

RAP Sheet

RESEARCH ADVANCING PRACTICE

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NEBRASKA CHILDREN WITH BEHAVIORAL IMPAIRMENTS LIKELY TO BE IN FOSTER CARE LONGER

1252 Nebraska children in out-of-home care were tracked through the foster care system using data from the Foster Care Review Board. Behaviorally impaired children were compared with "behaviorally impaired with other handicap" children and with non-behaviorally impaired children on several variables. Not surprisingly, behaviorally impaired children (with and without other handicaps) were more likely to be in care over four years. In fact, behavioral impairment was the strongest predictor of length of time in care. Other findings showed that behaviorally impaired children were more likely to be male, to be older when entering and leaving care, to be placed in the same county as their family of origin, and to have experienced physical or sexual abuse. Results suggest that mental health services be sought for behaviorally impaired children as early as possible, and that these children should be placed in therapeutic foster care when possible. Although these children are likely to have some degree of impairment before entering care, the experience of long-term care or multiple placements may exacerbate the problem.

Kupsinel, M.M., & Dubsky, D.D. (1999).

Behaviorally impaired children in out-of-home care. *Child Welfare*, 78, 297-310.

PEER RELATIONSHIPS MAY BE ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT, AND ESPECIALLY IMPAIRED, FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Peers are an important part of children's development; they provide opportunities for cognitive, social, moral, and emotional growth. Foster children often face special challenges in their peer relationships. Removal from home or placement may move them away from their peer group. Difficulties within the family (including violence) increase the likelihood that children will be overly aggressive or extremely avoidant, which decreases their chances at forming and maintaining positive peer relationships. Furthermore, children with poor peer relationships are at risk for later developmental problems as well. Fortunately, positive, stable peer relationships can also buffer the negative effects of an unstable home life. It is suggested that child protective service workers and foster parents become aware of children's social networks when considering how the child is faring in a particular placement. Also, the extent and kind of peer support a child has should be added to the (already long) list of factors influencing the "next placement" decision for a child. Finally, social skills programs may be helpful services to seek for children in out-of-home care who exhibit problems with peers.

Price, J.M., & Brew, V. (1998). Peer relationships of foster children: Developmental and mental health service implications. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 19, 199-218.

MULTIETHNIC PLACEMENT ACT HAS GOOD INTENTIONS, MAY BE DIFFICULT TO IMPLEMENT: SUGGESTIONS PROVIDED IN REPORT

The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 and the 1996 Interethnic Adoption Provisions changed the guidelines concerning interethnic adoption. Although the goal was to reduce the amount of time foster children (especially minorities) spend waiting for adoptive homes, child welfare professionals still face several challenges in interpretation and implementation. These authors argue that the controversial nature of transracial adoption, the ambiguity of the guidelines, and the government's unrealistic assumptions and expectations will prohibit the laws from functioning as intended. Additionally, child welfare professionals have to contend with competing interests, lack of control over significant factors, lack of resources, and lack of information concerning the relationship between ethnicity, placement and a child's development. Suggestions are provided in condensed form in the article, with the full report available at <http://cssr2.socwel.berkeley.edu/cwcr/reports/report.html>.

Brooks, D., Barth, R.P., Bussiere, A., & Patterson, G. (1999). Adoption and race: Implementing the Multiethnic Placement Act and the Interethnic Adoption Provisions. *Social Work*, 44, 167-178.

YOUTH SEXUAL OFFENDERS NEED TO BE TREATED DIFFERENTLY THAN ADULT SEXUAL OFFENDERS

An increasing number of child sexual assault perpetrators are children themselves. In fact, over 50% of male child victims, and 20-30% of female child victims are abused by older juveniles. Treatment for these sexually abusive youth has historically been modeled after treatment programs for adult sexual perpetrators. Recently, however, a developmental perspective has begun to shape treatment programs especially designed for youthful offenders. While adult-oriented programs are based on a belief of a lifetime propensity for relapse, many youthful offenders are believed to be capable of returning to a normal developmental path with proper intervention. Sexually abusive behaviors by youths are viewed as a result of deviant learning and/or developmental deficits, and it is assumed that many youths can replace their sexual deviance with more normative sexual desires and behaviors. Advocates believe that treatment should focus on nurturing the youth instead of the traditional tearing down and rebuilding process that is often used for adult sexual offenders. The consensus approach to treating youthful sex offenders includes the following six goals: 1) consistent definition of the abuse in their daily lives and in relation to their sexual fantasies; 2) recognition of the patterns associated with the abusive cycle; 3) demonstration of new competencies that interrupt those patterns; 4) acknowledgment of the risk of relapse (this demonstrates decreased denial and supports the use of

treatment gains in the future); 5) the consistent demonstration of empathic skills in daily interactions; and 6) the ability to create and maintain psychologically safe relationships based on reciprocal empathic interactions.

Ryan, G. (1999). Treatment of sexually abusive youths: The evolving consensus. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 14*, 422-436.

GANG MEMBERSHIP ITSELF MAY BE MORE DETRIMENTAL THAN SIMPLY HAVING DELINQUENT FRIENDS

The effect of gang membership on youth delinquency was studied by following 808 students from ethnically diverse, low-income areas in Seattle, from age 13-15. Specifically, the delinquency of three groups was compared: gang members, non-gang youth with delinquent friends, and non-gang youth with no delinquent friends. It was found that gang members engaged in more delinquency (particularly violent delinquency), sold more drugs, and drank alcohol more frequently than non-gang who had or did not have delinquent friends. In fact, across all of the violent, nonviolent, and general delinquency measures, the same trend emerged: gang members exhibited the most delinquent behaviors, followed by non-gang youth with delinquent peers, followed lastly by non-gang youth with non-delinquent peers. This research suggests that gang membership contributes to delinquency in youth above and beyond simply having delinquent peers. Because gang membership seems to actually intensify delinquent acts more than just associating with delinquent friends alone, the authors emphasize the need for gang prevention programs that can effectively prevent youth from joining gangs.

Battin, S.R., Hill, K.G., Abbott, R.D., Catalano, R.F., & Hawkins, J.D. (1998). The contribution of gang membership to delinquency beyond delinquent friends. *Criminology, 36*, 93-115.

RURAL AND URBAN STUDENTS REPORT FEW DIFFERENCES IN GANG INVOLVEMENT, BUT DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

2138 Nevada students (rural and urban, from grades 7 to 12) were compared on their similarities and differences in gang membership. Because this is a self-report study of adolescents, the results need to be interpreted with some caution. However, many important similarities and differences between urban and rural youth were found. For example, about 20% of both rural and urban students identified themselves as gang members. Additionally, the two groups reported no difference in pressure to join gangs. Urban students were, however, more likely to report that they had friends in gangs, and felt more threatened by gangs. They also reported more concern for their personal safety, and more violence in their schools and community. Thus, while as many rural students report they belong to gangs as urban students, rural students perceive their communities and schools as much safer places. Interestingly, there was no difference in the length of time

gang members had lived in their communities. The authors stated that this suggests the spread of gangs to rural areas may be more of a "home grown" phenomenon than simply the transplantation of urban gang members in rural areas.

Evans, W.P., Fitzgerald, C., Weigel, D., & Chvilicek, S. (1999). Are rural gang members similar to their urban peers? Implications for rural communities. *Youth & Society, 30*, 267-282.



IMPORTANT DATES!

►Y2KIDS: PROTECTING NEBRASKA'S CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY OCTOBER 26-29, 1999, KEARNEY, NE

This statewide conference is sponsored by the Governor's Commission for the Protection of Children and the Nebraska Court Improvement Project and is being planned by the faculty at the Center on Children, Families, and the Law. A number of nationally recognized speakers and trainers will address many aspects of child abuse and neglect. Protection and Safety workers, administrators, attorneys, judges, law enforcement personnel, health care providers, educators, and policymakers will be invited to attend. Plan to be there for all or part of what should be a great training opportunity with colleagues from across the state. For more information call Chris Wiklund, 402.472.3479.

BOOKMARKS



- Natl Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Info
www.calib.com/nccanch
- Future of Children
www.futureofchildren.org
- Stand for Children
www.stand.org
- Administration for Children and Families
www.acf.dhhs.gov
- Center on Children, Families, and the Law
www.unl.edu/ccfl/ccfl.htm
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
New Address
ojjdp.ncjrs.org

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