Identifying Barriers to Reunification in the Child Welfare System

A Parental Perspective.

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2013-2014

ABSTRACT

- Parental experience
- “FAILED REUNIFICATION”
- PURPOSE
- Uncover and identify themes

OUTLINE

- Review research literature
- Research motivations and goals
- Study Methods and procedure
- Study findings
- Identified barriers
- Recommendations
- Study limitations
- Future research directions

BACKGROUND

- PURPOSE
- Court Approved CASE PLAN
- Preferred permanency option
- REUNIFICATION

BACKGROUND CONT.

- Family stability and positive development
- Achieving reunification and preventing re-entry into the foster care system
- Multiple factors
  - case, family, and child characteristics

BACKGROUND CONT.

- HOW substance abuse effects long-term permanency outcomes
- Parental substance abuse is strongly associated with abuse or neglect of children
- Substance abuse- Significant RISK FACTOR to child welfare involvement

RATIONALE

- Data available concerning “failed reunifications”
- RESEARCH GAP
- UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE
- ECKERD COMMUNTIY ALTERNATIVES
- GOAL

METHODS

- Participants recruited through Community Based Care agencies (5)
- Semi-structured qualitative key informant interviews with voluntary study participants *(N=4)
- Coded based on themes revealed through trends in responses.
- Themes found drive EBP recommendations

METHODS

- Risk to participants
- Mandated Reporters
- Protection Against Risk
- Benefits to participants

Preliminary Observations

These findings should be regarded as "preliminary", with an intention toward more data collection

Study results indicate several important factors, but more interviews will or will not confirm their importance

Major Themes

Family Strengths

In each interview, parents were able to name strengths in their family, self, and children.

Some of the strengths included “close-knit”, “supportive”, “never give up”, and “strong.”

Parents were most pleased with the services they received when case managers noticed and incorporated the strengths the parents already knew their families had.

*"**We are a close family**. Even through all this that we've gone through, we still stay really close and try to help one another as much as we can"*

*"My children are **very independent**. They will choose to do something, whether right or wrong, and they'll stick with that"*

Major Themes

Maternal Background

- Maternal Substance abuse
  - All 4 interviews referenced
  - Referenced more times than any other code

- Physical Abuse/Domestic Violence
  - All 4 interviews experienced or witnessed
  - When Parental/Relational combine, referenced as many times as MSA

"I would do what I do and when he didn't like what I was doing, he'd correct me, I guess. One time, I stole money from him and he sawed my hand off. ***Cut it in half, [but] he was trying to teach me a lesson.*** *"*

"It's sad because even—I look back and ***it's deep in our family.*** *My mother's family and my father's family; both alcoholic families."*

Major Themes
Service Experience

- Adequate Amount of Services
- Services not effective
- Found to “miss the point”
- Regarded as “too punitive”

The oldest tried, but her problems are deeper than would allow her to make things right. So ***she tried and she tried and she did a lot of things and then she was able to get reunified, but then the same issues were still occurring*** *so then I ended up getting the boys back. Then after 6 months, they decided that—she decided that she didn't want to try anymore."*

Parental Recommendations

Design programs to nurture relationship between foster and biological families

"Maria's mom, she's very supportive with me She helps me, she gives me good advice. She even wants to talk to her daughter to make sure that she's doing what she's supposed to do"

Level 3 EBP: ***Parents Anonymous***

"Parents Anonymous® is a family-strengthening program of community-based weekly mutual support groups, based on national standards of practice and free to all participants. This culturally responsive model is open to any parent or caregiver in a parenting role seeking support and positive parenting strategies regardless of the age or special challenges of their children."

Pion-Berlin, L. (2010, August). *Parents anonymous*. Retrieved from http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/parents-anonymous/

Parental Recommendations

- Reduce Caseloads
  - Decrease turn-over rate
  - Increase targeted case management for high-risk mothers

"I had 6 case workers in 1 year. How are you guys supposed to get to know us if you're changing people all the time? They're supposed to have connections with the kids. How are you going to let the kids see you're a protector?"

Further Recommendations

- **Flag "high risk" mothers and provide trauma-informed and/or substance abuse care**
  - Will confirm with more interviews. Preliminary examples include:
    - Maternal Substance Abuse
    - History of Domestic Violence
    - Child behavior problems
    - Joblessness

Level 2 EBP : ***Project Connect***

"Project Connect works with high-risk families who are affected by parental substance abuse and are involved in the child welfare system. The program offers home-based counseling, substance abuse monitoring, nursing, and referrals for other services. The program also offers home-based parent education, parenting groups, and an ongoing support group for mothers in recovery"

Laprade, V. (2013, June). *Project connect*. Retrieved from http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/project-connect/

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ECKERD

- Distinction
- Different substances different consequences for parenting and child safety.
- Case Management Dilemma
- LOOKING FORWARD
  - Continued Education

RECOMENDATIONS

- Best practice standards
- Implementation process (how) vs. the implementation result (effect on the system, providers, consumers)
- Bureaucracy

CHALLENGES TO DATA COLLECTION

- Organizational Culture
- Difficult to gain access
  - Schedule constraints
- Participant follow through

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"I think they are doing a wonderful job. They really are. ***Because they could have given up on me long time ago and just keep her in foster care but they didn't do that****. They put her back in my home, they wanted her back in my home. They wanted that goal; to put her back, reunify us. They went to court, they talk to the judge and told the judge,* ***"We want this family to work. We want to keep them together." They never gave up on me, never, and they still there fighting for my daughter"***

Questions/ Comments?