

RAP Sheet

RESEARCH ADVANCING PRACTICE

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MISSION STATEMENT

The *RAP Sheet* is intended to inform professionals across the state of Nebraska of current findings from social science research that could impact the delivery of services to children and families. Summaries of recent articles from academic journals (and occasionally book chapters) on the areas of child protection and juvenile justice are the focus, with smaller sections reserved for announcements and websites of interest. Other topics will be included in special issues as needed. Citations are provided in the format used by the American Psychological Association (APA), and are available through many university libraries. The *RAP Sheet* is funded in part by the State of Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services System. Comments and suggestions are always welcome and can be sent to the editors or faculty advisor.

■ HOUSING ASSISTANCE, PROBLEM SOLVING AND SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING MAY BENEFIT NEGLECTFUL MOTHERS

Two groups of single mothers in rural and urban Georgia were compared: 95 mothers who provided adequate supervision for their children and 37 mothers who did not (as judged by child protective services). Although the two groups were similar in terms of income level and race, there were important differences that may help to explain their parenting behaviors. Mothers providing inadequate supervision were more likely to have had housing problems (multiple moves, homelessness, etc.), were less motivated to take care of their children, and were less skilled at problem-solving and social interaction. Their findings suggest that housing assistance and training in problem-solving and social skills could positively impact mothers at risk of neglectful behavior.

Coohey, C. (1998). Home alone and other inadequately supervised children. *Child Welfare*, 77, 291-310.

■ POVERTY ISSUES ARE OFTEN INVOLVED IN REUNIFICATION FAILURES

Using Department of Social Services (DSS) files for San Diego County, this study examined families whose children had been removed from the home for longer than 72 hours between April, 1990, and October, 1991, and who had been reunified. The analysis was designed to identify factors that were associated with re-referral to DSS, or re-entry into the foster care system, after reunification. The factors with the most impact appeared to be poverty and poverty-related issues (e.g., inadequate housing, receipt of public assistance, neglect, etc.) suggesting that social service workers should specifically address these issues with reunified families, making referrals to other service providers as necessary.

Jones, L. (1998). The social and family correlates of successful reunification of children in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 20, 305-323.

■ INVOLVEMENT IN SERVICE PLANNING INCREASES FOSTER PARENT SATISFACTION

This article reported the results of a mail survey of 1160 current foster parents in New York in 1993. Foster parents who had in-person contact with caseworkers rated their

own involvement in service planning higher than foster parents who did not report having such contact. Foster parents who felt they were more involved in service planning were more satisfied with their experience. Although the findings reflected only the experiences of current foster parents in New York State who returned the survey, implications are suggested. Including foster parents in service planning activities, and face-to-face contact (rather than simple phone contact) with caseworkers is likely to increase foster parents' satisfaction, which may lead to better retention (these links may be especially true for foster parents caring for "special needs" children). Finally, preservice training for foster parents in service planning may be helpful.

Sanchirico, A., Lau, W.J., Jablonka, K., & Russell, S.J. (1998). Foster parent involvement in service planning: Does it increase job satisfaction? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 20, 325-346.

■ CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE ARE AT HIGH RISK FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Children in foster care and other out-of-home placements are at significantly higher risk for a variety of mental health problems (emotional, behavioral, social, educational, and developmental). This is due mostly to a combination of factors: the context surrounding the crisis and transition to out-of-home care, the conditions occurring prior to the transition (including parental substance abuse, family violence, neglect, etc.), and characteristics of the child and family. The authors suggested a framework for the delivery of mental health services for these children based on three phases: prevention-evaluation, treatment, and maintenance. Mental health services for these families should be integrated within the total social service system, focus on prevention as well as treatment, be tailored to the specific needs of the child/family, and be of adequate duration. More specific suggestions are included within the article.

Schneiderman, M., Connors, M.M., Fribourg, A., Gries, L., & Gonzales, M. (1998). Mental health services for children in out-of-home care. *Child Welfare*, 77, 29-40.

■ CHILDHOOD PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL ABUSE INCREASES LIKELIHOOD OF GANG INVOLVEMENT

Using surveys from 2358 students in the 6th through 12th grades, these authors examined the connection between maltreatment and gang involvement in a midwestern school district. Being physically or sexually abused (or both) increased the likelihood that a youth had been involved in a gang fight. This relationship held true even after taking into account the effects of gender, grade, race/ethnicity, and family structure. Although several parental variables (support, communication, supervision, and interest in child's education) were also related to these youths' gang involvement, the relationship between maltreatment and gang involvement was stronger. The authors suggest that prevention of maltreatment may be a more effective means of decreasing gang involvement than intervention after maltreatment has occurred.

Thompson, K. M., & Braaten-Antrim, R. (1998). Youth maltreatment and gang involvement. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 13, 328-345.

■ **CHILDHOOD ABUSE OR NEGLECT INCREASES THE LIKELIHOOD OF LATER VIOLENT CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR**

These researchers examined juvenile and adult criminal records of 1575 people— 908 of whom had been maltreated at or before the age of 11. Results indicated that although the majority had no family history of criminality, physically abused or neglected children had a higher likelihood of being arrested for violent crime in adolescence and adulthood. In addition, individuals who had been physically abused or neglected were more likely to be arrested younger, and to be arrested more often than those who had not been maltreated. The authors suggested that intervention needs to occur as early as possible for physically abused and neglected children, especially for those who have behavior problems, and those who cycle through foster homes.

Widom, C.S., & Maxfield, M.G. (1996). A prospective examination of risk for violence among abused and neglected children. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 794, 224-237.

■ **INCARCERATED FEMALE OFFENDERS HAVE THREE TIMES THE RATE OF MENTAL DISORDER AS INCARCERATED MALES**

In this article, it was found that out of 173 youth offenders (121 males and 52 females) housed in a state institution in Ohio, 27% of males and 84% of females had some type of mental disorder. Considering these high percentages, the authors suggested that institutional staff need to be able to recognize symptoms of depression, anxiety disorders, psychotic disorders, and suicidal tendencies. In addition, youths in institutions should be evaluated to see if psychotherapy and/or medication are appropriate. Lastly, it is suggested that our justice system, which has been traditionally centered on males, needs to broaden its focus to include knowledge about females who engage in delinquent behavior in order to improve prevention and intervention programs.

Timmons-Mitchell, J., Brown, C., Schulz, S.C., Webster, S.E., Underwood, L.A., & Semple, W.E. (1997). Comparing the mental health needs of female and male incarcerated juvenile delinquents. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 15, 195-202.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!

► **Family Violence Conference.** May 26-27, 1999, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This conference is sponsored by UNL's Family Research and Policy Initiative. Six nationally known experts regarding family violence will discuss the current state of knowledge about family violence. For more information call Chris Wiklund, 402.472.3479

► **Y2Kids: Protecting Nebraska's Children and Families in the 21st Century.** October 26-29, 1999, Kearney, NE. This statewide conference is sponsored by the Governor's Commission for the Protection of Children and the Nebraska Court Improvement Project and is being planned by the faculty at the Center on Children, Families, and the Law. A number of nationally recognized speakers and trainers will address many aspects of child abuse and neglect. Protection and Safety workers, administrators, attorneys, judges, law enforcement personnel, health care providers, educators, and policymakers will be invited to attend. Plan to be there for all or part of what should be a great training opportunity with colleagues from across the state. For more information call Chris Wiklund, 402.472.3479

WEBSITES TO BOOKMARK

The following websites are very helpful in providing current information:

- Child Welfare League
www.cwla.org
- Children's Defense Fund
www.childrensdefense.org
- National CASA
www.nationalcasa.org
- American Bar Association Center on Children & the Law
www.abanet.org/child/
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
www.ncjrs.org/ojjdp/

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