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The Impact of Title IV-E Training on Case Outcomes for Children Serviced by CPS

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Empirical studies have demonstrated that Title IV-E child welfare training partnership programs contribute directly to the development and maintenance of a skilled and stable child welfare workforce. Social work graduates of the stipend program have better retention rates (Brown, Chavkin, & Peterson, 2002; Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Robin & Hollister, 2002), are more confident in their abilities (Gansle & Ellett, 2002), are more competent in terms of their knowledge, skills, coping, and assertiveness (Brown et al., 2002; Gansle & Ellett, 2002; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2003), and are more prepared to enter the field of child welfare (Clark, 2003). However, there are currently very few publications examining the case outcomes of Title IV-E stipend recipients. As many federal programs discuss possible budget cuts, it is imperative that partnership programs are able to demonstrate that continued federal support is justified in terms of effective outcomes in the lives of children. In order to provide valuable data, this study addresses how six case outcomes are affected by Title IV-E training.

Policy and Child Welfare Caseworkers

The organizational, social, and policy changes in the child welfare system have had a tremendous influence on factors that impact caseworkers, thereby having an effect on retention and turnover rates. For example, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1974 required every state to create systems for reporting child abuse and neglect (Costin, Karger, & Stoesz, 1996), which resulted in child welfare workers having to manage extremely high paperwork loads, conduct more investigations, and provide services to higher numbers of substantiated cases of abuse and neglect (Gansle & Ellett, 2002; Juby & Scannapieco, 2007). The number of reported cases of abuse and neglect more than tripled in the first 10 years after the passage of CAPTA, and between 1980 and 1985, reports of child abuse and neglect increased from 1 million to over 3 million (Ellett & Leighninger, 2007; Risley-Curtiss, 2003). In 1980, the Child Welfare and Adoption Assistance Act was passed to address the staggering number of children living in foster care, but there were no resources or training mandated to help child welfare workers and supervisors implement this policy (Auerback, McGowan, & LaPorte, 2007; Ellet & Leighninger, 2007; Zlotnik, 2002). State child welfare agencies did not receive increased funding to meet the new demand of the foster systems (Gansle & Ellett, 2002).

Despite a series of severe budget cuts that limited social service training, the early 1990s saw some progress towards improved training for social service workers with the passage of the Family Preservation and

Support Services Provisions of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, which held individual states accountable for creating professional development and training programs (Zlotnik, 2002). Soon afterwards, passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act in 1997 placed new demands on child welfare agencies in terms of higher standards for efficient, permanent placement, and competency and accountability (Landsman, 2007; Risley-Curtiss, 2003; Zlotnik, 2002). The increase in caseloads, documentation standards, and the decrease in professionally trained social workers resulted in many states dropping the requirement for workers to have a social work degree (Ellett & Leighninger, 2007).

De-Professionalization of Social Work

One of the most significant changes in the public child welfare system was the de-professionalization of child welfare workers (Lewandowski, 1998; Strolin, McCarthy, & Caringi, 2007). De-professionalization is described as "reducing or eliminating the minimum educational qualifications, particularly degrees in social work, for child welfare positions" (Ellett & Leighninger, 2007, p. 5). Prior to the 1970s, a social work degree was the norm for child welfare workers (Abramczyk, 1994; Ellett & Leighninger, 2007; Jones, 2002), but since the late 1970s, only around 30% of public child welfare workers possess social work degrees (Ellett & Leighninger, 2007; Jayaratne & Chess, 1984; Rycraft, 1994). In the mid-1980s, none of the states required an MSW (Russell, 1988) and in the late 1980s almost 50% of states reported that entry-level caseworkers who provided *direct* services were not required to hold a bachelor's degree (Russell, 1988). Rather than filling caseworker positions with those who possessed specific knowledge, skills, and values from a social work education, positions traditionally held by BSW/MSW-degreed individuals were filled by those with non-social work degrees (Rycraft, 1994). This resulted in shortages of trained social work staff, muddled staff roles in social service delivery, and perceived ineffectiveness of child welfare service delivery (Cahalane & Sites, 2008; Zlotnik, 2002).

Even in 2008, only around 40% of states required a BSW or MSW degree to become a caseworker in CPS (McClure, 2008), and approximately 75% of public child welfare workers did *not* have an advanced degree (Cahalane & Sites, 2008). Those without social work degrees may be less prepared or equipped to provide effective services (Booz-Allen & Hamilton, Inc., 1987; Pecora, Briar, & Zlotnik, 1989; Risley-Curtiss, 2003). Skills and knowledge critical to effective direct service provision in child protective services include, for example, assessments and interventions related to families struggling with complex issues like

substance abuse, violence, and mental illness; treatment planning; crisis management and counseling; case management; computer literacy; and cultural competency (Risley-Curtiss, 2003). Research has demonstrated that programs in social work provide curriculum that is most closely aligned with the knowledge, skills, and values required by most public child welfare agencies (Auerback et al., 2007; Folaron & Hostetter, 2007; Strolin et al., 2007).

In addition, the de-professionalization of social work is also reflected in the media, which often highlights the negative case outcomes in child welfare (Cahalane & Sites, 2008; Jones, 2002), *especially* in CPS, and criticizes caseworkers for being "unprofessional" or "incompetent" (Ellet & Leighninger, 2007). Although the majority of caseworkers do not possess a BSW or MSW degree, most caseworkers are still referred to as "social workers" (Costin et al., 1996). The negative media image of public child welfare creates a significant barrier to attracting social work-degreed professionals, and can make employment in the private sector more appealing. A study by the Child Welfare League of America found that public sector child welfare workers had less education, overall, than those working in the private sector of child welfare (Jones, 2002). After so many years of de-professionalization and the negative portrayal of public child welfare work, many agencies are now faced with this challenging question: how do we attract competent social work-degreed professionals to employment in public child welfare?

Caseworker Turnover and Retention

One of the most profound challenges in the child welfare system has been in the area of caseworker turnover and retention (Auerback et al., 2007; Graef & Hill, 2000; Jacquet, Clark, Morazes, & Withers, 2007; Rosenthal & Waters, 2006; Westbrook, Ellis & Ellett, 2006). The General Accounting Office reported in 1995 that 90% of states struggled with both recruiting and retaining child welfare caseworkers (Risley-Curtiss, 2003). Researchers estimate that the national turnover rate for child welfare workers is between 20-70% annually (Rosenthal & Waters, 2006; Ellett & Leighninger, 2007; Human Service Research Institute, 1997; Strolin et al., 2007). Nationally, the average length of employment for a child welfare worker is less than 2 years (Brown et al., 2002).

High child welfare caseworker turnover rates not only result in the disruption of the caseworker-client relationship, but also in tremendous financial costs for the agency as a result of the need to train waves of new workers (Cahalane & Sites, 2008; Folaron & Hostetter, 2007; Landsman, 2007; Rosenthal & Waters, 2006). Daly, Dudley, Finnegan-Jones, &

Christiansen (2000) found that the overall replacement cost per child welfare worker is estimated to be between $15,000 and $17,000 (Jones, 2002). Financial losses to public child welfare agencies occur as both *hard* costs and *soft* costs (McClure, 2008). Hard costs include additional administrative time, added overtime for remaining workers, advertisement for position openings, interviewing of potential new hires, reference checks, background checks, drug testing, new employee orientations (during which time no cases are assigned for 3 months), and psychological testing. Examples of soft costs include the lost productivity of both the employee who left the agency and the lost productivity of that employee's colleagues and supervisors. McClure (2008) estimates that the total financial cost to Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) for *each* Texas child welfare worker who quits is more than $52,500. Based on the turnover of more than 1,000 child welfare workers in 2006, McClure (2008) estimates that DFPS experiences total turnover costs of more than $56 million annually.

High turnover rates place tremendous additional burdens on an already-strained public child welfare system, including extra temporal and emotional pressure on personnel resources, which in turn, makes it more difficult for public child welfare agencies to meet the standards for client outcomes (Cahalane & Sites, 2008). According to the *Child and Family Services Review* (CFSR), there are several primary child welfare outcomes, including recurrence of child maltreatment, foster care re-entries, stability of foster care placement, length of time to achieve reunification, and length of time to achieve adoption (Leung, 2008). High turnover rates have negative consequences for many of these child welfare outcomes, including child permanency (McClure, 2008). Therefore, the goals of this study are to identify the impacts of Title IV-E child welfare partnership training on the five CFSR case outcomes. CFSR is administered by the Children's Bureau, the federal agency responsible for funding state and federal programs in order to "prevent and respond to the maltreatment of children," as well as "stabilize children's living situations and preservefamily relationships and connections" (Administration for Children and Families, 2012). This year the Children's Bureau commemorates their centennial of service to children, families and communities.

This study includes five hypotheses: (1) CPS children under the care of Title IV-E stipend graduates or social work degreed workers will have a significantly lower percentage of recurrence of child maltreatment than children under non-Title IV-E or non-social work degreed workers; (2) CPS children under the care of Title IV-E stipend graduates or social work-

degreed workers will have a significantly lower percentage of foster care re-entries than children under non-Title IV-E or non-social work-degreed workers; (3) CPS children under the care of Title IV-E stipend graduates or social work- degreed workers will have a significantly higher percentage of stabilized foster care placements than children under non-Title IV-E or non-social work-degreed workers; (4) CPS children under the care of Title IV-E stipend graduates or social work-degreed workers will achieve reunification in a significantly shorter length of time than children under non-Title IV-E or non-social work-degreed workers; and (5) CPS children under the care of Title IV-E stipend graduates or social work-degreed workers will be adopted in a significantly shorter length of time than children under non-Title IV-E or non-social work- degreed workers.

In this study, the investigators used definitions from the *Child and Family Services Review* to determine success for each outcome variable. Recurrence of child maltreatment refers to children who were victims of indicated or substantiated maltreatment and had another incident within 6 months. Foster care re-entries refer to children who re-entered foster care within 12 months of their previous episode. Stabilized foster care placements refer to children who had no more than two placements during a 12-month period. The length of time to achieve reunification refers to the length of time for children to be reunited with their families within 12 months of being placed under the state's care. The length of time of achieving adoption refers to finalized adoptions within 24 months of entering foster care.

Method

Existing administrative data from the state were examined to determine if the professional social work education provided by Title IV-E stipends led to better case outcomes as defined by the *Child and Family Services Review,* which includes: recurrence of child maltreatment (within 6 months), foster care re-entries (within 12 months), stability of foster care placement (no more than two placements within 12 months), length of time to achieve reunification (within 12 months), and length of time to achieve adoption (within 24 months). Data for the five outcome measures were made available by the state CPS through five computer datasets. A sixth dataset, the "Primary file," (containing about 4.9 million transactions from September 2003 to October 2005) provided a composite overview of all CPS workers, who were then identified as Title IV-E or non-Title IV-E stipend workers. Additionally, a survey was conducted to identify whether or not workers obtained a social work degree. It should be noted that not all social work-degreed workers are Title IV-E funded, as some of them

are self-financed. At the time of the survey, the state CPS had about 4,000 employees. All the data sets were converted to SPSS files for data analyses.

When multiple workers were assigned to a child during a specific period of time, the investigators selected the worker with the longest length of time (number of days) working with the child as the primary worker for the analysis. In the case of two workers with equal lengths of time, the most recent worker assigned to the child was selected for the analysis. As a result, the "Primary file" was reduced to about 1.8 million unduplicated interventions.

Results

Recurrence of child maltreatment

A Chi-square test was conducted to identify the relationship between the variables Title IV-E Stipend Status and Recurrence of Child Maltreatment. The statistics show that the percentage of children who were victims of substantiated or indicated maltreatment and had another incident within six months was lower for Title IV-E stipend workers (6.4%) than for non-Title IV-E workers (7.1%). However, Title IV-E status and recurrence of maltreatment were found to be **not significantly related**, Pearson X^2 (1, N = 10,035) = 0.925, p = 0.168) (See Table 1).

Because not all social work-degreed workers were necessarily funded by Title IV-E stipends, further analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the variables Social Work Degree and Recurrence of Child Maltreatment. Results show that the percentage of children who were victims of substantiated or indicated maltreatment and had another incident within six months was significantly lower for social work-degreed workers (6.6%) than for non-social work-degreed workers (9.3%). Pearson X^2 (1, N = 4,149) = 5.323, p = 0.0105) (See Table 1).

Table 1. Title IV-E stipend and social work degree status by recurrence of maltreatment

	Stipend Status[1]		Social Work Degree Status[2]	
	% of Recurrence (N)		% of Recurrence (N)	
	Non-Title IV-E Worker	Title IV-E Worker	Non-Social Work-Degreed Worker	Social Work-Degreed Worker
Non-Recurrence	92.9 (7762)	93.6 (1574)	90.7 (528)	93.4 (3330)
Recurrence	7.1 (591)	6.4 (108)	9.3 (54)	6.6 (237)

(1): $X^2 = .925$, *df* =1, p = .168 (one-tailed); (2): $X^2 = 5.323$, *df* =1, p = .0105 (one-tailed)

Foster care re-entries

A Chi-square test was conducted to examine the relationship between the variables Title IV-E Stipend Status and Foster Care Re-entries. The results indicate that the percentage of children who re-entered foster care within 12 months of their previous episode was higher for Title IV-E workers (29.4%) than for non-Title IV-E workers (20.2%). However, Title IV-E status and foster care re-entries were found to be **not significantly related**, Pearson X^2 (1, N = 212) = 1.418, p = 0.117) (See Table 2).

Further analysis was conducted to identify the relationship between the variables Social Work Degree and Foster Care Re-entries. The percentage of children who re-entered foster care within 12 months of their previous episode was slightly higher for social work-degreed workers (20.8%) than for non-social work-degreed workers (15.0%). However, the variables social work degree and foster care re-entries were found to be **not significantly related**, Pearson X^2 (1, N = 97) = .337, p = 0.281) (See Table 2).

Table 2. Title IV-E stipend and social work degree status by foster care re-entries

	Stipend Status[3]		Social Work Degree Status[4]	
	% of Foster Care Re-Entries (N)		% of Foster Care Re-Entries (N)	
	Non-Title IV-E Worker	Title IV-E Worker	Non-Social Work-Degreed Worker	Social Work-Degreed Worker
Non-Re-Entries	79.8 (142)	70.6 (24)	85.0 (17)	79.2 (61)
Re-Entries	20.2 (36)	29.4 (10)	15.0 (3)	20.8 (16)
Total	100	100	100	100

(3): $X^2 = 1.418$, *df* =1, p = .117 (one-tailed); (4): $X^2 = .337$, *df* =1, p = .281 (one-tailed)

Stability of foster care placement

A Chi-square test was conducted to assess the relationship between the variables Title IV-E Stipend Status and Stability of Foster Care Placement. The results indicate that the percentage of children who had no more than two placements during a 12-month period was significantly higher for Title IV-E workers (82.3%) than for non-Title IV-E workers (77.2%). However, Title IV-E status and stability were found to be **not significantly related**, Pearson X^2 (1, N = 7,182) = .313, p = .576) (See Table 3).

When the variables Social Work Degree and Stability of Foster Care Placement were examined using a Chi-Square test, the percentage of children who had no more than two placements during a 12-month period was significantly higher for social work- degreed workers (84.3%) than for non-social work-degreed workers (77.2%). Social work degree and stability were found to be **significantly related**, Pearson X^2 (1, N = 3,115) = 18.868, p = 0.00) (See Table 3).

Table 3. Title IV-E stipend and social work degree status by stability of foster care placement

	Stipend Status[5]		Social Work Degree Status[6]	
	% of Stability (N)		% of Stability (N)	
	Non-Title IV-E Worker	Title IV-E Worker	Non-Social Work-Degreed Worker	Social Work-Degreed Worker
Stable Placement	81.6 (4893)	82.3 (282)	77.2 (526)	84.3 (2053)
Non-Stable Placement	18.4 (1104)	17.7 (210)	22.8 (155)	15.7 (381)

(5): X^2 = .313, *df* =1, p = .576 (one-tailed); (6): X^2 = 18.868, *df* =1, p = .000 (one-tailed)

Length of time to achieve reunification

A Chi-square test was also conducted to examine the relationship between the variable Title IV-E Stipend Status and Family Reunification. The statistics show that more children under Title IV-E workers (68.2%) had family reunifications within 12 months than children under non-Title IV-E workers (61.8%). Title IV-E status and reunification within 12 months were found to be **significantly related**, Pearson X^2 (1, N = 1,377) = 3.253, p = 0.036) (See Table 4).

When the variables Social Work Degree and Family Reunification were examined, results indicated that more children under social work-degreed workers (64.9%) had family reunifications within 12 months than children under non-social work- degreed workers (64.5%). However, social work degree and reunification within 12 months were found to be **not significantly related**, Pearson X^2 (1, N = 572) = .008, p = 0.464) (See Table 4).

Table 4. Title IV-E stipend and social work degree status by family reunification

	Stipend Status[7]		Social Work Degree Status[8]	
	% Achieved Reunification (N)		% Achieved Reunification (N)	
	Non-Title IV-E Worker	Title IV-E Worker	Non-Social Work-Degreed Worker	Social Work-Degreed Worker
Reunification after 12 months	38.2 (441)	31.8 (71)	35.5 (38)	35.1 (163)
Reunification within 12 months	61.8 (713)	68.2 (152)	64.5 (69)	64.9 (302)

(7): $X^2 = 3.253$, *df* =1, p = .036 (one-tailed); (8): $X^2 = .008$, *df* =1, p = .464 (one-tailed)

Length of time to achieve adoption

A Chi-square test was also conducted to assess the relationship between the variables Title IV-E Stipend Status and Finalized Adoptions within 24 months. The result shows that Title IV-E stipend workers (70.6%) had more finalized adoptions within 24 months of a child entering foster care than non-Title IV-E workers (46.9%). Title IV-E status and adoption were found to be **significantly related**, Pearson X^2 (1, N = 1427) = 14.592, p = 0.00) (See Table 5).

When the variables Social Work Degree and Finalized Adoptions were examined, the Chi-Square test indicated that social work-degreed workers (60.3%) had more finalized adoptions within 24 months of a child entering foster care than non-social work- degreed workers (39.5%). Social work degree and adoption were found to be **significantly related**, Pearson X^2 (1, N = 588) = 24.214, p = 0.00) (See Table 5).

Table 5. Title IV-E stipend and social work degree status by finalized adoptions

		Stipend Status[9] % of Achieved Adoption (N)		Social Work Degree Status[10] % of Achieved Adoption (N)	
		Non-Title IV-E Worker	Title IV-E Worker	Non-Social Work-Degreed Worker	Social Work-Degreed Worker
Adoption after months	24	53.1 (722)	29.4 (20)	60.5 (138)	39.7 (143)
Adoption within months	24	46.9 (637)	70.6 (48)	39.5 (90)	60.3 (217)

(9): $X^2 = 14.592$, *df* =1, p = .000 (one-tailed); (10): $X^2 = 24.214$, *df* =1, p = .000 (one-tailed)

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to determine how case outcomes for children served by the state's CPS are affected by Title IV-E training or other social work education. The findings from the state case outcomes data were based on tests that analyzed the association between Title IV-E status and the achievement of five outcome objectives: 1) reduction in the recurrence of child maltreatment, 2) reduction in re-entry into foster care, 3) improved stability in foster care, 4) reduction in length of time to achieve reunification, and 5) reduction in length of time to achieve adoption. For the first three objectives the analyses showed no significant difference in outcomes for Title IV-E and non-Title IV-E workers. However, the data did show statistically significant better outcomes in two of these three areas (reduction in the recurrence of child maltreatment and improved stability in foster care) for social work-degreed workers compared to non-social work-degreed workers. For the fourth objective, the analyses showed statistically significant better outcomes for the Title IV-E workers but not for the social work-degreed workers. Finally, for the fifth objective, the analyses showed statistically significant better outcomes for both the Title IV-E and social work-degreed workers.

In this study, the first hypothesis was partially supported (reduction in the recurrence of child maltreatment for social work degreed workers).

The findings suggest that social work-degreed workers might have a more diverse curriculum, enabling them to reduce child maltreatment more effectively than Title IV-E stipend workers as indicated by several previous research studies (Brown et al., 2002; Gansle & Ellett, 2002; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2003). However, both Title IV-E workers and social work-degreed workers had a lower percentage of recurrence of maltreatment compared to non-Title IV-E workers. The findings imply that social work training might have an influence in lower recurrence of maltreatment.

The second hypothesis was not supported (reduction in re-entry into foster care). There was no statistical significance between Title IV-E stipend recipients or social work- degreed workers and their counterparts. The results suggest that reduction in foster care re-entry might be out of the control of the workers, as this issue relates to the level of risk and background of the children. For instance, certain family factors such as parental substance abuse, domestic partner violence and parents with poor mental health have been found to be correlated with children's re-entry into foster care, among other factors (Kimberlin, Anthony & Austin, 2009). In addition, social workers' professional training may also influence the level of child re-entry into foster care, because re-entry may be seen as a form of ensuring children's safety. Both Title IV-E and social work degreed workers worked harder to ensure child safety based on their social work training. Therefore, when they assess that a child is at risk, the Title IV-E and social work degreed workers would refer the child back to foster care in order to prevent further child abuse.

The third hypothesis was partially supported (improved stability in foster care among degreed workers only). This implies that social work-degreed workers were more effective in serving the role as a case manager, thereby significantly reducing the number of foster care placements (see Brown et al., 2002; Gansle & Ellett, 2002; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2003). Furthermore, the percentage of stability for Title IV-E workers was higher than for non-Title IV-E workers, suggesting that social work training is an important component in stabilizing foster care.

The fourth hypothesis was partially supported (reduction in length of time to achieve reunification for children who were assigned to Title IV-E stipend workers). The finding suggests that Title IV-E workers were specifically trained to handle issues regarding reunification and permanency. Other social work-degreed workers might not have such specific training. However, the social work-degreed workers still had a higher percentage of achieved reunification than non-Title IV-E workers;

this suggests that social work training is important for Title IV-E and social work-degreed workers.

Finally, the fifth hypothesis was fully supported (reduction in length of time to achieve adoption), implying that both Title IV-E stipend recipients and social work- degreed workers were trained in adoption and, as a result, they were more equipped than their counterparts to address related issues. With only one hypothesis unsupported by this study, the data provide strong evidence that both Title IV-E training and social work-degree workers are effective in meeting the goals of *Child and Family Services Review* as indicated by the federal guidelines.

Implications

This study provides implications for CPS training, research and policy. First, the data support the continued hiring of degreed social workers by CPS, as they have a significant impact on the reduction of recurrent child maltreatment, foster care stability, and on the length of time to achieve adoption. Second, CPS should continue to support Title IV-E programs and encourage employees to participate in them, as they have a significant impact on the reduction of time to achieve reunification and on the reduction of time to achieve adoption. Third, even though this study focuses on differences between Title IV-E and non-Title IV-E workers, more research is needed to identify other factors that might have contributed to the improvement of child case outcomes. Fourth, since both the Title IV-E and social work-degreed workers have better case outcomes, more research should be conducted to identify why Title IV-E stipend workers had better outcomes regarding reunification and adoption, and why social work-degreed workers had better outcomes regarding the reduction of child maltreatment, foster care placements, and adoption. In addition, further investigation is needed to identify why non-Title IV-E social workers have better outcomes than their Title IV-E counterparts.

Finally, on a macro level, state CPS and federal agencies should carefully examine the salary structures of CPS workers. Currently, the salaries of beginning CPS workers are significantly lower than those of teachers. Both state and federal agencies have spent millions of dollars training competent workers. However, the turnover rate maintains at a high level, ranging from 20 to 70 percent each year (Rosenthal & Waters, 2006; Ellett & Leighninger, 2007; Human Service Research Institute, 1997; Strolin et al., 2007). If the salaries for CPS workers remain non-competitive, the money spent on training will be wasted as workers leave the public sector for higher paying jobs.

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