



Title

A Research Agenda for the APS Field

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Source

<https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/programs/2020-10/APS%20Research%20Agenda.pdf>

Summary of Research

In 2018-2019, the Administration for Community living (ACL) facilitated the development of the first ever research agenda focused exclusively on APS. The research agenda aims to highlight research gaps in order to help inform the APS field and build a cohesive body of evidence. The final agenda highlights research questions identified by the field as still requiring answers and being high priority. These high-priority questions were identified through a multi-phase process. The first phase was to conduct a review of the literature focused on the evaluation of APS policies and practices, and to pull relevant topics or research questions that still need to be answered. Phase Two consisted of conducting stakeholder engagement activities (i.e., webinars and request for information) to identify additional research gaps and questions. In Phase Three, a technical expert panel (TEP), consisting of 9 researchers and APS leaders, was convened. TEP members had the opportunity to add research questions. The TEP then participated in a modified Delphi process to help achieve consensus on the priority of these questions. In this process, the TEP members were asked to rate each question on a scale of 1-9, with one being the lowest priority and 9 being the highest priority. After they completed their ratings, they were told how the group as a whole rated each question, and then were asked to rate the questions again. This process was repeated three times, ultimately leading to a list of 61 APS research topics/questions that the TEP agreed were of high priority at this time. These 61 topics were then sorted in 18 overarching themes, which represent the core elements of the research agenda. Each of these themes has three sections: importance, existing knowledge, and the research questions for that theme.

This research summary is part of a series sponsored by the NAPSA Research to Practice Interest Group. The purpose of this research summary is to provide direct access to findings in order to enhance practice and clarify policy choices.

Practice & Policy Implications

This webinar provided an overview of the research agenda, including its development, content, and relevant. In addition, the presenters discussed the themes the top 10 highest rated questions, and the themes they represent. The two highest ranking questions focused on caseloads. Existing literature around caseload size indicates that when caseloads exceed manageable levels, there are negative consequences for worker performance and client outcomes. The third highest ranking question fell under the theme of tools, and whether using standardized tools can help in APS practice. Existing research shows that using tools can make programs have higher rates of consistency in findings. Question four focused on perpetrators, specifically whether interventions for perpetrators can help improve client outcomes.

For years, APS research has focused on the characteristics of perpetrators, rather than working with perpetrators. The fifth highest ranking question had to do with investigations and findings, and how to effectively make decisions around case findings. Prior studies show that consistent understanding of the definitions of findings (e.g., not-founded, inconclusive, substantiated) is lacking. Training is recommended to help workers understand what each of these findings means in their state. Questions six and seven both fell under the theme of client outcomes. It can be difficult for APS agencies to define specific client outcomes that are achievable and measurable. Existing knowledge suggests there is no consensus in the field about key outcomes for APS, and what constitutes a good outcome. The eighth highest ranking question fell under the theme of specialized interventions. With resources in APS being so scarce, the field needs to conduct more research on the efficacy of these innovative, specialized interventions to determine if they are worthwhile to invest in. The final two questions rounding out the top ten, fell under the theme of intake, and how to do a better job at intake. Intake is a critical point in the life of an APS case, but research on this topic is lacking.

Further Reading

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