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## CORRELATION BETWEEN USE OF FAMILY VISITATION CENTERS AND FAMILY REUNIFICATION

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CORRELATION BETWEEN USE OF FAMILY VISITATION CENTERS AND  
FAMILY REUNIFICATION TIMES

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

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

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by  
Cynthia Ann Munn-Haywood

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## ABSTRACT

This study evaluated correlation between the use of San Bernardino County's Family Visitation Centers (FVC) and family reunification times. The FVC were developed out of the Department Human Services Redesign to enhance the visitation experience for families, staff and others involved in the process. The FVC centers are a place to provide safe visits, in a non-sterile environment, for children to maintain the bonds with their parents that they have been removed from by child welfare while in a reunification process. The County of San Bernardino has invested approximately 1.9 million dollars annually into the FVC's, and to date, there has not been a clear evaluation as to the effectiveness in reunifying families faster with usage of the FVC.

The researchers used a descriptive statistical approach to examine the effect FVC's has on the reunification process. The research methods used were quantitative in design and included comparative research, looking both at the results of clients use and non-use of the FVC's. Data was collected February 2017. The size of our sample was ninety family reunification cases from both those that used the FVC, and those who did not use the center in the same regions, 180 families in total. To ensure that a random sample was used, a third-party collected statistical information from Case Management System/Child Welfare System (CMS/CWS). The list was composed from preselected data included in the San Bernardino County Visitation Center Instrument. The variables used included families that were in the reunification process and having

visits either at a CFS office or at the FVC, primary and secondary reason for removal, age of youngest child, age of parent, race/ethnicity, if a visit occurred and number of months in placement.

Data was collected using every fifth family was selected; the researchers received a list, with only the above pertinent information for each of the families. The researchers did not need any Protected Identifying Information (PII) and no human subjects were used. All items related to the research were maintained in electronic form on password protected computers and was only calculated and read in a protected area.

The hope of this research project was to determine the FVC were producing the desired outcome of decreased reunification times. Results from this study could impact CFS. Positive outcomes could lead to more contracted agencies to promote faster reunification, while social worker hours spent supervising visits. Negative results could result in the FVC losing funding, CFS staff supervising the visits within the offices, increased social worker hours, and the visit could be affected by the presence of the social worker. Adjustments to the ideology of what visitation should be for families that are trying to work their case plans to reunify with their children. This study found families who used visitation centers had longer placement episodes lengths than non-visitation center users. This outcome is contrary to our assumption, use of visitation centers help families reunify in less time.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to take a special moment and thank San Bernardino County Children and Family Services, Deputy Director, Laura Lee for assisting us with answering our many questions about the Visitation and providing literature for us to read. Without Laura's guidance and support in this process we would have been unable to proceed in our research process.

We are also very grateful to Christopher Rinewalt, Statistical Analyst. Mr. Rinewalt was our third party assistant that really did a lot of the work of the hard data work for us. We are thankful to him for being the man that understood what we were trying to find and making sure we got what we needed to make that happen.

Not all researchers understand the language of statistics, for us that was not a language of choice and we struggled. We were blessed with Ms. Christi Bell, a very dear lady and friend, she took the time to sit with us, input data, and translate it all into English, so we understood what we found and how to write and explain it. Christi we are forever grateful for your assistance.

In closing we would also like to thank our cohort that worked together to pull each other through the rough spots, and a big thank you to our families and friends that cheered us on. Thank you to the Cal State San Bernardino School of Social Work staff who have all helped in one way or another along the way and to the County of San Bernardino for allowing us to

look at one of your many programs. This was a process that we will not soon forget.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate our thesis to my family, friends and grandchildren. Thank you for your love and support, for cheering me on even when I was sick, in pain and tired. To my 10+ grandchildren, if grandma can do this, you can do so much more, the world is yours, remember to always reach for your dreams, and if you miss reach further, you will achieve more than you ever imagined.

To the memory of my oldest sister Anita who was unable to complete her program of study. I finish this journey for the both of us. Finally to my sister and best friend, Cheryl: thank you for always being there for me.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## HISTORY AND RELEVANCE

### Introduction

This chapter will discuss the problem of length of reunification in San Bernardino County. Included in this chapter is a discussion on the purpose of the study which is to look into the effect of FVC on reunification. Finally, this chapter will briefly discuss the significance of this project to social work practice.

### Problem Statement

In San Bernardino County, there were over 2,000 children removed and placed in out-of-home placement in 2013. In 2013, there were over 4600 children in various types of out of home placement. The types of placement can vary from foster home, group home, relative home to guardian home etc. From the first to the third quarter of 2013 the number of relative placements increased 2.3%. From 2011-2013 over 1,000 children exited foster care and reunified with their families.

In 2012, Children and Family Services (CFS) of San Bernardino contracted with an outside agency to complete research on the department and assist in coming up with any ideas on how to improve the services provided to the community. This study is known within the department as the Deloitte. From the Deloitte's findings, a plan was formulated to improve the department was created, that plan is commonly referred to as the Redesign. The Redesign

discussed “a series of proposed recommendations of things that could better enhance the families touched within the community and possibly improve outcomes for the family and CFS”. (2012, Vijayakumar, M., Daflos, A. & Hanna, B.) In the Redesign’s findings and suggestions, under “Additional Area 7: Consider enhancing the visitation experience for families, staff and others involved in the process,” thus FVC emerged in San Bernardino County. The problem addressed was the effectiveness in reunifying families faster with usage of the FVC. Since their emergence in San Bernardino County there has not been a clear evaluation of the FVC.

The purposes of the FVCs are to provide safe places for children to maintain the bonds with their parents when they have been removed by child welfare, a custody dispute or a domestic violence situation. The anticipated benefit to the families is that a FVC could improve overall visitation experience be more centrally located and decrease reunification times. The county of San Bernardino has FVC in each of the regions of the county. The idea was to have a trained professional present during visits at a facility that is less sterile and more inviting to the families, to better engage them in the process of parenting while visiting with their children. The trained staff could be present to protect the children from inappropriate parenting practices, to document how the interactions of parent and child went, as well as to serve as a parenting coach to teach parents, new and different ways to interact with their children and reassure the family of the positive parenting that they are learning. FVC would provide

information to social workers regarding the regularity of visits, and the type of interaction between child and parent.

When the court orders Family Reunification, a major part of their case plan goal includes visitation. Often that visitation is ordered supervised and Children and Family Services (CFS), i.e. the social worker is required to facilitate those visits. For supervised visits, the foster parent, the agency social worker, the county social worker or the FVC can supervise the visits. For all the former there often conflicting issues that prevent those visits from being neutral. Often the parent is hostile toward the foster parent or the agency social worker as well as the county social worker. The families need to work timely and consistently on the reunification process and attend all case plan activities, especially the visits with their children.

From a child welfare perspective, families whose case plan goal is reunification would be most likely to use this service. For a child who was removed and placed in care, once the court orders reunification, the clock begins. For a child over the age of 3, the parent has approximately eighteen months to reunify, and even less if the child is younger. Once a child enters foster care there can be deterrents to parental visitation. Depending on the reason the child is in care, there could be safety concerns with one or both parents, which is why court ordered supervised visitation would occur.

FVC are also set up to support the CFS, workers and families as well. The anticipated benefit to CFS was to decrease the time a social worker is

required to organize and facilitate visits, enable CFS to continue to use visiting facilities, and clearly articulate and document visit practices so that the staff and courts have clear understanding of how the visits are progressing. The trained staff would allow for specialized support, to coach families as necessary, to practice learned parenting skills, documenting learned improvements and provide thorough reporting which allows for earlier family reunification. The centers are supposed to support earlier reunification while benefitting the county by having professionals assisting the families during visits, leading to the families' reunifying faster and moving the children into safer homes. FVC are provided to provide better outcomes regarding reunifying families in our communities.

Prior to FVC, families did their supervised visitation in the CFS offices, with CFS staff supervising the visits. The offices are a sterile and uncomfortable place to visit, staff, are typically overworked and frustrated that they do not have enough time to get work done adding supervising visits to the list of tasks to complete. The parents are often uncomfortable in the office with the worker watching their every movement, angry and unwilling to take directives from the workers involved in their cases, and unsure of their interest or judgment of parenting practices. The children are feeling the stress of the adults in the room and are not in a child friendly atmosphere. Some workers started conducting visits in outside areas such as McDonald's or the park. Some workers even started having foster parents to supervise the visits and report back how things

went. The department needed to find a new way to conduct these visits for the benefit of the family and the children.

### Purpose of the Study

FVC were made as part of the business redesign. The centers are county funded through a contract. The centers maintain trained staff to conduct the visits and act as an observer or parental coach. The visits start as supervised in agency visits and move to a more liberal visit that can include visits in the community as well as at restaurants. The social worker completes the referral to send the family to the center for visits after watching a few visits themselves. The social worker can state from the beginning if there are any concerns with visits or who can and cannot visit the children. The social worker also can state whether the visit is observational or interactive. The center a family is referred to is based on location of the home as well as foster home to try and find a neutral place.

The department has several agencies contracted throughout the county to handle the visitations of the families. The contracted agencies are paid a standard amount each month whether they are being utilized or not. To date, the county has invested several million dollars into the effort of providing FVC and staff trained in what they need to know to maintain supervised, interactive visits. The social workers are actively using the agencies to maintain the visitations. There has been no research to study the effectiveness of the FVC to determine the effectiveness of their usage. This study set out to discover if the FVC were

making a difference in the outcomes of children being returned to their family homes or was the County expending funds on a program that is not effective?

### Significance of Project for Social Work Practice

County administrators are concerned about the effectiveness of supervised visitation and its correlation to family reunification as the county continues to utilize funds on this program. The department is undergoing a business redesign and there is a question as to whether the FVC are increasing the number of children who are in care to reunify with their family of origin.

Visitation is a mandatory component of the reunification process. Gaining a greater understanding of the impact the use of FVC has on families who utilize them is important to understand their effectiveness. There is limited research on the effects of supervised visitation and reunification. In addition to the lack of research there remain inconsistencies in the definition of supervised visitation. These discrepancies make it difficult to determine if a program is useful as there are so few programs to compare it to.

Results from this study could change things dramatically. Positive outcomes could allow for more outside agencies to be used for other things to lighten the duties of the social worker. Negative results could make the department go back to doing visits within the office. The outcomes could change business on a daily basis for the department or centers in that, adjustments may need to be made, and provide a different standard of visitation for families that are trying to work through their case plans to reunify with their children.

The contracted agencies will be more stringent in reporting guidelines for social workers. They will be required to document when they schedule, supervise or receive a report of a supervised visit occurring. Additionally, once the purpose and guidelines for supervised visitation is determined social workers may be more involved in the actual visitation. Conversely research has shown that visits supervised by the worker can affect the outcome of parental visits, there will be a clearer more unified stance on the social worker's role, as some programs provide therapeutic services while others do not. The question being addressed was the effectiveness of FVC centers with regard to reunifying children involved in the child welfare system. The focus included information from previous research on the subject of visitation and reunification.

Are the families that are utilizing the visitation centers being reunified faster than those that are not utilizing the visitation centers within the County of San Bernardino?

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The articles read and reviewed all tend to have similar methodology and perspectives. Several of the articles make continued and repetitive statements to the importance and correlation of visitation and reunification. "Visits between parents and children are the key to successful reunification" (Loar, 1998). "Regularly scheduled contact between children and the parents from whom they are separated has consistently been found to enhance children's well-being" (Hess et al., 1992). It is not a surprise that across our nation, all areas of child welfare understand the importance of supervised family visits and relate the visitation process to being essential to the process of reunification.

#### Family Reunification for Foster Children

Clement (1998), suggested use the use of visitation programs as a mandatory component. At the time of this writing there was concern that supervised visitation programs would eventually peter out chiefly due to small size and lack of funding. Clemet discusses the use of visitation centers as a form of protection for parent and child victims of domestic violence. It is noted that visitation centers are also used in child welfare but the main focus here was domestic violence. The article uses the tragic deaths of the two Kostner children in New Jersey. Opponents of mandated visitation primarily came from fathers'

rights groups who saw the mandates as singling out men. This article clearly demonstrates a lack of research and knowledge as the focus of the article deals with parental visitation and domestic violence. There was limited information on foster children and parental visitation.

Frasier, et al, (1996) defines reunification as “the process of reconnecting children in out of home care with their families “. Frasier, et al, looks at a design in which randomly selected foster kids were to return to their family of origin. Included in this study are a control group and an experimental group. In this study, the FVC group also received assistance in building support circles, assistance with other needs and skills training. Frasier et al brings up an excellent point in that reunification of families has not been the forerunner when it comes to funding or research. Reunification can be described differently depending on who is using the term. Frasier found barriers to successful reunification.

Unfortunately, for many Child Welfare institutions establishing a safe place to visit and coordinating the time and location are not enough. There are many things to consider for visits for both the children and the parent. The visits can be “compromised by the limited ability of the parent of the child to cope with the traumatic events that happened before or during the placement,” or during visits. “Parent visitation, the scheduled, face to face contacts between parents and their children in foster care, is the primary intervention for maintaining and supporting the development of parent-child relationships necessary for reunification” (Haight,

Kagle & Black, 2003). Parent/child visitation is often a struggle that is necessary to work through and maintain. The visits are more than just a chance to see each other and maintain a bond, but they are also imperative for the child's wellbeing.

In the Ansay and Perkins article (2001), it is noted that, "increased involvement of illegal drug use by parents adds another critical dimension to the problem, one that should be viewed as "chronic relapsing syndrome" that continually endangers children, even during visitation. In San Bernardino County, at least 1/2 or more families are in the system with problems directly related to substance abuse or addiction issues. Yet it is these same majority of parents, "the parents with substance abuse problems that are among the most inconsistent visitors: and the most at risk of permanently losing their children" (Nesmith, 2014, 221) often due to a lack of visitation.

Nesmith (2014, 219) states, "Regular visits are associated with better child behavior and attachment, and less depression." The truth remains that although scheduling visits can be handled by clerical support, if the properly trained staff is not present other things can interfere with the visit itself. "Merely removing the potential for danger does not necessarily facilitate productive interactions. Rather the often overestimation of parental ability to participate in a visit obscures the reality that parents often must learn how to enjoy their children's company" (Loar, 1998). It is not an understatement to say that most the children in the foster system have never played with or interacted with their child in a way that was enjoyable just to spend time with them.

McWey and Mullis (2004) continue to support the idea of attachment to biological parent is important for gaining the ability to form attachments with others. McWey and Mullis neglect to investigate the effectiveness of visitation and maintaining the parental bond on reunification. A child is better able to adjust while in out of home care when there are consistent visits with parents. It is again important to note that a limitation of this study is the lack of focus on the impact the visitation had on reunifying families. Additional limitations here include the age of participants, the small geographic area; there were no assessments of effectiveness to serve as a contract person. Unable to determine effectiveness of visitation on reunification as the study's focus was more on attachment.

Proch and Howard (1996) looked at the impact of visiting as a predictor of children returning to their families. A study in New York indicated consistent child and parent visits were an indicator of children returning home. Proch and Howard found visits occurred in the parental home when the plan was reunification, over greater than half of face to face contact between children and their parents occurred in agency office at least one time per month.

Honomichil, Hatton & Brooks (2009) investigated different elements which factor into reunification successful or unsuccessful: age, ethnicity, mental health, poverty, mental health, substance abuse, parent's involvement and several agency specific factors. Honomichil, et al. found re-entry into foster care is an area that requires further research as 1 in 5 children who enter foster care, are

reunified with family who then re-enter the system due to maltreatment cited by Honomichil, et al (2009). Additional barriers to successful reunification are parent's ability to interact, lack knowledge how to parent in stress related times and low confidence level.

Pulido, Forrester & Lacina (2011) looks at visitation as a growing need in family courts. However, their focus is on the types of visitation that can occur. Pulido, et al. notes visitation can be one on one observational only, therapeutic or in a group supervision setting. According to Pulido, et al main reason for referral to a visitation center is substance abuse; domestic violence with supervised visits the last step before all visitations is terminated. Pulido et al follow the idea that continued visitation provides much needed mental and emotional support for children in care. This is simultaneously allowing the parent the opportunity to address reasons for removal and social workers the opportunity to assess the option of reunification. A limitation in the study is there is no consideration for families already reunified and whether they used supervised visits.

McWey & Oeheme look to a sample of 47 visitation programs in Florida. The outcome shows the lack of sufficient budget, lack of educated staff, inconvenient hours of operation and poor security as concerns. If visitation centers are to continue and be effective in allowing parents to visit their children these are some issues that need to be addressed. However not all programs in Florida participated in the study, the sample was not random and it was a small sample size, there was no standardized method of gathering information.

## Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The theories behind reunification appear somewhat congruent and able to understand with community. Most believe that the Attachment Theory, Identity Theories and Ecological Theories run through the child welfare systems and can be a basis of understanding. However, some theorists have suggested that in addition to formal restrictions on visiting, parents must overcome psychological barriers related to the placement of their children” (Leathers, 2002). Not all theories are related in the same ways or understood by all.

Attachment theory which focuses on the relationship with primary care giver during a critical phase of development is a guide to the child’s ability to form relationships throughout their lifetime. According theory if the child has a strong attachment they are better able to relate to others in satisfying ways. Prior research has indicated strong attachments to parents help a child in care cope with separation from parents and form some relationship with their care givers. It is also noteworthy to mention that this same attachment can cause stress on a child as their loyalty is tested when they bond with care providers who are not their parents.

This information from the literature reviewed allows one to see that further studies need to be done to better assist our foster children in the reunification process. The families, agencies, courts and community could better benefit by researching and reviewing how to use best practice visitation. Agencies should research to find what is working, why it is working and what can be done to make

things work in a positive manner to all involved. This research may involve both quantitative and qualitative research to allow for the growth of the family/child bond. Visitation standards should be the same, yet unique, for each family needs and insure that each child can build healthy attachment with people from their primary family. Research should be an ongoing effort at finding ways to rebuild the lives of the children affected by abuse within our communities. The research should include how to optimize visits to make reunification outcomes apparent early on so that parent has less chance to offend or abuse again in the future.

The study we looked at would be directed to results of those with in this county and should provide stats that show the difference between visit center and non-visit center outcomes and timeframes. We were hopeful the study would show the quality of work that is beneficial, in removing risk and danger to a child and teaching a parent how to better use community and parenting to facilitate better relations with their children.

### Summary

As we look back on HBSE one theory typically does not describe or cover all the elements. When looking at visitation centers and their effectiveness, we encounter some theories guiding the thoughts an ecosystem view looks at person in environment. The children who use the FVC have CFS contact means that somewhere along the way it was determined something or someone in their home environments were unsafe. A strengths perspective can be used to support

the reunification process and attempts to return the children to their families by focusing first on what is working well, and working with the family to determine what the concerns are and what needs to happen next.

A study of the effectiveness of visitation centers and their outcomes in relation to faster reunification was needed. There are questions that require answers to determine the continued use of visitation centers. San Bernardino County uses the visitation centers which have substantial funding supporting their use. As a practice, any program should consistently monitor input and output to see if the program is providing the desired or expected outcomes. The lack of prior research and the inability to show positive or negative outcomes from an organizational and/or individual level demonstrates a gap in literature and research.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This study will analyze the impact of FVC centers in San Bernardino County on families and did the use of the visit centers decrease the amount of time the child was in out of home placement. In addition, this chapter will explain how the research was be conducted. This chapter includes the following six subsections: study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects and data analysis.

#### Study Design

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of San Bernardino County's Family Visitation Centers (FVC) and their effect on improving rates of reunification in families that used the visit centers, as opposed to those families who did not use the visit centers. For our purpose, we use an inductive approach to examine the effect FVC had on the reunification process. The research methods used were quantitative in design and will include comparative research, looking both at the results of clients using and not using the FVC's. Data was initially set to be collected at the end of the fiscal year 2016, however the this study uses data collected from Winter 2017.. This design was not found in any of the research found to date, as there is a limited amount of research that addresses this topic from the perspective of county administrators.

This is a quantitative study which will use historical data, and case files to collect the necessary data.

Potential limitations to this type of study are that each family unit is unique to the department and may not follow the norms of expectations for our department. Resources outside of the FVC may also be a part of the case plan for a family and make changes that are not being looked at for this study. Sadly, there are families that do not want to reunify and do not share this information and may be counted in the study. Sample size could be an issue if the sample were too small to find results that are representative of the population being researched.

This can be considered a type of cohort study group because all the families have the commonality of having a reunification plan with the department of CFS. The advantages to a cohort study is that it takes away the threat of being unethical, can establish a time frame, persons eligible for the study and their assessments can be repeated and related to other populations, this type of study is simpler and less expensive. The researchers did not take part in determining which participants were exposed to the FVC's or those participants who were not.

The question we will answer is: Are the families that are utilizing the FVC being reunified faster than those that are not utilizing the FVC centers within the County of San Bernardino?

## Sampling

A random sample was pulled during Winter, 2017, from both those using the FVC and from those in traditional visits. The sample only included families from a specific population, families whose child welfare case plan was under Family Reunification (FR) status, with court ordered visitation within San Bernardino County. When children have been removed and reunification with their families as part of their case plans this FR status is one of the qualifying populations for this study. We are hoping that our sample size will be large enough to be representative of the larger population.

The size of our sample is ninety cases that have used the centers, and ninety families that have not used the center in the same regions, but were participating in reunification services, 180 families in total. To ensure that we had a random sample, a separate list from each of the FVC's that met minimum criteria was collected by a third party and every fifth family on the data list was given to us. Also, a list from each of the regions that meet minimal standards will be pulled and every tenth family on the data list will also be given to us so that we can compare them separate but equally. Of the approximately 2700 children seen at FVC, a sample of 90 families will be randomly selected. The sample will be large enough that the results can be applied to other settings. Approval was sought, and granted, by the Deputy Director of the Eastern Region of Children and Family Services. The FVC is a fairly new program, in our county, that no one

has researched to see if the program and money invested in the families are assisting the specific population to reunify faster.

### Data Collection and Instruments

Quantitative analytic data was collected by a third party, and the records reviewed were from the period January 1, 2015 thru June 30, 2016. Cases were reviewed by using the Child Welfare System to obtain demographic data, information about reasons for the removal of children, timelines and the independent variable of where the families are visiting, at FVC or at the CFS centers.

We used inferential statistics as we make inferences about the units in our population of families from the information gathered from the sample. One of the strengths of inferential statistics is that we can draw conclusions. The two main limitations of this type of data can be that information about the population is set on values from a sample and the degree of uncertainty and potential for error is present.

### Procedures

The technology used was the Case Management System/California Child Welfare System (CMS/CWS) delivered services: we sought specific data; Delivered Service Type-Referrals to Community Resources and Provider Agency-Visit Center. A third party collected the data from the CMS/CWS based on variables we provided in early 2017. The data collector made a list of every

fifth family which allowed us to review the records and collect information on the specific variables. We collected and documented only the needed information: the reason for removal, visitation plan, demographics within the county, family unit and timelines of reunification, with all personal information (PII) excluded. This information was reviewed by the third-party assistant prior to the researchers being allowed to take the information, to ensure that there is no PII breach.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

The confidentiality and anonymity of participants was protected. We used case records as our only source of information and we excluded all PII during the collection period. The third-party assistant will check our information and variables prior to the data pull. All information was maintained in password protected personal computers for security reason. Maintaining family confidentiality and following HIPPA guidelines was our highest priority with this research. We did not seek information from human subjects and therefore did not use any informed consent.

#### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used on the sample groups to gain information on the population, central tendency and ranges. The specific independent variables of interest were the reason for removal, visitation plan, demographics within the county and family unit. The specific dependent variable is placement

episode length. We were looking to find families that were in the process of family reunification and how visitation centers impact the process of reunification. In order to make these determinations, bivariate analyses including t-Tests, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and correlation tests will be conducted to determine whether there is a significant difference between users of FVC and non-users of FVC and Placement Episode Length, whether the variables of Ethnicity, Office, and Primary Removal Reason impact the Placement Episode Length and whether there is a relationship between the age of the child or the parent and the Placement Episode Length.

### Summary

This study examined the use of FVC among families whose child welfare case plans were in Family Reunification status. The data was retrieved from CMS/CWS. The researchers sought information needed to highlight the effectiveness of FVC in reunifying families. Quantitative methods of collecting the numerical data to explain the use/effectiveness of FVC were used in this research project.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter will discuss the relevant descriptive statistics for the sample. Presentation of the results of the independent samples, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson r Product Moment Correlation will follow which will highlight the relevant results of these analyses. The chapter will be summarized by a brief conclusion.

#### Presentation of the Demographics

The sample consisted of children in Family Reunification status with San Bernardino County. As per the research design, half of the participants held their visits in visitation centers (N = 90, 50.0%) and half of the participants did not hold visits in visitation centers (n = 90, 50.0%). Participants were nearly evenly distributed between four offices, Central (n = 49, 27.2%); Eastern (n = 45, 25.0%); North Desert (n = 38, 21.1%); Western (n = 48, 26.7%). The ethnic diversity of the sample was comprised of a small majority of white participants (n = 45, 24.9%), followed by Black participants (n = 31, 17.1%), then Hispanic (n = 14, 7.7%) making up the majority of the sample; a small group declined to state their ethnicity (n = 29, 15.5%). Most participants' primary reason for removal was General Neglect (n = 92, 50.8%), followed by Caretaker Absence/Incapacity (n = 38, 21.0%), Physical Abuse (n = 24, 13.3%), Severe Neglect, (n = 23, 12.7%) and Emotional Abuse (n = 3, 1.7%). The average age of children at removal was

5 years old ( $M = 5.298$ ,  $SD = 4.4902$ ). The average age of parents at removal was 31 years old ( $M = 31.360$ ,  $SD = 6.8607$ ). The average number of months spent in placement was 11 ( $M = 10.653$ ,  $SD = 7.7366$ ). (See Table 1).

Table 1. Demographics

	n	Percentage	Mean	Std. Dev
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
American Indian	2	1.1%		
Black	31	17.1%		
Declines to State/Indeterminate	29	15.5%		
Filipino	1	.6%		
Hispanic	14	7.7%		
Samoan	1	.6%		
White	45	24.9%		
White – Middle Eastern	1	.6%		
<b>Visitation User</b>				
Yes	90	50%		
No	90	50%		
<b>Office</b>				
Central	49	27.2%		
Eastern	45	25.0%		
North Desert	38	21.1%		
Western	48	26.7%		
<b>Primary Removal Reason</b>				
Physical Abuse	24	13.3%		
General Neglect	92	50.8%		
Caretaker Absence/Incapacity	38	21.0%		
Severe Neglect	23	12.7%		
Emotional Abuse	3	1.7%		
<b>Child Age at Removal</b>			5.298	4.4902
<b>Parent Age at Removal</b>			31.360	6.8607
<b>Placement Episode Length</b>			10.653	7.7366

## Presentation of the Findings

The Data were not examined, prior to conducting the analysis to determine if any assumptions were violated. To determine if there was a significant difference in Placement Episode Length between visitation center users and non-visitation center users, an Independent Samples t-Test was conducted. The outcome:  $t(122) = -2.023$ ,  $p = .045$ ; demonstrates that there was a significant difference in the number of months spent in placement by visitation center users versus non-visitation center users. Families who used visitation centers ( $M = 12.912$ ,  $SD = 3.8563$ ) had longer placement episode lengths than non-visitation center users ( $M = 9.800$ ,  $SD = 8.6326$ ) (See Table 2).

Table 2. Independent Samples t-Test

Variables	<i>n</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Visitation Center User	180	122	-	.045
Placement Episode Length			2.023	

To determine if any other factors had a significant impact on Placement Episode Length, a one-way ANOVA was conducted using Ethnicity, Office, and Primary Removal Reason as independent variables on the dependent variable Placement Episode Length. Ethnicity did not have a significant impact on Placement Episode Length,  $F(25, 98) = .867$ ,  $p = .648$ . The variable "Office" did have a significant impact on Placement Episode Length,  $F(25, 98) = 1.747$ ,  $p =$

.028. The variable Primary Removal Reason did not have a significant impact on Placement Episode Length,  $F(25, 98) = 1.327$ ,  $p = .164$  (See Table 3).

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Variable: Ethnicity</b>		.867	.648
Between	25		
Within	98		
<b>Variable: Office</b>		1.747	.028
Between	25		
Within	98		
<b>Variable: Primary Removal Reason</b>		1.327	.164
Between	25		
Within	98		

To determine if there was a relationship between age and the Placement Episode Length, a Pearson *r* Product Moment Correlation was conducted using Child's Age at Removal and Parent's Age at Removal. A significant, indirect relationship was found to occur with the Child's Age at Removal and the Placement Episode Length,  $r(122) = -.190$ ,  $p = .034$ . There was no significant relationship between the Parent's Age at Removal and the Placement Episode Length,  $r(109) = -.142$ ,  $p = .138$  (See Table 4).

Table 4. Correlations

Variables	<i>df</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Placement Episode Length Child Age @ Removal	122	-.190	.034*
Placement Episode Length Parent Age @ Removal	109	-.142	.138

### Summary

This chapter discussed the relevant univariate and descriptive statistics for the sample; detailed information was presented in tables. The findings of the independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson r Product Moment Correlations were presented.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter discusses the study on the San Bernardino County Visitation Center Outcomes. This study was done to answer the question of whether the families that could utilize the family visitation centers were reunifying faster than the families that did not able to utilize the visitation centers. This is a newer program and a large amount of money is being invested in it, with the hopes that it will improve reunification rates within our county. There are many reasons that the community and families would benefit from families reunifying at a faster pace within our system and finding a way to make that process better is good for everyone.

#### Discussion

Are the families that are utilizing the visitation centers being reunified faster than those that are not utilizing the visitation centers within the County of San Bernardino? The short answer to the question is no, they are not. The first test ran was a t-Test to see if using visitation centers made a significant difference in the amount of time prior to reunification and there was a significant difference between users of visitation centers and placement episode length. Interestingly, though, the families using the visitation centers had longer reunification times than those using traditional and office visitations.

This was not what we expected and it peaked some interest so several other tests were run. In addition to looking at placement length, ethnicity was also a variable; however, there were no significant impact there worth reporting. There was however a significant difference between placement episode length and the location of office the case was assigned to. Cases in the Central office tended to have longer placement episodes than cases in any other region. No other tests ran showed significant findings.

### Limitations

Some limitations of this study were the sample size of FVC users was not large enough for our initial random selection for random selection to occur. In that instance we had to adjust the random selection to fit the sample size. This situation also speaks to a common issue associated with quantitative research is the lack of resources for data collection.

Another limitation to consider, data collection for quantitative research can require a lot of time and resources. In this instance we were given approval to utilize CMS/CWS to extract our data. Once we had our instrument and knew the information we wanted to collect a third party was able to pull the information.

Statistical analysis of quantitative data presented a problem for the researchers as both have basic statistical knowledge.

Finally, the research discussed above utilized a structured questionnaire with closed ended questions. Some may argue this type of data collection is limited and does not accurately represent the population.

## Recommendations for the Social Work Practice, Policy & Research

In finding that the visitation centers are not providing faster reunification processes, it may be in the best interest of the county to conduct further research visitation approaches in other counties, as well as our own. Several million dollars have been invested into this project, and it may be the implementation and current practice has not shown the desired impact at this point, or the study did not ask the right questions. It is well known, a child is best served within his or her own family. The faster that they are returned to their family, once the family has shown to be safe, is better for all involved and the use of visitation centers seems like a step in the right direction. Visitation is the key to reunification; if the parent fails to visit, as the literature says, reunification will fail. We need to keep our eyes focused on our children returning home, and that means keeping visitation a priority.

When considering the future of FVC in San Bernardino County it may be helpful to have all the FVC use the same model. This would improve outcomes to better determine what works and what does not work. In addition to using the same model, the FVC could also have some knowledge of the state regulations guiding child welfare such as Structured Decision Making so that social workers and FVC staff are looking at the same risk and safety consideration. Also, when the current contracts expire modifying the new contract to fee for service plans, may reduce the overall costs of the FVC. A final thought is to possibly expand the FVC to include parenting classes as well.

## Conclusion

Are the families that are utilizing the visitation centers being reunified faster than those that are not utilizing the visitation centers within the County of San Bernardino? Based on the data collected it does not appear that the use of FVC positively affect reunification times. The FVC can be improved or changed, to make a greater impact in the future. Is there a better plan for visitation? There are differing models of visitation, or other aspects to the visitation centers that can be taken into consideration of the future. Maybe it is time to come together as a community and work as a village to come up with a way to help the families heal, repair and reunify.

APPENDIX A

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY VISITATION CENTER INSTRUMENT

## SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY VISITATION CENTER INSTRUMENT

1. Personal ID Number? (ID)
2. Location/Region? (REG)
  - a. Eastern b. Central c. North Desert d. Western
3. Are they using visitation center or office? (VC)
  - a. Visitation center b. CFS office
4. Primary Reason for Removal? (PRR)
  - a. Physical b. Sexual c. Emotional d. Neglect e. Caretaker Absence f. Severe Neglect g. other
5. Secondary Reason for Removal? (SRR)
  - a. Physical b. Sexual c. Emotional d. Neglect e. Caretaker Absence f. Severe Neglect g. other
6. Age of youngest child? (AYC)
7. Age of primary parent at removal? (APP)
8. Race/Ethnicity? (RAC)
  - a. White b. Black c. Hispanic d. Native American e. Asian f. Other
9. Attended Visits? (AV)
  - a. Yes b. No
10. Amount of time to reunify in months? (MTR)  
01\_\_2\_\_3\_\_4\_\_5\_\_6\_\_7\_\_8\_\_9\_\_10\_\_11\_\_12\_\_13\_\_14\_\_15\_\_16\_\_17\_\_18\_\_19\_\_20\_\_21\_\_22\_\_23\_\_  
24\_\_25\_\_26+\_\_

Created by Cynthia Munn-Haywood



PPENDIX B  
IRB APPROVAL

IRB APPROVAL

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK  
Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee

Researcher(s) Cynthia Munn-Haywood & Teri Posey  
Proposal Title San Bernardino County Visitation Center Outcomes  
# SW 1667

Your proposal has been reviewed by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board. The decisions and advice of those faculty are given below.

Proposal is:

- approved
- to be resubmitted with revisions listed below
- to be forwarded to the campus IRB for review

Revisions that must be made before proposal can be approved:

- faculty signature missing
- missing informed consent  debriefing statement
- revisions needed in informed consent  debriefing
- data collection instruments missing
- agency approval letter missing
- CITI missing
- revisions in design needed (specified below)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

[Signature]  
Committee Chair Signature

5/19/16  
Date

Distribution: White-Coordinator; Yellow-Supervisor; Pink-Student

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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:

Assigned leader \_\_\_\_\_  
Assisted by \_\_\_\_\_  
OR  
Joint effort   X  \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Assigned leader \_\_\_\_\_  
Assisted by \_\_\_\_\_  
OR  
Joint effort   X  \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

#### a. Introduction and Literature

Assigned Leader \_\_\_\_\_  
Assisted by \_\_\_\_\_  
OR  
Joint effort   X  \_\_\_\_\_

#### b. Methods

Assigned Leader \_\_\_\_\_  
Assisted by \_\_\_\_\_  
OR  
Joint effort   X  \_\_\_\_\_

#### c. Results

Assigned Leader \_\_\_\_\_  
Assisted by \_\_\_\_\_  
OR  
Joint effort   X  \_\_\_\_\_

#### d. Discussion

Assigned Leader \_\_\_\_\_  
Assisted by \_\_\_\_\_  
OR  
Joint effort   X  \_\_\_\_\_