



EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE A CHILD WELFARE RESEARCH AGENDA FOR CALIFORNIA

Background:

This research agenda is part of an ongoing effort to promote evidence-based practice by bringing the practice and the research communities together in California. Through a series of symposia beginning in July, 2005, practitioners and researchers learned about evidence-based practice. Activities during and between the symposia focused on how to move toward a system in which research conducted across the state reflected the priorities identified by the practice community and consumers of the child welfare system. Focus groups were convened with line staff, parents involved in the system, foster youth and foster parents to elicit the areas that they felt were important for research. The research agenda was intentionally divided into the areas of Safety, Permanence, and Well-Being, to reflect the broad federal and state outcomes for child welfare. The research and practice community then worked together to refine and prioritize these areas. The result is the research agenda below.

SAFETY

Priority questions:

1. What is the impact of differential response implementation on safety?
Differential response implementation factors may include:
 - Changes in agency caseload characteristics
 - Changes in complexity of family issues
 - Changes in demand for agency services
2. How do case management services provided by CWS agencies affect child safety outcomes?
Specific aspects of case management services may include:
 - System of care vs. traditional models of service provision
 - Frequency/intensity/timing of case management services
 - Quality and frequency of home visits
 - Who provides case management services (community-based organizations paraprofessionals, clinical staff, CWS case management staff)?
3. What is the relationship between worker characteristics and the decision to remove children?
(Suggested characteristics are at the end of this document)

Other questions:

- ▶ What is the impact of the use of assessment tools on racial/ethnic disparities in the child welfare system?*
- ▶ What is the relationship between the use of assessment tools and safety outcomes for children and families?
 - Specific aspects of assessment tool studies could also include aspects of assessment tool implementation (e.g. full vs. partial implementation, model fidelity, attitude toward use/effective use by social workers, support of supervisors, validity and reliability of assessment tools for child welfare population, etc.)
- ▶ What is the impact of relative placement vs. foster care vs. group care vs. foster family agency placement on safety outcomes?
- ▶ What is the relationship between child/family characteristics and the decision to remove children?
(Suggested characteristics are at the end of the document)
- ▶ What is the comparative impact of team decision making vs. family group decision making vs. standard practice of decision-making on child safety?
- ▶ What is the relationship between agency/organizational characteristics, worker characteristics, and child/family characteristics and safety outcomes?
 - Priority areas include studies involving parental substance abuse, and studies about the impact of the characteristics listed below on foster care reentry
(Suggested characteristics are at the end of the document)
- ▶ What is the relationship between agency/organizational characteristics and the decision to remove children?
(Suggested characteristics are at the end of the document)

PERMANENCE

Priority questions:

1. Which mental health and substance abuse services are most effective in promoting permanency within ASFA time frames?
2. * What constellation of services and interventions is most effective in attaining one or more permanency outcomes (i.e. reunification, adoption, guardianship, long term kinship care)?
Factors to study related to services and interventions may include:
 - Cost of services
 - Availability of community based organizations and service providers
 - Availability and amount of time of post-permanency supports (post-reunification and post-adoption)
 - Funding allocation methodologies
3. What is the comparative impact of team decision making vs. family group decision making vs. standard practice of decision-making on child permanence?

* These questions were identified as research priorities for CalSWEC's 2007-2008 Request for Proposals by the CalSWEC Board's Research and Development Committee, in consultation with the CWDA Children's Committee. CWDA Children's Committee also determined the priority for the research agenda as a whole. In subsequent years, CalSWEC's RFP will focus on the priority questions under safety, permanence and well-being.

Other questions:

- ▶ What is the relationship between worker characteristics and permanency outcomes?
(Suggested characteristics are at the end of the document)
- ▶ What is the relationship between child/family characteristics and permanency outcomes?
(Suggested characteristics are at the end of the document)
- ▶ What is the relationship between agency/organizational characteristics and permanency outcomes?
(Suggested characteristics are at the end of the document)

WELL-BEING

Priority questions:

1. Which mental health and substance abuse services are most effective in promoting child and family well being within ASFA time frames?
2. What is the impact of placement-related factors (e.g., long-term placement vs. guardianship vs. adoption; kin vs. non-kin placement), family-related factors (e.g., involvement of bio families with foster families; attitudes of foster parents toward parents, biological family) and child and family well-being for children and youth in out-of-home care?
3. * How does infant health and well-being impact removal and multiple placements? What strategies are successful in reducing the number of multiple placements for infants in the child welfare system?

Other questions:

- ▶ What is the relationship between agency/organizational characteristics and child and family well-being outcomes?
(Suggested characteristics are at the end of the document)
- ▶ Are there differences in child and family well-being outcomes based on level of training of community service providers (BSW, MSW, MFT, etc.)?
- ▶ What is the relationship between child/family characteristics and child and family well-being outcomes?
(Suggested characteristics are at the end of the document)
- ▶ What is the comparative impact of team decision making vs. family group decision making vs. standard practice of decision-making on child and family health and well being?
- ▶ What is the relationship between worker characteristics and child and family well-being outcomes?
(Suggested characteristics are at the end of the document)

Future Directions:

This research agenda is designed as a “living document” that will be updated and revised as research is conducted and new priorities are identified. The research priorities are intended to guide child welfare research at all levels throughout the state, including graduate student research, research and curricula sponsored by CalSWEC, and other independent and university-based research. Ongoing efforts will be made to include consumers as well as practitioners, researchers and other leaders in developing and refining the research agenda.

Master List of Agency/Organizational, Worker, and Child and Family Characteristics

Agency/Organizational characteristics:

- Workforce characteristics
- Caseload size/complexity
- Inter/intra agency communication
- Agency culture
- Response times
- Implementation of “promising practices” such as Team Decision-Making, Parent Partner Programs, Unified Family Assessments, etc.
- Policies and procedures related to decision to remove or return children, criminal background checks, etc.

Worker characteristics:

- Language ability
- Education level and type (BSW, MSW, etc.)
- Content/amount of training (in substance abuse and addictions)
- Cultural competence
- Cultural identification
- Value systems
- Amount of field experience
- Parenting experience vs. no parenting experience
- Supervisory relationship & support
- Personal experience with substance abuse
- Experience working with substance-abusing clients
- Attitudes toward substance abuse
- Caseload size/complexity

Child/Family characteristics

- Parental substance use/abuse vs. non use/abuse
- Substance of choice
- Family, parent and caregiver support of intervention
- Age and ability-level of child, parent and caregiver
- Ethnicity and other child/family demographics (child, parent and caregiver)
- Availability of type of service or intervention
- Child, parent and caregiver health characteristics
- Child, parent and caregiver mental health status