RESEARCH ADVANCING PRACTICE
VOLUME 1, NO. 2
SPRING 1999

NEBRASKA CHILDREN WITH BEHAVIORAL IMPAIRMENTS LIKELY TO BE IN FOSTER CARE LONGER

1252 Nebraska children in out-of-home care were tracked through the foster care system using data from the Foster Care Review Board. Behaviorally impaired children were compared with “behaviorally impaired with other handicap” children and with non-behaviorally impaired children on several variables. Not surprisingly, behaviorally impaired children (with and without other handicaps) were more likely to be in care over four years. In fact, behavioral impairment was the strongest predictor of length of time in care. Other findings showed that behaviorally impaired children were more likely to be male, to be older when entering and leaving care, to be placed in the same county as their family of origin, and to have experienced physical or sexual abuse. Results suggest that mental health services be sought for behaviorally impaired children as early as possible, and that these children should be placed in therapeutic foster care when possible. Although these children are likely to have some degree of impairment before entering care, the experience of long-term care or multiple placements may exacerbate the problem.


PEER RELATIONSHIPS MAY BE ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT, AND ESPECIALLY IMPAIRED, FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Peers are an important part of children’s development; they provide opportunities for cognitive, social, moral, and emotional growth. Foster children often face special challenges in their peer relationships. Removal from home or placement may move them away from their peer group. Difficulties within the family (including violence) increase the likelihood that children will be overly aggressive or extremely avoidant, which decreases their chances at forming and maintaining positive peer relationships. Furthermore, children with poor peer relationships are at risk for later developmental problems as well. Fortunately, positive, stable peer relationships can also buffer the negative effects of an unstable home life. It is suggested that child protective service workers and foster parents become aware of children’s social networks when considering how the child is faring in a particular placement. Also, the extent and kind of peer support a child has should be added to the (already long) list of factors influencing the “next placement” decision for a child. Finally, social skills programs may be helpful services to seek for children in out-of-home care who exhibit problems with peers.


MULTIETHNIC PLACEMENT ACT HAS GOOD INTENTIONS, MAY BE DIFFICULT TO IMPLEMENT: SUGGESTIONS PROVIDED IN REPORT

The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 and the 1996 Interethnic Adoption Provisions changed the guidelines concerning interethnic adoption. Although the goal was to reduce the amount of time foster children (especially minorities) spend waiting for adoptive homes, child welfare professionals still face several challenges in interpretation and implementation. These authors argue that the controversial nature of transracial adoption, the ambiguity of the guidelines, and the government’s unrealistic assumptions and expectations will prohibit the laws from functioning as intended. Additionally, child welfare professionals have to contend with competing interests, lack of control over significant factors, lack of resources, and lack of information concerning the relationship between ethnicity, placement, and a child’s development. Suggestions are provided in condensed form in the article, with the full report available at http://cssr2.socwel.berkeley.edu/ccwe/reports/report.html.


YOUTH SEXUAL OFFENDERS NEED TO BE TREATED DIFFERENTLY THAN ADULT SEXUAL OFFENDERS

An increasing number of child sexual assault perpetrators are children themselves. In fact, over 50% of male child victims, and 20-30% of female child victims are abused by older juveniles. Treatment for these sexually abusive youth has historically been modeled after treatment programs for adult sexual perpetrators. Recently, however, a developmental perspective has begun to shape treatment programs especially designed for youthful offenders. While adult-oriented programs are based on a belief of a lifetime propensity for relapse, many youthful offenders are believed to be capable of returning to a normal developmental path with proper intervention. Sexually abusive behaviors by youths are viewed as a result of deviant learning and/or developmental deficits, and it is assumed that many youths can replace their sexual deviance with more normative sexual desires and behaviors. Advocates believe that treatment should focus on nurturing the youth instead of the traditional tearing down and rebuilding process that is often used for adult sexual offenders. The consensus approach to treating youthful sex offenders includes the following six goals: 1) consistent definition of the abuse in their daily lives and in relation to their sexual fantasies; 2) recognition of the patterns associated with the abusive cycle; 3) demonstration of new competencies that interrupt those patterns; 4) acknowledgment of the risk of relapse (this demonstrates decreased denial and supports the use of

Published quarterly by the University of Nebraska’s Center on Children, Families and the Law (CCFL), 121 S. 13th Street, Suite 302, Lincoln, NE 68588-0227. For inquiries and news article suggestions contact Jennifer Wyatt, Editor, at CCFL 402-472-3479 or fax 402-472.8412.

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.
GANG MEMBERSHIP ITSELF MAY BE MORE DETRIMENTAL THEN SIMPLY HAVING DELINQUENT FRIENDS

The effect of gang membership on youth delinquency was studied by following 808 students from ethnically diverse, low-income areas in Seattle, from age 13-15. Specifically, the delinquency of three groups was compared: gang members, non-gang youth with delinquent friends, and non-gang youth with no delinquent friends. It was found that gang members engaged in more delinquency (particularly violent delinquency), sold more drugs, and drank alcohol more frequently than non-gang who had or did not have delinquent friends. In fact, across all of the violent, nonviolent, and general delinquency measures, the same trend emerged: gang members exhibited the most delinquent behaviors, followed by non-gang youth with delinquent peers, followed lastly by non-gang youth with non-delinquent peers. This research suggests that gang membership contributes to delinquency in youth above and beyond simply having delinquent peers. Because gang membership seems to actually intensify delinquent acts more than just associating with delinquent friends alone, the authors emphasize the need for gang prevention programs that can effectively prevent youth from joining gangs.


RURAL AND URBAN STUDENTS REPORT FEW DIFFERENCES IN GANG INVOLVEMENT, BUT DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

2138 Nevada students (rural and urban, from grades 7 to 12) were compared on their similarities and differences in gang membership. Because this is a self-report study of adolescents, the results need to be interpreted with some caution. However, many important similarities and differences between urban and rural youth were found. For example, about 20% of both rural and urban students identified themselves as gang members. Additionally, the two groups reported no difference in pressure to join gangs. Urban students were, however, more likely to report that they had friends in gangs, and felt more threatened by gangs. They also reported more concern for their personal safety, and more violence in their schools and community. Thus, while as many rural students report they belong to gangs as urban students, rural students perceive their communities and schools as much safer places. Interestingly, there was no difference in the length of time gang members had lived in their communities. The authors stated that this suggests the spread of gangs to rural areas may be more of a “home grown” phenomenon than simply the transplantation of urban gang members in rural areas.


**BOOKMARKS**

- Natl Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Info  
  www.calib.com/nccanch
- Future of Children  
  www.futureofchildren.org
- Stand for Children  
  www.stand.org
- Administration for Children and Families  
  www.acf.dhhs.gov
- Center on Children, Families, and the Law  
  www.unl.edu/ccf/ccfl.htm
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention  
  ***New Address***
  ojjdp.ncjrs.org

Editor: Jennifer M. Nyott  
jnyott@unl.edu
Assistant Editor: Angela L. Williams  
awillam@unl.edu
Faculty Advisor: Vicki Nelsen  
vnelsen@unl.edu
Layout: Chris Wildund  
gwildund@unl.edu

Funding provided by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, UNL’s Center on Children, Families, and the Law, and the Nebraska Court Improvement Project.