

Journal Highlights

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The purpose of Journal Highlights is to inform readers of current research on various aspects of child maltreatment. APSAC members are invited to contribute by mailing a copy of current articles (preferably published within the past 6 months) along with a two- or three-sentence review to the editors of the APSAC Advisor at the address listed on the back cover, or E-mail: JSRycus@aol.com.

Child Welfare Practitioners' Engagement in Evidence-Based Intervention

This study was an effort to better understand the willingness and readiness of practitioners who are working with families involved in child physical abuse to engage in evidence-based practice. This small study of 77 practitioners from nine agencies used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to provide an overview of primary characteristics of child welfare practitioners that influence their acceptance of evidence-based interventions. The profiles included caseworkers' attitudes and beliefs, their treatment preferences, and how these might impact the implementation of evidence-based treatment in child maltreatment. Practitioners typically used family/systems therapy techniques and focused on family issues. Practitioners were not always clear in their understanding of treatment manuals or how to implement treatments guided by formal manuals. Although practitioners thought treatment manuals were important, respondents reflected a mix of attitudes toward actual use of manualized interventions. The study also attempted to relate elements of organizational climate to practitioners' engagement in evidence-based interventions, but findings were inconclusive. The researchers conclude that researchers and community agencies providing services to maltreated children must collaborate if evidence-based treatments are to be effectively disseminated and implemented.

Baumann, B. L., Kolko, Collins, K., & Herschell, A. D. (2006). Understanding practitioners' characteristics and perspectives prior to the dissemination of an evidence-based intervention. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 30*(7), 771-787.

Neighborhood-Based Foster Care

In this article, Berrick challenges the notion that placing foster children back into their local communities is always in the children's best interest. She provides a review of the empirical literature describing the effect of high- versus low-poverty neighborhoods on the well-being of children, and she critically discusses the significance of neighborhoods in terms of child abuse and neglect risk factors and ultimate placement outcomes of children and youth. While acknowledging the benefits of neighborhood-based foster care, which include minimizing disruptions in education and peer friendships, maintaining cultural connections, and increasing potential for parental visitation, the author also argues that research suggests that these factors appear to be less critical for younger children and are more relevant for older children and youth. The author further suggests that neighborhood-based placements are less important for the 50% of children in foster care who are never reunified with their families because their chances of returning to their neighborhoods are lower. The author notes additional research suggesting there may be some benefits for children who move from higher- to lower-poverty neighborhoods. The author argues for a more balanced approach to neighborhood-based placements, whereby placement decisions

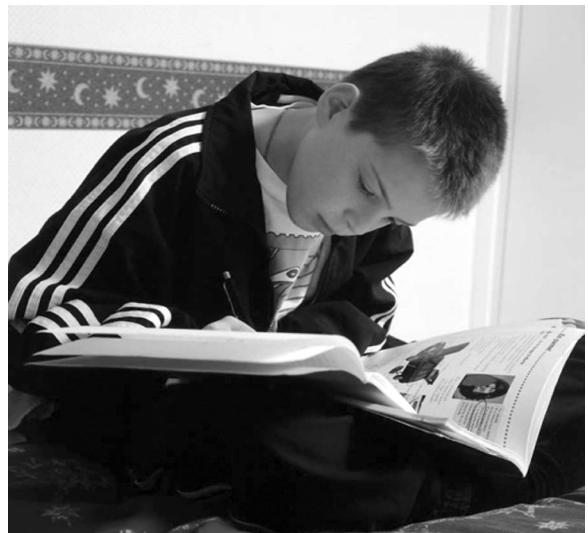
should be more concerned with the characteristics of the family with whom the child is placed than with the particular location of the placement.

Berrick, J. D. (2006). Neighborhood-based foster care: A critical examination of location-based placement criteria. *Social Service Review, 80*(4), 569-583.

Using Intensive Family Preservation With Adoptive Families

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 and the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 have contributed to an increase in the number of adoptions of children with special needs, including older children, sibling groups, children from minority races and/or ethnicities, and children with behavioral, emotional, and/or medical needs. This study explored the use of intensive family preservation services with adoptive families of children with special needs in Missouri. The authors studied factors that influenced the ability of adoptive families to remain intact after the termination of formal agency services. The researchers used multiple regression analyses to determine which factors contributed to the intactness of families at 6 and 12 months posttermination of services, thereby offering insights into the characteristics of children and adoptive families that impact adoption outcomes. Their prediction model included four factors: child characteristics, family characteristics, child's previous placement history, and service characteristics. At the 6-month postservice interval, the researchers found that the strongest predictors of a family remaining together were child and family characteristics (i.e., ethnicity of child, employment of parent) and child's initial reason for placement. At the 12-month interval, all four factors of the model contributed significantly to family preservation, but service characteristics were the greatest predictors of the family's ability to remain together.

Berry, M., Propp, J., & Martens, P. (2007). The use of intensive family preservation services with adoptive families. *Child and Family Social Work, 12*(1), 43-53.



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Child Neglect and Poverty

Child neglect is the most prevalent form of child maltreatment in this country. The authors of this article used data from the 1994 *National Study of Protective, Preventive, and Reunification Services Delivered to Children and Their Families* to approximate the effects of parental characteristics on both child neglect and on several poverty indicators that have been previously linked to substantiated physical neglect. In this study, physical neglect was defined as “a parent or caregiver not providing the child with basic necessities (e.g., adequate food, clothing, shelter, and hygiene)” (p. 111). The correlational analyses found associations between poverty and substantiated physical neglect, but logistic regression analyses showed that none of the poverty-related variables was statistically significant in predicting physical neglect. The study also found that families who were involved in the WIC program were less likely to physically neglect their children. This finding was attributed to the success of the WIC program in achieving positive child health outcomes and behavioral changes in mothers to engage in child wellness practices. Finally, the study found that primary caregivers with substance abuse or mental health issues were twice as likely to have their cases substantiated for physical neglect. Although some associations between poverty and child neglect were suggested in correlation analyses, none of the poverty variables was a statistically significant predictor of child neglect.

Carter, V., & Myers, M. R. (2007). Exploring the risks of substantiated physical neglect related to poverty and parental characteristics: A national sample. *Children and Youth Services Review, 29*(1), 110-121.



Parent Mentors in Child Welfare

In this article, Cohen and Canan describe the Parent Partner Program in California, which was designed to integrate parent mentors into the routine process of serving families in the child welfare system. Parent Partners are individuals who have personally experienced involvement of the child welfare system in their families. They are assigned to work with the birth parent(s) of children at the time of the initial placement hearing. The Parent Partners Program is modeled after other peer support and advocate programs, wherein peers play a key role in helping families successfully navigate the complexities of a social service system. This article describes the program’s structure and its implementation in one region of the state. Discussion includes both the challenges and positive influences of the program on child welfare workers, parents, parent mentors, and the organization itself. The program’s relationship to improved child and family outcomes is noted as an area in need of future research. Information gathered to date indicates the program

offers promise for improving the interaction between child welfare agencies and families.

Cohen, E., & Canan, L. (2006). Closer to home: Parent mentors in child welfare. *Child Welfare, 85*(5), 867-884.

Effective Helping Relationships in Child Welfare

This article reports the findings from a qualitative study conducted in Canada which was designed to identify key attributes and practices of child welfare workers that contributed to positive relationships with their clients. The study was based on prior research findings that established the importance of the helping relationship in child welfare practice. Six worker-client dyads, which had been identified as having good relationships, participated in five semistructured interviews, resulting in a total of 30 interviews. Researchers used a back-and-forth interview process that allowed workers and clients to respond to each other’s input, thereby eliciting “co-authored stories” of their relationship development process and its perceived impact. The analysis revealed two primary themes about attitudes and actions of workers that contributed to positive worker/client relationships: “(1) soft, mindful and judicious use of power; and (2) humanistic attitude and style that stretches traditional professional ways-of-being” (p. 35), which included going beyond responsibility to simply assure child safety by providing personal emotional support for the family, working with parents after termination of parental rights, and finding material resources for families. The authors conclude by suggesting three specific considerations for identifying, hiring, and training child welfare workers. First, individuals must possess abilities to develop relationships with clients. Second, workers must be trained in how to maintain good helping relationships with clients of the child welfare system. Last, child welfare supervision should include assessments of worker relationships with clients and incorporate monitoring and accountability of worker capacities in maintaining supportive, positive helping relationships with clients of the child welfare system.

de Boer, C., & Coady, N. (2007). Good helping relationships in child welfare: Learning from stories of success. *Child and Family Social Work, 12*(1), 32-42.

Wraparound Services in Child Welfare

As the title suggests, this article provides a descriptive and contextual understanding of the development of wraparound services in child welfare. The author first discusses the history and definition of wraparound as it was initially developed in the field of children’s mental health. Key legislation and publications leading to systems change efforts describe the context for simultaneously implementing wraparound in children’s mental health care, while also working to change systems to better integrate all of the public children’s service systems. Noting that mental health and child welfare systems share similar service populations and a common philosophical focus on family-centered services, the author discusses how changes in child welfare legislation and resulting program development provide a good fit and fertile ground for wraparound’s emergence in child welfare services. The author describes wraparound as part of a continuum of the established Family Support, Family Based Services, and Intensive Family Preservation Services. Wraparound is distinguished as an approach that emphasizes informal services, flexible funding, a “less prescriptive” service process, and unlimited length of participation. In the California example used in the article, wraparound also assumes a more child-centered than family-centered approach. The

author notes only two controlled studies of wraparound in child welfare and suggests that wraparound's sustenance in child welfare will be determined by further demonstration of its effectiveness.

Ferguson, C. (2007). Wraparound: Definition, context for development, and emergence in child welfare. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 1*(2), 91-110.

Social Work Education and Child Welfare

This article describes a study across human service-related disciplines to determine which baccalaureate educational program appears to best prepare graduates to assume jobs as public child welfare case managers in Indiana. Research methods included surveys and focus groups, and content analysis of Indiana's child welfare policies and training competencies. The state's child welfare policies and training competencies were reviewed, and data from both line staff and supervisors were gathered to identify the skills necessary for case managers. Baccalaureate program directors were then engaged in matching identified competencies against their respective educational programs. Findings indicate that social work programs were the best fit with the values, theory, knowledge, and skills required for child welfare case managers. The applied nature of social work programs, which use more structured and supervised practicum experience in the child welfare setting, better prepared graduates and promoted mastery of the requisite competencies to do the work.

Folaron, G., & Hostetter, C. (2007). Is social work the best educational degree for child welfare practitioners? *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 1*(1), 65-83.

The Community Norms of Child Neglect Scale

In 2004, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that child neglect has the highest incidence rate of all types of child maltreatment. The first step in addressing the issue is to discern the perceptions of individual community members about child neglect, but little attention has been given to identifying these perceptions. This article describes the development and validation of an instrument called the Community Norms of Child Neglect Scale (CNCNS), which was developed to measure individuals' perceptions of child neglect. The measure was developed based on a classification approach recommended by Barnett, Manly, and Cicchetti (1993), in which they identified four types of child neglect: "failure to provide, physical neglect-lack of supervision, emotional maltreatment, and moral, legal, or educational maltreatment" (p. 69). The authors tested the instrument with practitioners and lay community people in rural and urban areas. The results suggest that this scale may be helpful in eliciting and comparing perceptions of child neglect among individuals and communities.

Goodvin, R., Johnson, D. R., Hardy, S. A., Graef, M. I., & Chambers, J. M. (2007). Development and confirmatory factor analysis of the Community Norms of Child Neglect Scale. *Child Maltreatment, 12*(1), 68-85.

Children's Perspectives of Kinship Care Placements

"Kinship care is a living arrangement in which a relative or another person who is emotionally close to a child takes primary responsibility for raising that child" (p. 1415). According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 6 million children are being raised by grandparents or other relatives in formal and informal kinship care. Informal kinship care has been a part of the tradition in this country for many years. In recent years, however, the child welfare system has recognized the value of kinship care resources within the foster care system. This small research study provides a descriptive analysis of kinship care

from the perspectives of 40 children placed in kinship care. The researchers held eight focus groups in which children offered and discussed their perspectives on transitional issues, family relationships, the stigma of being in care, and stability of their placements. Transitioning into kinship care did not appear to bring about substantive challenges to children's adjustment. While they expressed fear of entering the child welfare system, children described what the author termed "fluidity" in their families and expressed that living with a relative reduced the stigma they felt in being separated from their biological parent(s). They expressed comfort in being legally tied to their guardians. At the same time, children expressed anger and disappointment, especially toward their mothers, for not showing up for visits and for unsatisfactory visits. Children further verbalized disappointment in their biological parents' inability to care for them but maintained hope for living with their parent(s) again in the future.

Messing, J. T. (2006). From the child's perspective: A qualitative analysis of kinship care placements. *Children and Youth Services, 28*(12), 1415-1434.

Substance Abuse Treatment in Child Welfare

Nearly half of the children found to be abused and neglected in 1995 had caregivers who abused alcohol or other drugs. Substance abuse has a negative effect on parenting practices and increases the risk of child maltreatment. Children of substance abusing caregivers are more likely to stay in foster care for long periods of time and are less likely to be reunified with their caregivers. Child welfare agencies have begun to explore the integration of child welfare services and substance abuse services to better meet the needs of children and families. This study used an experimental design to examine the effectiveness of a service integration model that used intensive case management to integrate substance abuse services and child welfare services. Over 700 families were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (receiving regular services plus intensive case management and a recovery coach) or a control group (treatment as usual—substance abuse assessment, referrals for services, and monitoring compliance and encouraged ongoing treatment participation). The study focused on two specific outcomes: family reunification and substance abuse services. The study found that the recovery coach program goal of moving participants into treatment more quickly was met with a significantly greater number of recovery participants gaining quicker access to substance abuse treatment than the control group. The study found that, overall, 12% of the families who received the recovery coach model of services were better able to access substance abuse treatment and were more likely to achieve family reunification compared with 7% of families in the control group who achieved reunification. It further found that the cost for implementing the recovery coach program was cost neutral when compared with services as usual.

Ryan, J. P., Marsh, J. C., Testa, M. F. & Louderman, R. (2006). Integrating substance abuse treatment and child welfare services: Findings from the Illinois Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Waiver Demonstration. *Social Work Research, 30*(2), 95-107.

