



Functional Family Therapy does not reduce ASB or offending in youths

By Dr Jessica Edwards

A randomized controlled trial has found that Functional Family Therapy (FFT) plus Management As Usual (MAU) does not significantly reduce youth antisocial behaviour (ASB) or offending compared to MAU alone. The trial, conducted in the UK, recruited 111 youths (aged 10-17 years) through crime prevention agencies such as the Youth Offending Services and Targeted Youth Support Services. All youths had been sentenced for offending or were receiving agency interventions following contact with the police for ASB. The FFT consisted of a range of systemic family therapy interventions plus cognitive, behavioural and social learning theory strategies, which were delivered in 12 sessions across 3-6 months. MAU was delivered by a case worker, usually using a support and counselling model. Interview and questionnaire-based assessments were made at baseline, and 6 and 18 months after randomization to determine the effects of MAU and FFT +MAU on youth offending, parenting and parent behaviour. Both groups showed large reductions in all measures of offending and antisocial behaviour, but there were no significant changes in parenting behaviour or the parent-child relationship over time.

There were also no significant differences between the intervention and control group at 6 or 18 months based on self-reported delinquency, police records of offending or symptoms or diagnoses of conduct disorders. These findings are in contrast to most previous trials of FFT¹, which the researchers propose may be because MAU alone is effective at reducing antisocial behaviours.

Referring to:

Humayun, S., Herlitz, L., Chesnokov, M., Doolan, M., Landau, S. & Scott, S. (2017), Randomized controlled trial of Functional Family Therapy for offending and antisocial behaviour in UK youth. *J Child Psychol Psychiatr.* 58: 1023-1032. doi:10.1111/jcpp.12743

Further reading:

¹Baldwin, S. et al. (2012) The effects of family therapies for adolescent delinquency and substance abuse: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marital Fam Ther.* 38: 281-304. doi: 10.1111/j.1752-0606.2011.00248.x.