

Informational Update

Working Group to Review Scientific Literature
for High Conflict Family Relationships with Child Involvement
March 15, 2020

The Working Group was established in Spring 2018. Since that time, it has met both virtually and in-person to refine its mission and charge, and advance the activities assigned. Among these activities included a Call for Submissions (Fall of 2018), and in-person meetings (August 2018; December 2018; August 2019, and January 2020).

Procedural Steps and Methodology

Among its initial discussions included the organization of the categories and subtopics that will ultimately frame the literature review and project as a whole. In addition, a host of methodological issues were identified that were important to consider in terms of literature review. Of primary concern is the lack of consensus on the definitions of (a topic) and the use of varying non-standardized measures and procedures which may serve to “limit the ability of researchers to undertake methodologically sound research in this area.” (See Saini, M. A., Johnston, J., Fidler, B. J., & Bala, N. (2016). Empirical studies of alienation. In L.M. Drozd, Saini, M. A., & Olesen, N. (Eds.), Parenting plan evaluations: Applied research for the family court. Second edition (pp. 374-430). New York: Oxford University Press.). The Working Group continues to identify and advance strategies to review articles or studies based on “clinical illustrations and expert opinions” vs. evidence based or evidence-informed scholarship, and discuss select criteria to guide this review, including peer review, study design issues, and the degree to which theoretical or clinical models are consistent with relevant social science research.

Meetings of the Working Group

In December 2018, in a two-day meeting format, the Working Group held a broad discussion on the mission and charge of the group, opportunities and limitations, issues of interest (e.g., definition of high conflict; systems vs. individual issues; models that might apply or be useful; sufficiency of the data / literature received; and review criteria; among others.) Key to its work, the Working Group evaluated the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model that would allow Working Group members to better understand the dynamic interrelationship among various individual, group and environmental factors, and to organize the literature taking into account these dynamic factors.

Since that time, via virtual means, the Working Group has refined its conceptual framework, identifying key issues and categories, with the intention to Call for Papers on specific topics or areas, apply select criteria and ratings sheets in the review of articles received, and identify gaps in what was submitted and solicit submissions, using multiple strategies. PsycNET searches are already underway and subject to review.

In January 2020, in a two-day meeting format, the Working Group met to further discuss, “test drive” and modify the criteria by which peer reviewed literature and other submitted items are being reviewed. The Working Group also refined its framework for its summary report which will be advanced to the four (4) content Boards for further review and discussion. Finally, there was a broad discussion of timeline and how the Chair might interface with the boards in advance of releasing its summary, findings and recommendations. The group plans to meet in the months ahead, to complete its review and begin drafting its findings and recommendations on how the Association might advance knowledge development and application in this important area of professional education, training, research and practice.

Collaborations of the Working Group

Throughout, the Working Group has connected with internal and external stakeholders, including the Working Group established to revise the APA Guidelines on Evaluation of Child Custody in Family Law Proceedings, among others.

About the Working Group

The Working Group to Review Scientific Literature for High Conflict Family Relationships with Child Involvement has been formed to review the scientific literature on families experiencing high-conflict family relationships and custody issues. In this regard, this group will (1) review and synthesize the current peer-reviewed scientific literature and scholarly research in this area, and (2) recommend next steps for advancing knowledge development and application in this area. Recommendations initiated by this group will not constitute APA policy and will be subject to formal review in accordance with Association Rules. Since APA does not develop diagnoses of health conditions or advocate for their creation, this will not be part of this group's charge.

This is a brief update from the Working Group to Review Scientific Literature for High Conflict Family Relationships with Child Involvement. This update, including summary notes of group activities, does not represent the official record or minutes of the Working Group. Rather, it is provided for informational purposes only.