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CALIFORNIA CHILD WELFARE REENTRY TRENDS FROM
JANUARY 1998 THROUGH DECEMBER 2007

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Sarah Marie Jacobson
Melissa Anne Weber


June 2010

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Approved by:


Dr. Janet C. Chang, Faculty Supervisor
Social Work

6/8/10
Date


Dr. Janet C. Chang,
M.S.W. Research Coordinator

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this quantitative research study was to examine the characteristics of children who reentered the child welfare system in the state of California. Another purpose of this study was to see how San Bernardino County's reentry trends fit in to the rest of the state of California. Characteristics of 26,404 children were examined from the entire state of California from January 1998 through December 2007. This will help to develop child welfare practice to determine if a policy or specific practice can be altered so that the recidivism rate decreases.

The findings of this study found that children younger than five years of age reenter at a higher rate of 45% compared to children of older ages with 20% of these children between the ages of 0-1 years. Regarding ethnicity, it was found that children of Hispanic decent reenter at a higher rate and that the number of children increased over the ten-year period. Children of Black and White decent decreased in numbers over the ten-year period. Relative caregiver placements result in a lower reentry rate for children while Foster Family Agency placements result in the highest reentry rate.

Though this exploratory study defines the "who" for defining identifying factors of children who are reentering into foster care, it does not define the "why". The findings of this study emphasize the need for further research that explains the "why" to why are children reentering into the child welfare system.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The principal goal of the child welfare system is to reunify children who are placed in foster care with their birth parents (Wulczyn, 2004). When a child is removed from their home due to neglect or abuse and is placed in long term care with a county agency, the goal is not to raise that child in the system until emancipation, instead the agency strives to create a safe environment for the child to return and reside with their nuclear family (*"Children and Family Services, who are we?"*, n.d.). Currently, children have been entering the child welfare system and reunifying with their families and then reentering the system again; creating a cycle of instability for the child. Preventing the need for children to reenter foster care is a key outcome for child welfare services due to the damaging effects on the child as well as the financial strain on the agency. Thus, foster care re-entry is a serious problem.

Courtney (1995) found that there are an increasingly large proportion of children who are being raised in

substitute care for the majority of their childhoods. As these children are reintroduced into the system, caseloads continue to grow and children continue to receive less and less attention from their overburdened social worker. These caseloads increase when the number of children exiting care is less than the number entering care over a specified time period. If children that have exited are continually reentering the caseloads grow and the placement opportunities decrease, creating a longer stay in out of home care.

The idea of permanency planning led to the passing of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980. This Act (also known as Public Law 96-272) is a federal initiative that developed reunification services for families as well as adoption subsidies for families willing to adopt children living in foster care. P.L. 96-272 led policymakers to develop the Family Preservation and Support Act in 1993 which emphasized that the family is the ideal placement for children (Popple & Leighninger, 2008).

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) which was passed by Congress in 1997 has had the largest impact on child welfare practices since P.L. 96-272. ASFA addressed

the problem that children were remaining in foster care for a significant amount of time. This Act is requiring that children are reunified (when possible) with their families in a timely manner without increasing reentry into foster care (Yampolskaya, 2007). Since children are being reunified at a more rapid rate due to ASFA regulations, questions are being raised about whether children are reentering into the child welfare system at a higher rate (Festinger, 1996).

Reentry into foster care also signifies the recurrence of abuse or neglect for these children. These children have already been victimized and are being placed into homes that are re-victimizing them. This is not only traumatic but also disrupting to the health and growth of the child now and in the future. ASFA requires that social workers show "reasonable efforts" to reunify children with their family of origin. Due to these "reasonable efforts", children are being reunified when appropriate; however, there are children in the state of California who are reentering into the child welfare system.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the characteristics of children who reentered the child welfare system in the state of California. Another purpose of this study was to see how San Bernardino County's reentry trends fit in to the rest of the state of California. Characteristics of children were examined from the entire state of California from January 1998 through December 2007 to determine if there was a specific characteristic of children that is most common over a significant amount of time. This will help to develop child welfare practice to determine if a policy or specific practice can be altered so that the recidivism rate decreases.

It is important to understand the characteristics that contribute to children reentering the foster care system because it will allow workers to better prevent reentry and preserve the reunified home. Many of the populations that experience high reentry rates also experience low reunification rates, and thus represent extremely vulnerable populations (Shaw, 2006). Knowing the contributing factors and issues will allow practice

to evolve and address these issues in a manner that is evidence based and reputably substantiated.

Since there have not been generalized findings for this population regarding reentry there is difficulty in applying any of the findings to practice. Many research studies have actually contradicted each other only emphasizing the need for large-scale research. As cited in Kimberlin (2009), Courtney, Piliavin, and Wright suggest that some of the factors associated with greater risk of reentry are actually complicated by unmeasured factors that affect reunification. Reunification that results in reentry to foster care is an unsuccessful outcome. Therefore, reentry possibilities should be a primary consideration in the reunification procedure.

Thus the county agencies and the workers are concerned about this deficit in evidence based practice knowledge. The United States Department of Health and Human Services has declared that its subsidiaries should be ensuring that only 9.9% of the nation's foster youth should reenter the system following reunification (Kimberlin, 2008). Many states that fail to meet specified outcome objective goals which may include reentry rates, are subject to funding sanctions. These

sanctions create an even stronger barrier to providing these children with stability as workers and funds are cut. Reentry causes a large financial deficit in County, State, and Federal budgets that are already scant.

While this goal is admirable and is a standard to attain, the figures from most counties across the country are far higher. The variations between each counties practices and outcomes create a difficult challenge for child welfare workers and researchers alike to conquer this issue. Workers are not given the tools and skills that evidence based research can provide because the researchers that have explored this topic have found difficulties in creating standardized measurements and variables that can then be generalized.

The study that was conducted addressed the issue of children reentering into the foster care system in order to determine the causes of reentry. In order to study these causes, the characteristics of the children who reenter were looked at to determine if there is a common correlation that is being overlooked by policies and workers. The state of California was researched with an emphasis on San Bernardino County to determine how this particular county fits in with the rest of the State.

The data employed a secondary data analysis design which used what the social workers report to the Child and Family Services Review. This information was gathered through the University of California, Berkeley, and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Child Welfare Dynamic Report System. This information included what social workers send to the Review through Child Welfare Services and Case Management System (CWS/CMS). These resources were then analyzed and organized in a manner that fits the study. A secondary analysis of archival data served as the best way to obtain data for this study due to the vulnerable population that it encompasses (Grinnell, 2008). The variables included all cases that were recorded to the Child Welfare Dynamic Report System from January 1998 through December 2007.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

The findings of this study contribute to generalized data specifically for San Bernardino County, and can be modeled by those agencies that share similar attributes. The clarification of the characteristics of children who reenter after reunification contribute to the child welfare system's way of practice empirically by enabling

the County agency to better reach their reentry rates, thus allowing for sanctions to be lifted and more workers and services to be provided. Department programs and policies are developed based on the evidence derived from studies on the population that the Department serves. By understanding the population and make up of San Bernardino County children, the Department will be able to adapt the programs and policies to better serve the families.

Children continue to reenter foster care in San Bernardino County and by adapting the programs and policies there is a possibility that these children will be able to remain in the family after the first reunification. The evidence based practice knowledge that this study provides will allow workers of Children and Family Services of San Bernardino County to better serve their clients and administrators to better enable their agencies for the challenges that the study reveals. With no specified reentry studies for this region or agency currently underway, one can see the benefit such a study provides to both child welfare practitioners and the mission they are to uphold. The findings of this study also contribute to child welfare practice by providing

knowledge of possible trends in reentry rates throughout the state of California.

The findings of this study contribute to the planning stage of the generalist intervention process. By having an understanding of the diverse population of families in San Bernardino County, Children and Family Services can adapt programs and services to the families so that reentry rates can be reduced. The different programs and services are discussed in the planning portion of the generalist process and the families are referred to different programs. The findings of this study may produce a common characteristic of children that a particular program or service may help so that children can remain in the family of origin without reentry.

The research question for this study is: What are the key characteristics of children who reenter foster care after reunification in the county of San Bernardino, California compared to the state of California in its entirety from January 1998 through December 2007?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A variety of studies have examined the issue of children reentering foster care by using a variety of differing samples and differing definitions for reentry. While these disparities in the research surrounding this topic exist, certain characteristics have been found to be associated with an increased risk of reentry into foster care in these studies. The following literature review reflects two theoretical perspectives that have been used to guide this investigation. Both the characteristics of children and Child Welfare service variables where reentry into foster care following a failed reunification occurs are documented as evidentiary support for the current investigation.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Regarding practice theories, ecological systems theory is the most applicable theoretical perspective that has guided the exploration of children reentering foster care after reunification (Hepworth et al., 2006). The interaction between Child Protective Services and a

family unit are the key contributors to the outcome this study has measured. The families' characteristics can also be varied by the families' interaction with outside systems. The families' social support system, religious system, and other external systems may affect the relationship between the primary systems. Also, Child Protective Services' interaction with federal and State systems may contribute to its involvement with the family system. The systems theory suggests that all of these theories contribute to one another and interact freely with one another. When a change occurs in one system, the neighboring system experiences it as well. Thus, when State funding is cut for County Social Services programs, the services that families are receiving from Child Protective Services may be decreased or altered in some way which affects the ability of the family to reunify with their children. The State system and the family system are interrelated and are affected by each other. Systems theory has guided this study in the analysis of the collected data and the subsequent decisions that are drawn. Understanding how these systems work together and allowing that to be a guiding source in the study has

allowed for very specific and system sensitive conclusions to be made.

As applied to this study, the reunification of children and their families is affected by many systems interacting with one another. The family system is affected by the lifestyle and actions of the extended family system, the families' religious belief system, the system made up of the community that they reside in, and many other interrelated systems that affect how and what the family does on a day to day basis. These systems can dictate the financial and moral state of the family which then may affect the families' ability to make appropriate decisions for their children. When a family is under the poverty line, lives in an unsafe neighborhood in San Bernardino County, comes from families that live lifestyles of drugs and abuse, and is also affected by the economic downturn in their home State, the family will have a difficult time avoiding Children and Family Services simply due to the impeding systems that surround them. While it is possible to branch out, we are always tied to many of these systems. Thus, this study has examined some of the characteristics of children and child welfare service variables in order to determine if

any of these factors can predetermine reentry and thus a discussion of how the systems can better interact to prevent this predetermination.

Characteristics of Children and Child Welfare Service Variables

The data that has been collected for research purposes in this study of the characteristics of children that have reentered the foster care system after reunification is primarily involved in demographic topics such as age, race, and behavioral issues.

The first study, conducted by Barth (2008), used data from a National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) of 273 children ages 5 to 12 and concluded that reentry was associated with the number of children in the family. This study found that children with an ensuing reentry rate were older on average and also more likely to be male. The gender statistic however is not completely credible due to the fact that there were more male participants in the sample size. Children who were White/Non-Hispanic were more likely to reenter foster care (Barth et al., 2008).

A study conducted by Becker, Jordan, and Larsen (2007) sought to examine the predictors of successful

permanency planning for children served by the child welfare system in Florida. A retrospective study was conducted using children who had been placed into and exited foster care in Florida during an 18-month period. Race was found to be a significant characteristic of significance where-in non-white children were less likely to successfully exit care (Becker et al., 2007).

Using data exclusively from California databases, Frame, Berrick, and Brodowski (2000) found that in 28 of 88 cases of children age 1-day-12 months had re-entered into out-of-home care within two years after being reunified with one or more parents. The children who reentered foster care did so within four-six years after reunification with their family. Thus 32% of the sampled cases were re-entered into foster care. Frame et al. found that key factors may have played a role in the child's reentry into the system including the type of placement that the child was in prior to reunification and the age of the child at the time of reunification (Frame, 2000).

Using a case-control design and information gathered from a child welfare administrative database and client case records, a study conducted by Fuller (2005) examined

the factors that predict short-term, identified as within 60 days, maltreatment recurrence among 174 families with children returning home from their first stay in out of home care. Seven variables added to the study included child age, caretaker mental illness, number of placements, type of placement, length of time in placement, number of children in the home at reunification, and the interaction between household structure at reunification and the presence of siblings returned home with the child being studied. Several variables were significantly related to increased risk of maltreatment recurrence at the bivariate level. Children younger than 5 years old, initial placement in kinship foster care, length of time in care 3 years or more, and having five or more placements while in care were all significantly associated as predictor variables of maltreatment recurrence. Although there seems no accurate way to prevent this recurrence the researchers felt that in addition to providing appropriate post-reunification supports for the families that need them, caseworkers must make better informed and more researched judgments about the safety of children they are considering returning home. They felt that while the results of the

current study alone do not provide enough information to change current safety assessment tools that are used to determine reunification they felt there was a clear need for additional research and discussion on this issue (Fuller, 2005).

Hindley, Ramchandani, and Jones (2006) review research that has been performed to see if children who have been maltreated have a higher risk of recurrent maltreatment compared to children who have not been maltreated. The authors also studied the research to see if there were factors associated with maltreatment recurrence in children. Sixteen studies were included in this research review. Fifteen were performed in the United States while one was performed in Australia. Many factors were included in these studies; however, only four of them were recurrent. Factors were identified as predictors of maltreatment recurrence including the number of previous episodes of maltreatment. These factors helped to give the authors clear evidentiary support in finding that children who have been maltreated are approximately six times more likely to be re-maltreated than children who had not been previously maltreated. Hindley et al. (2006) also found that

children were often re-maltreated soon after the first episode of maltreatment (within 30 days). The time between recurrences also shortened as the number of episodes increased (Hindley et al., 2006).

McDonald, Bryson, and Poertner (2006) conducted a study using event history analysis to examine the relationship between reunification and reentry rates for 33 Oklahoma counties with over 100 reunifications occurring in 2002. The final sample consisted of 23,261 cases over a four and a half year period. Their findings were consistent with most research in this area. They found a relationship between reunification that occurred before 6 months and higher reentry rates. The major difference in findings from other previous works was the very low reentry rates for children who were reunified within 30 days of removal. The authors note that the study's findings call into question current practices of permanency planning and the expedited timelines of the Adoption and Safe Families Act. They note that expedited situations of reunification seemed to be the best indicators of permanency. The researchers conclude that much more research is to be done regarding service variable and their effectiveness (McDonald, 2006).

Shaw (2006) examined the issue of reentry into foster. Logistic regression was used to model reentry, examining demographic, and child welfare characteristics. The sample consisted of all children who entered the California Child Welfare System for the first time in between 1998 and 2002 and were reunified with their families within 12 months of entry, totaling of 45,154 children. Ultimately, the findings showed that the 2002 entry cohort was significantly less likely to reenter care within one year compared to the 1998 entry cohort, showing the effect that ASFA has had in lowering the number of reentries within one year of reunification. Also, this study found that the odds of reentry into the foster care system after reunification was associated with race, reentry occurring more for African American children. The researchers found that children who are in the system for longer periods of time have decreasing odds of reentry within one year of reunification (Shaw, 2006).

Terling (1999) explored the efficacy of reunification practices. The study utilized two CPS data sources and both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to identify reentry rates and the

correlates of reentry for these children. The sample included 1,515 children in Houston, Texas over a three and a half year period that began in 1992. The results concluded that reentry into the system due to additional maltreatment occurrences was considerable. The findings showed that 37% of the children that reunified with their families reentered the system within three and a half years. The author concluded that the high reentry rate suggested that CPS family reunification practices had not been entirely successful, but that the identification of the specific risks of reentry would be helpful in assessing risk on cases. The author suggested that additional studies should explore the CPS system deficiencies that have contributed to the reentry of these children back into the foster care system (Terling, 1999).

This article written by Wells and Guo (1999) sought to report the results of a case study of foster children in Cuyahoga County in Ohio to determine the reunification and reentry rates and correlates that contribute to these outcomes. The sample included 2,616 children that first entered care in 1992 and in 1993. The longitudinal study's data was drawn from the county's public child

welfare agency's management information system. Event history analyses of this data revealed characteristics associated with a slower rate of reunification and a faster rate of reentry. Regarding ethnicity, these findings concluded that an African American child was reunified at a rate that was 39.8% slower than a White child. With respect to type of last placement, a child in non-relative foster care reentered 226% faster than child whose last placement type was kinship foster care. The researchers concluded from their findings that further research is needed regarding children who are African American, infants, and are placed due to dependency, because these a child consisting of these three qualities are a very vulnerable group and not much is known about the child welfare and permanency outcomes for these particular children (Wells, 1999).

A research endeavor conducted by Wulczyn, Chen, and Orlebeke (2009) analyzed the performance of contract agencies in achieving timely permanency for children in foster care. The researchers used the Cox regression model on administrative data of children admitted into the foster care system between 2001 and 2003. The sample size was roughly 12,000 children and spanned over 50

foster care agencies. The findings showed that kinship care seems to lessen timely permanency. The rate of reunification for children in kinship care was only 78% of that for children in conventional foster homes. The study found that demographic characteristics of foster children are also related to their chance of returning home. African American children had a significantly lower reunification rate than White children. The model also demonstrated a significant effect of age at placement on the likelihood of reunification. Children under the age of twelve had a higher rate of reentry that is over 20% higher than the rate for infants and teenagers. The researchers felt that further progress on this front depends on research that combines analysis of administrative data with case reviews and organizational studies (Wulczyn et al., 2009).

The goals of a study by Yampolskaya, Armstrong, and Vargo (2007) were to assess the ability of Community Based Care (CBC) to meet the Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requirements and examine factors associated with undesired child welfare outcomes for children with different legal status. The sample size consisted of 34,503 entry participants and 38,830 exit participants.

The results of multilevel Cox regression analysis indicated that among children whose parents' rights were not terminated; younger children were less likely to be reunified within 12 months. Children whose parents' rights were terminated were less likely to have a timely exit from out-of-home care if they were older and if they were African American. Age, minority status, and length of stay in out-of-home care were found to be significantly associated with reentry into the foster care system. The findings from this study supported the importance of family assessment before reunification takes place. Families should be carefully evaluated for their readiness to regain custody of their children. Also, the researchers indicated that more intense follow-up services and supports should be provided to reunified families for at least the first 6 months following reunification due to the intense adjustment period associated with a new living situation in order to prevent reentry into out-of-home care (Yampolskaya, 2007).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter includes the research methods and procedures that were used while conducting this study. The design of the study, sampling methods, data collection, and instruments used, procedures, protection of human subjects, and the methods used to analyze data are explicitly examined in this chapter.

Study Design

The proposed study explored the characteristics of children who reenter the child welfare system in San Bernardino County, California. These characteristics were also compared to the state of California as an entirety to assess for possible characteristic trends. Because permanency is one of the three missions of Children and Family Services, this study was chosen to examine areas that could potentially affect a child's permanent living arrangement. The characteristics of children may be shown to be associated with the recidivism into foster care. These characteristics include age of the child, ethnicity of the child, gender of the child, placement type for the

child, the type of caregiver the child had while out of home, and the episode count with a particular reentry occurrence.

This study employed a quantitative, secondary data analysis method to see if there is an association between the characteristics chosen and reentry. The rationale for the chosen quantitative research design was due to the low cost, confidentiality, accessibility of data, and expansive time frame for data collected. All documented reentry data for the County of San Bernardino could be obtained and was quickly attainable for this study. This design makes certain that the researchers, Sarah Jacobson and Melissa Weber's, biases and values would not taint the data collection or the interpretation of such data. The accessibility of the data set and the analysis of this data were best suited for a quantitative study. Using the Child Welfare Dynamic Report System, data spanning from January 1998 to December 2007 was collected and analyzed to determine the characteristics that are associated with children who reenter the foster care system following reunification.

The Child Welfare Dynamic Report System (CWDRS) contains child welfare data from every county in the

state of California. This data is collected through the Child Welfare System/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) that all California social workers use to document case activities. CWS/CMS saves all case activities to a main database which is located in Sacramento, California. This information is available to the public through the Center of Social Services Research under the School of Social Work at the University of California, Berkeley.

While the strengths of this study design have been stated, there are methodological limitations that also apply. The characteristics of the nuclear parents are not available for this study. Some variables such as substance abuse, alcohol abuse, and criminality are not available to the investigator, which limits the scope of this study. The child and their family's economic standing are not accessible through the data that has been collected through the Child Welfare Dynamic Report System (CWDRS). The child's mental health or behavioral health status is not included in the data set which presents as a limitation because the child cannot be studied holistically. The child welfare service variables, including the initial reason of removal, the quantity of out of home placements, and quality of

services provided to the family during the first episode and the potential social worker bias in dealing with the family's case are not available through the CWDRS.

The research question for this study is: What are the key characteristics of children who reenter foster care after reunification in the county of San Bernardino, California compared to the state of California in its entirety from January 1998 through December 2007?

Sampling

Participants for this study were obtained from the Child Welfare Dynamic Report System. The sample period from January 1998 to December 2007 includes children who returned to out of home care from January 1998 to December 2007. The sample size that was obtained for this study is 26,404 participants. This number represents 26,404 children who reunified with their family of origin and reentered into the child welfare system within a twelve month period. Included in this number are 1,643 children who have reentered into the child welfare system in San Bernardino County within the same twelve-month period. The data encompassed a time frame of ten years, January 1998 through December 2007. The selection

criterion included all children who have reunified with their family of origin within a twelve-month period in San Bernardino County. A demographic sampling criterion in terms of age, ethnicity, and gender was not restricted and encompassed all cases that were reported to CWDRS.

Justification for this sample size included an expansive data set which spans ten years and a vulnerable child population. Due to the public accessibility of the sample through the Child Welfare Dynamic Report System, the expansive sample size for this study was able to be easily obtained and thus was the reason for its use. Confidentiality is ensured due to the inclusion of only numerical child welfare data on the CWDRS. The resources needed to complete this study were minimal, including only the CWDRS website. This sample also allowed for this research to be completed in a timely manner due to the easy accessibility of the participants through the data source. This sample can be revisited and re-obtained at the desire of the researchers throughout the period of the study.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data for this study was collected using the CWDRS website. The sampling of this study included all cases that were reported to the CWDRS in the time period of January 1998 until December 2007. The collection was a case records review from CWDRS. The independent variables of this study are the characteristics of the children who reunify with their families of origin. These characteristics include: age of the child, ethnicity of the child, gender of the child, placement type for the child, the type of caregiver the child had while out of home, and the episode count with a particular reentry occurrence. The dependent variable was the reentry rate of the participants in the sample.

The independent and dependent variables were interpreted through nominal, ordinal, and interval level of measurement. This data set contains a high level of reliability and validity due to its direct extraction from the CWS/CMS database. The instrument that was used to obtain this data is a data extraction form containing both the independent and dependent variables (see appendix A). The strengths of collecting data from the CWDRS system was that the researchers are given access to

this vulnerable child population that would otherwise be difficult to obtain and was able to do so in a concise and timely manner. The limitation of this data collection method was that only the characteristics that were named above were able to be studied and addition of other significant factors could not be explored.

Procedures

This research study encompassed many steps in completion of data collection. The initial step was to seek approval of the research study through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of California State University, San Bernardino. Data collection took place in the California State University, San Bernardino campus library. Participation did not have to be solicited for participants of this study due to the nature of this secondary data method. The researchers, Sarah Jacobson and Melissa Weber collected the nominal, ordinal, and interval data sets for both the independent and dependent variables from the CWDRS database. The data was collected from January 15, 2010 to March 1, 2010.

Protection of Human Subjects

The protection of human subjects was secured by the research design that has been chosen for this study and by the procedures used to carry out the study. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants is protected through CWS/CMS's non-disclosure of participant's personal information to the CWDRS database which contains numerical data only. Names, addresses, telephone numbers, or any other identifiable information cannot be seen through the CWDRS. Informed consent and debriefing statements were not applicable to this study due to the secondary data research study design.

Data Analysis

This research design made use of a quantitative data analysis method to evaluate any associations between the age of the child, ethnicity of the child, gender of the child, placement type for the child, the type of caregiver the child had while out of home, the episode count with a particular reentry occurrence, and the child's reentry into the foster care system. The CWDRS website was used to extract such data in order to generate such associations. This relationship between

independent and dependent variables can also be described as correlational associations through bivariate analyses.

In order to analyze the data that was collected, descriptive statistics will be used to describe the independent variables. Analysis was done through the use of Microsoft Excel software to develop tables to document the data. By looking at each individual table recorded through Microsoft Excel, the researchers were able to identify common trends that were evident by the increasing and decreasing numbers of children who reentered the child welfare system over the ten-year period. Percentages of children who reentered were able to be identified through the use of Microsoft Excel. Furthermore, logistic regression analysis were used to establish the effect of the independent variables on a child's reentry into the foster care system and to ascertain what independent variables are preeminent predictors of a child's reentry into the foster care system.

Summary

The research method used in this study design was a quantitative secondary data analysis design, using the

data collected through the Child Welfare Dynamic Report System. The participants in this study have been in the care of Children and Family Services of San Bernardino as well as other California child welfare agencies, reunified with their family of origin, and reentered into the care of child welfare agencies. The sample includes 26,404 children who have encountered the reunification process from January 1998 through December 2007.

The data included the age of the child, ethnicity of the child, gender of the child, placement type for the child, the type of caregiver the child had while out of home, and the episode count with a particular reentry occurrence of those who reentered the foster care system (independent variables) during a twelve month period following reunification (dependent variables). These independent and dependent variables were extracted in the data collection process. A bivariate analysis included the use of descriptive statistics and logistical statistics to summarize the preeminent predictors of a child's reentry into the foster care system.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter Four presents the results of the data that was collected in this study. Due to the nature of the study and how the demographics of the participants in this study are being included in the collected data, they are presented among the findings. A further investigation follows of how age, ethnicity, gender, placement type, caregiver relationship, and episode count relate to characteristic trends of children reentering the child welfare system in the State of California as well as the County of San Bernardino, California. This chapter concludes with a summary.

Presentation of the Findings

The data collected from January 1998 through December 2007 in the State of California shows that children ages 0 to 1 years of age reentered at a higher rate than the rest. Twenty percent of the children who reentered in California were of the age 0 to 1 year old. As can be seen in Figure 1, the trends over this ten-year period steadily increased over time for the 0 to 1 age

group. Children ages 2 through 16 years old have similar reentry levels where most ages in this group keep a steady reentry rate. Children who are 17 years of age are the least likely to reenter with only 1% of the total number children reentering in this age group.

The data collected from San Bernardino County over this same time period shows that children ages 1 to 2 years old reenter at a higher rate. Three hundred and eight 1 to 2 year olds reentered over the 10-year period. Ninety children who were 0 years old reentered the child welfare system between the times of January 1998 to December 2007. As can be seen in Figure 2, Children ages 8 through 16 years old reentered at a similar rate with a range of 38 children reentering between the low being 53 children over the 10 years who were 16 years old, to the high being 91 children reentering who were 9 years old. As in the State data, children 17 years old were least likely to reenter into the child welfare system (1% of all reentered children).

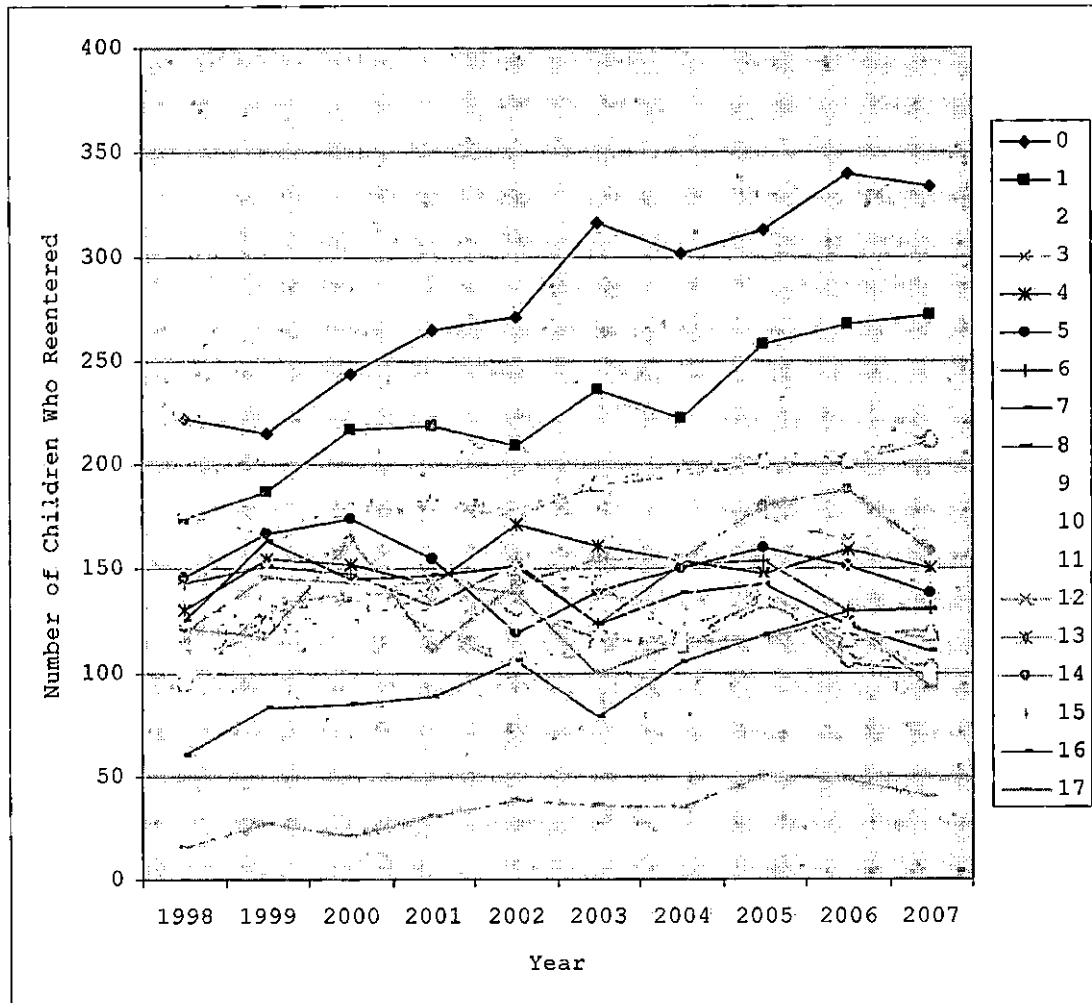


Figure 1. Age Reentry and the State of California

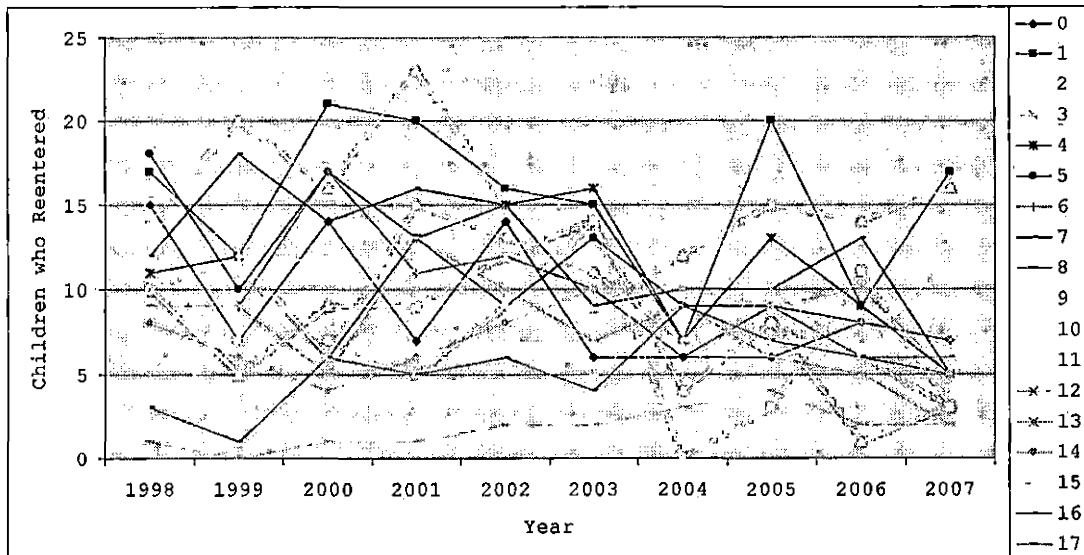


Figure 2. Age Reentry and the County of San Bernardino, California

The ethnicity information found in Figure 3 shows a steady upward trend for Hispanic children reentering the child welfare system from January 1998 through December 2007. In 1998 Hispanic children made up 32% of those who reentered and in 2006 this percentage peaked at 45.9%. In 2007 a slight decline to 45.6% is shown.

The data for children claiming Asian or Pacific Islander Ethnicity also has trended upward. The peak in 2005 shows an increase from 1.7% in 1998 to 2.7% of the state total in 2005. This peak only slightly dropped in 2007 to 2.6%.

Trends over the ten-year period show that the amount of Black, White, and Native American children reentering the child welfare system remains fairly consistent for the state of California. Ethnicity was not noted in several cases from 1998 to 2004 in the State of California. From 2005 through 2007, there was no missing data for ethnicity. This was represented in the missing value category shown in Figure 3.

The ethnicity of the children reentering the County of San Bernardino differed from the data in Figure 3 in three areas. In Figure 4, the amount of White children reentering the child welfare system dropped from 58.9% in 1998 to 35.8% in 2007. The data representing Black children also dropped from 20% in 1998 to 14.5% in 2007. Conversely, the Hispanic population only increased slightly from 1998 to 2007, moving from 41.5% to 44%. Consistency between the state of California and the County of San Bernardino remained for the Asian and Pacific Islander and Native American ethnic groups.

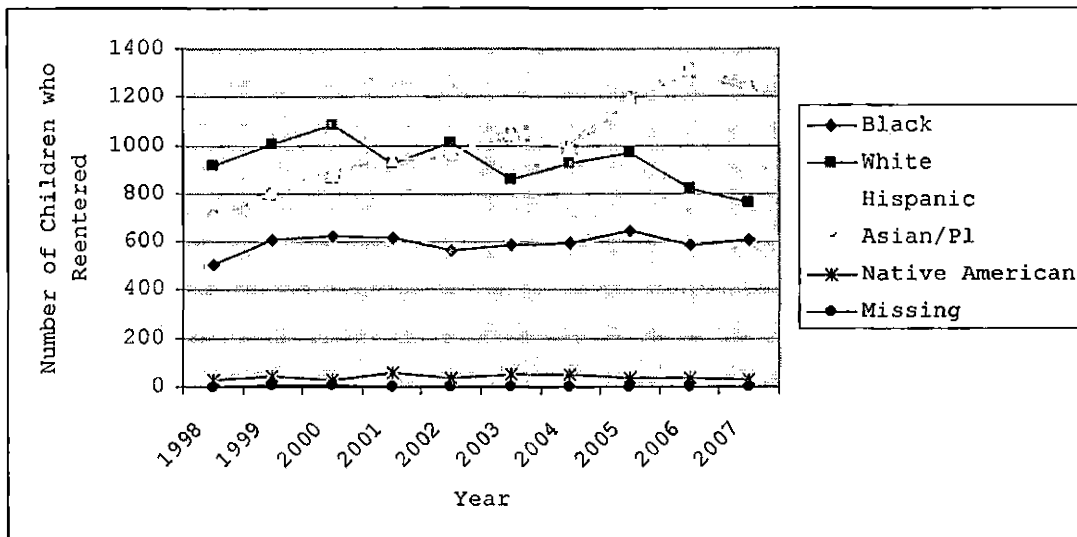


Figure 3. Ethnicity and Reentry in the State of California

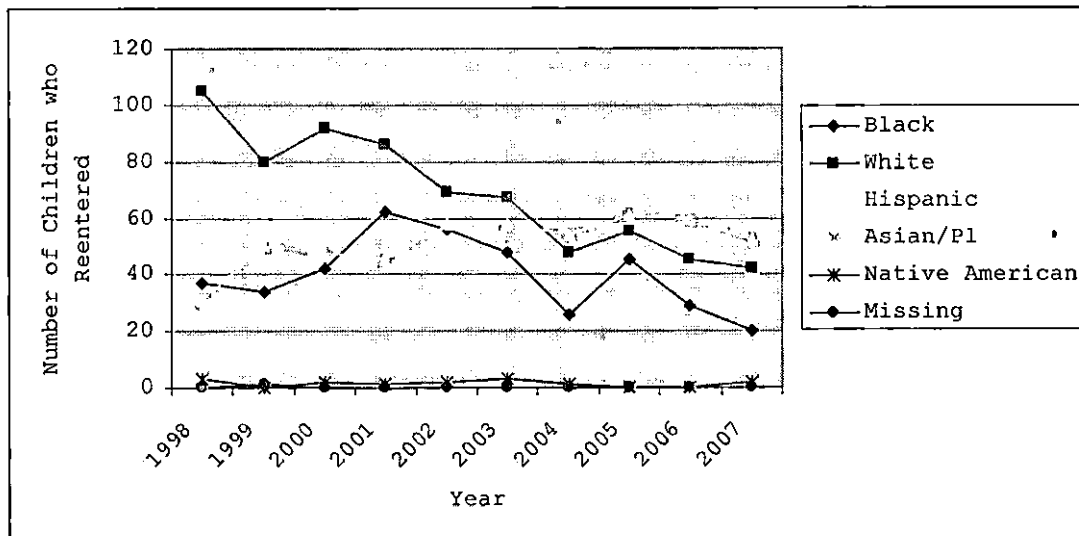


Figure 4. Ethnicity and Reentry in the County of San Bernardino, California

Data collected from January 1998 through December 2007 shows that 26,404 children reentered the child welfare system in the State of California. The data shows that 287 more females reentered the child welfare system than males in the State of California from January 1998 through December 2008. San Bernardino County had 1,643 children reenter the child welfare system over the same time period. Of this 1,643 children, 19 more males than females reentered the child welfare system in this same time period.

Trends over the ten-year period show that there is not a large difference in the gender of children who

reenter the child welfare system in California with 50.5% of the children being female and 49.5% of the children being male. San Bernardino County differed this by having 49.4% female reentry and 50.6% male reentry (See Figure 5 and Figure 6), Gender was not noted in CWS/CMS for three of the children, one in 2002, one in 2003, and one in 2004. This was represented in the missing value in Figure 5 and Figure 6.

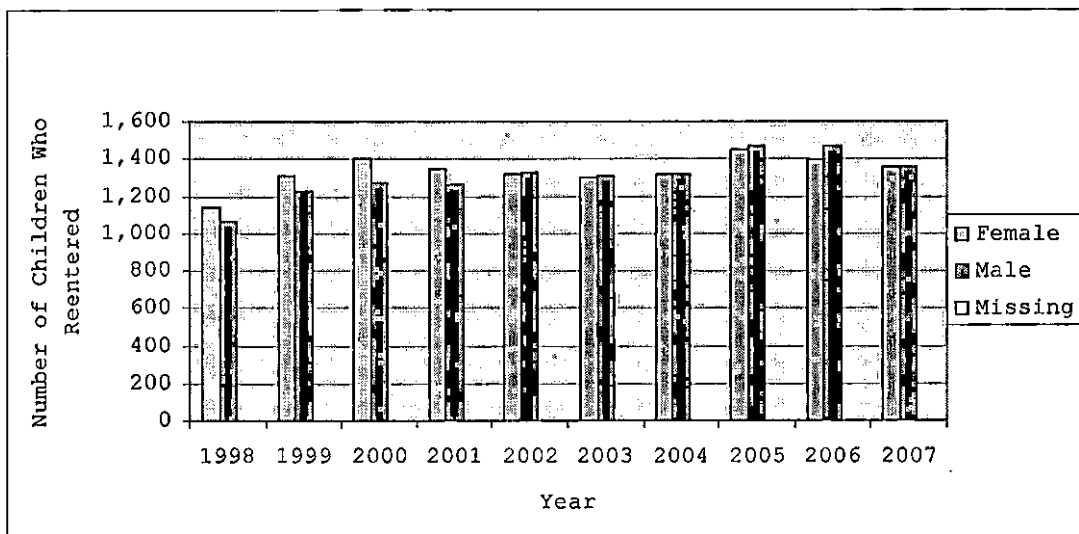


Figure 5. Gender Reentry and State of California

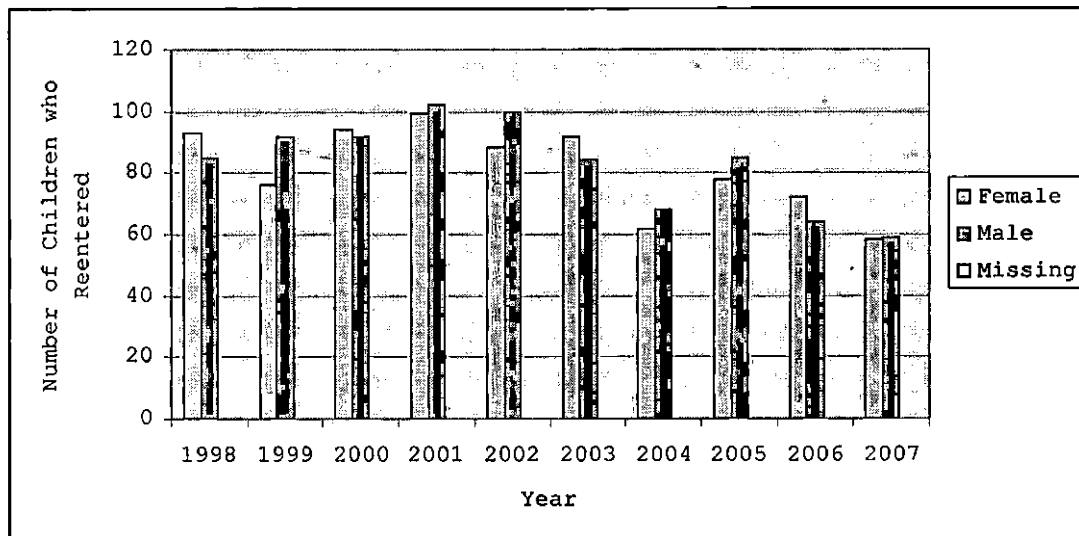


Figure 6. Gender Reentry and County of San Bernardino, California

Figure 7 shows the frequency of children reentering the child welfare system in the state of California divided by their placement type from 1998 to 2007. The consistency of children placed in homes labeled as Guardian and homes labeled as other show little variation over the ten-year period (see Figure 7 and Figure 8). However, the Foster Family Agency (FFA), Kin, and Foster placement types show significant movement between 1998 and 2007. In both the state of California as well as the County of San Bernardino, the amount of FFA placement types that result in reentry tripled. The Foster placement type decreased in California from 34.4% to

17.6% over the ten-year period while the County of San Bernardino mirrored this decrease with 37.6% in 1998 to 8.5% in 2007. The Kin Placement type decreased from 38.2% in 1998 to 26.4% in 2007 in San Bernardino County while the data for the State of California Kin placement type remained stagnant over this period.

Contrary to the data for San Bernardino County, wherein there was no significant movement for the Court Specified, Shelter, and Group placement types, the State of California experienced trends in these categories over this ten-year period (see Figure 7 and Figure 8). The Court Specified placement type went from showing a frequency of 29 in 1998 to 1 child in 2007. The Shelter placement type had 352 children reenter the child welfare system after placement and subsequent reunification in 1998 and then decreased to 91 children in 2007. Contrarily, the Group placement type actually increased from 209 to 313 over the ten-year period.

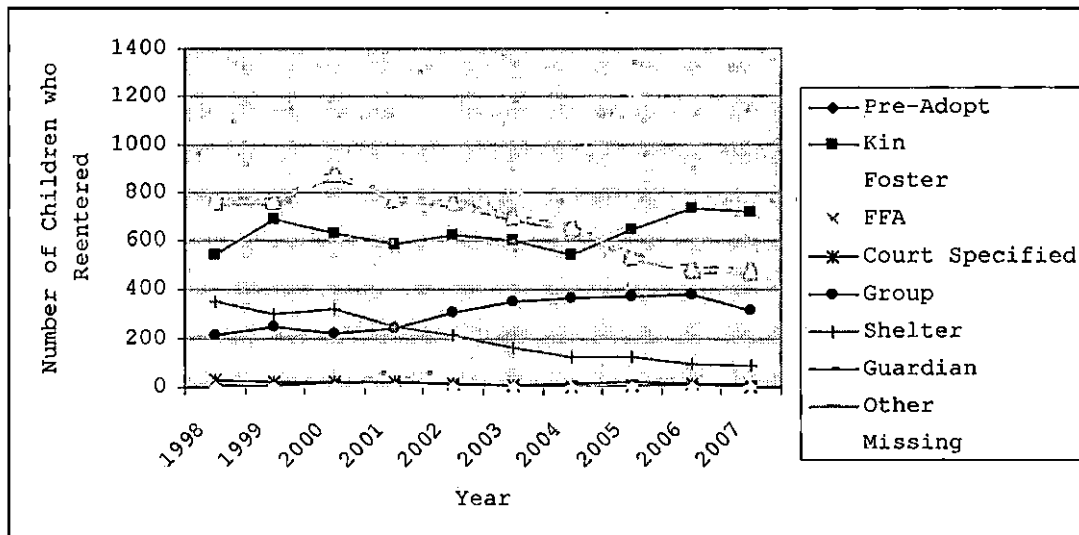


Figure 7. Placement Type and State of California

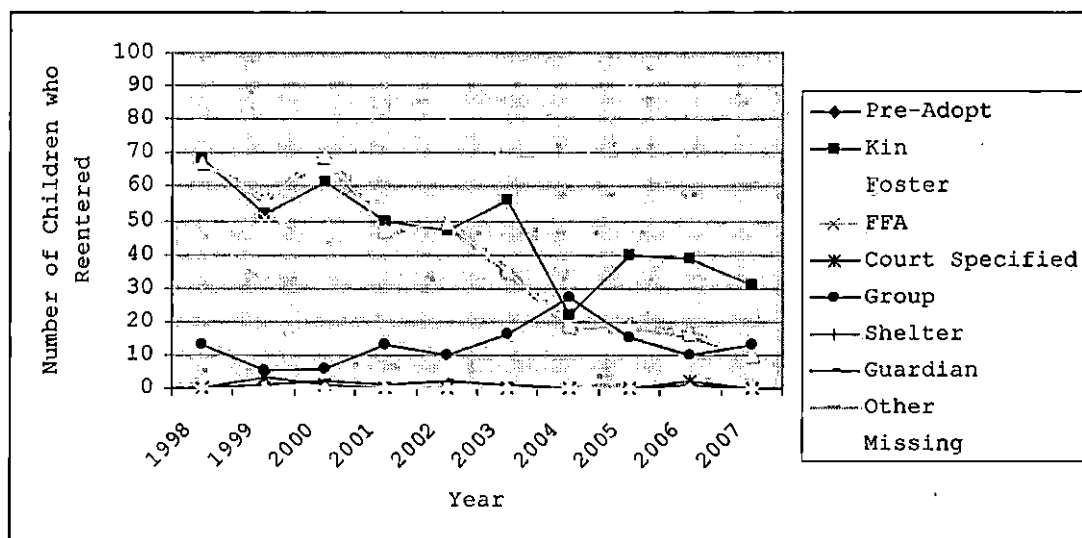


Figure 8. Placement Type and the County of San

Bernardino, California

There were four separate categories identified as Caregiver Relationship; Nonrelative Guardian, Nonrelative Nonguardian, Relative Guardian, and Nonrelative Nonguardian. The frequency graphs, Figure 9 and Figure 10, identify trends over a ten-year period from 1998 to 2007. The Nonrelative Nonguardian percentage increased in both figures between 1998 and 2007. The County of San Bernardino experienced a drastic increase in reentry for children who had been placed into these Nonrelative Nonguardian homes, a 15.7% increase. Comparatively, the State of California experienced a 4% increase.

The Relative Guardian placement type trended downward, with a frequency of 107 in 1998 and then 21 children reentering the child welfare system in 2007 for the entire State of California. The San Bernardino data for the Relative Guardian placement type echoed this trend, having shown a frequency of 6 children in 1998 and then 0 children in 2007.

The Relative Nonguardian placement type decreased from 36.5% in 1998 to 23.9% in 2007 for San Bernardino County while the State of California remained stagnant. The Nonrelative Guardian placement showed little variance in either county over the ten-year span.

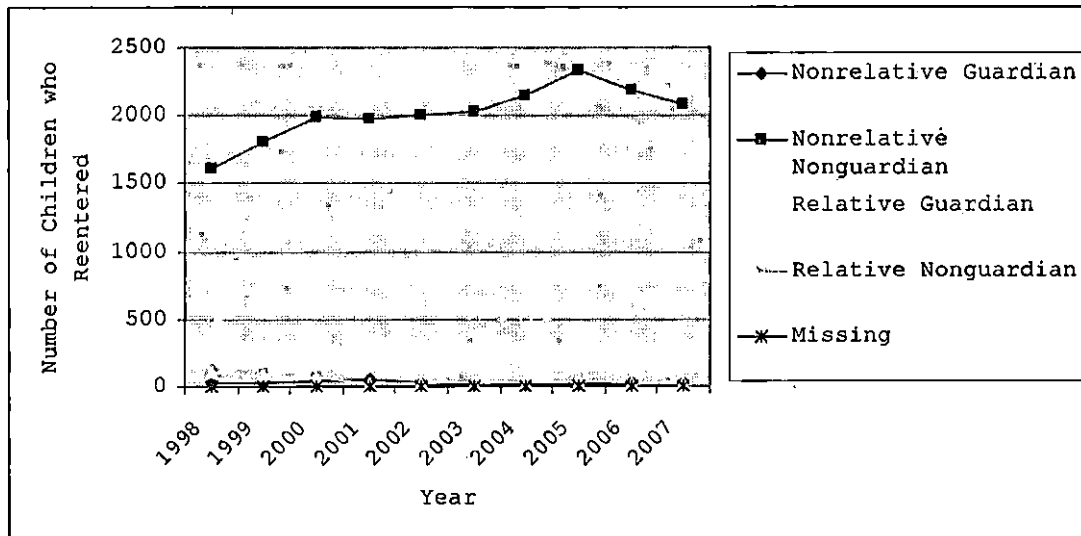


Figure 9. Caregiver Relationship and State of California

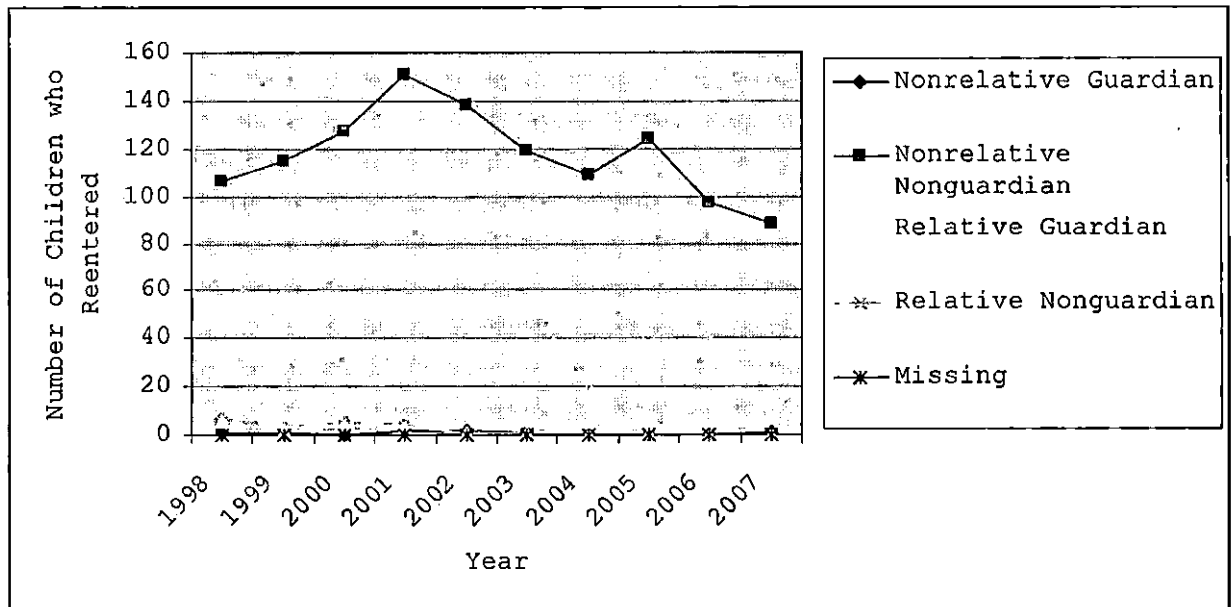


Figure 10. Caregiver Relationship and the County of San Bernardino, California

Of the data collected, nearly all of the children who reentered in California were first entry children (79%). This leaves 21% of the children to be in the other entry subcategory. San Bernardino County has 77% of its reentered children in the subcategory of first entry while the remaining 23% of its reentered children are in the other entry category.

Over the time period of January 1998 through December 2007, the number of children in California ranges from a low of 1,772 children reentering after the first entry in 1998 to a high of 2,271 children

reentering in 2005. San Bernardino County ranges from a low of 87 children reentering into the child welfare system in 2007 to a high of 159 children reentering in 2001 after the first reentry.

As can be seen in Figure 11, a noticeable change in the trend is not seen in the State numbers of First Entry as there is only a 3% difference in the range of data. Also, there is not a noticeable change in the trend of First Entry in the County of San Bernardino as there is only a 5% difference in the range of data (See Figure 12). For other entry children in the State, there is a 2% difference in the range of data between the low 436 reentries in 1998 and the high 651 reentries in 2005. Other entry children in the County there is a 7% difference in the range of data between the low 27 reentries in 2006 and the high 54 reentries in 1998.

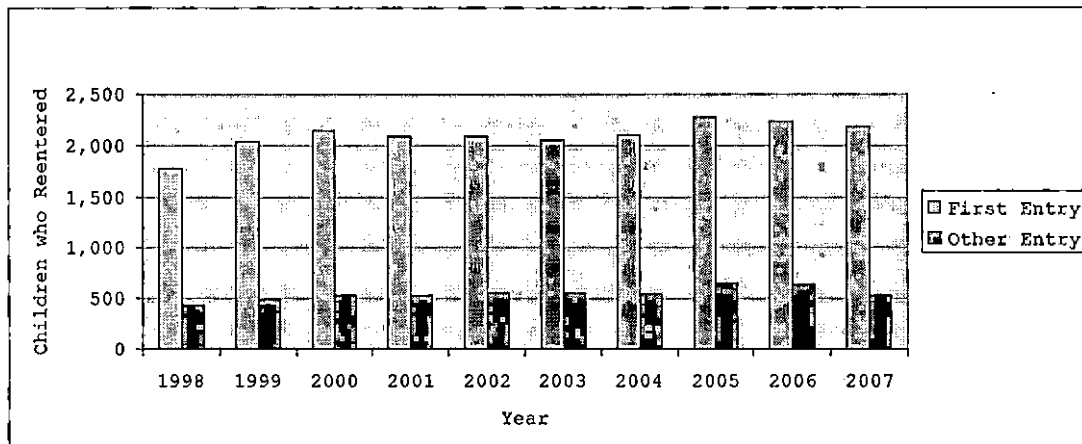


Figure 11. Episode Count and State of California

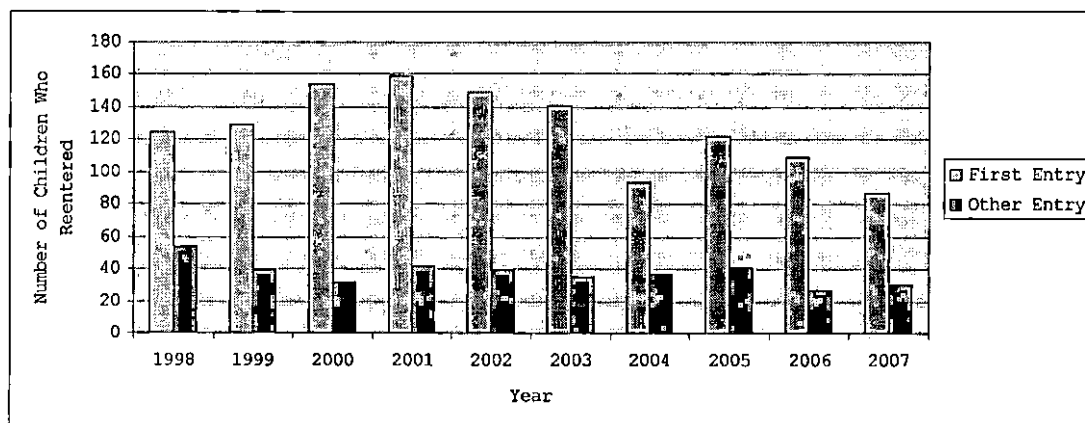


Figure 12. Episode Count and County of San Bernardino, California

Summary

The design for this study was prepared to be an exploratory study to examine key characteristics of children who reenter the child welfare system after reunification. These characteristics are age, ethnicity, gender, placement type, caregiver relationship, and episode count. Chapter Four included a presentation of the findings in which the key characteristics were analyzed and concluded that there were trends and differences noticed between reentered children in the state of California in its entirety compared to the county of San Bernardino, California from January 1998 through December 2007.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Chapter Five includes a discussion of the key findings of this exploratory study. Also included is a discussion of the limitations of this study as well as recommendations for further social work research for the success of family reunification goals and services as well as policies and practice for child welfare social workers. Chapter Five ends with a conclusive summary of the key findings and implications of this study.

Discussion

The data collected from January 1998 through December 2007 shows that 26,404 children reentered the child welfare system in the State of California within twelve months of reunification. San Bernardino County had 1,643 of these children reenter the child welfare system over the same time period and within twelve months of reunification. It is interesting to note that children with certain characteristics had a higher rate of reentry into the child welfare system.

As shown in Chapter Four, this study found that children aged 0-1 years reentered the child welfare system at a higher rate than older children. The ten year period showed an increasing trend of this age group reentering into the system in the State of California. Twenty percent of the age population in the State of California was included in the 0-1 age group. This differs from what Wulczyn, Chen, and Orlebeke found in their 2009 study. Wulczyn, Chen, and Orlebeke (2009) found in their sample size of roughly 12,000 children that younger aged children younger than twelve years old reentered at a 20% higher rate than infants and teenagers.

The finding in this study also contradicts what Barth concluded in 2008. Barth (2008) found that children who reentered into the child welfare system were of older age on average. The current study found that the older the child was that there was a lesser likelihood they were to reenter the child welfare system. The data found in this study for San Bernardino County also concludes the finding that younger children reenter at a higher rate with the results of children ages 1 to 2 years old

reentering at a higher rate over the ten-year period compared to older children.

This study reinforces what Fuller (2005) found in a study about maltreatment reoccurrence. Fuller (2005) found that children younger than five years of age have a higher risk of reoccurring maltreatment than older children. The findings of the current study coincide with Fuller (2005) and show that 45% of children who reentered over the ten-year period were five years old and younger. A reason for this age group reentering at a higher rate could be due to the dependency of the children on the parent. Children ages 0-5 years do not hold the developmental skills to care for their own needs. Where older children are able to voice their needs and even go in search to fulfill their needs, children of this age group are not able to. Therefore, they are fully dependent on another person to care for their needs in order to survive. This dependency may be too overwhelming to the parent depending on the capabilities and previous stressors of that parent and therefore, a child is able to be re-maltreated.

This study identified several noteworthy findings with regards to ethnicity and reentry. Ethnicity was a

topic that was not generally agreed upon in the research findings. Shaw (2006) had noted that African American children were the most likely to reenter foster care compared to all other ethnic groups. On the other hand, Terling (1999) found that there was no statistical difference between the reentry rates for African American and Caucasian children. This study actually asserts its own conclusion contrary to these regarding the Black and White children reentry patterns. Trends over the ten year period show that the amount of Black and White children reentering the child welfare system remain fairly steady for the state of California. The data also shows that in San Bernardino County, the percentage of Black and White children reentering the foster care system actually decreased from 1998 to 2007.

Regarding the Hispanic population, this study found a steady upward trend over the ten-year period. The data shows that in 1998 Hispanic children made up 32% of those who reentered and in 2006 this percentage peaked at 45.9%; a 13.9% increase. Contrary to this, Terling (1999) had noted that Hispanics were the least likely to reenter the child welfare system; data that is clearly not corroborated by the ten year trend examined here. This

trend may reflect an increase in the Hispanic population from 1998 to 2007 in the State of California.

The findings of this study concluded that there is not a notable gender difference between male and female children reentering the child welfare system. In California, 13,339 of the children who reentered were female while 13,052 of the children were male. This shows a 1% difference in gender reentry over the ten-year period. While this study found that females reenter at a slightly higher rate than males, Barth (2008) found that children who reentered into the child welfare system were more likely to be male.

Barth's study (2008) does, however, coincide with the findings of this study regarding the gender reentry rate of San Bernardino County. San Bernardino had a higher reentry rate of males than it did females. San Bernardino County had a 1.2% higher male reentry rate than female which equates to 831 males reentering and 812 females reentering over the ten year period. For the characteristic of gender, San Bernardino County does not fit in with the trends of the State of California.

As stated in chapter four, there were several key findings for the placement type and caregiver type

variables. These two variables are speaking to very similar issues, the types of out of home placements and caregivers the children are placed with. Most notable are the Kin, Relative Guardian, and Relative Nonguardian placement types as they show a decrease in reentry rates over the ten-year period. The amount of children placed in Kin, Relative Guardian, and Relative Nonguardian placement types prior to reunifying with their parents were less likely to reenter the child welfare system. In 1998, 38.2% of children reentered the child welfare system following Kin Placements while in 2007 this rate dropped to 26.4% for San Bernardino County. The Relative Guardian placement type also trended downward, with a frequency of 107 in 1998 and then 21 children reentering the child welfare system in 2007 for the entire State of California. The San Bernardino data for the Relative Guardian placement type echoed this trend, having shown a frequency of 6 children in 1998 and then 0 children in 2007.

The Relative Nonguardian placement type also decreased from 36.5% in 1998 to 23.9% in 2007 for San Bernardino County. Also significant, the Foster Family Agency (FFA) and Nonrelative Nonguardian placement types

both showed a significant increase in reentry rates over the ten-year period. This study found that in both the state of California as well as the County of San Bernardino, the amount of FFA placement types that result in reentry tripled over the ten-year period. The Nonrelative Nonguardian percentages also increased between 1998 and 2007. The County of San Bernardino experienced a drastic increase in reentry for children who had been placed into these Nonrelative Nonguardian homes, a 15.7% increase. Similarly, the State of California experienced a 4% increase.

These findings are consistent with Jonson-Reid's (2003) study findings that children placed with kin were associated with a decreased risk of reentry. Shaw (2006) also found that children that were placed in relative homes were also associated with a lower risk of reentry. Wells (1999) similarly found that those that were placed with kin reentered at a slower rate than those who are not.

The data for the Foster placement type seems to be an exception to the increased reentry rates seen for most other placement types. Foster placement reentry rates decreased in California from 34.4% to 17.6% over the

ten-year period and the County of San Bernardino mirrored this decline with a 29.1% decrease from 1998 to 2007.

All 26,404 children included in this study were found by the juvenile court to have been maltreated by child abuse or neglect on more than one occasion. The research study found that there is a much higher rate for children who were first time reentering (79%) than there were for children who reentered more than one time (21%) in the State of California. San Bernardino fits into this trend with having 77% of its children reenter with a first entry occurrence and 23% other entry occurrence. Although no studies have been found to specifically discuss episode count, all of the studies show that recidivism of child maltreatment does in fact occur and supports the findings of this current study. This, therefore, concludes that children of all ages, ethnicities, and genders are being re-maltreated by people in parental or caregiver positions.

Limitations

This study had limitations that narrowed the scope of research. A limitation that impeded the study was the fact that researchers were not able to access information

that would give a more holistic picture of reasons that a child reentered into the child welfare system. Due to the nature of the exploratory study design, the findings were able to define the "who" for identifying factors; however it was not able to define the "why" as to why the children are reentering into the child welfare system. Examples of information that could define the "why" include: number of siblings that a child had, the child and family's economic standing in the community, mental health or behavioral health of the child and/or parents, substance abuse and alcohol abuse variables, and criminality factors. These variables were not found so that these characteristics could be noted when it came to a child's reentry. Therefore, the sample was not necessarily representative of the variables that associate with a child reentering into the child welfare system.

Another limitation of this study was included in the variable of ethnicity. In today's society, many children are from multiple ethnicities and have multi-ethnic characteristics. The data that was collected in this study had information pertaining to one specific ethnicity per child. Therefore, the child was seen as a

specific ethnicity instead of allowing the data to show them as multi-ethnic. If a child had Hispanic and White ancestry, he/she would only be recorded to be one or the other ethnicity. Due to the presentation of the data on the Child Welfare Dynamic Reporting System (CWDRS), researchers were not able to distinguish which child was multi-ethnic compared to which child was not.

A final limitation of this study was included in the variables of caregiver relationship and placement type. It is possible that while a child is in the child welfare system, he/she is moved to multiple placements. The data available by the CWDRS did not allow for a variable that showed how many placements the child was in during his/her time in the child welfare system. The final placement or caregiver relationship that the child had before reunification with the family of origin is what is recorded into the CWDRS. Therefore, there is a possibility that these two variables are not necessarily representative of the children who reentered into the child welfare system.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Social work practices have been transformed over the past few decades in which policies placed an emphasis on permanency planning. This idea was developed with the passing of the Adoptions Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 and further emphasized by the Family Preservation and Support Act in 1993 (Popple & Leighninger, 2008). The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) which was passed by Congress in 1997, developed practices to be what child welfare workers use today, which emphasize that children are remaining too long in foster care and pushed to reunify children with their families (Yampolskaya, 2007).

Permanency continues to be a topic for policy makers and researchers. Though this exploratory study defines the "who" for defining identifying factors of children who are reentering into foster care, it does not define the "why". The findings of this study emphasize the need for further research that explains the "why" to why are children reentering into the child welfare system.

With the findings regarding the age of children reentering, it is recommended that families with children under the age of five years old receive more or different

family preservation services to ensure that recurring maltreatment will not happen. It could also be recommended that children of this age group have a longer period to transition back into the family of origin's care through family maintenance services. The dependency factor of this age group of children is much higher on the parent and there is a possibility that the parent might not know how to properly address the dependency. Further research could also be conducted on the quality of parenting programs for this age group to see if there is a correlation between parental learning from the programs and reentry of children to the child welfare system.

The type of out of home placement a child enters may be a key determinate of their recidivism. Social Service agencies need to be aware of these discrepancies. FFA placements show higher rates of reentry and thus should be used with caution and care. Kin and Relative placements lend to the best outcomes and should be sought at no end. In practice it is often difficult to locate adequate Kin and Relative placements due to issues of criminal records and impermanent addresses, but these homes prove to serve as a predictor of future permanency

for children in the child welfare system. Using every avenue of information, as small as it may be, may lend to stability for the child as they reunify with their caregivers.

Also, services that specifically serve the Hispanic population may also need to be sought and used in Counties across the State of California. Spanish speaking courses like parenting or domestic violence may need to be created. Also, the drug and alcohol treatment programs that are offered to clients may need to begin employing more Spanish speaking employees.

Community resources, such as churches, counseling centers, and emergency food and housing programs may also need to be sought to serve the particular needs of the Hispanic populations to better improve the family's ability to succeed after reunification has occurred.

In the State of California, the Hispanic children have proved to be the highest reentry population. This population presents with many unique issues. The proximity of the Mexican border to many California counties allows for an ease of travel and deportation. Many of the Hispanic children in the child welfare system in the State of California have immediate or distant

relatives in Mexico. However, as children are removed from their caregivers in California, Counties are reluctant to use Kin homes in Mexico as permanent or even temporary placements for these children. As a result, these children are at a greater risk for reentry due to the issues of citizenship and poverty that their caregivers may be experiencing in the State of California. Thus, changes in State and County policies regarding seeking permanency for children who may have Kin in Mexico or other Latin countries need to be examined further. Possible partnerships between child welfare entities and governments in Mexico may need to be established to better serve this Hispanic child population.

Further research should be done with regards to the discrepancies found between the Foster placement type and the FFA placement type. The Community Care Licensing (CCL) and County licensing programs may need to be examined to explore the variances that may exist between the two placement home environments and caregivers. A close examination the child and family populations existing in the two different placement types must also be explored. A call for further research to explain such

a disparity between the increased FFA reentry rates and the permanency being achieved with the Foster placement type must be pursued to achieve better FFA outcomes.

Regarding the episode count of children reentering the child welfare system, additional studies could be done to deduce why children are reentering multiple times into the child welfare system and what child protective reunification and preservation programs are being used for those families. This could infer why reunification services are failing for some families.

Conclusions

The findings of this study developed the following conclusions. Children younger than five years of age reenter at a higher rate of 45% compared to children of older ages with 20% of these children between the ages of 0-1 years. Regarding ethnicity, it was found that children of Hispanic decent reenter at a higher rate and that the number of children increased over the ten-year period. Children of Black and White decent decreased in numbers over the ten-year period. There was not a notable difference in female to male reentry. Relative caregiver placements result in a lower reentry rate for children

while FFA placements result in the highest reentry rate. Seventy-Nine percent of the children who reentered had a first reentry episode count to where 21% had other entry episode count.

APPENDIX
DATA EXTRACTION FORM

Data Extraction Form

Identifying Information:

Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Missing

Ethnicity: ☐ Black ☐ White ☐ Hispanic
 ☐ Asian/P.I ☐ Nat. American ☐ Missing

Age: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2
 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8
 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11
 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ 14
 ☐ 15 ☐ 16 ☐ 17

Placement Type: ☐ Pre-Adopt ☐ Kin ☐ Foster
 ☐ FFA ☐ Court Specified
 ☐ Group ☐ Shelter ☐ Guardian
 ☐ Other ☐ Missing

Episode Count:

Dependent Variable:

Reentry within 12 Months ☐ Yes ☐ No

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Sarah Jacobson & Melissa Weber

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Sarah Jacobson & Melissa Weber

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

- a. Introduction and Literature

Team Effort: Sarah Jacobson & Melissa Weber

- b. Methods

Team Effort: Sarah Jacobson & Melissa Weber

- c. Results

Team Effort: Sarah Jacobson & Melissa Weber

- d. Discussion

Team Effort: Sarah Jacobson & Melissa Weber