Parental Perceptions of Coaching

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Abstract

Family Life Coaching (FLC) is an emerging approach to serving families that blends family science and coaching psychology. While family life coaching is growing, there is limited research on the perceptions of families about coaching. This study explores parental knowledge of and opinions of family life coaching as a way to help deal with parenting issues across the life course. Findings from this mixed methods study support parental preferences of family life coaching and further suggest that parents support the idea of hiring a family life coach or coaching professional to assist in meeting their goals.

Keywords: Family life coaching, parental perceptions, coaching psychology, family science, parent coaching

Introduction

To meet the ever-changing challenges modern families face, new approaches to supporting families are becoming more common. One such approach is an innovative, family-centered, and strengths-based approach called Family Life Coaching (FLC) (Allen & Huff, 2014). FLC serves as a sort of umbrella for coaching within the family realm, including parent coaching. Though the practice has been around for over a decade, few studies have looked at the effectiveness of coaching families. More research and information are needed to determine if, and how family life coaching can serve as a method to helping families (Allen, 2013), and if families have knowledge of and interest in receiving family coaching services.

The history of coaching began as a method for helping athletes, managers, and companies set goals and focus on strengths by promoting resilience and performance (Hudson, 1999). Today, many companies employ executive coaches to work with senior and middle management, and have found that coaching is an effective way to help increase profit and productivity (Theeboom, Beersma, & Van Vianen, 2013). Executive coaches help employees identify and coalesce individual strengths, ultimately fostering a more unified workforce resulting in an improved return on investment (Swart & Harcup, 2013). In fact, research shows as much as a 300% increase in businesses outputs with the use of coaching (Pagliarini, 2011). This trend not only shows the positive influence coaching has on businesses, but begs the question, *what about families?* If investing in coaching has shown positive effect in business, what can coaching do for families?

While most literature on coaching is predominately about coaching and industry, coaching has surfaced in family science literature (Allen, 2013; Allen & Huff, 2014; Rush, Shelden, & Hanft, 2003). Evidence-based coaching applies behavioral sciences and family systems theory to support families in the various realms of their lives (McGoldrick & Carter, 2001; Rush et al., 2003; Stober & Grant, 2006). More recently, coaching has found a place in human services (Moran & Brady, 2010), clinical science (Timmer, Zebell, Culver, & Urquiza, 2009), therapy (Graham, Rodger, & Ziviani, 2009), and early education and parenting (Beyer, 2008; Rush et al., 2003).

To date, however, significant gaps remain in understanding individual's perceptions of family life coaching (Allen & Huff, 2014). The is an even greater deficit of literature gauging to understand

parental perceptions of the concept and practice of coaching. To increase the prevalence of family life coaching as an approach to helping families, researchers must first gauge parent's knowledge about and perceptions of family life coaching. This study aims to be the first of its kind to explore parents' knowledge of, attitudes toward, and interest in family coaching through the use of a mixed-methods study.

Literature Review

Family Life and Parenting Education

Family life and parenting education are approaches for supporting positive child and family development. Family life coaching is a newcomer in the field of family science, but one that is growing in popularity and practice. Machara, Kruenegel-Farr, & Allen (2017) note a distinction of what is meant by family life coaching and how it relates to practice in other realms. According to the Family Life Coaching Association (2017), family life coaching "connects the family science realm with coaching techniques" and serves as a collaboration between the coach and the family in a relationship developed to further goals or work on issues the family has identified. Specialties under the umbrella of FLC include parent, relationship, special needs, health/wellness, academic success, and financial coaching (Machara et al., 2017).

Throughout the development of family science, researchers have documented key parenting practices evident in positive individual and family outcomes, such as secure attachment (Bowlby, 1977) and responsive parenting (Eschel, Daelmans, Cabral de Mello, & Martines, 2006). Parenting concepts such as these are taught in family life education as both a preventative and reactive effort to increase overall positive family functioning.

Research suggests that delivery format can impact the overall outcomes of family centered interventions. This research has shown variations in effectiveness depending on delivery differences such as group delivery, online delivery, workshop delivery, facilitator-led, and individual settings (Cotter, Bacallao, Smokowski, & Robertson, 2013), and differences in approaches including client-centered, family-approach, strengths-based, multi-modality of educational material (Whittingham, Boyd, Sanders, & Colditz, 2014). Studies indicate long-lasting impacts of interventions that engage families with more family-centered activities, such as playing games together (e.g., playing a game of soccer) or completing chores together (e.g., washing the car or walking the dog; Connel, Dishion, Yasui, & Kavanagh, 2007; Cotter et al., 2013). Furthermore, Swick (2004) suggests that establishing a meaningful relationship in which to work alongside families, as opposed to a hierarchical model, provides the respect, the validation, and the acceptance families prefer.

Framework for Coaching Families

One fairly new delivery form of interest is family life coaching (FLC). Although family life coaching is a new field, it is starting to be recognized all around the country. Allen and Huff (2014) surveyed 180 family practitioners across the United States and of those, 85% where familiar with coaching and identified FLC as an up-and-coming approach to family science. Furthermore, nearly half had received some training on coaching and 85% showed an interest in employing FLC in their work with families. There are numerous arenas where evidence-based coaching is reaching families, including: home visits (Beyer, 2008; Timmer et al., 2010); emotion coaching (Gottman, 2001); and coaching families with children in special education and for children with disabilities and medical issues (Graham et al., 2009; Rush et al., 2003).

There are a variety of theories and models practitioners can and do use to coach families (Allen & Huff, 2014). Family systems theory, for example, recognizes families as whole systems comprised of individual subsystems of relationships (e.g., parent-child, sibling, parent; McGoldrick & Carter,

2001). Murray Bowen, a prominent researcher of Family Systems Theory, suggests that family members function in reciprocity--family members interact with one another in a mutual fashion such as reflecting each other's actions and moods (Brown, 1999). Bowen's view of families as an interdependent emotional system can be applied to family life coaching as it is important for coaches to consider this interplay because when one- person changes, it impacts the whole family dynamic. A family life coach highlights perceived strengths within and among family members, including interactions and situations, and then guides the family toward improvement strategies utilizing the identified strengths (Allen, 2013).

Family life coaching generally utilizes a client-centered approach in order to identify individual strengths that empower the client. Rogers (1959) explains how in an environment that is supportive and unconditionally positive, people are able to understand and find answers to their own problems. Other research suggests that a strong association between a coach's core values and those of humanistic and positive psychology theories provides guidance for the how to of coaching (Abravanel & Gavin, 2017). The belief that clients have within themselves the ability and information necessary to find solutions to presenting problems fosters a dynamic partnership between the client and the coach (Wildflower & Brennen, 2011). The coach should actively listen to the client and restate the client's feelings and situations, acting as a sounding board. Researchers have identified benefits of the collaborative client-coach partnership that include imparting knowledge, increasing self-efficacy and confidence, and improving family outcomes (Kelly & Barnard, 1999; Rush et al., 2003; Timmer et al., 2010). Furthermore, Moran and Brady (2010) acknowledge that the coaching process positively affects individual self-efficacy, suggesting that improved individual self-efficacy reinforces positive familial support. With support from the coach, families recognize their strengths and build action plans that align with their values and goals.

Using a strengths-based approach is another framework referenced in literature with regard to coaching families (Beyer, 2008; Seligman, 2007). Early interventionists who work with families and children under age five have recognized positive outcomes that arise as a result of identifying and working with individuals and families using a strengths-based approach. For example, Rush et al. (2003) found that focusing on the learner's perspective and hosting sessions in natural settings improves child-parent participation. Family-centered practitioners employ a strengths-based approach when helping clients set goals and build resources by identifying things that the family is doing right and recognizing family resilience (Moran & Brandy, 2010; Salisbury, Cambray-Engstrom, & Woods, 2012), even in families in crisis (Walsh, 2002).

Personally-Selected Family Interventions.

Individuals seeking private family centered interventions have the option to employ any number of professionals from fields such as family life education, parenting education, or family therapy. Making the decision that much more difficult, family professionals vary in their techniques, methodology, and approaches making it difficult for families to discern the type of professional to seek for particular issues (e.g., psychologist, family therapist, family life and parent educator, etc.). As such, individuals must rely on referrals, previous experience with or knowledge of family professionals, and/or the professional's credentials in order to make an informed decision.

Parental preference and comfort with a particular type of family centered intervention impacts whether or not said interventions are successful (Cullen, 2010). However, there is little research on parental preferences when choosing among family professionals to address particular family issues (e.g., parenting advice, child development, improving health and well-being, divorce, special needs). The research available assumes families should be well-informed about credentials as a measure of a professional's knowledge base, however, the general public do not generally understand the differences and nuances of those credentials (Goddard, Gilliland, & Goddard, 2011).

In order to better understand family life coaching as an approach to helping families, more research

is needed to better understand what parents want and what they perceive as helpful in terms of parenting professionals. The present study assesses parental knowledge, attitudes, and opinions of FLC when compared to other like professionals including, psychologists, parent educators, therapists, family life coaches, and clergy.

Current Study

The aim of this study was to explore parental knowledge and opinions of family life coaching as a method for helping families. Although parents might not have previously engaged in coaching services to be a part of this study, the concepts and definitions of family life coaching were clearly defined and used to better understand parents' interests and opinions of coaching. Using data collected from 168 parents, the study begins to answer the following questions:

1. Are parents interested in coaching?
2. For which areas of family life would parents most likely seek a coaching professional?
3. What qualities are important to parents when searching for a family coach?
4. What methods would parents use to find a family coach?
5. What are the opinions of parents about the use of family life coaching to help with family issues?

Methodology

This study used a mixed-method design to explore parental attitudes and opinions about the application of family life coaching as an approach to addressing family issues that may arise over the life course. After receiving university Institutional Review Board exemption approval (#3658), a 35-item online questionnaire was developed consisting of five sections: history, interest, attitudes, opinions of hiring family professionals, and demographics. The survey began with a clear definition of Family Life Coach using the following statement: *Coaches help parents by partnering with and offering support to families while helping them create and reach personal goals*. Subsequent questions asked participants to rate the likelihood of hiring a family professional (i.e., psychologist, therapist, parent educator, coach, or clergy) for particular issues that arise in family life (e.g., potty training, risk behaviors, special needs/ADHD).

Participants

A convenience sample of adult parents with children of any age was recruited using a snowball sampling technique via email, word of mouth, organizational-based listservs (e.g., North Carolina Parenting Education Network), and social media platforms (i.e., Facebook and Twitter). Interested parents were asked to voluntarily participate in a secure, online survey using Qualtrics. This sampling technique was chosen because it would be the easiest way for the researchers to obtain a large sample of parents (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The survey was anonymous and participant consent was obtained at the onset of the survey. Recruitment efforts resulted in a sample size of *N* = 168 for quantitative data, with most participants residing in the state in North Carolina, and all residing within the United States. Sample sizes for qualitative responses varied, with the lowest response rate for open-ended questions being *N* = 88.

The participant's ages and subsequent percentages were: (18-26; 1%), (27-35; 19%), (36-44; 40%), (45-53; 25%), (54-62; 10%), and (63+; 6%) with the majority (40%) of participants in the middle adulthood (36-53) category. Participants were 16% male and 84% female. As this survey was administered to parents, their reported children's ages ranged from infancy (0-5; 19%) through early adulthood (19+; 25%), with 56% in the 6-18 years old range. Additionally, participants' reported family household income ranged from *less than $30,000 a year* (5%), to the majority (75%) in the

more than $60,000 a year income bracket. Furthermore, over 90% of participants reported receiving post-secondary education.

Quantitative Methods

Quantitative data consisted of yes/no and Likert-scale questions. The yes/no questions asked about parental knowledge and experience of coaching with family issues such as: "Have you ever sought help from a family life or parenting professional?" and "Would you consider hiring a coaching professional if you saw a need in your family?" Additionally, participants were asked questions about particular issues that arise within families (i.e., general parenting issues, potty training, school success, adolescence-related issues, risk behaviors, special needs, relationship education, and divorce) and asked their likelihood to which type of family practitioner they would seek (*this question was asking participants to gauge the likeliness of choosing a specific practitioner for a particular issue, not exclusively*): therapist, psychologist, parent educator, clergy, and coach. A Likert-scale was used for this measure and choices were: *not likely, somewhat likely,* and *very likely.*

Qualitative Methods

The qualitative portion of the survey included open-ended questions asking participants to elaborate on their thoughts about family life coaching. Questions were: "If you decide to hire a family coach, what method would you use to find one?"; "What benefits do you see from hiring a family coach?"; "What drawbacks do you see from hiring a family life coach?"; and "What else would you like us to know about your opinion of family life coaching?" To determine themes for each question, two researchers used open and axial coding to analyze aggregate responses. Once themes were identified, they were categorized into similar groups.

Results

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data was analyzed through Qualtrics online survey software and SPSS statistical software. Frequency tables were generated in order to compare parental choices of family practitioners (i.e., psychologist, therapist, parent educator, coach, and clergy) for the particular family issues such as: general parenting, potty training, school success, adolescent related issues, health and well-being, risk behaviours, relationship education, special needs, time management, divorce, unemployment, blending of families, extended families, and financial management. These response choices were not exclusive, meaning participants were not asked to choose between professionals, but rather were asked to rate their likelihood of choosing <u>each</u> type of family professional based on the type of issue presented.

Frequency tables were tabulated to capture descriptive statistics; additionally, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was statistical significance of participants who had previously hired a coach to compare which family professional(s) they would likely hire for a particular family issue. The reported likelihood of using a family life coach as reported in Table 1 shows that family life coach was the most highly rated category for issues related to *health and well-being, time management, unemployment, extended families,* and *financial concerns.* Additionally, family life coaches were considered the second best option for the issues of *general parenting, potty training, school success,* and *blending of families.* The percentages of participants reporting their likeliness to seek a family life coach are presented in Table 2, ranked in descending order by family issues. Furthermore, 88% of the sample indicated that they would be willing to hire a *family life or parenting professional* if they saw a need in their family; 85% reported that they would consider hiring a *professional family life coach* if they saw a need in their family.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess statistical significance ($p < .05$) among responses from

participants who indicated they had previously hired a coach. Those who had previously hired a coach were analyzed to explore which family professional(s) (psychologist, clergy, therapist, coach, and parent educator) they would likely hire for each family issue listed. Participants who had previously hired a coach indicated a significant likeliness to hire a *coach* for general parenting (p = .030) and divorce/separation (p = .017) issues. Participants who had previously hired a coach also indicated a significant likeliness to hire a *psychologist* for general parenting (p = .007) and school success (p = .017); and a *therapist* for school success (p = .025).

Qualitative Data

A thematic content analysis was conducted on open-ended responses to assess for information related to methods used to find a coach and the benefits of hiring a coach. Thematic categories were based on reoccurring phrases, common words, and verbiage found in the various responses. After the responses were corroborated by another researcher through open and axial coding, triangulation of the data identified different themes for each individual open-ended question. The identified themes were then placed in frequency tables, showing the percentages of variability within participants' responses for each question below.

What Method Would Someone Use to Hire a Coach?

Eight themes were identified (see Table 3) to denote the methods participants could use to hire a coach: (1) Internet, (2) professional (e.g., doctor, therapist, counselor, etc.), (3) employment, (4) insurance company, (5) word of mouth, (6) friends, (7) referral, and (8) other (see Table 3). The method referenced most often by participants was the Internet (45 responses; 35%). Responses varied from short replies, such as "Internet" and "Google search," to those more elaborate: "Check the web for certifications and cross check with professional psychologists, therapists"; "Google and look for reviews online"; and "Internet search within 20 miles of my home." Other responses commented, "friend referral," "word of mouth," and "referral from our pediatrician." While a few responses were related to work and insurance, "Maybe through my employment," and "I would start by calling my insurance company and see who or if they were covered then start an online search based on customer referrals."

Table 1: Likelihood of Seeking Different Family Practitioners for Intervention on Family Issues (N=168)

Family Issues	Type of Family Practitioner (%)				
	Psychologist	*Parenting Educator*	*Therapist*	*Family life Coach*	*Clergy*
General Parenting	11.6	35.7	15.5	19.0	10.4
Potty Training	3.3	25.4	3.5	14.2	6.4
School Success	13.2	26.8	12.6	23.1	6.4
Adolescent- Related Issues	23.6	29.4	31.4	22.9	10.6
Health & Well-Being	16.5	14.8	17.8	19.2	12.8
Risk Behaviors	41.7	19.6	43.4	16.1	19.1
Relationship Education	11.0	21.4	21.8	18.7	21.7
Special Needs (e.g, ADHD)	46.5	29.6	42.3	22.5	6.4
Time Management	5.1	11.9	6.1	35.0	6.4
Divorce	32.5	21.8	46.5	23.8	34.0
Unemployment	5.0	8.3	13.4	31.1	12.8
Blending of Families	23.6	25.5	33.1	29.0	27.7
Extended Families	13.1	17.2	22.1	23.6	17.8
Financial	2.6	14.0	6.9	36.3	8.7

Table 2: Participants Likely to Seek Coaching for Particular Family Issues (N=168)

Family Issue	% Reported Likely to Seek Family Life Coach
Financial	36.3
Time Management	35.0
Unemployment	31.1
Blending of Families	29.0
Divorce	23.8
Extended Families	23.6
School Success	23.1
Adolescent Related Issues	22.9
Special Needs	22.5
Health & Well-Being	19.2
General Parenting	19.0
Relationship Education	18.7
Risk Behaviors	16.1
Potty Training	14.2

Table 3: Percentage of Sample Showing What Method Used to Find a Family Life Coach (N=128)

Theme	n	%
Internet	45	35
Referral	25	20
Friends	17	13
Professional (e.g., family practitioner)	15	12
Word of Mouth	9	7
Insurance Company	3	2
Employment	2	1
Other	12	10
	128	100

What Benefits are Perceived from Hiring a Family Life Coach?

Qualitative data from the following question identified five themes: (1) help/assistance/support, (2) education, (3) outsider/third party/objective perspective, (4) approach, and (5) cost, while the large majority (45%) were *unsure or somewhat ambiguous responses that did not fit well with other themes* (see Table 4). There were 23 responses (19%) related to the identified theme of *help/assistance/support* as a benefit from hiring a family life coach. Participant responses included: "assist in coming up with a solution to problems," "individualized attention to multiple family issues," and "someone to help me talk out my problems and help me figure out what I want to do." Additionally, another response said, "Becoming closer as a family, building solution focused perspectives as a family, being more positive and energized as a family."

There were seventeen responses related to the *education* theme, in fact one was, "Education, education, education!" Moreover, sixteen responses related to the *outsider/third party* theme and included: "The benefit of an outside opinion, with an insight maybe the average person doesn't know," and "Outside perspective on attitudes and actions that each may not be aware of."

Less common responses were related to the themes *approach* and *cost*. Participants response to the theme *approach* were, "Someone to partner with you and help you discover the answers, not just tell you want to do" and "Working together to solve common problems, increasing communication." Other participants addressed cost as a benefit from hiring a family life coach. Responses included: "Cheaper than therapist," and "Less costly than other professionals."

Many responses were "N/A" or "none." These responses were identified under the theme *no benefit*. The identified theme, *other*, had a variety of different responses that could not be categorized; responses such as, "This is hypothetical," and "I am not familiar with family coaching so I am not aware of the benefits," were too ambiguous to classify.

Table 4: Percentage of Sample Showing Perceived Benefits from Hiring a Family Life Coach (N=124)

Theme	n	%
Help/Assistance/Support	23	19
Education	17	14
Objective Perspective	16	13
No Benefit	13	10
Approach	7	5
Cost	5	4
Other	43	35
	124	100

What Drawbacks are Perceived from Hiring a Family Life Coach?

Five themes were identified of the question regarding drawbacks toward hiring a coach: (1) *time*, (2) *money*, (3) *lack of training/credentials*, (4) *insurance coverage*, and (5) *none* (see Table 5). There were 30 responses (25%) related to the identified theme *lack of training/credentials* as a drawback to hiring a family life coach. Participant responses included, "Not familiar with what training and background they have," "Are they qualified to help? Without proper training, advancements in therapy could be curtailed with improper advice and coaching," and "Unsure of the credentialing and licensing process; is it rigorous?" Similar responses were, "Credentialing would be an issue for me; my family life coach should have more knowledge/education that I do or it defeats the purpose of seeking professional help," and "Vague credentials and training."

There were 29 responses (23%) related to the theme *money* as a drawback of hiring a family life coach. Many responses were simply, "Money," "Cost," "Expense," and "Affordability," while other responses noted the need for insurance coverage to help pay for the cost: "Not covered by insurance" and "Not reimbursed by insurance, costs."

The identified theme, *no drawbacks*, included different responses. Some responses were "not sure" while others implied a positive feeling about the attitudes of parents with the response "none." Additionally, ten responses were related to the identified theme, *time*. Two comments were, "Time investment," and "Take time away from family."

Table 5: Percentage of Sample Perceived Drawbacks of Hiring a Family Life Coach (N=122)

Theme	n	%
Lack of Training/Credentials	30	25
Money	29	23
No Drawbacks	18	15
Time	10	8
Insurance	5	4
Other	30	25
	122	100

What is Your Parental Opinion of Family Life Coaching?

The analysis of the final open-ended question identified three overall themes: (1) *need definition and credentials* (2) *like to know more*, and (3) *new idea* (see Table 6). Participant responses about the identified theme *licensure and credentialing* were equally prevalent as responses regarding the identified theme *like to know more*. Responses regarding the theme *licensure and credentialing* involved quotes like: "I am wondering about the process for their licensure or credentialing," "It would be beneficial if there were clear descriptions of what they do, criteria for excellence, how to find qualified ones, financial assistance to cover the cost of their services," and "As it is described in this survey, I think many professionals do coaching but don't have coaching credentials." Additionally, one participant put it this way:

> *I do not know much about life coaching. Does it even require a degree? When looking for help in my own family I would want to know the credentials of the person that I hired and because I am not familiar with life coaches, I do not know the education they have to have in order to earn that title.*

Each of these responses imply the earnest need for universal credentials for professionals wishing to be family life coaches.

There were seventeen responses regarding the theme *like to know* more, revealing a high interest. Some of the responses were, "I would simply like to know more about it," "Need more awareness," and "I don't think I know enough to be able to give you an opinion. I'm wide open to learning more" This high percent of respondents who would like to more, showed an open and positive attitude about FLC.

Participant responses for the theme *new idea* were, "I think it is an awesome idea" and "New concept for me, may be of benefit if one doesn't have good family back up." Similar responses were, "I think this is a relatively new idea and I think people need to better understand exactly what a coach does vs using other professionals," "Great concept, wish there [were] some around," and "I see it as another potential resource for families." While another commented on a possible drawback, "I think it is a good idea but could be unavailable to middle class or low-income families." Exploring the results to these questions can help us further understand the coaching field's application toward particular family issues.

Table 6: Percentage of Sample Opinions of Family Life Coaching (N=88)

Theme	N	%
Like to Know More	17	19
Definitions & Credentials	17	19
New Idea	10	11
Other or N/A	45	51
	88	100

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore parental perceptions of family life coaching as a method for assisting families. The findings from this study provide useful information about parental opinions and attitudes toward FLC, as well as a starting point for future research in the field of FLC with parents. Results show that even without a full understanding of coaching, parents report having an interest in and a desire to learn more about coaching. Some parenting topics generated more interest than others. Table 2 shows participants were most interested in areas where coaching first made its debut (financial, time management, and unemployment), then quickly moves toward family related themes. For example, the next two categories identified by participants lean towards family such as: *blending families* and *divorce*. This finding is considered a major strength in this study because FLC is an emerging field with a markedly different approach. The difference between percentage of *unemployment* (31%) and *blending of families* (29%) is very small.

Further, qualitative data analysis suggested findings that are consistent with existing literature. Recall that Cotter et al. (2013) found delivery format and parental preference of receiving family life and parent education is associated with positive family outcomes. Themes found from analyzing the open-ended response questions were consistent with the literature on delivery format: (1) Internet use, (2) strong relationships between coach and client, (3) a client-centered approach, (4) focusing on family goals and strengths, and (5) meeting families where they are by aligning with families (Connel et al., 2007; Kelly & Bernard, 1999; Radey & Randolph, 2009; Swick, 2004). Coaching methods eliminate the expert approach that carries the stigma of "needing help," which research demonstrates is consequently detrimental to parent education involvement (Swick, 2004).

When asked what method they would use to hire a coach, 35% of participants reported they would likely use the Internet as a method for hiring a family life coach. This finding is extremely helpful for programs using coaching approach and is consistent with the literature of disseminating parent education through online and distance technologies (Hamren & Quigley, 2012). Moreover, this finding implies the Internet as an avenue for awareness and education about family life coaching.

Participants who responded about perceived drawbacks of hiring a Family Life Coach, suggest a need for the field to be wholly defined and credentialed. The results of this question show that 25% of participants define lack of training/credentials is a drawback and 23% of participants define that money/cost is a drawback. This finding implies that the field of family life coaching needs to grow by implementing coach competencies, training standards, educational requirements, and credentialing (Allen & Huff, 2014; Goddard et al., 2011; Hamon & Smith, 2014). In addition, these findings point to the need for a better understanding of the cost of FLC and a standardization of coaching pricing. Likewise, parents who responded with their opinions of family life coaching, yielded similar results involving credentialing, such that 19% of participants reported a need for defining the field of family life coaching and implementing a credential.

Additionally, family life coaching was identified by the sample as a likely professional to seek in dealing with blended families and divorce/separation, after the more traditional areas of financial, time management, and unemployment support. Results from the analysis of variance showed statistical significance for parents who had previously hired a coach to hire a coach for general parenting issues and divorce. This finding suggests that future research is needed to explore these specific areas as they apply to family life coaching. Specifically, research on the perceptions of coaching by parents that have received coaching services is needed, as is research on the efficacy of coaching on specific parenting topics.

Finally, the study helped to identify where families might go to find FLC professionals. Participants suggested the best method to hire family life coaches is on the Internet. This finding is helpful for both parents in locating coaches and for coaches in advertising their services. The current study reinforces previous research findings that suggest that the Internet is one of the most effective ways

to learn about family life coaching and parent education (Radey & Randolph, 2009). In addition, the field of family life coaching can increase its awareness with more Internet exposure.

Implications

Participant responses yield information that is useful for future studies of family life coaching and suggest actions that may be of benefit to coaches who are currently practicing. Participants reported an interest in seeking coaches to address family needs and expressed a desire to learn more about FLC. As the field of coaching continues to grow, there is a need to better understand potential audiences, and this article shows parenting as a promising specialty for coaching. The interest in coaching among this sample also presents a possible opportunity for family life coaches to differentiate from other family practitioners as a method for helping families. The participant base was predominately more educated, perhaps implying a more open mind to coaching or more access to information about up-and-coming approaches to family science. Additionally, the participants may be able to afford a coach because current family life coaches are not yet covered under insurance plans.

Research suggests that there is an overwhelming need for familial support to meet families where they are as they make positive changes towards more healthy family outcomes (Swick, 2004). Family life coaching is an approach that partners with its client, fostering an atmosphere of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation (Moran & Brady, 2013), recognizing the client is best equipped to provide answers to their own problems by highlighting positive familial patterns and strengths (Allen, 2013). Furthermore, the mere act of studying parental perceptions of family life coaching helps to broaden the understanding of parental preferences in family life education and parenting skills (Radey & Randolph, 2009). This study creates a starting point for further research into family life coaching preferences and implementation strategies.

Limitations

While this research shows parents' interest and desire to learn more about family life coaching, there are limitations starting with the design of the survey. First, this study did not measure efficacy or even require participants to have experienced coaching; it was designed to gauge the interest of parents and coaching services. To more accurately measure parental perceptions of coaching, a sample including parents that had already received coaching would be beneficial. Furthermore, this study did not include comprehensive demographics (e.g., race/ethnicity was not measured). Many participants did not complete or answer all survey questions, most likely due to the length of the survey. Restructuring the survey design would allow more inferential analysis of the data and would likely lessen respondent fatigue. This also points to the need to pilot the survey as a means for fine-tuning the survey design and length (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

Another limitation is that the survey was only accessible by the Internet, thereby limiting the number of participants to only those who could either access the Internet or have access to a computer. In addition, a snowball sample may result in researcher bias because the selected sample may already have a good understanding of what the researcher is studying (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Disseminating the survey in other forms such as mailings, pamphlets, or phone calls, and broadening the participant base to include a more diverse sample would likely improve the generalizability of the results.

Conclusion

Family science has continually moved forward by employing innovative and effective practices for

families. Family life coaching is one such innovative approach that has been identified in the family science literature as an area of interest for more research and application. More information is needed to determine how FLC practice and research can be used to grow the field of family science.

This study sought to better understand the perceptions and interest of parents in employing family life coaches to help with family life issues. Results show that parents have an interest and willingness to use coaches to address family-related issues, and that participants would like to know more about the field of family life coaching, specifically as related to better managing family issues such as general parenting and divorce.

The research on family needs is congruent with the theoretical stance of FLC. Family life coaches are able to provide familial support and parent education through a strong client-coach relationship (Rush et al., 2003), and through effective home visits (Beyer, 2008; Hamren & Quigley, 2012). This research supports current trends to help families through coaching via online technology platforms for special needs (e.g., early intervention, divorce, ADHD, and Autism).

While the field of parent and family life education is wide, there is still need for growth. Ultimately, family life coaching has several different niches and applications that will benefit from further exploration to establish the evidence-base it needs to grow and become well accepted. Delivering family life and parent education within the parental preferences noted above provides the respect and empowerment needed for families to experience long-term impacts. Family life coaching is unique because it bridges the education of family life with the support, encouragement, engagement, and family-centered activities for which families are asking. Future studies need to address the methodology, theory, and best practices of currently practicing family coaches. This information would enhance the rigor of family life coaching training programs and the budding coaching field as a whole.

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