufficient and want to receive intensive employment services (there appears to be a misunderstanding that if the waiver is received employment services will not be provided). Two groups stand out from the county interviews; the first consists of people who do not disclose and therefore are not eligible for the waiver. However, domestic violence is still seen as a possible hidden barrier. When a client is non-compliance with the work requirement, workers bring up the possibility of family violence again. The second group discloses to the caseworker and takes a big step by doing so; many times these clients have already made contact with a domestic violence agency themselves and therefore do not need referral.

Individuals Screened, Identified and Referred in March 2001

The number of individuals screened in March varied by county size since all counties stated that they offer notification of the waiver to all families that apply for Work First. The number screened during the month of March ranged from 8 to 625. The

number of victims identified among clients screened varied from 0% to 26% with the mean being 5% and the median 1.5%. Half of the counties who knew how many they identified said they identified 0 victims. All of the clients identified as victims of domestic violence were referred to domestic violence agencies for assistance. March seems to be representative in terms of these counties' experiences. In sum it appears that there is universal screening but not a lot of identification.

Conclusion

Counties in North Carolina are screening all Work First applicants for domestic violence. Some counties do a more in-depth job than others, having specialists on-site or doing a series of interviews with clients aimed at identifying personal issues and barriers. Counties that do a more thorough screening go beyond merely reading the notification at intake. However, regardless of the extent of the screening process, not many Work First recipients opt for the work requirement waiver. This may be because those who need it are not disclosing but is also due to the fact that those who disclose do not want to use the waiver. For example, a woman who lost her job because her boyfriend harassed her at work declined the waiver and sought another job. It may be the nature of the syndrome that keeps people from disclosing but it is also the strength of spirit of those experiencing domestic violence which drives them to seek self-sufficiency against difficult odds.

Appendix A
Summary Tables of Findings

Screening Tool Used	Frequency	Percentage
State Form	24	88.89%
Agency Form	3	11.11%
Staff Turnover		
High	8	29.63%
Low	19	70.37%
Length of Time Screening		
approximately 1 year	17	62.30%
approximately 1.5 years	7	25.93%
approximately 2-3 years	3	11.11%
Number Screened in March 2001		
10 or fewer	3	11.11%
11 to 25	2	7.41%
26 to 75	5	18.52%
76 to 100	1	3.7%
101 to 150	4	14.81%
201 to 250	2	7.41%
301 or higher	2	7.41%
Don't Know	8	29.63%
Percentage Identified as a Victim		
None	9	33.33%
1% to 4%	3	11.11%
5% to 10%	3	11.11%
11% to 15%	3	11.11%
More than 16%	1	3.7%
Don't Know	8	29.63%

Appendix B
Interview Guide
Second Wave

My name is _____ and I am with the Jordan Institute for Families at the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. We are conducting a study of the services provided to Work First participants that appear to be victims of domestic violence. We recently sent you a letter describing the study.

Did you receive the letter? *(If no, do not ask any additional questions. Arrange to fax or mail the individual a copy of the informed consent letter.)*

Are you willing to talk to us about the services provided to Work First participants that appear to be victims of domestic violence? *(If no, then thank them and terminate the call.)*

1. Does your agency screen applicants and recipients for Work First to identify individuals that may be victims of domestic violence?
2. How do you screen them?
3. Are there instances where the individual reports for screening accompanied by the suspected abuser? How do you handle those situations?
4. Do you use a formal screening tool? Could you send me a copy? Could you describe the tool?
5. Who conducts this screening? An intake worker? The client's regular eligibility specialist? A social worker?
6. What type of training do you provide these individuals that conduct the screening?
7. Is there high turnover among these screeners?
8. Is the screening done only at the client's initial application? Is it done at recertification? Is it done at other times?
9. What do you do when you identify an individual that appears to be a victim of domestic violence?
10. How do you handle situations of individuals reporting for an interview or screening that have physical signs of being a victim of domestic violence yet they deny the abuse?
11. After individuals are identified as suspected victims of domestic violence, are they referred for additional screening?
12. After an individual is identified as a suspected victim of domestic violence, do you refer them for services?
13. What types of services are provided?
14. Are these services provided by your agency or do you refer the individuals to some other agency in your county?
15. Do you refer these individuals to shelters? Are there shelters for domestic violence victims in your county? Where is the nearest shelter?
16. How do you separate the victims and their children from the suspected abuser?
17. Do you handle the Work First cases of these individuals differently from other Work First cases? In what ways do you handle them differently?
18. What additional services do you offer these individuals?
19. How long has your agency been screening individuals for domestic violence?
20. How long has your agency been providing services to individuals suspected as being a victim of domestic violence?

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21. In the last month, how many individuals has your agency screened for domestic violence?
Is that families or individuals? Is that adults only ore does that number include children?
 22. Of those screened, how many were identified as victims of domestic violence?
 23. Were all of those individuals referred for services?

Is there someone else in your agency I also should talk with about the services provided to Work First recipients suspected as victims of domestic violence?
