

Do Dads Matter? Child Welfare Outcomes for Father-Identified Families

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The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services launched the Fatherhood Initiative to facilitate increased fatherhood engagement. To understand how fatherhood identification in child welfare care planning influences outcomes, a secondary data analysis study was conducted to answer the following questions: Are cases that identify fathers associated with decreased time in foster care, shorter time to permanent placement, more reunifications, and increased use of kinship permanency? The children in cases that identified fathers spent more time with a parent during their child welfare case and therefore less time in foster care. These cases more often resulted in reunification with a parent.

KEYWORDS fathers, permanency, foster care, reunification, child welfare

Historically, the child welfare system has focused its interventions on mothers and has not involved or identified fathers in child welfare services (Franck, 2001; O'Donnell, 2001). However, in 2001 the U.S. Department of Health and

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Human Services (DHHS) launched the Fatherhood Initiative. This initiative is guided by the principle that governmental policies and programs promote fathers' involvement. Certain provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), enacted in 1997, encourage the use of kinship placements and concurrent permanency planning, which in turn has resulted in more fathers becoming involved in child welfare cases. While a number of studies discuss involvement of fathers in the child welfare permanency planning process (Featherstone, 2001; Franck, 2001; Malm, Murray, & Geen, 2006), the barriers to serving fathers, and the direct impact of their involvement on their children (Bauman, Silver, & Stein, 2006; Dubowitz et al., 2001; Marshall, English, & Stewart, 2001), at present, few research studies have examined whether identifying fathers influences child welfare case outcomes (DHHS, 2008). This paper continues to build this evidence. Specifically, using data from the first national evaluation of Family Treatment Drug Courts (FTDCs), an intervention that serves parents involved with child welfare due to substance abuse, this secondary data analysis study examined whether cases that identify fathers tend to have decreased time in foster care, shorter time to permanent placement, more reunifications, and greater use of kinship permanency (when the parents are found unable to care for their children).

Potential Benefits of Identifying and Then Involving Fathers

When reviewing the literature on father involvement, it is important to keep in mind that the terms "father" and "father involvement" are defined in various ways across studies exploring benefits of father involvement. For example, studies define father involvement by the extent or quality of involvement, such as the frequency of contact or the level of involvement with the child, or by the father's role in the child's life (e.g., custodial relationships versus noncustodial; Sonnenstein, Malm, and Billings, 2002). Moreover, the term father, while usually referring to the legally identified male parent, may or may not refer to a biological parent. Despite the lack of consistent definition of these terms, the literature provides insight into whether and how the presence of a father, broadly defined, influences child well-being and other outcomes.

The literature speaks to the benefits of identifying and then involving fathers, particularly noncustodial fathers, in their child's life and to how father absenteeism negatively influences child outcomes. These benefits lay a foundation by which potential impacts of father identifying and then involving on child welfare outcomes may be hypothesized. For example, one multisite study found that a father's presence was associated with better cognitive development and perceived competence in children (Dubowitz et al., 2001). Moreover, this study found that as the frequency or level of father interaction or support increased (despite whether the father was a custodial or noncustodial father), so did the child's sense of social competence, while their

depressive symptoms decreased. Howard, LeFever, Borkowski, and Whitman (2006) found that the level of father contact was associated with children's school readiness and social and emotional functioning. The educational literature provides further evidence that father involvement positively influences children. Indeed, the literature describes a positive relationship between family structure, particularly two-parent families, and educational outcomes (Ginter & Pollak, 2004). These outcomes extend to college in that children with two parents involved in their lives are more likely to enter college (Han, Huang, & Garfinkel, 2003). Finally, in one of the few studies of fathers in the child welfare system, Marshall et al., (2001) examined the effects of the presence and quality of interaction between fathers and children involved in child welfare services on child behavior. They found that children with a father were more likely to have lower levels of aggression and depression.

In addition to demonstrating the benefits of father involvement, research has also shown that there are negative impacts on children due to father absenteeism (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1997). Indeed, studies have shown that boys who grow up without their fathers are twice as likely to end up in jail (Harper & McLanahan, 1998). Other studies have shown that children raised without both parents' involvement are more likely to suffer from physical health concerns (Bauman et al., 2006), more likely to be placed in foster care (Shook, 1998), and more likely to be victims of child abuse (Weissman, Jogerst, Johnson, & Dawson, 2003). In fact, the DHHS affirms that children are less likely to be victims of child maltreatment when the father, or any other parent, lives with the child (DHHS, 2004).

Policy Initiatives Designed to Increase Father Involvement

One of the first national initiatives that encouraged father involvement in child welfare services was the ASFA, enacted in 1997. This legislation encourages the use of kinship placements and concurrent planning, which has resulted in more fathers becoming involved in child welfare cases. Next, based on the evidence that father involvement influences emotional and cognitive outcomes for children, the DHHS launched the Fatherhood Initiative, an initiative focused on increasing father involvement in governmental programs. Nationwide, child welfare agencies have adopted the practice of concurrent planning, which encourages caseworkers to pursue more than one goal for the child. Thus, as the caseworker is working toward reunification, usually with the mother, the caseworker is also working on an alternative plan should reunification with the mother become unfeasible. This plan often involves identifying, locating, and serving putative, or noncustodial, fathers (Sonnenstein et al., 2002).

Certain state initiatives stipulate that the first substitute placement priority be for placement in the home of the noncustodial parent, usually the father, or in the home of a suitable relative if the noncustodial parent is unavailable

(Sonnenstein et al., 2002). Moreover, the Adoption and Permanency Guidelines from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Courts state that at the first hearing on a petition alleging abuse or neglect, child welfare caseworkers should initiate the process of locating and including in services all parents involved in the child's life (Sonnenstein et al., 2002). This puts the onus on the child welfare agency to locate and provide services to the noncustodial parent.

Once identified and contacted by child welfare, the majority of fathers appear to become involved with their child and the child welfare case. One study found that once located, up to 62% of fathers agree to participate in child welfare permanency planning by attending family group decision meetings (Theonnes, 2003). Another study found that many fathers are committed to parenting their children despite potential barriers, such as maternal resistance and child welfare bias against some fathers (Laakso & Adams, 2006).

To understand the process by which fathers engage in child welfare case planning, researchers from the Urban Institute were commissioned to examine the extent to which the child welfare system was engaging noncustodial fathers in child welfare case planning. Findings from this study, which included interviews with 1,222 child welfare caseworkers, found that more than two thirds of noncustodial fathers were identified at the time their child's case was opened. However, family and friends of the child were often unwilling, or unable, to provide information about unidentified noncustodial fathers. Circumstances that made it difficult to locate noncustodial fathers included incarceration, homelessness, and living out of the country. Despite these challenges, half of the noncustodial fathers who were contacted expressed interest in having their child live with them; more than half of noncustodial fathers, once identified, had visitation with the child while the child was in foster care. Finally, caseworkers who received training on father involvement were more likely to locate the father. This study demonstrated that if engaged, noncustodial fathers are likely to be involved in their child's case and potentially contribute to their child's well-being (Malm et al., 2006).

Following this 2006 study on father engagement, the Urban Institute examined the relationship between father involvement and case outcomes. Using administrative data from all of the states involved in the original study (Arizona, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Tennessee), this follow-up study included fathers who appeared on the case plan and were involved with child welfare services, as well as those not involved with services. This study was unique because it looked at the level of involvement of nonresident fathers in the child welfare case plan. The results of the study found that when nonresident fathers were involved with their children, there was a higher likelihood of reunification, and that children with highly involved nonresident fathers were more likely to discharge from foster care more quickly (DHHS, 2008).

In sum, although a number of studies discuss the benefits of involving fathers in their children's lives, and that many fathers become involved in their children's child welfare cases, the evidence for the importance of

involving fathers in child welfare cases is just beginning to build. The current study aims to add to the evidence base by examining the relationship between any presence of fathers on child welfare cases and child welfare outcomes. More specifically, this study uses a simple and straightforward operationalization of father involvement—whether or not any father figure is identified on the child welfare case—and whether that makes a difference to child welfare outcomes. Thus, this study uniquely attempts to extend the knowledge base by answering the overriding question: Does father identification in child welfare cases result in increased time spent with a parent during the child welfare case, reduced time to permanency, and increased likelihood of reunification with one or more parent?

Research Questions

The research questions for this study addressed the relationship between family configurations, specifically father-identified versus non-father-identified families and child welfare outcomes, and asked:

Question 1: Do children in cases where there is a father identified in the case spend more time with a parent and less time in foster care?

Question 2: Do child welfare cases where a father is identified take less time to reach a permanent placement?

Question 3: Do child welfare cases where a father is identified result in more reunification or permanent placement with a parent?

Question 4: Do child welfare cases where a father is identified result in more permanent kinship placement?

All of these questions are grounded in the idea that father inclusion at any level in child welfare cases increases the parental and kinship placement resources and therefore improves the likelihood of permanent placement with one or both parents, or with kin.

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This study used data from the first national evaluation of FTDCs (Worcel, Green, Furrer, Burrus, & Finigan, 2005). The FTDC evaluation employed a quasi-experimental, nonequivalent comparison group design using child welfare record data to extend the knowledge base on certain child welfare and substance abuse treatment outcomes for families participating in the program

compared to families who did not participate. This secondary analysis study used the FTDC evaluation data to investigate differences between father-identified and non-father-identified families on child welfare case outcomes.

Administrative Data Collection

The FTDC evaluation used pre-existing administrative data collected through county child welfare offices. Data were not available to the evaluation by electronic download. Instead, extraction forms were developed to transfer the data from the electronic or paper file onto a paper extraction form. These extraction forms were designed to record the data from the original file.

Quality Assurance

Multiple steps were taken during the data collection process to ensure the quality of data collected. First, several child welfare program staff and researchers were consulted to ensure that the administrative data collection forms captured the most important data elements required to answer the program evaluation research questions of interest, and that the forms used terminology reflected in the original data. Second, six staff members, two project managers, and four data collectors piloted the extraction forms using the same primary data sources in order to ensure minimal interrater discrepancy. Once staff reached over 90% agreement on how the data should be extracted, as determined by a review of each rater's form, staff were able to collect data independently. Third, one of the project managers was trained to clean the data so that missing data or illogical patterns would be corrected. Fourth, interrater verification occurred throughout the data collection period. For example, at quarterly site visits, project managers randomly sampled 10% of the collected cases during the previous quarter. Project managers reviewed and extracted the raw data on each of these cases before comparing their extracted data form with the data collector's form. Discrepancies between the project manager and data collector forms were recorded for each reviewed case during each site visit for each site. Results of these audits showed 95% to 100% agreement between the project manager and the data collector at each site visit.

Measurement

The data for the analyses of this study included the following:

Independent Variable

The independent variable in this study is whether the child welfare case is father identified or not. Father identification is defined as whether a father was identified by child welfare. Identification was indicated by a check box on administrative data records. This variable did not account for the level or

quality of engagement of the father by child welfare, or to the extent that the father was involved with services, and was coded as “0 = not father identified (mother only)” and “1 = father identified.”

Covariates

Studies have found that certain demographic characteristics act as predictors for child welfare outcomes (Kemp & Bodonyi, 2002; Worcel et al., 2005). These characteristics include, but are not limited to, the primary parent’s race and prior involvement with child welfare, presence of a child over the age of 3, and the sum of family risk factors for child welfare involvement. The average number of risks for families included in this study, on a scale of 0 to 6 is 2.2 ($SD=1.2$). Therefore, each of these characteristics was accounted for as a covariate in an attempt to isolate the effect of the dependent variable on case outcomes.

RACE/ETHNICITY OF THE PRIMARY PARENT

This categorical characteristic was recoded into a dichotomous variable and the variable recoded as “0 = Caucasian” and “1 = Non-Caucasian.”

OLDER CHILD

This continuous variable (age of child) was recoded into a dichotomous variable and coded as “0 = no older child in the family” and “1 = at least one older child in the family over the age of 3.”

PRIOR CHILD WELFARE

This variable was collected as a dichotomous variable, and was defined as any substantiated child welfare involvement of the primary parent prior to the current case. This variable was coded as “0 = no prior child welfare involvement” and “1 = prior child welfare involvement.”

TOTAL RISK

Child welfare cases are assigned one point for each of the following risk characteristics: presence of an older child, parental substance use, mental health problem, homelessness, prior child welfare involvement, and domestic violence. This continuous variable was coded 0 to 6 for each family.

Outcome Variables

DAYS WITH PARENTS

This continuous variable is the number of days the child was living with one or the other parent during the child welfare case as recorded in the child

welfare case file. The mean number of days with parents during the case for this sample was 173 days ($SD = 169$).

DAYS TO PERMANENT PLACEMENT

This continuous variable was calculated as the number of days from the initial child welfare shelter hearing petition to the final permanent placement date. The mean number of days to permanent placement for all cases was 258 days ($SD = 199$).

REUNIFICATION

This dichotomous variable was coded as “0 = no reunifications” and “1 = reunified with at least one child on the case.” About half of all cases (52%, $n = 1024$) achieved reunification.

KINSHIP PERMANENT PLACEMENT

This dichotomous variable indicated whether the case resulted in a kinship permanent placement and was coded as “0 = no kinship permanency” and “1 = kinship permanency.” Exactly 551 (28%) of the cases indicate kinship permanent placement.

A 2-year data collection window, beginning at the petition date, or the start date of the child welfare court case, was collected on the majority of cases.

Sample and Sample Identification

This study included all child welfare cases involved in the FTDC evaluation. For this study, father identified means that a father figure, biologically related to the child or not, was identified on the child welfare case plan. Identification on the child welfare case plan did not necessarily mean that the father figure was receiving services from child welfare. In fact, while 69% ($n = 836$) of the identified fathers were identified as a potential placement resource and therefore received at least some services from child welfare, the remaining 31% ($n = 375$) of identified father figures may or may not have received services from child welfare. The extent, level, or frequency of the father's involvement with the child is unknown. For that reason, the focus of this study is on any involvement and not on the extent of involvement.

The following is a brief description of the sampling process used in the FTDC evaluation and the results of the sampling process. The Family Treatment Drug Court Evaluation examined the effectiveness of FTDCs in four counties referred to here as sites A through D. Site A implemented a system-wide reform prior to the evaluation, and Site B began its system-wide reform midway through the evaluation. Thus, within-county comparison groups were not available in Site A and were only partially available in

Site B. Thus, two demographically matched counties with no FTDC program were selected and used to draw comparison group samples for the two system-reform counties.

The individual-level administrative data collection in Sites A and B encompasses cases filed between 2000 and 2004. The Site A sample included 477 treatment cases. The Site B sample included 283 treatment cases and 194 pre-system-wide reform comparison cases. The comparison counties each included 200 cases. The sample was built by generating lists from each FTDC program database. In Sites A and B, due to the volume of cases reviewed in this jurisdiction, only a sample of cases were selected; the first 10 cases that entered each month were included in the sample for each year (2000 to 2004) that the sample was built. Comparison group cases for these two sites were selected from child welfare administrative data systems based on whether these cases matched the treatment group across key case characteristics including race/ethnicity, age of child, prior child welfare history, and prior criminality.

For the other two counties (Sites C and D), all child welfare cases with an indicated substance use issue at the time of petition for shelter care, that began between July 2002 and July 2005, were included in the administrative data sample. The total Site C sample included 132 treatment cases and 268 comparison cases. The total Site D sample included 88 treatment cases and 127 comparison cases. Thus, the total sample available is 980 treatment cases and 989 comparison cases involving several thousand parents and children.

Sample Characteristics

The data available for this study represent 1,969 child welfare cases from six child welfare jurisdictions (four counties in California, one county in Nevada, and one county in New York). Of the total number of child welfare cases available, 1,211 (62%) cases were father identified. Half of the primary parents in these cases are Caucasian (51%, $n = 1,004$), with the second most predominant being Hispanic (28%, $n = 551$), followed by African American (13%, $n = 256$). In this study, 74% ($n = 1457$) of the cases have at least one older child, and less than half (42%, $n = 827$) of the cases include a primary parent with prior child welfare involvement. Analysis of all available characteristics was conducted between treatment cases and comparison cases and found that the comparison cases were more likely to contain Caucasian cases than FTDC cases. However, it is noted that this characteristic is accounted for in the analysis. A summary table of these characteristics is provided in Table 1.

RESULTS

The unit of analysis for this study is the case, or the family, which may include a mother figure, a father, and the case-involved children. Each of the

TABLE 1 Sample Sizes, Means, and Standard Deviations for Continuous Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Total Risk Factors (<i>n</i> = 1,969)	2.2	1.2

Sample Sizes and Percentages for Dichotomous Variables	
Variable	Percentage
Father identified (<i>n</i> = 1,211) N = 1969	62%
Caucasian (<i>n</i> = 1,004) N = 1907	51%
Prior child welfare (<i>n</i> = 827) N = 1790	42%
Older child (<i>n</i> = 1457) N = 1966	74%

following research questions is followed by statistical findings. Linear regression was employed to test the first two research questions examining days spent with a parent during the child welfare case, and mean days to permanency. Logistic regression was used to test the second two research questions, as these questions include dichotomous dependent variables (whether reunification occurred or not and whether kinship permanency was used or not). Each of the following was included as a covariate in all analyses: primary parent's race and prior child welfare involvement, presence of at least one child over the age of 3, and family risk. The independent (predictor) variable for all analyses was identification of a father figure on the case.

QUESTION 1

Do children in cases where there is a father identified spend more time with a parent and less time in foster care?

Linear regression analysis using the number of days the child spent with a parent as the dependent variable found that cases that identified a father spent more time with a parent and therefore less time in foster care, R^2 change = .04, $F(1, 1558) = 36.8$, $p < .00$ (See Table 2).

QUESTION 2

Do child welfare cases where a father is identified take less time to reach a permanent placement?

Results from this study found no difference in the number of days to reach permanency between cases that identified fathers and cases that did not identify fathers, R^2 change = .02, $F(1, 1613) = .10$, $p > .05$ (see Table 2).

TABLE 2 Summary of Regression Analyses Predicting Days With Parent and Days to Permanent Placement

Variables	Days with parent ($n = 1,901$)			Days to permanent placement ($n = 1,453$)		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Mother's Race	-8.83	2.74	-.081**	5.95	1.99	.075**
Age of Child	-20.13	11.01	-.046	.875	8.03	.003
Prior Child Welfare	-37.99	9.47	-.100**	27.53	6.88	.099**
Total Risk	-6.99	4.04	-.043	6.59	2.93	.056*
Father Identified	60.62	9.99	.151**	2.24	7.21	.756
R^2		.041			.019	
F for change in R^2		36.797**			.097	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

QUESTION 3

Do child welfare cases where a father is identified result in more reunification or permanent placement with a parent?

Results showed that father-identified cases were more likely to result in more reunifications or permanent placements with a parent, than non-father-identified cases. The coefficient for father-identified cases is positive and statistically significant at $p < .01$ level. Cases identifying fathers are 1.6 times more likely to result in reunification than non-father-identifying cases (see Table 3).

QUESTION 4

Do child welfare cases where a father is identified result in more permanent kinship placement?

In this study, it was found that identifying a father did not increase the likelihood that cases where parents' rights are terminated are more likely to see a permanent placement with kin (see Table 3).

TABLE 3 Summary of Logistic Regression Analyses Predicting Reunification and Kinship Permanency

Variables	Reunification ($n = 1,588$)			Kinship permanency ($n = 1,581$)		
	B	SE B	e^B	B	SE B	e^B
Mother's Race	-.017	.032	.98	.031	.035	1.03
Age of Child	-.040	.129	.96	-.006	.143	0.99
Prior Child Welfare	-.357	.111	.70**	.026	.122	1.03
Total Risk	-.090	.047	.91	.040	.052	1.04
Father Identified	.356	.115	1.59**	.097	.129	1.10
Model Chi Square		24.39			1.93	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

DISCUSSION

Summary

The purpose of this research was to uncover whether a statistically significant relationship exists between family configuration and certain child welfare service delivery and permanency outcomes. The overriding question was, Does any identification of a father figure in child welfare cases result in increased time spent with a parent during the child welfare case, reduced time to permanency, and increased likelihood of reunification with one or more parent?

Results found that presence of fathers in child welfare cases was associated with more time spent with one or both parents and eventually more permanent placements with a parent than cases involving non-father-identified families. Both of these results are good news for children, families, and the child welfare system. First, that father identification results in more time spent with a parent means that children are living at home with one or both parents, rather than spending much of their child welfare case in foster care. Second, as reunification may often be seen as a desirable case outcome, the likelihood that father-identified cases result in reunification demonstrates that engaging fathers in these cases may be worthwhile. Given that engaging the father in the child welfare case results in an additional available parent, it is not surprising that increased opportunities exist for the child to be placed with a parent both during the case and as a permanent placement.

Despite these encouraging results, statistically significant relationships between family configuration and time to permanent placement, as well as use of kin for permanency (for those cases that result in a termination of parental rights) were not found. Rather than expediting the time to permanent placement, including fathers in child welfare cases does not reduce the time to permanency. A potential explanation for this is that including fathers in child welfare increases the complexity of the case, therefore even though additional placement resources are available, father inclusion results in no change to case processing. An additional explanation may be that given the prescriptive nature of ASFA timelines and the regularity at which child welfare cases proceed, including standard semi-annual review hearings, father identification is not likely to influence systemic case processing. Systemic issues may also explain why an increased likelihood of kinship permanency was not found in this study. As father identification in child welfare cases may result in not just one additional person in the child's life, the father, but also the paternal relatives, it is surprising that kinship permanency is not more likely in father-identified child welfare cases. Perhaps, while fathers may be engaged in the child welfare case, paternal relatives are not.

The literature presented in this paper suggested that father identification in social service programs influences cognitive, emotional, and physical

outcomes for children and results in less child maltreatment. The results from this study align with this literature, and suggest that father identification may be related to less foster care use and more reunification. However, an alternative hypothesis could be argued that virtually all of the significant relationships reported between family configuration and child welfare outcomes can be parsimoniously accounted for by the simple difference of parental availability between having two parents rather than one parent involved in the system. However, while it may seem that this availability argument supports a policy shift toward two-parent families, in actuality, only 18% of the fathers ($n = 216$ out of 1,211) included in this study were married to the mother of the child involved with child welfare. Thus, rather than arguing that two-parent families matter, it appears that the identification of a father does matter for select child welfare outcomes.

It is worth noting that the father-identification child welfare cases in this study demonstrated slightly more risk factors than single parent families. As domestic violence is considered a family risk factor, and given that domestic violence is likely more frequent when both parents are identified than it is for single parent families, this risk factor might account for additional risk in some father-involved cases. Thus, it could be argued that father identification may not always be in the best interest of the child. Indeed, in situations when the father's behavior may be a detriment or harm to his child, father identification is likely not in the best interest of the child.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from this study have both policy and practice recommendations and implications, and recommendations for further areas of inquiry. Specifically, this research presents at least three key policy recommendations. First, the evidence from this study shows that when legally identified fathers are involved in child welfare case planning and service delivery, these child welfare cases are likely to see more time spent with a parent and, therefore, less out-of-home-substitute foster care utilization. Therefore, another consequence of identifying fathers may be reduced foster care costs. Recent studies have found that reduced time in foster care can save millions of dollars to the taxpayer (Burrus & Worcel, 2007; Finigan, Crumpton, & Worcel, 2005). The second policy implication is related to the finding that father-identified families may be more likely to result in reunification. Here again, financial benefits are evident in that reunification with one or both parents is likely to consume fewer taxpayer dollars than long-term foster care or other less stable permanency outcomes. This leads to the third policy implication, which is the need for child welfare practitioners to continue efforts to identify fathers.

The fourth policy implication relates to kinship. This study found no evidence that father involvement results in increased use of kinship

permanency. Although father involvement potentially increases the number of kin available for permanency resources should the parents become unable to care for their children, and while studies have shown that kinship care may result in positive implications for children whose parents are unable to care for them, including better continuity, stability, and reduced behavior risks (Lorkovich, Piccola, Groza, Brindo, & Marks, 2004), this study did not find that father identification increases the use of kinship permanency. However, additional analysis for those father-identified cases used as placement resources did indicate these cases resulted in more time spent with kin, which suggests these families may be additionally engaged in the child welfare case process as father involvement increases in the overall child welfare process. Here again, this speaks to how and whether child welfare case-workers identify and involve both fathers and their extended family members.

Recommendations for Future Research

A primary area for further research includes understanding the extent and quality of father identification to achieve desired child welfare outcomes. Follow-up hypotheses to this study might include: How, and in what ways, is father engagement measurable; and once measured, how much, or to what extent, must fathers engage in child welfare case and permanency planning for father identification to influence child welfare case planning and permanency outcomes? Now that these data have indicated a relationship between father identification and certain outcomes, the next logical step is to understand the level or frequency of father involvement required to achieve the most positive outcomes for children involved in the child welfare system. While the 2008 DHHS study began to explore the question of father involvement, and this study provides even more evidence that any involvement or identification supports child welfare outcomes, a more detailed understanding of the role of fathers, and the extent to which nonresident fathers should be involved and when, appears to deserve further exploration and understanding.

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