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# An Introduction to the Ecocultural Family Interview Project

## at the City of Milwaukee Health Department

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The Ecocultural Family Interview (EFI) is a conversation with families about how they plan, implement, and sustain family activities. The interview was designed in 1993 by Dr. Tom Weisner, a professor of Anthropology from UCLA, to gain information regarding the daily family routine. Dr. Weisner found in his 20-plus years of research that daily routines are the best barometer of not only family functioning and well-being, but child developmental outcomes as well. It is called the Ecocultural Family Interview model because the family's routine is based on what Dr. Weisner terms their "ecology", or their resources and constraints, and the family "culture" – their beliefs and values.

Rather than a formal questionnaire or assessment form, the EFI is actually an informal, directed conversation intended to uncover strengths and barriers that affect how the family meets their needs. The EFI contains a mix of casual conversation, probing questions by the interviewer, and preplanned, structured questions.

We are implementing the Ecocultural Family Interview Project within the City of Milwaukee Health Department's Empowering Families of Milwaukee (EFM) program. EFM is a comprehensive, long-term home visitation program that services families in eight high-risk Milwaukee zip codes from pregnancy until the child is five years old. Through the EFI Project, we are studying whether using the EFI as a family assessment tool can help us better identify the social, economic, and mental health needs of our families, and how we can turn this information into better care plans, and therefore better outcomes for our families. We believe that by asking questions a different way, we can get at information that does not normally come out in traditional home visits using structured assessment forms.

In the EFI Project, we will be learning about families and their daily, weekly, and monthly routines, and how this supports or hinders family functioning. We want to get information about the family's strengths, and what resources and supports the family feels they have available to them. We also want to know what constraints the family must live with, what obstacles they encounter as they go about their lives, and how they problem-solve to overcome these challenges. In addition, the interviewers and researchers will be listening for family goals, values, and beliefs as participants talk about their daily routine. In summary, we want to uncover how the family creates and runs their daily routine, and what is truly important to them.

The interviews will be conducted by the EFM social workers and community health workers every four to six months on approximately 70 participants in the EFM program. The interviews are submitted to the EFI Program Coordinator, who provides timely written feedback to the interviewer and partnering public health nurse regarding interview content, potential areas for updates to the participant's care plan, and available community resources. A copy of these feedback forms are also provided to the supervisor(s) for follow up.

Each interview is recorded, then transcribed and uploaded into an internet-based mixed-methods research database. Each interview will then be coded by topic, and scored according to acuity and need. This will give us rich and valuable data on the issues that our families are facing, what they are doing to overcome these obstacles, and how we can best make changes to meet the needs of the families in our community.

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