



Challenging Families and Emotional Supports in Early Intervention:

Two Qualitative Studies

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The Issue?

Early intervention programs are accountable for outcomes for families

BUT

We don't know what kinds of supports and services are supposed to lead to those outcomes

Our research design

- Exploring how family support is understood by people in context of the culture of early intervention:
 - Behaviors
 - Beliefs
 - Language – interactions and communication
 - Administrative structures

Our Data Sources

- ~~Three sites – all serving 0-3, all home visiting models~~
- Interviews with 14 families
Interviews with 18 professionals
Interviews with 3 administrators
- Agencies asked to select at least 2 families: “typical” and “challenged”
- Observations of home visits with families



Our Analysis

- ~~Site teams in each site conducted interviews, observations~~
- Full team meetings to discuss emerging themes
- Cross-checking in subsequent interviews with observations from other site team
- Coding and theme development



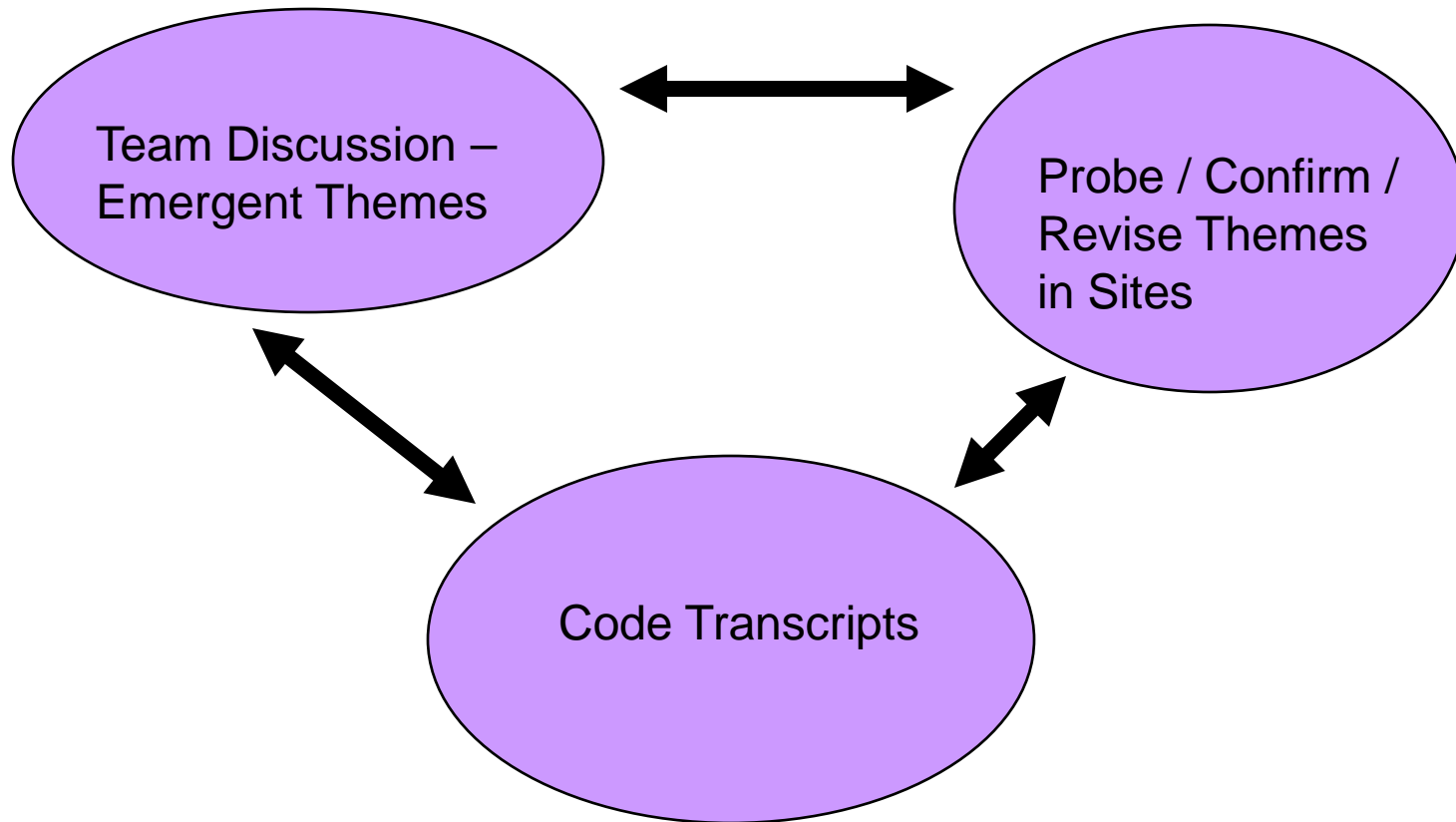
Research Rigor

- Multiple data sources
- Triangulation of researchers across sites
- Peer debriefings
- Credibility checks
- Constant comparative approach to theme generation

Codebook Categories

- ~~Administrative supports/ structures~~
- Quality of life issues
- Program approaches/service models
- Levels of program involvement
- Impact/outcomes experienced by families
- Professional beliefs about partnerships
- Role of extended family and community
- Family background

Converging Theme Development with Coding Process



Challenged by Families with Challenges: An Investigation of Family Supports in Early Intervention





Literature - Rationale

HOW? Families were satisfied with EI, but families from racial and economical diverse backgrounds were less satisfied and expressed more needs (NEILS data, 2007).

WHO? Families with challenges in EI have a number of risk factors including poverty or low-income. When families have more risk factors, there is greater “jeopardy” for the child’s development (Sameroff, 1998).



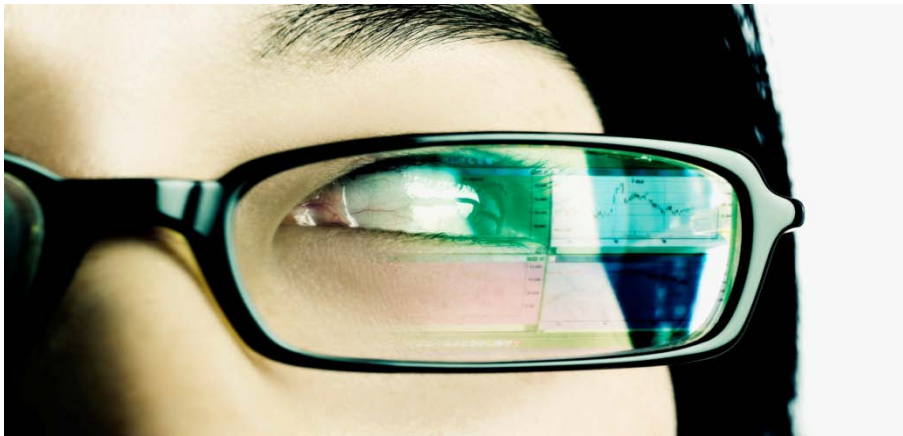
Literature - Rationale

WHY? Although DEC has outlined best practices and IDEA Part C supports services and partnerships with families, policies do not require enough towards meeting family's needs (DEC, 2002; IDEA reauthorization, 2004).

WHAT? Pragmatic, attitudinal, and cultural factors from both practitioners and families with challenges inhibit the development of effective family-practitioner partnerships (Landy & Menna, 2006).

Research Question

How do early intervention practitioners perceive *challenged families* and how do their perceptions influence the supports they provide to *challenged families*?

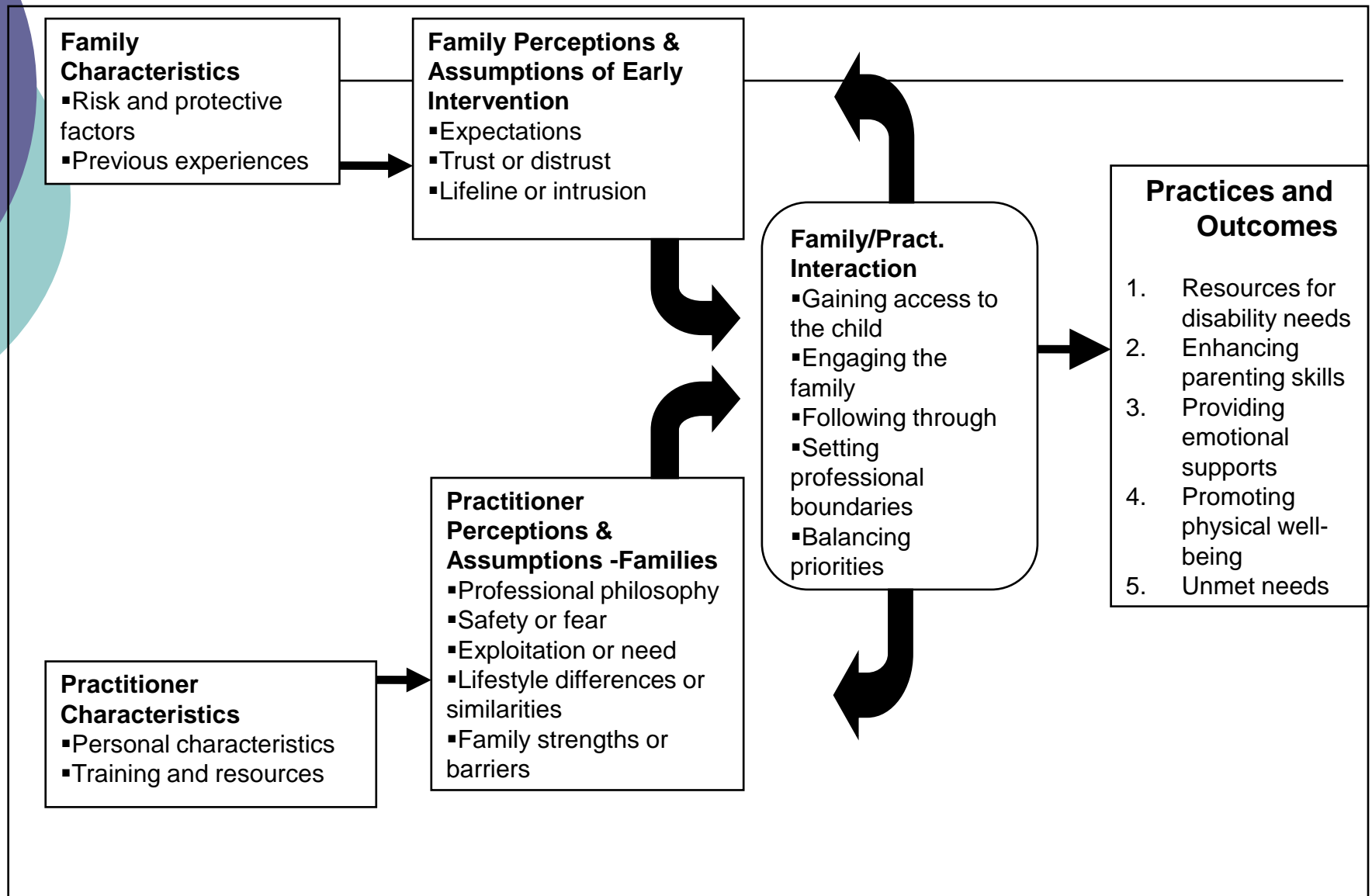




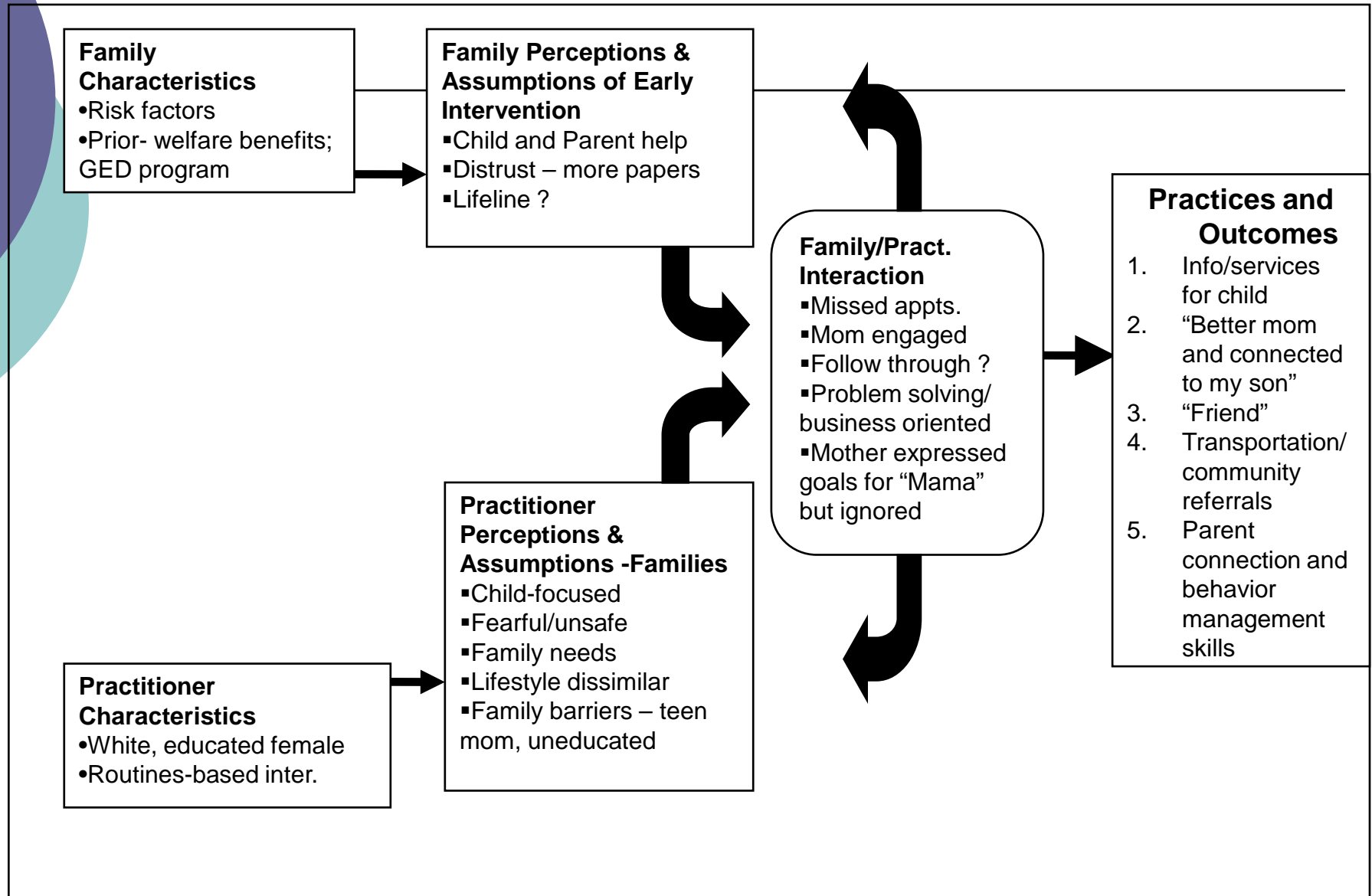
Methodology

- Part of Larger Study
- Grounded theory design
- Participants
 - Families and practitioners in 3 sites in Midwest
 - Challenged and typical family definitions
- Data
 - Home visit observations, focus groups, and individual interviews

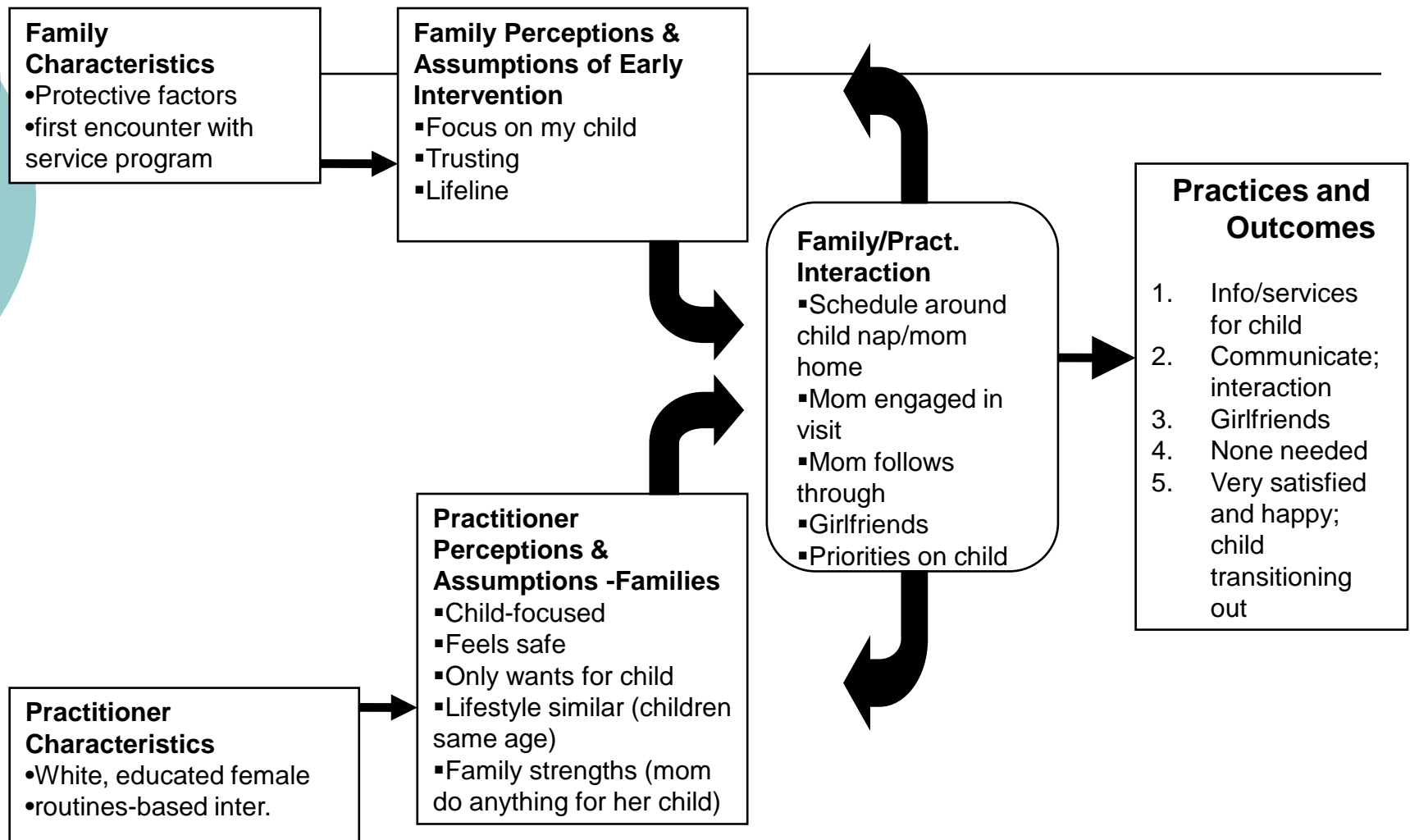
Grounded Theory Framework



Example 1: Challenged family scenario



Example 2: Typical family scenario





Key Findings

1. Defining Challenged Families

- Literature from risk and protective factors
- “Value” of early intervention > practitioner perceptions and assumptions
 - Accessing the child
 - Engaging in services
 - Following through

Challenging, not challenged



Key Findings

2. ~~The Meaning of “Empowerment”~~_____

What does this term mean?

- engaged in services
- valuing early intervention
- determined by the practitioner

Disconnect with “family strengths perspective”

- fails to recognize family strengths and priorities to build their capacity
- services tailored to the child’s needs

Practice implication – Reflective practices encourage family engagement



Key Findings

3. Relationship boundaries

Girlfriends vs. Problem Solver

- Practitioners invest in families who value EI
- Practitioners connect with those like them
- Time inhibits building friendships

Practice implication –



Key Findings

4. Satisfaction and Unmet Needs

- Role of Part C is not understood
- Family satisfaction is self-report
- Services not tailored to *family* needs

Practice implication – Resiliency training and mentoring programs

"How parents come to view themselves as parents, their child, and their circumstances will depend, in part, on the attitudes of those who work with them and on the approaches taken to the intervention process."

(Gilkerson & Stott, 2000, p.460)





Second Qualitative Study:

Partnership Patterns: Addressing the Emotional Needs of Families in Early Intervention

Literature - Rationale

- Home visiting– primary model of 0-3 services
- Partnerships are key in this model
- Families have informational, material, and emotional needs
- Responsibility to meet emotional needs has fallen to home visitors
- Research and recommended practices have not addressed emotional needs



Research Questions

- What are the factors contributing to the formation of an emotionally supportive partnership?
- What are the barriers to forming emotionally supportive partnerships?

Method

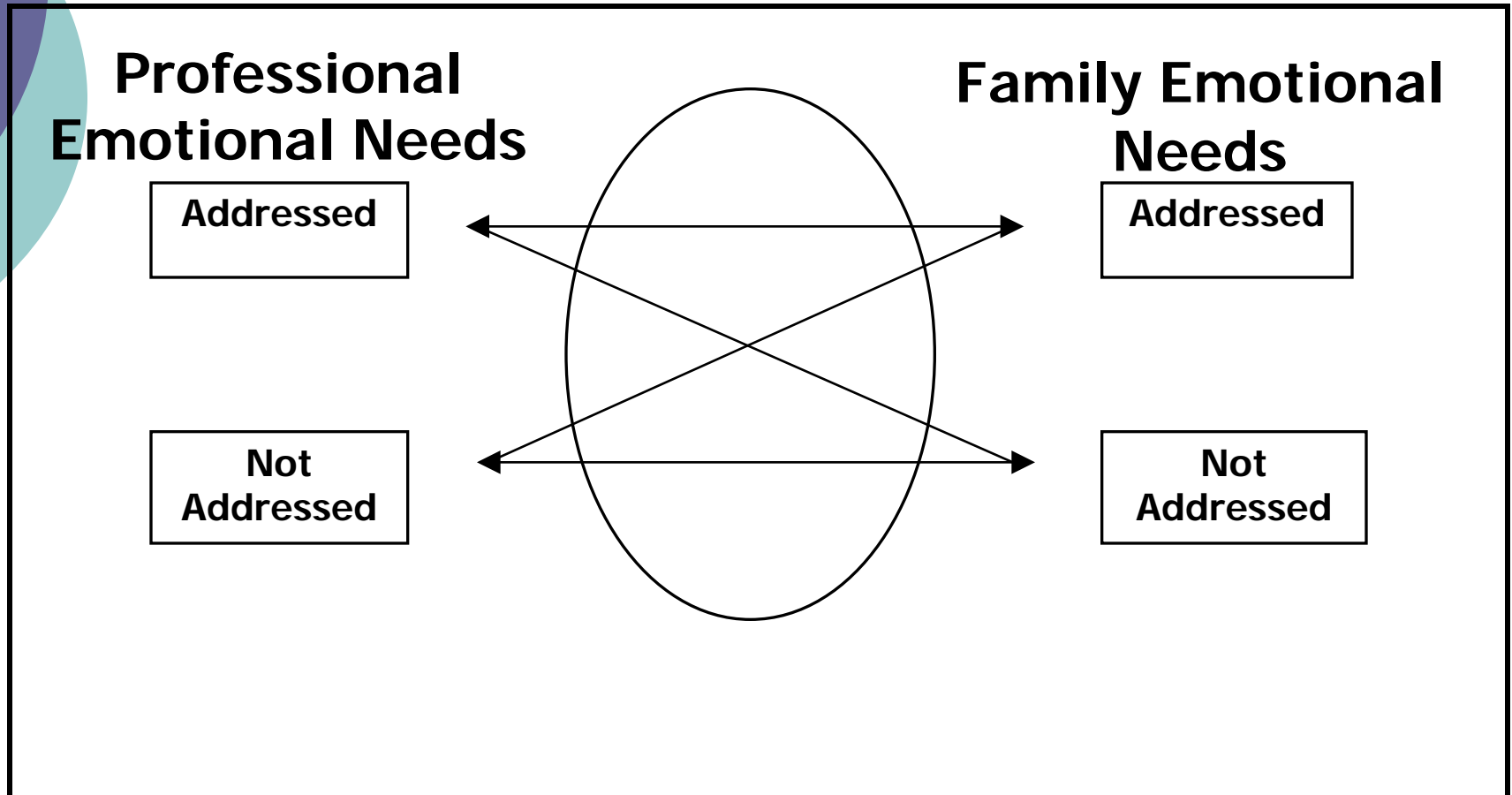
- Ethnographic approach – understanding the culture of EI
 - Analyzed the data to understand partnership formation and providing emotional support to families in home visiting
 - Developed four case studies describing partnership patterns in early intervention
 - Limitations



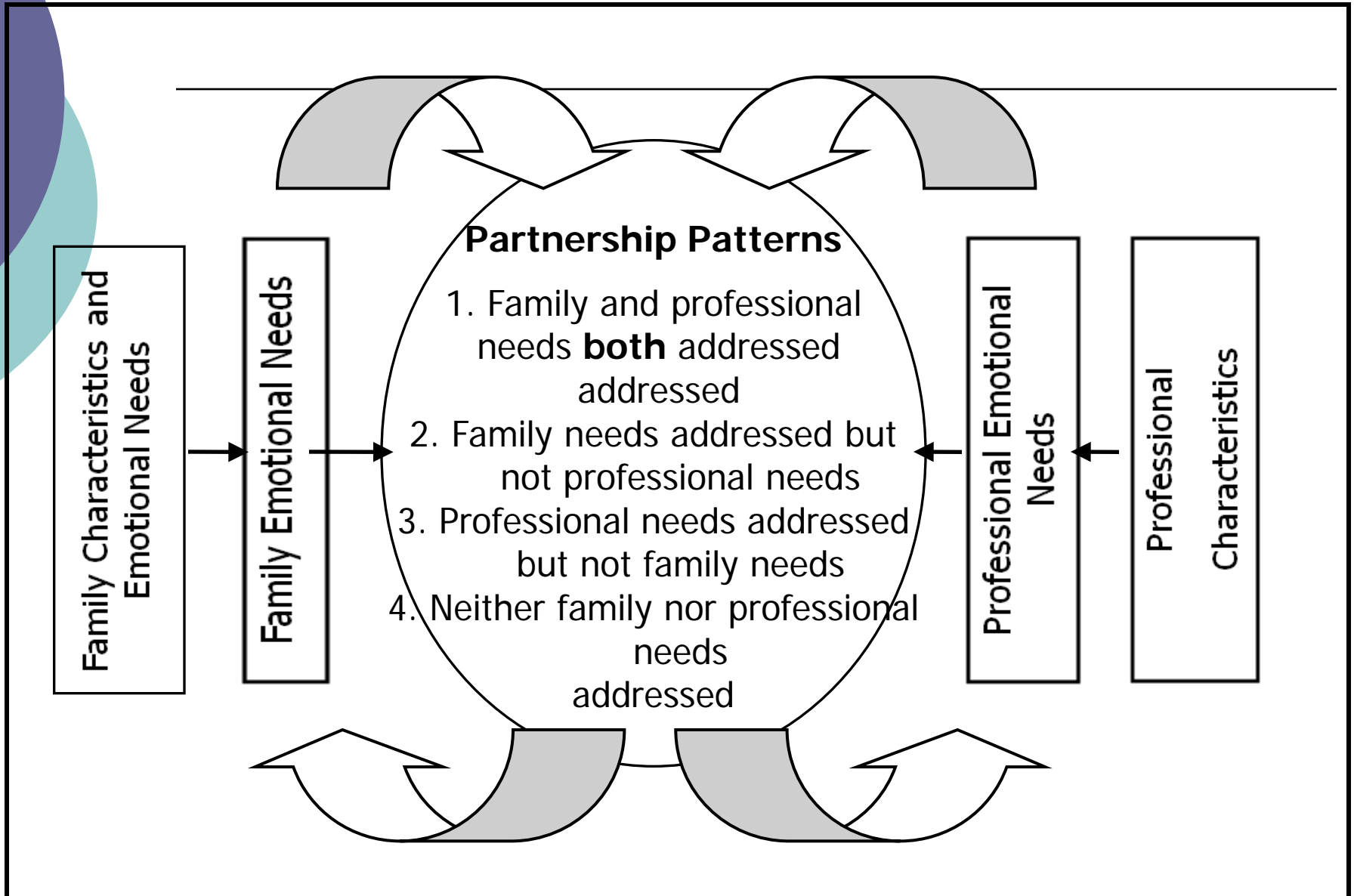
Major finding of the study

For a trusting partnership to be built between parents and early interventionists in home visiting, the emotional needs and expectations of both the parent and professional need to be addressed.

Four Possible Family/Professional Partnership Patterns



Partnership Patterns



Group Discussion Activity

- Turn to your neighbor and read the summaries of the four partnerships
- The four partnerships are:
 - **Kendra and Doris**
 - **Brad and Jennifer**
 - **Sheena and Cindy**
 - **Angel and Lois/Colleen**
- Make a decision on which type of partnership pattern this partnership could exemplify
- Discuss decisions with the group

Addressing Family Emotional Needs in Partnerships

Focus on **training issues** -

- Understand issues of family HOPE – “closing the gap” help professionals to move past “denial” question
- Understanding resiliency and risk factors in families (would help in identifying strengths in diverse families)

Addressing Family Emotional Needs in Partnerships – cont'd

Training Issues

- Focus on communication, listening and help giving skills (not new – but this takes time)
- Building relationships takes time – so connected to the caseloads and more time for families

Addressing Professional Emotional Needs in Partnerships

- How can we support professionals to be emotionally available to families?
- Focus on reflective practice
 - Key to understanding and working with challenging and diverse families
 - Gilkerson (2006) - "reflective supervision" needed to keep professional thinking about their own values

Addressing Professional Emotional Needs in Partnerships

- Address Burnout/Compassion Fatigue/Emotional labor - it is written about with numerous terms
 - We need to come to terms with the Compassion Fatigue/Emotional labor issues – recognize it – include in training
 - Fialka (2006) and others suggest such strategies as humor, celebration, guided imagery, journaling

What does all of this mean for emotional supports for families?

~~How well equipped are early~~ _____
interventionists to meet the emotional needs of families?

