

RAP Sheet

RESEARCH ADVANCING PRACTICE

<http://ccfl.unl.edu/publications/rap/>

VOLUME 6, NO. 1
Winter/Spring 2004

SEVERAL ASPECTS OF FOSTER PARENTING SKILLS RELATED TO PLACEMENT DISRUPTION

Parenting foster children is a challenging task and can differ from the parenting of birth children in several ways. Therefore, it is important to determine which particular parenting skills are related to successful placements. The foster parents of 68 newly placed adolescents (ages 11 to 17, all with behavioral problems) were interviewed about their parenting skills and practices. Parents were interviewed at two points in time: two months after the start of the new placement, and then either one year after the placement began or at the point of disruption, whichever occurred first. It was found that foster parents' supervision of the youths was greater within rather than outside of the home; however, it was good supervision *outside* of the home that was related to a reduced likelihood of placement disruption. In addition, a majority of foster parents seemed to be sensitive to the child experiencing anxiety and distress, and were able to respond to the child's "emotional age," which was not always the same as their chronological age. Recognizing and responding to the child's "emotional age" was also related to fewer placement disruptions. Another factor related to fewer disruptions was if the foster child was able to talk about negative events in his/her past. Some foster parents found that developing specific strategies for this was useful, such as setting aside an hour each week to discuss any past or current issues causing distress. Foster parents were moderately involved in encouraging activities and friendships for the youth, and most foster parents were involved in the youth's education. However, almost half of parents showed little or no involvement in the development of life skills for these youth, many of whom might soon face independence. In addition, many foster parents found it difficult to talk to the youth about their relationships and sexual behavior, though the foster parents did have concerns for the youth in these areas. Finally, when the foster family had experienced significant stress right before the placement began, the quality of their parenting was decreased, which suggests that less demanding youth should be placed with these families or that they should be provided with more support.

Lipscombe, J., Farmer, E., & Moyers, S. (2003). Parenting fostered adolescents: Skills and strategies. *Child and Family Social Work*, 8, 243-255.

WHETHER JUVENILE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES ARE PRIVATE IS ONLY INDIRECTLY RELATED TO PERCEPTIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Approximately 30% of incarcerated youth offenders in the U.S. are housed in correctional facilities operated by private companies rather than a public entity. Supporters of privatization argue that private companies use resources more effectively and are more innovative, whereas opponents worry that the quality of facilities will be lessened because the profit-seeking private sector will cut corners to save money. This study assessed whether environmental quality differences existed between a sample of public and private juvenile correctional facilities. Over 4,000 incarcerated youth offenders in 48 facilities (32 public and 16 private) were asked about their facility's physical and social environment. The researchers also made site visits to the facilities to gather additional information. It was found that private facilities used

a stricter admission process that excluded youth with suicide risks or histories of severe abuse. Private facilities were also significantly smaller and newer than public facilities. Compared to the perceptions of incarcerated youth in public facilities, those in private facilities rated them higher on a variety of factors: better control, more activity, better quality of life, more justice, more therapeutic programming, better preparation for release, less resident danger, less environmental danger, fewer risks to residents, and greater freedom. However, when researchers statistically controlled for various facility factors, no differences in environmental quality were found between public and private facilities. Thus, the higher ratings for private facilities were not directly explained by the fact that the operator was private, but by the tendency for private facilities to be newer and smaller. The authors suggested that smaller facilities were preferred because they allowed staff to focus on the particular needs of the juveniles rather than just the security of the group (private facilities averaged 60 residents, public 137), and newer facilities offered more secure designs.

Armstrong, G. S., & MacKenzie, D. L. (2003). Private versus public juvenile correctional facilities: Do differences in environmental quality exist? *Crime & Delinquency*, 49, 542-563.

PARTICIPANT, PROVIDER AND PROGRAM FACTORS ARE RELATED TO RETENTION IN HOME VISITATION SERVICES

Healthy Families America (HFA) is a national child abuse prevention initiative that provides home visitation services to at-risk families in an attempt to promote positive parenting and prevent child abuse. HFA programs provide a needs assessment for all mothers giving birth within a particular geographical area, and then offer more intensive home visits for parents identified by the assessment as facing the greatest challenges. Typically, these home visits consist of a more in-depth needs assessment of mother and child, demonstrations of basic child care and appropriate child-parent interactions, and help in getting additional services for the parent and child. Because one of HFA's aims is to keep families enrolled for as long as possible, this study examined which factors about the particular *participant*, the particular *provider*, or the particular *program* might be related to two important outcomes: the length of the parent's enrollment, and the number of home visits accomplished during enrollment. With respect to participant factors, older participants, unemployed participants, and those who enrolled early in pregnancy stayed in the program longer and had a greater number of home visits. In addition, mothers who were enrolled in school had longer service duration. Regarding provider characteristics, younger home visitors were more likely to retain participants longer and perform a greater number of home visits, while prior work experience was related to a greater number of home visits. At the program level, as caseloads increased, the number of home visits completed decreased, and programs which matched a larger proportion of parents/providers on parenting status and race/ethnicity were significantly more likely to keep families in the program longer and perform a greater number of home visits.

Daro, D., McCurdy, K., Falconnier, L., & Stojanovic, D. (2003). Sustaining new parents in home visitation services: Key participant and program factors. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 27, 1101-1125.

ABUSE RATES AMONG AMERICAN INDIAN CHILDREN UNCLEAR DUE TO BARRIERS IN COMMUNICATION AND REPORTING

Obtaining accurate assessments of the rates of child abuse and neglect among different populations is important in targeting programs and services specifically towards those populations. Unfortunately, research suggests that the national rate of child abuse and neglect among American Indian children may be underestimated due to incomplete reporting. Researchers interviewed child welfare workers in tribes and at the state level in several states, including Nebraska. Roughly two-thirds of tribes reported that they were involved in child welfare investigations, with 23% stating that they were the only investigator, meaning that the state was not involved. The majority of tribes, over 80%, had child protective teams and protocols in place. For the one-third of tribes that were not involved in investigations, the lack of a tribal court appeared to be a common barrier. Compared to tribes, a smaller proportion of state workers (42%) reported involvement in investigations of American Indian children. All state workers reported sending their data to the federal reporting system. However, reporting among tribes was not nearly as systematic, with only one tribe sending their data to the federal system. Only about half of tribal workers reported sending data to any outside source. Perhaps surprisingly, 65% of tribal workers reported that they did not enter the data into a computer at all. On average, state and tribal workers reported that their relationship with each other was slightly better than OK or neutral. However, workers reported a better relationship when the agency shared information with tribes, when state/tribal agreements were in place, and when only one group, regardless of which, was responsible for child welfare investigations. Given that a great deal of data being collected by tribal workers is not being reported to state and federal sources, the actual rates of child maltreatment among American Indian children might be significantly lower than current estimates. Clearly, an important step in improving data collection is fostering communication between the state and tribes, and the findings here suggest ways to begin doing so.

Fox, K. A. (2003). Collecting data on the abuse and neglect of American Indian children. *Child Welfare*, 82, 707-726.

IN RURAL IOWA, SEVERAL COMMUNITY FACTORS ARE RELATED TO RATES OF CHILD ABUSE

In order to develop effective prevention programs at the community-level, researchers and policy-makers must identify the risk factors of maltreatment for the particular community. Much of the child maltreatment research either focuses on urban areas or makes no distinction between urban and rural areas. However, given the significant differences in employment, resources, social structure, and population between urban and rural communities, there is reason to believe that the community characteristics of rural communities might not be related to child maltreatment in the same way that they are in urban communities. For that reason, researchers in Iowa set out to study the relationship between demographic and social characteristics of each county with rates of reported and substantiated maltreatment. When all the characteristics were taken into consideration at once, a few of them significantly predicted rates of maltreatment. Higher numbers of single parents and higher divorce rates predicted higher rates of maltreatment, as did higher rates of elder

abuse. Also, interestingly, the location in the state predicted rates of reported maltreatment, but did not predict rates of substantiated maltreatment. One possible explanation for this finding is that limited resources prevent social workers in regions with high rates of reporting to investigate all of those reports, thereby leaving the rates of substantiation the same across districts. An effective community prevention program cannot be developed until the community risk factors for maltreatment are defined. In this rural sample, those risk factors appear to be rates of elder abuse, divorce, and single parenting.

Weissman, A. M., Jogerst, G. J., & Dawson, J. D. (2003). Community characteristics associated with child abuse in Iowa. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 27, 1145-1159.

AMONG FAMILIES WITH SUBSTANTIATED CHILD ABUSE, NEGLECT IS THE MOST COMMON TYPE OF SUBSEQUENT MALTREATMENT

The services offered to a family often depend on the type of maltreatment identified by the caseworker. However, research suggests that all families may benefit from services aimed at reducing the likelihood of neglect, regardless of what type of abuse was substantiated. Researchers collected statewide child welfare data to investigate whether, in families with multiple reports, the first incident of abuse that was investigated was the same or different from the types of abuse later reported. The authors found that in most cases of recidivism, the type of abuse reported first was not the same as in later reports. In fact, of those children who were originally investigated for abuse (not neglect) and were investigated at least three times after that, 94% experienced a different type of maltreatment, often neglect. On the other hand, children exposed to neglect were more likely to be investigated multiple times for neglect, rather than a different type of maltreatment. In other words, regardless of the initial type of maltreatment, for families who recidivated, the reports following the initial event were most likely to be neglect. The researchers also examined whether exposure to services reduced the likelihood of the family repeating the original type of maltreatment. They found that such likelihood was only reduced in cases of neglect when the children had entered and exited foster care. Given the pervasiveness of neglect in this sample, and the observation that services may reduce the likelihood of recidivating, the authors suggest that all intake and continuing safety assessments include screening for neglect, regardless of what type of maltreatment was originally reported. By getting services into place early, the chances that the family will later be reported for neglect may be reduced.

Jonson-Reid, M., Drake, B., Chung, S., & Way, I. (2003). Cross-type recidivism among child maltreatment victims and perpetrators. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 27, 899-917.

Editor	Twila A. Wingrove	twingrov@unlserve.unl.edu
Assistant Editor	Angela L. Williams	awilliam@unlserve.unl.edu
Faculty Advisor	Vicky Weisz	vweisz1@unl.edu
Layout Design	Chris Wiklund	cwiklund1@unl.edu
Funding provided by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services System, UNL's Center on Children, Families, and the Law, and the Nebraska Court Improvement Project.		



Center on Children, Families, and the Law
121 South 13th Street Suite 302
Lincoln, NE 68588-0227