

# The TIPS Evaluation Study: A theory driven approach to dissemination research<sup>1</sup>

Kevin P. Mulvey, Ph.D.<sup>a,\*</sup>, Susan W. Hayashi, Ph.D.<sup>b</sup>, Susan M. Hubbard, Ph.D.<sup>b</sup>, Andrea Kopstien, Ph.D.<sup>a</sup> and Judy Y. Huang, Ph.D.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, SAMHSA, 5515 Security Lane, Rockwall II Suite 8-180, Rockville, MD 20852, USA

<sup>b</sup>Johnson, Bassin & Shaw, Inc., Silver Spring, MD, USA

## Abstract

This editorial introduces the special issue of *Evaluation and Program Planning*. This issue focuses on four major studies under the Treatment Improvement Protocols (TIPs) Evaluation Project sponsored by the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT). The goal of these evaluation studies was to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of TIPs in influencing attitudes and behaviors, the people who are most effective in transmitting new practice guidelines, the barriers to implementation, and the methods that would best transfer information into action. In addition to providing an overview of each article, this introduction addresses the value of using a theory driven approach to dissemination research.

*Keywords:* Treatment Improvement Protocols (TIPs); substance abuse; substance abuse treatment; evaluation; dissemination research; theory driven evaluations; diffusion of innovations theory; diffusion theory

## 1. SAMHSA and CSAT's mission

To emphasize the need for services and services research, the U. S. Congress reorganized the substance abuse treatment research and services administration in 1992, dissolving Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA) and forming the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The research components of ADAMHA moved to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and consisted of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), the National Institute of Drug Addiction (NIDA), and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). In its current structure, SAMHSA consisted of three service centers (i.e., the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), and the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS)), and three offices (i.e., the Office of the Administrator (OA), the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), and the Office of Program Services (OPS)).

The three service centers work to carry out SAMHSA's mission *of improving the quality and availability of prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation services in order to reduce illness, death, disability, and cost to society resulting from substance abuse and mental illnesses*. As one of the services centers of SAMHSA, CSAT's mission is to *improve the lives of individuals and families affected by alcohol and drug abuse by ensuring access to clinically sound, cost-effective*

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<sup>1</sup>The opinions and assertions contained in this article are the private views of the authors and are not to be construed as official or as reflecting the views of the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or the Department of Health and Human Services.

\*Corresponding author. Tel.: 1-301-443-9472. E-mail address: kmulvey@samhsa.gov (K. Mulvey).

*addiction treatment that reduces the health and social costs to our communities and the nation.* As the sponsoring agency of the TIPs Evaluation Project, CSAT is working towards fulfilling one of its primary charges, which is to support and improve substance related treatment throughout the United States. In addition, CSAT collaborates with other Federal agencies, such as the Departments of Justice and Veteran Affairs, to achieve the goals set forth by the Administration's Office of National Drug Control Policy. CSAT also works with multiple stakeholders to develop The National Treatment Plan, which represents an effort to design and implement a coordinated approach to deal with our nation's substance abuse problems.

As part of the National Treatment plan, CSAT currently focuses on providing services through two types of programs (i.e., the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant and the Targeted Capacity Expansion), to ensure that thousands of Americans with substance abuse problems have access to the best treatment services possible, when and where they need them. CSAT also ensures the effectiveness of substance abuse treatment services through its Knowledge and Application Program, which exists to bridge the gap between research and service providers in local communities.

## **2. CSAT's mission and vision for the TIPs Evaluation Project**

Development of practice guidelines in the substance abuse treatment field, which began in 1992, is a component of the Knowledge and Application Program of CSAT that brings to light the "Science to the Service" paradigm. However, while SAMHSA has been progressive in the dissemination of basic information and in the real life applications, there has been a paucity of evaluation data regarding the process by which guidelines can most effectively be developed, disseminated, and evaluated.

Toward this aim, CSAT supported a multi-year evaluation study to examine the effectiveness of the Federal Government's efforts to develop and disseminate best practice guidelines in substance abuse treatment. CSAT was specifically interested in assessing the impact of their Treatment Improvement Protocol series (TIPs) on practices within the substance abuse treatment field. The TIPs Evaluation Project, which began in 1997, was a 4-year initiative consisting of a Retrospective Study, an Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) Study, a Prospective Study, and a study of primary care physicians based on TIP #24: *A Guide to Substance Abuse Services for Primary Care Clinicians*. The project also conducted a study on the implementation of TIP #35: *Enhancing the Motivation for Change in Substance Abuse Treatment*. Together, these studies were designed to meet the following objectives:

- To assess the extent to which members of the TIPs target audience are aware of, read, and implement TIPs.
- To evaluate the effects of TIPs on the delivery of addiction treatment services
- To learn ways to strengthen the development, formatting, marketing, dissemination, use, and evaluation of TIPs to ensure effective use of future Federal resources devoted to TIPs

The TIPs Evaluation Project represents the effort of the Federal government to assess the effectiveness of practice guidelines on the process and outcomes of addiction treatment. The

results of this evaluation project are expected to offer valuable information to other Federal agencies involved in the development and dissemination of practice guidelines.

### **3. Use of theory**

A unique aspect of this evaluation project is the fact that it is a theory-driven evaluation. While evaluation is different from research, concepts and terms of research methodology are utilized in evaluation. The use of theory in evaluation anchors the study in the literature. Relating the evaluation to a body of a relevant knowledge base gives it a broader and more solid foundation. In addition, the use of theory in evaluation provides a framework for identifying relevant variables that need to be examined, thus allowing for a more thorough investigation but without wasted efforts. A theory driven approach to evaluation ultimately results in more judicious use of funds as well as providing a paradigm for interpreting and applying the new information gathered from the evaluation.

The TIPs Evaluation Project uses the diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 1995) as the conceptual framework for designing the studies and for interpreting the results. According to Rogers, diffusion is “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system” (Rogers, 1995, p. 5). Three key elements of the diffusion theory helps explain the way that new ideas and practices get disseminated within a community. First of all, dissemination occurs over time. Secondly, people do not adopt innovations instantly, but rather pass through incremental stages in the adoption process. Finally, the characteristics of the innovation, the organization, and of individuals, affect the rate of adoption.

Diffusion theory provides a framework for understanding and assessing the extent to which TIPs have permeated the substance abuse treatment system. The success of the TIPs series is contingent on our ability to predict what types of materials or tools will be most effective in influencing attitudes and behaviors, who will be most effective in transmitting them, what barriers to implementation exist, and what methods will help most in transferring information into action.

### **4. Overview of articles**

The articles in this special issue represent the results of a 4-year evaluation study of protocol development and implementation in the field of substance abuse treatment. The topics covered in this special issue are: 1) theory driven evaluation: the use of diffusion theory; 2) a retrospective evaluation of the published TIPs at the time of program funding; 3) a study of technology transfer centers as a mechanism in diffusion of TIPs innovation; 4) a prospective study on the level of support needed to implement practice guidelines; 5) a methodological piece on the use of Tailored Design Method; and 6) a summary piece on the use of evaluation findings in planning future activities.

The first article (Hubbard and Hayashi) lays the foundation of the evaluation study with the use of diffusion of innovations theory to drive a federal agency’s program evaluation. This article

describes how diffusion theory can be instrumental in understanding the process of diffusion and implementation of TIPs. By understanding treatment providers' current awareness of TIPs, attitudes toward the TIP series, and uses of TIPs, suggestions are made to CSAT that can modify current and future TIPs to more fully meet the needs of the providers. Furthermore, information regarding the characteristics of TIPs can provide guidance as to what types of materials will most likely be adopted. Additionally, identifying the characteristics of provider organizations and/or barriers to adoption will help determine the best methods to transfer into practice the knowledge contained in TIPs. This article will focus on the use of diffusion of innovations theory to drive the TIPs Evaluation Project and provide the framework for the remaining five articles.

The second article in this issue presents the finding from the Retrospective Study, including both Wave 1 and Wave 2. The authors, Hubbard and Mulvey, conducted a two-wave survey to determine: (1) if TIPs are reaching their intended audiences; (2) if TIPs contain appropriate information for use by the target audiences; (3) how readers use information in TIPs, and (4) the impact of TIPs on changing substance abuse treatment practices. Wave 1 of the Retrospective Study collected information from 3,267 individuals affiliated with State recognized SA treatment programs (i.e., Single State Agency [SSA] directors, treatment facility program directors, clinical supervisors, and program counselors). Respondents who reported awareness of and used TIPs in the Wave 1 Survey were sent the Wave 2 survey. The Wave 2 of the Retrospective Study included 1,028 participants. The Wave 2 survey focused on objectives 2 and 3 of the Retrospective Study by asking respondents to provide feedback regarding their attitudes toward and uses of a TIP they found particularly useful (i.e., most useful TIP), and on another TIP they found less useful than the other TIPs (i.e., least useful TIP).

The article by Hayashi, Suzuki, Hubbard, Huang, and Cobb focused on a study of the addiction technology transfer centers as a means of diffusion. This qualitative study was designed to determine how ATTC curriculum developers, faculty, and trainers have incorporated TIPs into curriculum development and/or the delivery of trainings. The results from this study clearly demonstrated that the federal government is at the forefront of providing resources to the substance abuse treatment field. Although ATTC faculty and curriculum developers gave many positive comments regarding the TIPs programs, they also provided recommendations for improving the development and dissemination of TIPs. This article includes a discussion of how CSAT may wish to proceed with its TIPs development and dissemination programs to better meet the needs of all treatment professionals and to ensure adoption of practices outlined in the TIPs.

Melzer, Hubbard, and Huang, authors of the fourth article in this issue, provided a preliminary examination of the level of support needed to implement into practice the treatment guidelines contained in TIP #35: *Enhancing Motivation for Change in Substance Abuse Treatment*. This Prospective Study, building on the results from the Retrospective Study, followed treatment providers' use of TIP #35 over time. The objective of this study was to determine the most cost effective level of support needed by substance abuse treatment professionals to implement the information contained in TIPs into practice. In addition, it assessed how the information was used and the impact of the guidance on treatment practices.

The Huang, Hubbard, and Mulvey article focused on survey methodology and response rates. In survey research, response rates are a factor in determining the generalizability of results and impact the overall validity of study findings. To achieve high response rates, researchers may implement specific procedures, such as the Tailored Design Method (Dillman, 2000)<sup>2</sup>. The Tailored Design Method (TDM) not only provides guidelines for instrument development (i.e., surveys) but also specifies timed intervals for initial contact, follow-up mailings, telephone follow-up, and incentives. However, use of TDM does not necessarily lead to high response rate. This article addresses the subtleties of how knowledge of and access to participants can significantly impact desired response rates, even when methods such as TDM are employed. Two studies sponsored by CSAT (i.e., the Retrospective Study and the TIP #24 Study) yielded significantly different response rates and are compared in the context of using participants with whom the researchers are familiar, standard pilot testing work, and TDM data collection procedures.

Lastly, the Hubbard, Huang, and Mulvey article summarizes the overall results of the TIPs Evaluation Project and discusses the findings in light of the diffusion of innovations theory. CSAT has taken an innovative approach to evaluation, and hopes that this project will exemplify the use of theory based program evaluation for other Federal agencies or programs providing treatment services.

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<sup>2</sup>Dillman's (2000) Tailored Design Method is a revision to Dillman's (1978) first book titled *Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method*. Both the Tailored and Total Design Methods are referred to by Dillman as TDM.

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