



Preserving Stability After Foster Care: A Study of Post- Permanency Services in Illinois

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Adoption and Guardianship Trends



The major successes that have been realized in achieving permanence for families bring new questions and challenges:

- What are the needs of these families?
- What is the most effective way to support these needs?
- How can such programs and services be financed?
- What is the state/federal government's role in supporting these children and families?



A Call for Action in Illinois

In March 2005, the Illinois House of Representatives passed a resolution that called for an in-depth study of post-adoption services and subsidies, specifically including:

- Examination of recent trends in the achievement of permanency among children in substitute care in Illinois
- Comparative analysis of post-permanency services and subsidies available in Illinois and other states
- Survey of adoptive parents to determine their post-permanency service needs

The Illinois Post-Permanency Studies



The Children and Family Research Center at the University of Illinois began work on three studies:

1. A statewide telephone survey of a randomly selected sample of adoptive and guardianship parents regarding post-permanency service needs
2. A national survey of child welfare administrators regarding post-adoption spending, services, and subsidies
3. An administrative data analysis of permanency trends in Illinois



Sample Selection

The population of children eligible for selection into the study included those who:

- Were adopted or taken into subsidized guardianship between July 1, 1997 and June 30, 2002;
- Had an open adoption or guardianship subsidy case as of June 30, 2005; and
- Were between the ages of 6 and 17 as of June 30, 2006.

Sample Selection



- 18,708 adopted children and 2,951 children in subsidized guardianship were eligible for inclusion in the study.
- To ensure adequate representation of children throughout the state, the population was divided into two groups (Cook and non-Cook) and two separate samples of approximately 250 were selected for the study.



The final sample consisted of 498 families (caregiver-child pairs). Of this sample, 350 caregivers were interviewed (70% completion rate):

- 304 adoptive parents (87%)
- 45 subsidized guardianship caregivers (13%)

Caregiver Characteristics

The caregivers:

- Ranged in age from 29 to 82, with a mean age of 54 years
- Were 93% female
- 43% were married, 25% were divorced or separated, 14% were widowed, and 18% were single
- 47% were employed; 53% were unemployed or retired
- 25% described their health as excellent, 52% as good, 21% as fair, and 2% as poor

Child Characteristics



The children:

- Ranged in age from 6 to 16, with a mean age of 12 years
- 53% were male and 47% were female
- 22% had one or more physical health problems
- 30% had a diagnosed mental health disorder
- 31% were receiving special education services
- The average total score on the Behavior Problem Index was 11 (of a possible total score of 28), compared to a national average score of 6.4

Household Characteristics



The households:

- Total number of children living in the home ranged from 1 to 12, with a median of 3
- Family income ranged considerably:
 - 30% reported \$20,000 or less
 - 38% reported \$21,000 - \$40,000
 - 18% reported \$41,000 - \$60,000
 - 15% reported \$61,000 or more



Service Needs

The total number of service needs per family ranged from 0 to 13 (out of a possible total of 19):

- 15% reported no service needs
- 22% reported one service need
- 13% reported two service needs
- 13% reported three service needs
- 25% reported 4 to 6 service needs
- 12% reported 7 to 13 service needs

Service Needs



The five most frequently needed services:

- Dental care (39%)
- Day care (37%)
- Counseling (35%)
- Camp (35%)
- Psychological evaluation (26%)

Unmet Service Needs



The percentage of families that reported that they needed a service but did not receive it (unmet need):

- 84% reported no unmet service needs
- 14% reported 1 to 3 unmet service need
- 2% reported 4 or 5 unmet service needs

Unmet Service Needs

The five greatest unmet needs were:

- Drug/alcohol treatment (100%)
- Educational advocacy (52%)
- Respite care (50%)
- Preservation services (42%)
- Day care (41%)



Unmet Service Needs

Two characteristics distinguished families with no unmet service needs from families with at least one unmet need:

- Children with a diagnosed mental health problem were more likely to have unmet service needs ($p < .01$)
- Children who scored in the clinical range of the Behavior Problem Index were more likely to have unmet service needs ($p < .001$)



Summary of Findings

Examination of the services that post-adoption and guardianship families need reveals that they are much like “traditional” families in that most require few services, and the most commonly needed services are “routine” services such as day care and dental care.

About one-third of the sample (37%) reported having 4 or more services needs. Children with physical, mental health, or behavioral problems were more likely to need services than those without these problems.

Summary of Findings



Most families that need services are able to obtain them – 84% of the families in the sample had no unmet service needs.

Families reported that they often got the services on their own without assistance from the state agency.

Children with mental health or behavioral problems were especially likely to have unmet service needs, as well as children who scored in the clinical range of the Behavior Problem Index.



Service Implications

- Meeting the service delivery challenges of the “post-permanency world” calls for innovative partnerships among federal and state governments with local service providers and child welfare researchers.
- Families dealing with mental and behavioral health problems may need access to a wider array of post-permanency services, as well as additional assistance in overcoming the obstacles associated with service delivery.

Conclusions

The successful movement to bring permanence to the lives of foster children through adoption and guardianship is one of the great success stories in recent child welfare history. To preserve this success, we believe that state and federal governments must increase their commitment to support these families post-finalization.

Conclusions

This increased support should occur through:

1. Federal child welfare finance reform that allows states to use the savings that have occurred from moving children out of foster to provide additional funding to post-adoption and guardianship services
2. Changes in post-adoption service delivery to include prompt outreach to all families so that services can be implemented before unmet needs reach critical levels, as well as comprehensive treatment programs that can be immediately accessed if problems are identified.