

# Participants’ Experiences in the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program: Social Support Needs

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**Background**

In 2013, Florida received \$21.6 million in federal funding to establish and expand home visiting programs in high-need communities. Eleven programs, covering 14 of 29 eligible Florida communities, were funded through a competitive process.

The Florida Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program Evaluation explored families’ perceptions of the types of services and supports most utilized and deemed most helpful from the home visit. Forty-five participants were interviewed and asked a series of questions relating to their perceptions of their home visiting experience.

**Objectives**

The USF Florida MIECHV Program Evaluation is a multi-component, mixed-methods evaluation that examines the impact of the federally-funded MIECHV Program, including database linkages and analysis, social network analysis, qualitative research, continuous quality improvement, and cost-benefit analysis.

As part of the evaluation of the MIECHV Program, this study sought to:

- Identify the needs of families receiving MIECHV home visiting services,
- Understand the support that MIECHV home visitors provide to families, and
- Generate recommendations for improvement, enhancement, or expansion of services.

**Methods**

Home visitors distributed flyers to all families receiving MIECHV services in their programs; those interested in participating called the research team directly for a telephone interview in English or Spanish. During interviews, participants were asked a series of questions relating to their perceptions of their home visiting experience, including:

- 1) The types of referrals they receive,
- 2) What parts of the home visits are most helpful to them,
- 3) What their relationship is like with their home visitor, and
- 4) How home visiting lessons and activities are utilized in their daily life.

Phone interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. Transcripts were further reviewed by the MIECHV evaluation team to ensure accuracy. Content analysis of transcripts was conducted, then systematic coding was applied using *a priori* and emergent codes. A second researcher independently coded 10% of transcripts to establish inter-rater reliability. The themes that emerged were consistent with Social Support Theory<sup>1</sup>.

**Participants**

Semi-structured phone interviews were conducted with 45 home visiting participants from five programs. Forty-three of the interviews were conducted in English and two in Spanish.

Most participants identified their race as Black (44%) or White (40%) and 13% identified as Hispanic. The majority of participants were also:

- Female (96%),
- Single (71%),
- < Age of 25 (53%),
- Unemployed (40%), and
- Did not have a college degree (48%).

**Emotional Support**

*“She is very knowledgeable about what she does. She is very interested, I would say, and invested in me and my daughter to make sure that I stay on the right track and continue doing the right thing to be able to provide the best that I can for my daughter.”*

**Informational Support**

*“We go over everything... Parenting, developmental skills, if my son’s behaving – behavioral techniques or being like – basically anything you can think of parenting-wise that you can do with your child, she’ll help you with.”*

**Appraisal Support**

*“... We sat down and I [started] going through the paperwork and setting the goal that I wanted. It was goals that I want for the baby, goals that I want for myself, goals that I want as a family. Actually, it’s helping me stay on track with those goals that I have set... So that’s what I’ve enjoyed the most, the goal-setting.”*

**Instrumental Support**

*“Most of it, she has off the top of her head, and it is really awesome that what she does, and she is really attentive to make sure that she goes and lists it up. If it’s something that I need more immediately, she will actually text me or call me with the information on where to find it, to help me locate the information that is really important, whereas on less important things, like by the next visit, she already has pamphlets that she printed out for me.”*

**Results**

Consistent with other research<sup>2</sup>, participants report that the emotional support provided by the home visitor is one of the most important aspects of the MIECHV Program. Emotional support played such a key role in the client-home visitor relationship that transitioning to a new home visitor or out of the program was identified as a concern by some participants.

Informational and appraisal supports help parents to learn and reflect on their parenting knowledge and their own personal development and life management skills.

Instrumental support was primarily demonstrated by home visitors referring clients to other services to directly assist families’ needs; however, over one third of participants reported not using referrals, as they did not have a perceived need for the service at the time.

Appraisal Support	Emotional Support	Informational Support	Instrumental Support
Goal setting activities regarding the child’s development, as well as personal and family goals	Forming close personal relationships with the home visitor	Advice regarding parenting techniques and child development	Referrals for food, transportation, housing, financial assistance, clothing, furniture, childcare, and employment assistance
Setting goals for the different stages of pregnancy and checking in on progress	Ability to relate, trust, and feel comfortable with the home visitor	Lessons on parenting (discipline, home safety, nutrition, and parent-child communication)	Providing direct resources, like baby diapers or formula, when needed
Encouragement, affirmation, and feedback on goals	Home visitors helping with stress management and personal issues	Lessons on prenatal care and childbirth	List of contact information for referral agencies
		Topics addressing childhood stages of development (books and pamphlets on milestones)	Information on health services, such as prenatal care and counseling
		Activities addressing childhood stages of development (developmental games with children)	Information on social groups and educational classes on topics such as breastfeeding and car seat safety

**Discussion**

Families who participate in the MIECHV Program need and receive substantial emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support from home visiting staff. In particular, home visitors provide a lifeline for access to meet basic needs (food, shelter, medical care, etc.).

However, substantial needs remain in many additional high-risk communities; expanding home visiting, in addition to capacity building activities and program enhancements, will create an improved system of care to support families who otherwise may not have access to that system.