


What do parents perceive about their involvement with child welfare services? Implications for intervention

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Presenter Disclosures

Lianne Estefan

- The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed in the past 12 months:
 - No relationships to disclose




Background

- Approximately 700,000 children were victims of maltreatment in 2009 (US DHHS, 2010)
- Families who maltreat their children often face other stressors
 - Intimate partner violence
 - Substance abuse
 - Mental health issues





Child Welfare System

- Child welfare system
- Florida's model
- Importance of intervening effectively

Parents' experiences with child welfare system

- Themes
 - Power relationships between parent and worker
 - Satisfaction with child welfare services
 - Communication
- Gaps in research
 - "General dearth of information on how parents view their experience in it" (Baker, 2007, p. 1190)
 - Most research focused on mothers
 - Parents' experiences throughout child welfare process



Purpose of Study

- Explore parents' lived experiences navigating the child welfare system
 - Using family-centered perspective
- Identify more effective interventions and approaches for children and families

Research Design



- In-depth, in-person, semi-structured interviews
- Recruited through Nurturing Parenting Program
- Recruitment
 - In person
 - Mailed letters

Interview Guide



- Explore lived experiences of how parents experience child welfare process
- General topics:
 - Strengths and concerns about family and children
 - Family history (including violence)
 - Reason for referral to child welfare system
 - Service pathways and service receipt
 - Appropriateness of services
 - Empowerment

Participants



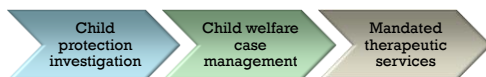
- N=21
- 14 involved with child welfare services, 7 diversion services
- 12 mothers, 7 fathers or boyfriends, 2 grandparents who acted as caregivers
- 7 couples (5 married, 2 dating)

Results

Parental Involvement in the Child Welfare System



- Reasons for involvement
- Parental response to the child welfare process
- Trajectory of parental involvement:



Areas that Influence Child Welfare Experience



- Parents' responses and perceptions were impacted by how they were treated throughout the investigation, involvement with the child welfare system, and therapeutic agencies
- Themes:
 - Control and lack of choice
 - Respect and concern for parents
 - Lack of empowerment
 - Communication
 - Caseworker supportiveness

Child Protection Investigation (CPI)



- Lack of respect and concern for parents
 - Attitudes of investigators were often abrasive and judgmental
- Control by CPI
- Stigma

I thought that they, they felt like they thought about me like I was a piece of white trash or something. And that's the way with their attitude and voices and everything.
[Father]

Child Welfare Caseworker



- Communication
- Control
- Caseworker supportiveness

Communication



- Critical component to understanding and reactions to child welfare system
- Poor communication led to confusion, fear, and frustration

Am I a child abuser because my name is on there? ...Now I have a case plan. Case plan for what? Neglect for my child? What am I being charged with? What does this mean? Name goes in an abuse registry, what? Tell me. Let me know! Nothing. They won't tell you anything. [Mother]

Lack of Control



- No voice in shaping the case plan
- Given a “check list” of tasks they needed to complete
- Felt more positive when felt they had a voice in the decision-making process

It's so frustrating. Like you're in their hands, and whatever they want to do, they are going to do... it's them in control, not you in control. So you don't have any choice but to do whatever. [Mother]

Caseworker Supportiveness



- Often not responsive to participant needs, even when asked for specific assistance
- Participants responded to small demonstrations of caseworker encouragement

At the end, they really kinda believed in us, so then it was like, it was easier to get through.
[Mother]


Experiences with Specific Service Types



- Most helpful part of child welfare process
- First time many participants felt supported or empowered
 - Intimate partner violence services
 - Parenting program
 - Substance abuse services




Discussion and Implications



Lack of Empowerment

- Stigma
 - Began with investigation and continued throughout process
- Negative interactions with investigators, caseworkers, and others in the system led to lack of empowerment for parents
- Little understanding of what the “child welfare process” meant and their role in it
- Lack of effective communication



Responsiveness of Services

- Families had many challenges as well as strengths
- Few participants felt that they received supportive or empowering services until reaching the mandated therapeutic services
 - Should be able to track these types of outcomes throughout system
 - Isolation of therapeutic services



Implications for Child Welfare Intervention

- Need for continued shift to more family-centered, strengths-based, and responsive services
- Individual changes
- System-wide changes




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