# Systematic review of Family Support workforce skills: conceptualization, process, and findings

## Research report

The editor and coordinator of this document is Nevenka Zegarac (University of Belgrade, Faculty of Political Science - Management Committee Member from Serbia and WG4 Leader in EurofamNet).

The authors of this document are Anita Burgund Isakov (University of Belgrade, Faculty of Political Science - Management Committee Substitute from Serbia and WG4 participant in EurofamNet), Cristina Nunes (University of Algarve - Management Committee Member from Portugal and WG4 participant in EurofamNet), Nevenka Zegarac (University of Belgrade, Faculty of Political Science - Management Committee Member from Serbia and WG4 Leader in EurofamNet), and Ana Antunes (University of Madeira – WG4 participant in EurofamNet).

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For further information, please contact:
EurofamNet: https://eurofamnet.eu/contact
Contact author: Nevenka Zegarac, nelazegarac@gmail.com / nevenka.zegarac@fpn.bg.ac.rs

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# CONTENT

## Abstract

Skills used in practice of family support workforce are implemented in different settings and frameworks worldwide, and often the same names are used for different skills and vice versa – different skills are covered by similar names. This report will provide an overview of the available literature on family support workforce with an opportunity to draw some conclusions about identified workforce skills, as well as gaps to be covered in further research of family support. Using PRISMA guidelines a systematic review was conducted, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies on skills in the practice of family support published in peer-reviewed scientific journals in English, from 1995 to 2020. The literature was collected in an exhaustive search of several databases: PsycInfo, MedLine, PsycArticles, ERIC, Web of Science, and Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, where a set of 8,489 papers was selected. Forty studies from five countries met the inclusion criteria. Eleven studies were literature reviews, one was a theoretical reflection and 28 were empirical studies. The workforce referred to in the studies was mainly formed by social workers, followed by psychologists. The workforce skills described included the qualities of the professionals, technical skills, and specific knowledge. The majority of studies were empirical, but they did not define specific skills, had very small samples and presented issues with bias. However, further research is needed in order to allow for the establishment of standardized guidelines for family support workforce skills.

Keywords: Family support, professional skills, systematic review, workforce.

This literature review is committed to furthering our understanding of family support as value-based practical approach with a common set of concepts which informs not only service delivery, but also professional education, research, and policies. As an emerging trans-disciplinary field, family support relies upon a range of socio-structural and psycho-social theories embedded in a holistic, ecological, and comprehensive approach (Herrera-Pastor et al., 2020). As one of the action-work streams of the EU COST action "The European Family Support Network: A bottom-up, evidence-based and multidisciplinary approach", a group of researchers undertook an assignment to review the current knowledge and state of affairs regarding family support workforce skills. This COST action (CA18123, EurofamNet) involves representatives from 36 countries across the continent (https://EurofamNet.eu/).

Family support services and programmes are introduced differently across the world. Different political, professional, and traditional frameworks are formed around family support services and programmes which makes it difficult to both identify and compare them. As a unique child-rights and child-protection perspective, family support involves both a set of activities and an approach to practice that encourages positive informal social networks through integrated programmes. Those programmes combine the statutory, voluntary, and private agencies and services (Dolan et al., 2020) in order to enhance family functioning and activities in a system of supportive relationships and resources (Daly et al., 2015). The services are mainly provided in the family household and in the community, while "the primary focus of these services is on early intervention aiming to promote and protect the health, well-being and rights of all children, young people and their families. At the same time, particular attention is given to those who are vulnerable or at risk" (Dolan et al., 2006, p. 16).

This report will provide an overview of literature on family support workforce from peer-reviewed journals with an opportunity to draw some conclusions about identified workforce skills, as well as gaps to be covered in further research of family support. The aim of this systematic review was: (1) to conceptualize family support workforce skills in different social, cultural and political contexts across world; and (2) to offer a foundation for guidelines on the standardization of family support workforce skills.

## Family Support and Its Workforce

It is crucial to outline what is meant by family support workforce in this paper, as well as to define family support workforce skills, given that there are several related definitions with different scope and precision, and almost none deals with this specific field of family support.

Family support workforce, based on the approach that we take in this paper, comprises a broad range of professionals and paraprofessionals from both the government and nongovernmental organizations, engaged in relevant social subsystems, who employ their resources in providing concrete, emotional, advice, as well as esteem support to families. These types of support offer developmental, compensatory, or protective support to families as a whole and their members, to provide subsistence, productive development, and integration of the family into the community. Drawing on the framework of social work, psychology, pedagogy, medicine and law, professionals in various occupations, in collaboration with paraprofessionals, organize, provide, and advocate for services within the human and child rights framework, supporting different aspects of family functioning, while incorporating family support approach into their practice.

The skills used in practice of family support workforce are implemented in different settings and frameworks worldwide, and often the same names are used for different skills and vice versa – different skills are covered by similar names. Furthermore, the term 'skills' is often used interchangeably with concepts such as 'competences', 'interventions', and "techniques". Trevithick (2012) cites Welford's (1958) three characteristics of skills, closely bound together. These involve organized and coordinated activity in relation to object and/or situation in ways that lie behind performance; these are learned gradually, through repeated experience and entail ordered and coordinated actions. As a learned quality, developed through training and experience, skills represent a doing part in a particular process; it is an ability and capacity to perform activities or job functions efficiently and adaptively.

It is also important to consider how terms "skills" and "competences" relate to each other in order to expose the definition of family support workforce skills. According to European Commission's Cedefop glossary, the term 'skills' refers to an "ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems" (Cedefop, 2014, p. 227). 'Competences' are a more developed concept as an "ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities in work or study situations, and in professional and personal development" (Cedefop, 2014, p. 47). Therefore, competences

are not limited to the functional aspect (namely, technical skills) or interpersonal qualities (such as time management or social skills), but they also include cognitive elements (utilization of knowledge) and ethical values. Undoubtedly, the concept of competences is important for outlining family support workforce, however, we believe that defining and mapping relevant skills is a preliminary step that should allow for further development in this area.

In this article we consider family support workforce skills as their learned power of doing things in collaborative ways, while supporting different aspects of family functioning in a competent manner, and the ability to use their knowledge effectively and readily in the execution or performance of serving families using holistic, strengths-based and relationship-based practice approach.

Making a distinction represents a special challenge in delineating similarities and differences between family support and other skills used in helping, or rights-based and protection contexts. This represents a challenge in comparative studies among countries as well as in identifying general ('core') and specific (if there are any) skills needed to support families with children. The aim of this systemic review is to identify the current state of affairs regarding theoretical background, research findings and practice wisdom, and to provide a framework (or baseline) for the classification of family support workforce skills.

Considering workforce skills in terms of helping families with children, we can identify skills that are general for a range of professions in various countries. This would enable the standardization of workforce skills as well as transdisciplinarity across professional and paraprofessional workforces in the family support field. Identifying workforce skills would enable freeing up professionals to do more complex work (Harvard Family Research Project, 2007), and when possible, one cut-price labour efficiency strategy implementation in international health and social welfare contexts (Baines, et al., 2014). However, it is very important that workforce substitution is not done when a highly trained professional of specific education is needed.

Social workers have traditionally played significant roles in case management and in supporting child and family social inclusion (Sims, 2011). Social workers can also play a strong advocacy role in transdisciplinary teams, and advocate for appropriate service delivery that will have the best chance of responding to specific needs. For example, social workers might argue that families experiencing multiple challenges associated with disadvantage, combined with parenting a child with disability, would be better served

through a multidisciplinary team approach where each team member would be working with the family in a collaborative way.

Systematic review of literature about family support workforce is not potentially useful merely in conducting the task of identification of a unique set of skills that is needed when supporting families in need. Potential usage could also be in truly engaging families in different services, since it is a permanent challenge for child welfare and other workers, as demonstrated by pervasively low levels of parent engagement in services (Alpert & Britner, 2009; Kemp et al., 2014; Littell, 2001). It is widely recognized, however, that meaningful family and/or parent involvement in service provision positively impacts family outcomes, and also that successful engagement of parents leads to a greater investment in the change process and better outcomes for children (Gladstone et al., 2012).

## Method

This systematic review was conducted according to the PRISMA guidelines for conducting and reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Moher et al., 2015).

*Search and eligibility criteria*

A search of studies was completed, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies on skills used in family support practice. The following inclusion criteria were considered: (a) families living with their children and families using family support services. Both literature review of family support workforce and research, whether quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method, were included. Studies assessing workforce skills for children living in out-of-home placement or family support for the elderly were excluded. Various topic appeared in journals, like working with families facing difficulties or culturally sensitive practices and relationship-based approaches; (b) the timeframe covered was from 1995 to February 2020. Articles published prior to 1995 were excluded because of the modernization of family support services across the world; (c) the sources and languages included peer-reviewed articles published in scientific journals in English. Once we have extracted all the relevant papers (n=29), we searched the lists of references in each of them and found 11 additional papers. In total, 40 papers were extracted from six data bases.

Two search methods were followed to identify the studies: An Internet-based search of the literature and a scan of the reference lists of articles that were found in the previous search and deemed relevant. The following electronic databases were searched: (i) PsycInfo, (ii) MedLine, (iii) PsycArticles, (iv) ERIC, (v) Web of Science, (vi) Psychology, and Behavioral Sciences Collection. To identify subject-related research terms, we performed a preliminary literature search and consulted child welfare experts. Based on these findings, an iterative search on each electronic database was carried out by matching two sets of terms, including both truncated (Figure 1) and thesaurus terms (Figure 2).

Figure 1. *Truncated search strategy*

TOPIC: ("family* support" OR "family* training" OR "support* families" OR "assisti* families" OR "skill*" OR "standard*" OR "good practice*" OR "ability") AND TOPIC: ("workforce" OR "professionals" OR "case worker" OR "supporter" OR "social worker" OR "psychologist") AND TOPIC: ("child*" OR "adolesc*" OR "youth")

Figure 2. *Example of thesaurus search for PsycInfo*

(SU.EXACT("family support") OR SU.EXACT("family training") OR SU.EXACT("supporting families") OR SU.EXACT("assisting families") OR SU.EXACT("skill") OR SU.EXACT ("standard") OR SU.EXACT("good practice") OR SU.EXACT ("ability") AND SU.EXACT("workforce") OR SU.EXACT("Professionals") OR SU.EXACT ("case worker") OR SU.EXACT("supporter") OR SU.EXACT("social worker") OR SU.EXACT ("psychologist") AND SU.EXACT("child") OR SU.EXACT("adolescence") OR SU.EXACT("youth") found 0 results.

*Selection procedure and study characteristics*

Records were sorted by relevance, and duplicates were removed. The relevance of the studies was determined through the screening of the titles and/or the abstracts (if the

study was not in the relevant subject area it was excluded based on the title) of the retrieved records. After this selection, the studies that met the eligibility criteria were evaluated in further detail. The studies that made references to or used family support for families with children, services or programmes were included in the review. For data collection purposes, a data extraction sheet was developed and adjusted after having been tested on the first selected study. Researchers extracted data from all the selected studies and shared them with three senior researchers for further analyses.

The search of the aforementioned databases provided a total of 8,949 records (Figure 3). After adjusting key words in the abstracts search, dates, types of publications, and publication status, 4,596 records remained. Out of these, 4,159 were discarded because, after reviewing their abstracts, it was concluded that those studies did not meet the criteria for inclusion. Finally, 105 studies were excluded since no full papers were available.

Figure 3. *Systematic review procedure*
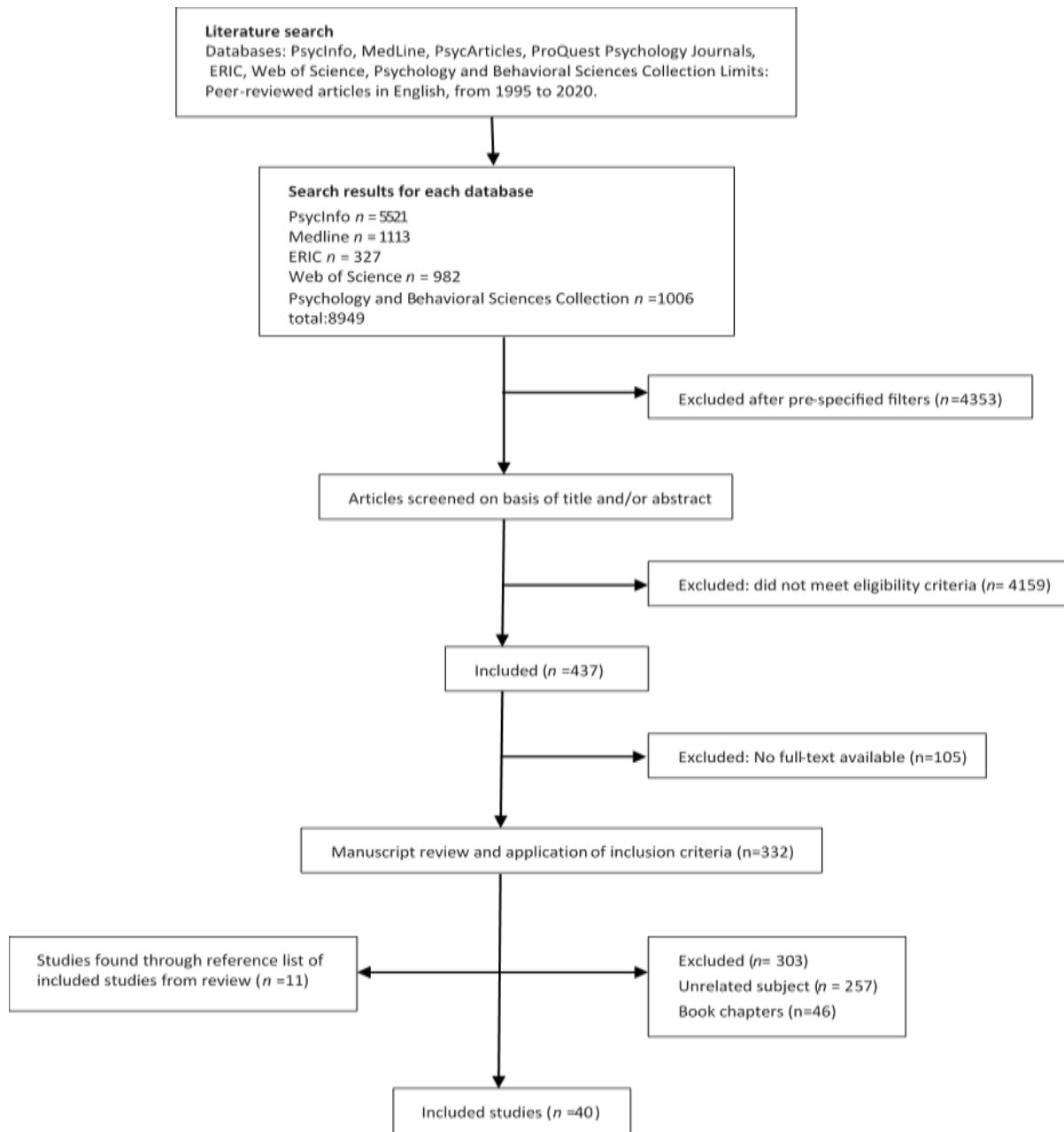


The full text versions of the remaining 332 studies were examined, and 293 studies did not meet the inclusion criteria described above. Twenty-nine studies met the inclusion

criteria and were included in the review, and eleven relevant studies were identified by checking the reference lists of the studies that met the inclusion criteria. Finally, a total of 40 studies on family support workforce skills were identified and analysed for this review.

Taking into a consideration that helping professions rely on relationships forged between the clients and the workforce, this review included project evaluations regarding family support in different environments. Since this study focused only on scientific, peer-reviewed papers, books in the area had not been included in the analyses. In papers, skills are always directly or indirectly tackled in the framework of a specific context and included as such.

*Data analysis*

The following variables were extracted during the analysis of the selected studies: author(s) and date of publication, title, aim, country, type of study/information, data collection method, data analyses, sample size, and main findings.

## Results

Summarizing the findings from 40 identified studies (see Table 1 and 2), we have identified that most of the studies were conducted in the UK (42%), 27.5% were carried out in the USA, 14% in Canada, 14% in Australia and 2.5% in Spain (see Table 1). Eleven studies were literature reviews, one a theoretical reflection and 28 empirical studies. Out of these, six used quantitative, 14 qualitative, and eight used mixed methodologies. Since two-thirds of the identified studies were empirical, they mentioned family support workforce skills indirectly as part of the assessment of some segments of service provision.

Table 1. *Main characteristics of the 40 studies in chronological order*

| Author(s) / (Year of publication) | Country | Type of study | | | Sample size | | | Data analyses | | | Family support workforce skills topics | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Qual stu-dy | Quant study | Lit re-view | Small scale | dna | Big stu-dies | The-matic ana-lyses | dna | Descrip-tive/ Inferential Statistics | Profe-ssionals' qualities | Technical skills | Specific knowledge |
| Bridge, G. (1999) | UK | | | + | | + | | | + | | | | + |
| Harrison, R. S., Boyle, S. W., & Farley, O. W. (1999) | USA | | + | | + | | | + | | + | | | + |
| Littell, J. H., & Tajima, E. A. (2000) | USA | | + | | | | + | + | | + | | + | |
| Hetherington, R., & Baistow, K. (2001). | UK | + | | | | + | | + | + | | | + | + |
| Turney, D., & Tanner, K. (2001) | dna | | | + | | + | | + | + | | | | + |
| Trotter, C. (2002) | AU | + | | | + | | | + | | + | + | + | |
| Chand, A., & Thoburn, J. (2005) | UK | | | + | | + | | + | + | | + | | + |
| Platt, D. (2008) | UK | + | | | + | | | + | | | + | | + |
| Whitton, C., Williams, C., Wright, B., Jardine, J., & Hunt, A. (2008) | UK | + | + | | + | | | + | | + | + | | |
| Woodcock, J., & Tregaskis, C. (2008) | UK | + | | | + | | | | | + | + | + | |
| Winter, K. (2009) | UK | + | | | + | | | + | | | + | | |
| Connell, M. (2010) | USA | | | + | | + | | | + | | | + | + |

| Author | Country | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Harvey, A. R., McCullough-Chavis, A., Littlefield, M. B., Phillips, A. D., & Cooper, J. D. (2010) | USA | + | | | | + | | + | | + | + | | |
| Leake, R., Holt, K., Potter, C., & Ortega, D. M. (2010) | USA | + | + | | + | | + | | | | | + | + |
| Tregeagle, S. (2010) | AU | + | | | + | | + | | | + | | | |
| Nunes, C., & Ayala, M. (2010) | ES | + | + | | + | | + | | + | | + | | |
| Cox, D. J. (2012) | DNA | | | + | | + | | + | | + | | | |
| Forrester, D., Westlake, D., & Glynn, G. (2012) | UK | | | + | | + | | + | | + | + | | + |
| Gladstone, J., Dumbrill, G., Leslie, B., Koster, A., Young, M., & Ismaila, A. (2012) | CAN | + | + | | + | | | | | + | + | + | |
| Magnuson, D., Patten, N., & Looysen, K. (2012) | CAN | | | + | | + | | + | | | | | |
| McLendon, T., McLendon, D., Dickerson, P. S., Lyons, J. K., & Tapp, K. (2012) | USA | | | + | | + | | + | | | | | + |

| Reference | Country | C1 | C2 | C3 | C4 | C5 | C6 | C7 | C8 | C9 | C10 | C11 | C12 | C13 | C14 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bogo, M., Shlonsky, A., Lee, B., & Serbinski, S. (2014) | CAN | | | + | + | | | | | + | | | | | + |
| Gladstone, J., Dumbrill, G., Leslie, B., Koster, A., Young, M., & Ismaila, A. (2014) | CAN | | + | | + | | | | | + | | | | + | + |
| Kemp, S. P., Marcenko, M. O., Lyons, S. J., & Kruzich, J. M. (2014) | USA | | + | | | | + | | | + | | + | | + | |
| Lindsay, S., Tétrault, S., Desmaris, C., King, G., & Piérart, G. (2014) | dna | + | | | + | | | + | | | | | | | + |
| Wolfe, V. (2014) | UK | + | | | + | | | + | | | | | | + | |
| Al-Khatib, B., & Norris, S. (2015) | UK | + | + | | + | | | | | + | | | | | + |
| Appleton, J. V., Terlektsi, E., & Coombes, L. (2015) | UK | + | + | | + | | | + | | | | | | | |
| Knight, C. (2015) | USA | | | + | | + | | | + | | | | | + | + |
| Sheppard, M., & Clibbens, J. (2015) | UK | | + | | + | | | | | + | | | | | + |
| Oliver, C., & Charles, G. (2016) | CAN | + | + | | + | | | + | | | | | | + | |
| Brassart, E., Prévost, C., Bétrisey, C., Lemieux, M., & | USA | + | | | + | | | + | | | | | | + | + |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Desmarais, C. (2017) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Damiani-Taraba, G., Dumbrill, G., Gladstone, J., Koster, A., Leslie, B., & Charles, M. (2017) | CAN | + | + | | + | | | | | + | + | | |
| Evans, S. (2017) | AU | | | RA | | + | | | + | | | | |
| Hunter, W. C., Elswick, S. E., Perkins, J. H., Heroux, J. R., & Harte, H. (2017) | USA | | | + | | + | | | + | | | + | |
| Westlake, D., & Jones, R. K. (2018) | UK | + | | | + | | | + | | + | | + | |
| Rawlings, M. A., & Blackmer, E. R. (2019) | USA | | + | | | | | + | | + | | | + |
| Rollins, W. (2019) | AU | + | | | + | | | + | | | + | | |
| Forrester, D., Killian, M., Westlake, D., & Sheehan, L. (2020) | UK | + | | | + | | | + | | | | + | |
| Stabler, L., Wilkins, D., & Carro, H. (2020) | UK | + | | | + | | | + | | | + | | + |

*Note.* DNA – Does Not Apply, RA – Reflective account, Qual – Qualitative, Quant – Quantitative, Lit – Literature

Table 2. *Aims, main findings, conclusions, strengths, and limitations of 40 studies reviewed*

| | Author(s) / (Year of publication) | Aims | Main findings /Conclusions | Strengths & Limitations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Bridge, G. (1999) | To consider child observation as a strategy for improving the quality of training for social workers engaged in service provision to disabled children and their families. | As social workers are among the main providers of services, their training needs in this area should be identified and strategies implemented. It has been apparent that knowledge may be developed from many subject areas and integrated by those observing through having the opportunity to see 'what others may not want to see' and learning to suspend judgment. | As we shall see from the brief history of social work involvement with disabled children later in this paper, there is an urgent necessity to improve training and thereby the quality of service provided to clients. Possible scientific bias. |
| 2 | Harrison, R. S., Boyle, S. W., & Farley, O. W. (1999) | To determine the effectiveness of a 12-week family-based intervention for troubled children. | Family-based interventions provided by social workers were associated with improved psychosocial functioning on the part of parents and children with behavioural problems. | The effectiveness of booster sessions, in which parents and their children can have periodic mini sessions to review concepts previously learned but adjusted to the developmental needs of families with adolescents, also needs to be examined. |
| 3 | Littell, J. H., & Tajima, E. A. (2000) | To identify two distinct components of parent participation in intensive family preservation services: collaboration in treatment planning and compliance with programme expectations. | Programme factors matter as well, although some operate in tandem with case characteristics and worker perceptions. | Two components of participation in FPS (collaboration and compliance) were found, but other distinctions could be made. Future studies might distinguish collaboration from congruence (agreement) in treatment planning and treat compliance and cooperation as separate phenomena. Further work is needed to identify |

|  |  |  |  | important elements of client participation in FPS and other treatment settings. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | Hetherington, R., & Baistow, K. (2001) | Comparison of cooperation between services for community mental health and child protection in 11 states. | A comparison of commonalities and differences highlights the problems shared across countries, and alternative ways of responding to them at ground level are discussed. The factors that facilitate a good outcome are analysed in relation to English practice and service structures. | Inputs on practice, education, and services, but research process not described. |
| 5 | Turney, D., & Tanner, K. (2001) | Focus on relationship difficulties between parent and child which manifest as unwillingness or inability on the part of the primary carer to offer reliable, adequate care, and on broader relationship difficulties within the family. | Relational approach requires an ability on the part of the social worker to work both with and within relationships and look at the contribution that a critically informed relationship-based approach can make to the work with families where child neglect occurs. | Good understanding of relationship practice, but the limitation is in possible research bias since the review is not systematic. |
| 6 | Trotter, C. (2002) | This study attempts to identify the extent to which child protection workers make use of these skills and how these skills relate to client outcomes. | It was clear that when workers used certain skills, their clients had better outcomes – the workers believed their clients showed better progress, the clients were more satisfied with the outcomes and the cases were more likely to have been closed 16 months later. | There is no clear evidence in this study that any skill is more powerful than any other skill. Most of the skills seem to be effective most of the time. |
| 7 | Chand, A., & Thoburn, J. (2005) | The paper finally examines what research says about the qualities sought in social workers by minority ethnic parents. | There are many concerns and limitations around some services currently offered to minority ethnic families; there are others that are valued and appear, at least in the eyes of | The very small amount of research that has looked at the outcomes for minority ethnic families, measured in terms of parent or child well-being and improvements in well-being overall, means that it is not possible to say at this |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | the parents, to be associated with more positive outcomes. | stage whether some approaches to family support work are 'better' than others for particular groups of families. However, the studies that do exist provide pointers to those more promising interventions that should be included in the much-needed outcome evaluations. |
| 8 | Platt, D. (2008) | The effects of more coercive and less coercive interventions on relationships between social workers and parents. | The less coercive initial assessments, combined with child welfare concerns that were perceived as less serious, provided the context for good working relationships between parent and worker. | Predominantly females interviewed and provides a context within which positive relationships between social workers and parents are achievable. |
| 9 | Whitton, C., Williams, C., Wright, B., Jardine, J., & Hunt, A. (2008) | To evaluate a new rural community palliative care service for children according to the perceptions of families and service providers, to make changes suggested by families and to re-evaluate 1 year later. | Families rated 'respectful and supportive care' as the highest domain in the MPOC-UK and 'providing general information' as the lowest. Emphasis was placed on improving the provision of information during the following year. | The Measure of Process of Care (MPOC) was found to be a very useful tool for evaluating the way in which care is delivered in a relatively small population. |
| 10 | Woodcock, J., & Tregaskis, C. (2008). | This research, constituting secondary data analysis of a current Economic and Social Research Council funded programme of research with parents with disabled children in two areas in Northern England, responds to policy and practice prescriptions for family support services to be responsive and | Findings identified several barriers to inclusion even for mainstream disabled families, particularly in the area of parent–social worker communication. | As secondary analysis of qualitative data is rarely reported, the paper provides a useful commentary on this type of research process. We have reservations because the perspectives of some minority ethnic groups and fathers were excluded from the study and recognize that objections could be raised as to what extent the perspectives of the individual researchers represent those of their professions as a whole. |

| | | inclusive to a diversity of parenting situations. | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | Winter, K. (2009) | This paper begins by confirming the importance of developing relationships between social workers and young children but questions the ability of the new policy developments to facilitate these. | Drawing upon data from research involving interviews with social workers, the paper outlines the factors which hinder social workers' relationships with young children and argues that while the new proposals address some of the more surface structural and organizational factors, they do not address the deeper factors regarding attitudes, values and emotional competence which are crucial if social workers are to successfully build relationships with young children in care. | The findings have highlighted that the contributory factors hindering the development of social worker relationships with children in care are complex. Possible bias. |
| 12 | Connell, M. (2010) | This article explores how various sources of authority interact to govern psychologists' parenting plan evaluations (child custody evaluations), and remedies that are available when an evaluation is poorly conducted. | This article has explored the sources of authority or guidance that illuminate the process of conducting a parenting plan evaluation, and their relative enforceability, the manner in which they may be enforced, and the consequences of not following them. | A rare standard proposal but there could be bias. |
| 13 | Harvey, A. R., McCullough-Chavis, A., Littlefield, M. B., Phillips, A. D., & Cooper, J. D. (2010) | The paper describes a culturally competent intervention model developed by the MAAT Center for Human and Organizational Enhancement, Inc. in Washington, D.C. for parents of African American male youths who live in high-risk environments. | The importance of respecting and validating clients as ways of building trust and providing emotional and instrumental support to engage and retain parents in these types of programmes. | The participating parents and community adults viewed their experiences in FEEM as being empowering for their parenting role and for their own personal development, but it was just a result of preliminary action. |

| 14 | Leake, R., Holt, K., Potter, C., & Ortega, D. M. (2010) | The purpose of the project was to grapple with the challenge of increasing culturally responsive practice in a context of safety and permanency that is defined by American political and cultural values. | Findings from the formative evaluation indicate that stakeholders felt that the simulation was well worth the time and effort. | The evaluation was designed to gather formative feedback about the design and delivery of the training and create a continuous feedback loop so that the project team could make ongoing improvements. These results do suggest, however, that many participants experienced this training to be profoundly different than other trainings about cultural competency, and that it was successful in raising their awareness of cultural issues with the Latino families they serve. |
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| 15 | Tregeagle, S. (2010) | This paper reports on a qualitative study of service users of two widely used systems in Australia: "Looking After Children" (LAC) and "Supporting Children and Responding to Families" (SCARF) (both based on adaptations of United Kingdom systems). | Children, young people, and parents reported positive experiences of case-managed interventions: the goals of the intervention were usually clear, processes productive, and relationships with social workers possible. | However, service users did identify barriers to participation, limitations in assessment, and described diverse experiences of interventions. While these findings challenge critics, they also suggest that LAC and SCARF could be further developed to better meet the expectations of families. |
| 16 | Nunes, C., & Ayala, M. (2010) | To analyse communication techniques used by paediatricians during well-child program visits. The visits are used to assess overall health, development, behaviour, and family functioning, as well as provide parental education through age-appropriate counselling. | Paediatricians used a limited range of techniques to inform, counsel and give narrative support to patients. Significant differences among paediatricians were observed in the use of most techniques. A limited range of communication techniques were observed. The lack of homogeneity among paediatricians suggests different styles of communication, depending on the quantity and quality of communication techniques used. | This study provided information that may help improve paediatrician counselling skills, remove barriers in counselling, and reinforce adequate counselling practices. The existence of different communication styles that result from differences in the quantity and quality of communication techniques used is a useful finding that should be confirmed with larger paediatrician samples, as it would aid in an overall understanding of consultation practices. |

| 17 | Cox, D. J. (2012) | As the field of autism therapy moves toward a more comprehensive, holistic, and interdisciplinary model, the complexity of an interdisciplinary service delivery model could pose significant challenges. | This paper has argued that the appropriate integrating force is the language of ethics underlying the premise for why each of the disciplines comprising the interdisciplinary conceptual framework does what they do. | This paper attempted to take the first steps toward integration amongst the disciplines by way of ethical language and offered a workable code of ethics for therapeutic programmes. There could be bias. |
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| 18 | Forrester, D., Westlake, D., & Glynn, G. (2012) | This paper identifies social and individual reasons why parents may be resistant. | It is concluded that MI offers an opportunity to improve practice by increasing parental engagement and to make a contribution to social work theory by combining an attention to both broader social structure and the micro-skills required in social work interviews. | Usage of MI in social work but possible bias. |
| 19 | Gladstone, J., Dumbrill, G., Leslie, B., Koster, A., Young, M., & Ismaila, A. (2012) | This paper reports a study that sought to understand what facilitates engagement between parents and child protection workers and to ascertain the relationship between such engagement and intervention outcome. | The study demonstrates that engagement between clients and workers is related to positive outcomes (as reported by workers and parents) and supports the contention that promoting engagement is integral to a successful child protection intervention. | The study makes an important contribution in terms of conceptualizing engagement as part of a change process in child welfare practice. Examining engagement longitudinally from the point of intake until case closure would provide more information as to whether engagement changes over time. |
| 20 | Magnuson, D., Patten, N., & Looysen, K. (2012) | How child protection professionals orient to the work can be described as a style, and in the two teams reported on here, a style is emerging that is characterized by reaching for and inviting ongoing negotiation with families, with allied | Associated with this style is a reflexive approach to conversation in which the intense and frequent need to articulate a stance and a point of view about the best interest of the child (and family) results in frequent self-critical and practice-critical conversation. | Given the contested nature of child protection practices, it is important to study whether there is an immediate connection between these understandings and effectiveness, understood as improvements in the quality of professional–client relationship, improvements in the practices of |

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| | | professionals and colleagues, and a reflexivity that is the result of the attention focused on the professional and the need to continually defend the work and explain to others one's point of view. | | applied professional ethics, and improvements in the well-being of children and families. |
| 21 | McLendon, T., McLendon, D., Dickerson, P. S., Lyons, J. K., & Tapp, K. (2012) | This article presents a literature review specific to parental engagement in child welfare services, identifies gaps in service provision, and introduces the Family-Directed Structural Assessment Tool, which addresses several challenges of engaging parents in this process. | The students reported that the tool effectively engaged families in a non-threatening, strengths-based manner, identified needed concrete resources, and facilitated the collection of a great deal of information from the parents' perspective in a short amount of time. | Useful review of Family-Directed Structural Assessment Tool, but as a literature review, there could be bias and needs more research support. |
| 22 | Bogo, M., Shlonsky, A., Lee, B., & Serbinski, S. (2014) | Systematically searched the published and grey literature for studies that evaluated training for child welfare practitioners and used simulation methods that included standardized actors. | All three studies were focused on investigative interviews of child abuse. | The strength of the included studies is their use of simulation not only to teach but also to assess participants' performance using objective measures of specific skills. Many challenges exist for researchers who study the effectiveness of education and training approaches in general, and those that use simulation in particular. Challenges relate to conceptualization, measurement, and implementation. |
| 23 | Gladstone, J., Dumbrill, G., Leslie, B., Koster, A., | This study examines the way casework skills relate to parent | The use of particular casework skills was also related to the severity of the case, worker experience, work environment, worker stress, and worker burnout. Findings suggest that | Notwithstanding the limitations, this study helps to advance the conceptualization of the change process involving adult parent client. |

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| | Young, M., & Ismaila, A. (2014) | and child welfare worker engagement. | certain casework skills should be emphasized in child welfare practice with parents. Relationship-building skills appear to be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, for engagement to come about. Needed are skills that contribute to a collaborative relationship and an anti-oppressive approach with clients. | |
| 24 | Kemp, S. P., Marcenko, M. O., Lyons, S. J., & Kruzich, J. M. (2014) | The present study used path analysis to examine the relationship between parent report of workers' use of strength-based practice and parent investment in child welfare services. The study also examined the role of worker characteristics, organizational factors, child placement status, and parent risk factors. | The findings provide empirical support for the link between parents' willingness to engage in services and the use of strength-based interventions and contribute to current discussions regarding the appropriate balance between reducing risks to child safety and strengthening family capacities. | Although more research is needed to better understand how parent, worker, and system factors interactively enhance or undermine parental engagement as a child's status changes, this finding highlights the dynamic and often fragile nature of parents' motivation and investment, and the need for workers to respond accordingly. |
| 25 | Lindsay, S., Tétrault, S., Desmaris, C., King, G., & Piérart, G. (2014) | Although culturally sensitive care is acknowledged as the gold standard in paediatric rehabilitation, very little is known about the social worker's role in providing culturally sensitive care to immigrant families raising a child with a physical disability. | These results also highlighted common challenges that social workers encountered in providing culturally sensitive care. These challenges included language barriers, discrepancies between clinicians' and patients' cultural orientation, gender and generational differences, lack of knowledge of resources, and difficulties building rapport and trust. | Identifying the critical role of social workers but missing the role of other profiles. |
| 26 | Wolfe, V. (2014) | The current study elicited the perceptions of parents relating to the school-based UKRP. | The study supports and expands upon earlier studies which highlight the importance of meaningful parent-school partnerships and offers new evidence to inform home-school | The current study links existing theory with new data and provides a plausible explanation for the processes at play in parents' perceptions about a new school initiative: the UKRP. As the present |

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| | | | policies and effective working practices with parents. | study was a small-scale research study it is not possible to generalize the findings or apply them to wider populations. |
| 27 | Al-Khatib, B., & Norris, S. (2015) | How EPs can use consultation skills directly with clients within a mental health context and presents a theoretical rationale for this. | Dilemmas arising from the project are considered and subsequently addressed through the introduction of the Common Factors perspective: a paradigm which is gaining interest within the helping professions. | The authors are also interested in how a Common Factors perspective may be applied more broadly within our profession as a conceptual framework for researching practice and informing future practice across contexts to help us achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people. |
| 28 | Appleton, J. V., Terlektsi, E., & Coombes, L. (2015). | This study examined the impact and feasibility of implementing the SF model across one local authority. | Study findings indicated problems with the roll-out of training for the SF approach, yet model fidelity was largely adhered to during SF conferences. | Thought is needed about how to tackle the perception amongst families that they are judged and that they are powerless during the ICPC process, particularly as our observations of SF conferences revealed that parents were active in their contributions to meetings. |
| 29 | Knight, C. (2015) | In this article, trauma-informed practice is explained, incorporating the most recent theoretical and empirical literature. | Adult survivors of childhood trauma are a particularly challenging group of clients given the long-term effects of the victimization and the present-day difficulties they face. In this article, trauma-informed practice is explained, incorporating the most recent theoretical and empirical literature. | Emphasis is placed on helping survivors understand how their past influences the present and on empowering them to manage their present lives more effectively, using basic skills of social work practice. Trauma-informed practitioners are, in fact, well-served by their core training as social workers, but there is possible bias. |
| 30 | Sheppard, M., & Clibbens, J. (2015) | This study reports on an evaluation of a social worker delivered school-based social skills programme, which can | The findings here present a base – intriguing possibilities, suggesting social work can have a constructive and effective role, but this may be explored further through replication studies. | Some caution should be applied to claiming too much from these findings, which arise from a novel exploratory study for social work, as noted earlier. It does raise significant questions for |

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| | | contribute to the important area of resilience. | | social work, however, and its potential future direction. |
| 31 | Oliver, C., & Charles, G. (2016) | This paper describes one component of a mixed-methods study in a large Canadian statutory child protection agency in which 225 workers described how they applied the ideas of strengths-based practice in their daily work. | They provide what may be a useful model to help workers understand and navigate relationships in which they must reconcile their own authority and expertise with genuine support for the authority and expertise of their clients. | The description of the 'Enacting firm, fair and friendly practice' version of strengths-based practice was constructed from interviews with four front-line workers. More research is needed, in this and other child protection agencies, to evaluate the extent to which it resonates with others. |
| 32 | Brassart, E., Prévost, C., Bétrisey, C., Lemieux, M., & Desmarais, C. (2017) | SP's knowledge of barriers and strategies to enhance the engagement in treatment by IP raising a child with a disability. | Several adaptations are needed within the health care services for the IP. They can help guide clinical practice to increase the level of treatment engagement of the IP raising a child with a disability. | The study investigated only the perceptions of the SP. Also, it focused on the strategies used by a small number of SPs in each discipline. |
| 33 | Damiani-Taraba, G., Dumbrill, G., Gladstone, J., Koster, A., Leslie, B., & Charles, M. (2017) | To increase the understanding of the relationship between workers and child protection clients through the development of a client engagement model. | Workers who were kind and considerate were more likely to be engaged. Worker engagement predicted satisfaction with the case outcome and whether workers' believed families would contact the agency in the future. Lastly, client engagement predicted worker engagement although it is our belief that this is an iterative reciprocal process. | While our study attempted to sample a representative sample from 11 children's aid societies across Ontario, these organizations might not fully represent all families and workers involved in child protection. |
| 34 | Evans, S. (2017) | Focused on the author's brief experience in a key worker role, the article highlights challenges and contradictions that arise | The article renews support for social workers playing professionally appropriate roles in early childhood intervention teams in ways that can | Recognizing knowledge and skill boundaries of different ECI professionals has emerged as a major theme in this article. Claims about the usefulness of the model rest on certain |

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| | | when health and welfare professionals are expected not only to exchange knowledge, skills, and expertise, but also to perform each other's work. | protect best service delivery to children with disability and their families. | assumptions, which include: (1) any ECI professional can potentially be an effective key worker, if they are (2) supported by strong team collaboration involving adequate case consultation. |
| 35 | Hunter, W. C., Elswick, S. E., Perkins, J. H., Heroux, J. R., & Harte, H. (2017) | This research emphasizes the importance of exposing students with disabilities enrolled in early childhood programs (preK) to literacy-rich home and school environments. | The authors conceptualize how an interdisciplinary approach involving the school social worker is essential in developing interactive literacy workshops designed to enhance the development of children's early literacy skills within the home and school environment. | Very useful workshop description, limited to one model. |
| 36 | Westlake, D., & Jones, R. K. (2018) | This paper explores how social workers can communicate effectively using an interpreter. It examines how child and family practitioners describe their experiences of working with interpreters and uses audio recordings of home visits to analyse how the challenges they describe manifest in practice. | The study demonstrates the centrality of social worker skills in managing interpreter-mediated sessions and improving practice for non-native speaking families. This has implications for social work practice internationally. | The paper adds weight and detail to recent arguments for social work as a 'leadership profession' and begins to illuminate what leadership means in this context. Conceptualizing this element of direct practice in terms of leadership may be useful – both for the work with clients who require interpreters and for the practice in general. |
| 37 | Rollins, W. (2019) | Explores social work–client relationship. | Findings confirmed the centrality of social worker–client relationships for achieving client outcomes and revealed a distinctive practice approach where the social worker–client relationship is seen as the workspace for the intervention, and the social worker acts as relationship-building agent. | This study valorises the centrality of the social worker–client relationship for achieving client outcomes. However, it did not include client perspectives of the social worker–client relationship. |

| 38 | Rawlings, M. A., & Blackmer, E. R. (2019) | A two-station (scenario) Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) was developed and tested for validity and reliability for assessing social work engagement skills in public child welfare. | Findings suggest a promising approach for directly assessing social worker skill in engagement of clients. | Small sample size and students from a single institution. |
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| 39 | Forrester, D., Killian, M., Westlake, D., & Sheehan, L. (2020) | This study explores patterns of practice skill found in child and family social work home visits. | First, three fundamental dimensions of good practice emerged, which we characterize as care and engagement, good authority, and support for behaviour change. Second, in exploring the relationship between "care" and "control" elements of social work, skilled social workers were able to combine good authority and empathic engagement, whereas those who were less skilled in use of authority were also less good at engagement. | This paper reports on one step in such a journey. Our hope is that other researchers, using this or different frameworks, will be encouraged to explore the complex and fascinating nature of practice, and its relationship to outcomes for children and their families. |
| 40 | Stabler, L., Wilkins, D., & Carro, H. (2020) | Understanding how children experience social work interventions is an important part of gauging whether what is provided is genuinely helpful. | This suggests not an archetypal "good social worker"; instead, there are skills that are good for specific children at specific times within the context of specific relationships. | Innovative model of research. |

Most of the empirical studies have identified clients and indirectly tackle family support workforce skills. Clients of the studies have been recognized and divided in four categories: (1) families of neglected/abused children or in care, (2) families with children affected by behavioural problems, (3) families with children with disability, and (4) minority ethnic parents.

The professionals in the 40 studies reviewed were mainly social workers (N=22, 55%), followed by child protection workers (including social workers, psychologists, and others, N=14, 35%), psychologists (N=3.8%), and paediatricians (N=1.2%).

Family support workforce skills described in the studies were organized in three topics: (1) the qualities of the professionals (attitudes and attributes), (2) technical skills, and (3) specific knowledge. The identified topics will be further described in the next section (Table 1).

*The qualities of the professionals*

Several studies suggest that accuracy, empathy, warmth, and genuineness are associated with higher satisfaction with social workers and other professionals (e.g., Damiani-Taraba et al., 2017; Forrester et al, 2020; Rollins, 2019; Stabler et al., 2020). To a lesser extent, several studies show that these qualities are related to positive client outcomes (e.g.: Gladstone et al., 2012; Kemp et al., 2014; Trotter, 2002).

*Technical skills*

The technical skills often referred to included ways to empower and enable families (Gladstone et al., 2012; 2014; Harvey et al., 2010; Kemp et al., 2014; Knight, 2015; Leake et al., 2010; Oliver & Charles, 2016; Wolfe, 2014) and communication skills (Brassart et al., 2017; Forrester et al., 2012; 2020; Nunes & Ayala, 2010; Trotter, 2002; Tregeagle, 2010; Westlake & Jones, 2018; Woodcock & Tregaskis, 2008). Only three studies detailed which communication techniques were more effective (Forrester et al, 2012; 2020; Nunes & Ayala, 2010). For instance, in child protection work, if empathy, reflection and good listening are combined, social workers can reduce parents' resistance and promote real change (Forrester et al., 2012; 2020). In addition, other specific communication techniques can promote parents' satisfaction and adherence to professionals' recommendations. To give narrative support, professionals dispose of an array of techniques, such as facilitation, showing empathy, repetition, clarification, or interpretation. To give information or provide counselling, professionals can use exemplifying to detail behaviour, reasoning to identify knowledge, and motivating and rewarding, among others, to transform beliefs (Nunes & Ayala, 2010).

Other technical skills described include planning skills (Connell, 2010; Gladstone et al., 2014; Littell & Tajima, 2000), decision-making skills (Gladstone et al., 2012; 2014; Trotter, 2002), problem-solving (Gladstone et al., 2012; 2014; Trotter, 2002), offering flexible and non-prescriptive approach to delivery, in fact flexibility and adaptability to service users' needs (Littell & Tajima, 2000), engaging and working with other services (Cox, 2012, Hetherington & Baistow, 2001; Hunter et al., 2017; Wolfe, 2014), and time-management and organizational skills (Gladstone et al., 2012; 2014; Hetherington & Baistow, 2001).

*Specific knowledge*

Regarding specific knowledge necessary to support families, studies were scarcer. We identified eleven studies about technical and professional expertise, namely cognitive-behavioural strategies (Al-Khatib & Norris, 2015; Knight, 2015) or modelling skills (Gladstone et al., 2014; Harrison et al., 1999; Sheppard & Clibbens, 2015), training in child observation techniques (Bridge, 1999), conducting plan evaluation (Connell, 2010) or using specific assessment tools (Bogo et al., 2014; McLendon et al., 2012; Rawlings & Blackmer, 2019) and motivational interviewing (Forrester et al., 2012; Stabler et al., 2020).

Understanding family context was a topic presented in five studies (Brassart et al., 2017; Gladstone et al., 2014; Hetherington & Baistow, 2001; Platt, 2008; Turney & Tanner, 2001).

Three studies approached the need to be aware of equality and diversity issues (Chand & Thoburn, 2005; Leake et al., 2010; Lindsay et al., 2014), and another three the need to master knowledge about child development (Brassart et al., 2017; Bridge, 1999; Turney & Tanner, 2001). Finally, only one study refers to the knowledge of available support (Chand & Thoburn, 2005).

## Discussion

A wide range of studies exist in the family support domain but, when family support workforce skills are the main specific topic, the number of studies is drastically lower. In fact, the systematic literature review conducted in the selected 40 studies revealed results from other studies, which refer to the prevalence of research about social workers' skills (Winter, 2009; Forrester et al., 2012; Evans, 2017).

It was also verified that the studies had been conducted in five different countries with uneven distribution. These data seem to reveal that research on family support workforce skills is concentrated in some parts of the world. In fact, these countries, namely UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and even Spain, are traditionally associated with the improvement of education and

social inclusion, and also, family support. However, the search conducted only looked for articles in English. So, if other researchers from other countries had published in their mother tongues their studies were not covered by this systematic review.

It seems that researchers from the selected studies organized diverse types of research. They included eleven literature reviews, one theoretical reflection and 28 empirical studies. In fact, empirical studies were the prevalent choice, with an emphasis on qualitative research, followed by mixed and quantitative research as the less chosen options, so it seems qualitative and mixed research is more adequate to achieve a deeper understanding in this case. It is also characteristic of the current state of affairs in social work research, since qualitative and mixed research methods are well connected with social work skills and values (Baruch et al., 2011). Actually, qualitative research demands active knowledge about the reality and about how it changes (Carspecken, 2011), which is an assumption that those qualitative and mixed researchers seem to share.

Outcomes from the selected studies show diverse "clients" (family and family members) as well as diverse professionals studied. The professionals involved in the selected studies were mainly social workers, although general child protection workers (such as social workers, psychologist, and others), psychologists and paediatricians were also included. Therefore, possibly family support workforce skills described were conditioned by those professional categories and expected outcomes related to their professions. Nevertheless, three topics of family support skills were identified in the reports: professional qualities (attitudes and attributes), professional technical skills and professional specific knowledge. These three topics refer to essential skills that are indeed expected in the professional domain of social workers, although they have a distinctive role in supporting children and families (Sims, 2011). Family support embraces a wide diversity of interventions and human resources (Devaney et al., 2013), which make it more difficult to identify a unique or a single set of core professional skills and competences.

In this sense, dealing with people and families, seems to require what was designated as attitudes and attributes. It seems important because professionals with these characteristics were associated with higher satisfaction among their clients (e.g., Damiani-Taraba et al., 2017; Forrester et al., 2020; Rollins, 2019; Stabler et al., 2020) and, in fewer of the selected studies, these qualities were also associated with positive client outcomes (e.g., Gladstone et al., 2012; Kemp et al., 2014). This aspect reflects the diversity that can also be registered in the assessment of the effectiveness of the intervention, going beyond client satisfaction and providing indicators of change. In fact, lately, the importance of evidence-based practice (EBP) has been demanded in social and psychological practice (APA, 2006).

Technical skills are also vital, and a wide range was reported in the studies. So, it seems that skills to empower and enable families are an asset (e.g., Kemp et al., 2014; Knight, 2015; Oliver & Charles, 2016), as well as communication skills (e.g., Brassart et al., 2017; Forrester et al., 2020; Westlake & Jones, 2018), even though a few studies presented communication techniques more effectively (Forrester et al, 2020; Nunes & Ayala, 2010).

Likewise, regulatory and planning skills were studied, namely planning skills (e.g., Gladstone et al., 2014), decision-making skills (e.g., Trotter, 2002), problem-solving (e.g., Gladstone et al., 2012), offering a flexible and non-prescriptive approach to delivery (Littell & Tajima, 2000), engaging and working with other services (e.g., Hunter et al., 2017), and time management and organizational skills (e.g., Hetherington & Baistow, 2001). Is seems professionals need to master regulatory and planning skills and using these skills effectively in their work with families. Also, flexible thought and problem-solving techniques are important tools. Indeed, those skills are increasingly necessary since the professional is an active actor in the search for knowledge, not focusing anymore only on the "accumulated subjective experience with individual cases" (Devaney et al., 2013, p. 7).

It seems that technical and professional expertise can be organized in diverse skills domains. Some of them relate more to cognitive and behavioural skills, implying changes in conduct and thought, like cognitive-behavioural strategies (e.g., Al-Khatib & Norris, 2015) or modelling skills (e.g., Sheppard & Clibbens, 2015), and others relate to skills required in assessing family processes and dynamics, like training in child observation techniques (Bridge, 1999), conducting plan evaluation (Connell, 2010) or using specific assessment tools (e.g., Rawlings & Blackmer, 2019), and motivational interviewing (e.g., Stabler et al., 2020).

However, skills used to learn about and understand the family context were also in focus (e.g., Brassart et al., 2017), as well as the awareness of equality and diversity issues (e.g., Lindsay et al., 2014), the knowledge of child development (e.g., Brassart et al., 2017) and the knowledge of available support (Chand & Thoburn, 2005). In this sense, knowledge is important when referring to a theoretical specific domain, including technical skills to implement actions with families. Moreover, a kind of general technical skills and attitudes and attributes of the professionals are important to work with and provide support to families. It seems that technical skills are closer to the "ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems" (Cedefop, 2014, p. 227) definition of "skills", whereas specific knowledge, attitudes and attributes approximate to the "ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities in work or study situations, and in professional and personal development" (Cedefop, 2014, p. 47) definition for "competences". In fact, both designations for skills and competences are interconnected under the emerging concept of family support workforce skills umbrella.

## Towards a Systematization and Classification of Family Support Workforce Skills

If we interpret findings on family support workforce skills in the framework of Drury-Hudson's (1997) model of professional knowledge of social work, we can notice that skills and qualities classified in this way permeate at least four of the five recognized domains. Namely, there are five main knowledge forms in this model: theoretical, empirical, procedural, practice wisdom and personal knowledge. None of these forms is a discrete category, and there is significant overlap between each area.

Personal knowledge and practice wisdom (gained from experience) in Drury-Hudson's model includes intuition, empathy, communication, relationship, and the use of self, which is the field where what we have identified as 'the Qualities of the Professionals' is situated. Those are accuracy, empathy, warmth, and genuineness, as essential qualities for relationship-building in any helping and supporting interpersonal activities.
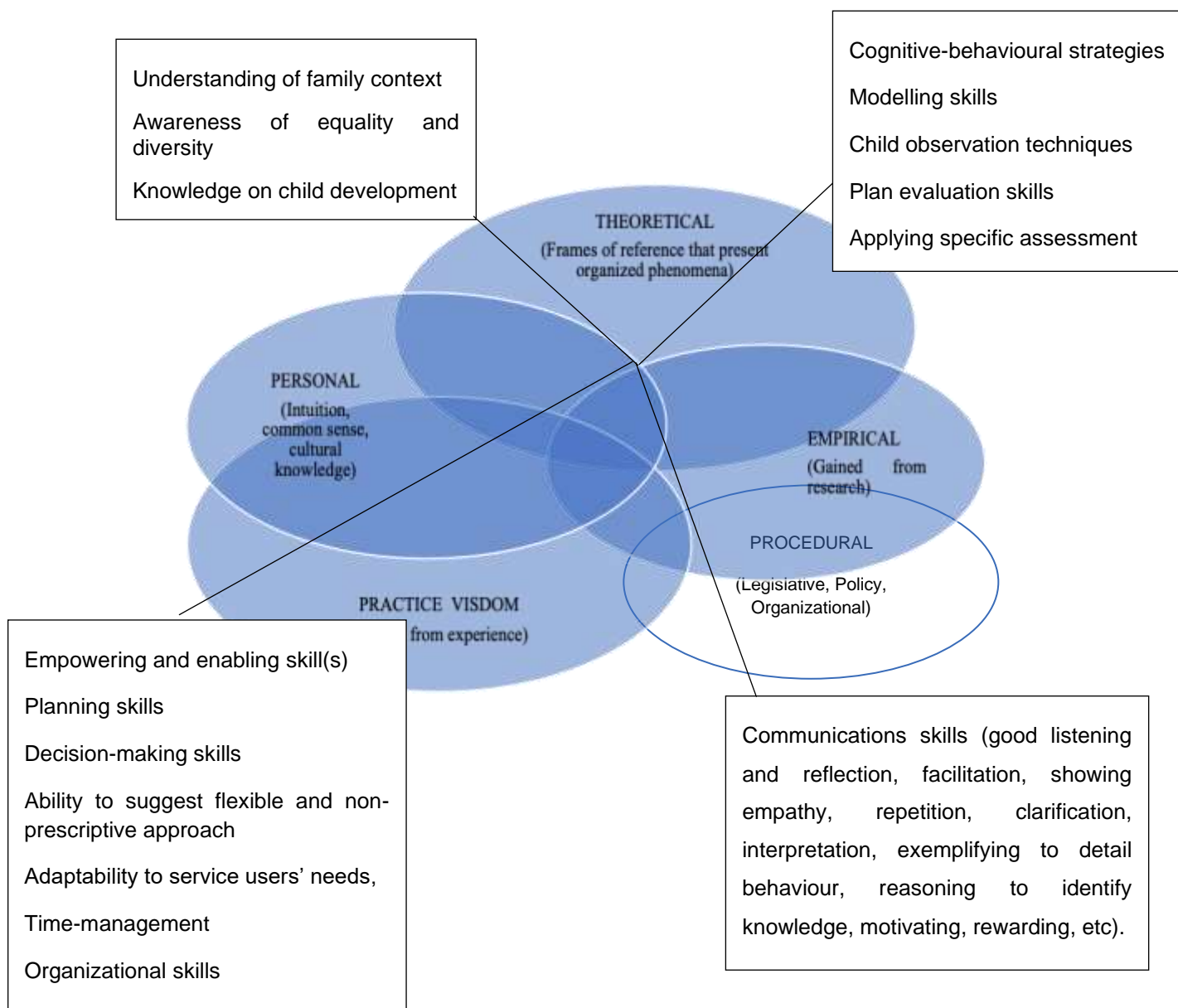
A theory (or theories), or frame of reference, that presents, explains, and interprets organized phenomena, provides the basis for methodologies and/or know-how, in our case, family support. From the areas of *specific knowledge*, we have identified understanding of the family context, awareness of equality and diversity issues and advanced knowledge about child development, together with insight into available support and resources. From the *skills side* of theories, we find specific knowledge and professional expertise in cognitive-behavioural strategies, modelling skills, child observation techniques, plan evaluation skills, as well as knowledge and skills in applying specific assessment tools and techniques, also including motivational interviewing.

*Empirical knowledge* gained from research, as a foundation of evidence-based practice, partly overlaps with the skills we have identified in the sphere of specific knowledge, and also contains technical skills recognised in our findings, like the range of communications skills and techniques which have proven to be effective (good listening and reflection, facilitation, showing empathy, repetition, clarification, interpretation, exemplifying to detail behaviour, reasoning to identify knowledge, motivating, rewarding, etc).

Other skills that we have classified as technical, such as empowering and enabling skill(s), planning skills, decision-making skills, ability to suggest flexible approaches and solutions, adaptability to service users' needs, time-management and organizational skills, overlap with at least three fields in this model: theoretical, empirical and practice wisdom, but are probably also permeated by personal attributes and qualities.

The procedural part for family support workforce skills does not appear to have been identified in this literature review, although different interpretations are possible. Figure 5. shows the fields covered by the identified family support skills covered in the mentioned model.

Figure 5. *Family support workface skills in Drury-Hudson's model of professional knowledge of social work (1997)*

Understanding of family context

Awareness of equality and diversity

Knowledge on child development

Cognitive-behavioural strategies

Modelling skills

Child observation techniques

Plan evaluation skills

Applying specific assessment

THEORETICAL
(Frames of reference that present organized phenomena)

PERSONAL
(Intuition, common sense, cultural knowledge)

EMPIRICAL
(Gained from research)

PROCEDURAL
(Legislative, Policy, Organizational)

PRACTICE VISDOM
(from experience)

Empowering and enabling skill(s)

Planning skills

Decision-making skills

Ability to suggest flexible and non-prescriptive approach

Adaptability to service users' needs,

Time-management

Organizational skills

Communications skills (good listening and reflection, facilitation, showing empathy, repetition, clarification, interpretation, exemplifying to detail behaviour, reasoning to identify knowledge, motivating, rewarding, etc).

So, it seems that most of the technical skills, as well as some specific knowledge identified during this systematic literature review, actually cover the field which represents the heart or the central point in this model, as it overlaps with theoretical, empirical, personal knowledge, and wisdom of practice domains, providing a specific framework for the explication of family support workforce skills, as their learned power to support families as a whole and their members in a dignified, collaborative and effective manner.

Theoretical, empirical, and personal domains overlap in the essential abilities to apply the knowledge of family dynamics, child development and resources in the environment in concrete practice settings. At the same time, practice wisdom and personal domains provide space for the development of the professionals' qualities (we could also add relevant groups of paraprofessionals) involved.

In this analysis, we failed to identify skills related to procedural knowledge from Drury-Hudson's model, which does not mean that they do not exist. Also, other models may allow for a different interpretation of our findings.

## Conclusion and Implications

This systematic review has presented a very general concept of family support workforce skills. The data found in the current work are not sufficient to present a strong, broad global perspective comparing different social, cultural, and political conditions. Some considerations and limitations of the study can be discussed. The information reported only includes five countries worldwide, so it would be interesting to explore other countries and to list different skills needed to respond to different "clients" in different countries, if there are any. Even though some studies were done with specific groups, the procedures were not replicated. Deeper knowledge would be an asset for standardization, and it would be interesting to compare if there are specific and different professional skills studied at different levels of intervention (Devaney at al., 2013).

Another limitation can be the English language used as an inclusion criterion, which would not allow access to all articles published in the area. However, as the studied topic is an emergent topic, this could provide plausible justification for the few and disperse results found. The current study only considered peer-reviewed articles. Probably a number of handbooks, monographs and grey literature contain important data about the subject and should be considered further. Also, the scientific databases considered as well as the descriptors could have affected the results.

These findings indicate that, despite the range of professionals, disciplines and settings integrated, when we consider family support workforce skills, social workers are the main targeted professionals in studies, albeit other child protection workers were studied too. It is important to stress this particular finding, since it has been argued for a while that in social work and specifically in child protection, the impact of bureaucracy and performance management devastates relationship-based and reflective practice, which is essential in (skilful) activities implemented to strengthen and preserve families, prevent family separation or breakdown, and provide early intervention among families at risk (Ferguson, 2018).

These analyses plainly provide a starting point for the further development of a knowledge model in which family support workforce skills will be identified, described, systematized, classified, and compared with distinctive supportive skills.

To sum up, family support workforce skills is an emergent concept and research related to it needs to be intensified to allow for the establishment of standardized guidelines for family support workforce skills. We are currently committed to it and we hope this paper contributes to the first steps towards that.

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