

**Children in Foster Care
Effect of Visitation on Length of Time in Out of Home Care
in
Mercer County, Kentucky**

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Research Abstract

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Children in Foster Care: Effect of Visitation on Length of Time in Out of Home Care: Mercer County

The purpose of this study is to identify if there is a correlation between the frequency and quality of the visits that children have with their family and the length of time that children remain in OOHHC. The research is aimed to identify the importance of attachment in the reunification process. Throughout the literature review, visitation was found to be vital in maintaining and enhancing the attachment that is necessary for reunification to be successful. The sample for the quantitative study consisted of all children who entered foster care through the Department of Community Based Services (DCBS) in Mercer County Kentucky for reasons of abuse, neglect or dependency during the calendar year 2002. Data for the quantitative study was gathered from existing case records for a period of up to one year following each child's entry into care. For the qualitative study, three families were purposively selected based on the available documentation about the quality of the visits between the child(ren) and their parents.

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Introduction

- Program description
 - DCBS provides extensive services
 - Services to families who have had their children removed by the court
 - Providing opportunities for visitation very important
- Literature review
 - Attachment
 - Visitation
 - Reunification

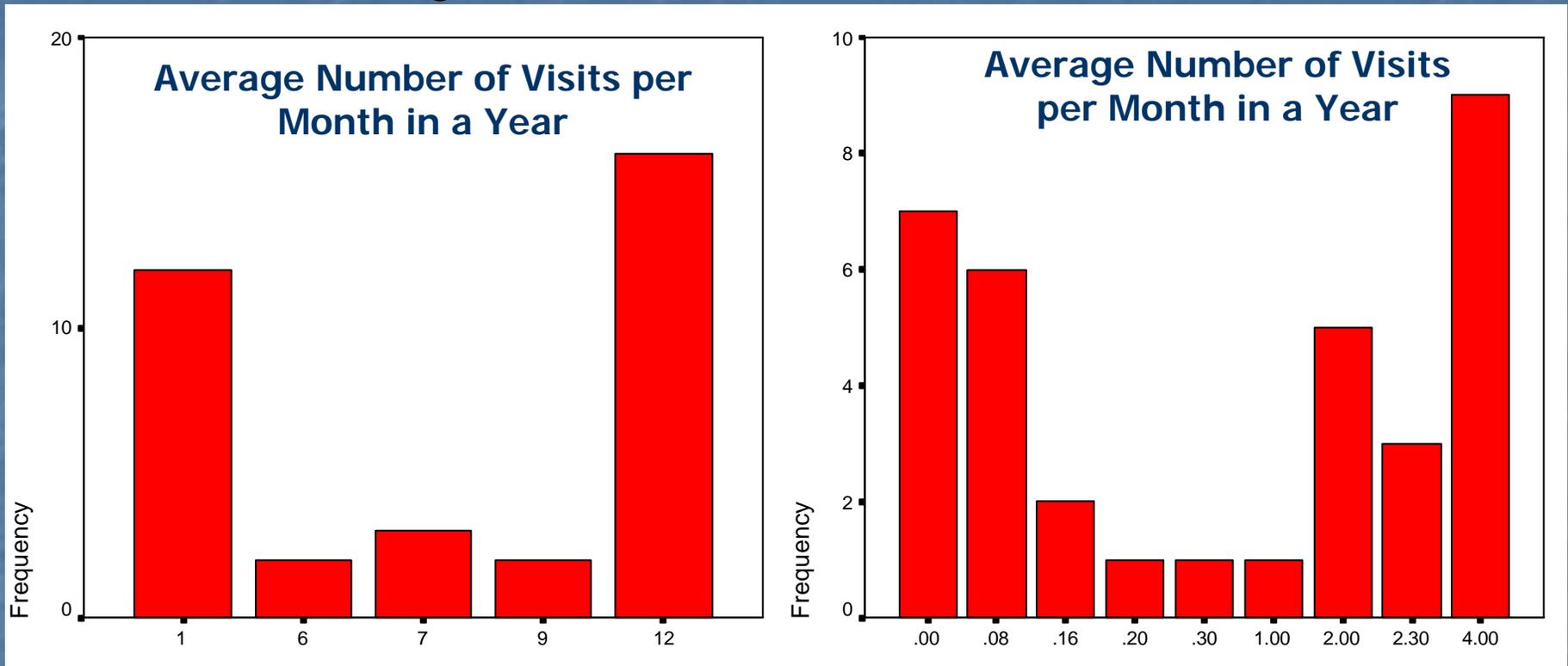
Quantitative Research Questions

- Is there a correlation between the frequency of the visits that children have with their family and the length of time that children remain in OOHC?
- Is there a relationship between the number of placements and the reason the child was placed in OOHC?
- Is there a relationship between the reason the child was placed in OOHC and the length of time the child remained in OOHC?

Design and Sample

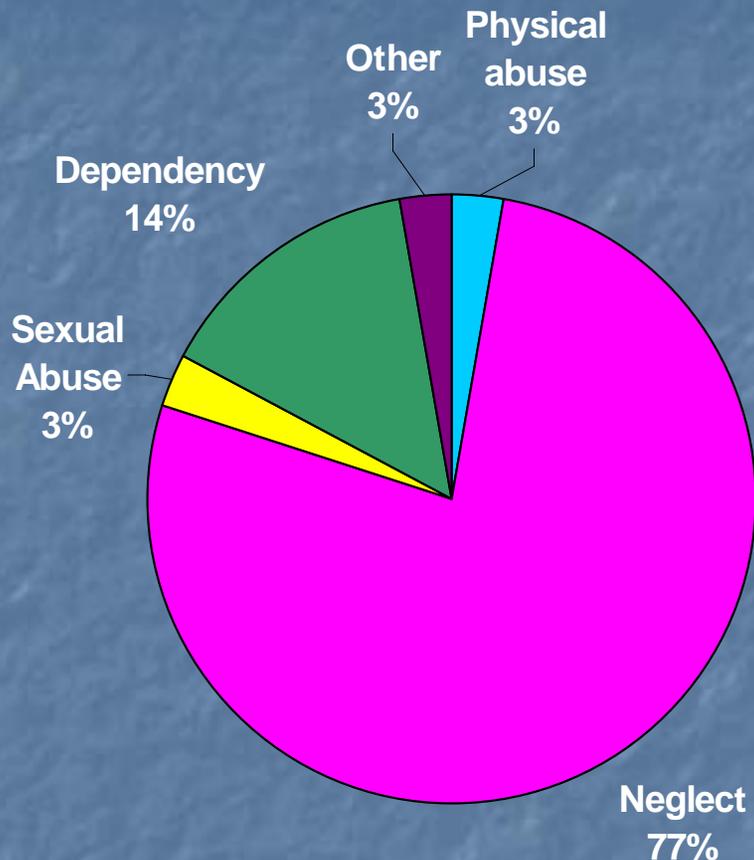
- All children entering out of home care in 2002 in Mercer county Kentucky (N=35)
- Existing data obtained from case records
- Data from up to 12 months in care
- 62.9% Males, 37.1% Females
- 34.3% African American; 2.9% American Indian; 60% Caucasian; 2.9% Hispanic
- Mean age of children 8.3 years, min age – 1 year, max age 17 years
- 54.3% Single Parents; 11.4% Blended Families; 31.4% Nuclear Families; 2.9% Other Relative
- 54.3% Returned to Parent; 8.6% Placed with relatives; 0% Emancipated; 37.1% Did not exit w/in 12 months

Correlation - average number of visits per year & months in care



- A Correlation test between months in care and average # of visits p/month resulted in $r(33) = .693, p < .01$. There is a high positive correlation that is significant. Mean visits p/month = 1.6. Mean months in care = 7.3

Relationship between # placements and reason child removed



- An independent t-test was conducted to determine if there was any significant difference in the number of placements between the two groups defined by the reason for removal (neglect/other) $t(33) = -.17, p = .866$
- The mean number of placements for the sample ($N = 35$) was .16 with a standard deviation of .66
- The lowest number of placements was 1 and the highest number was 3.

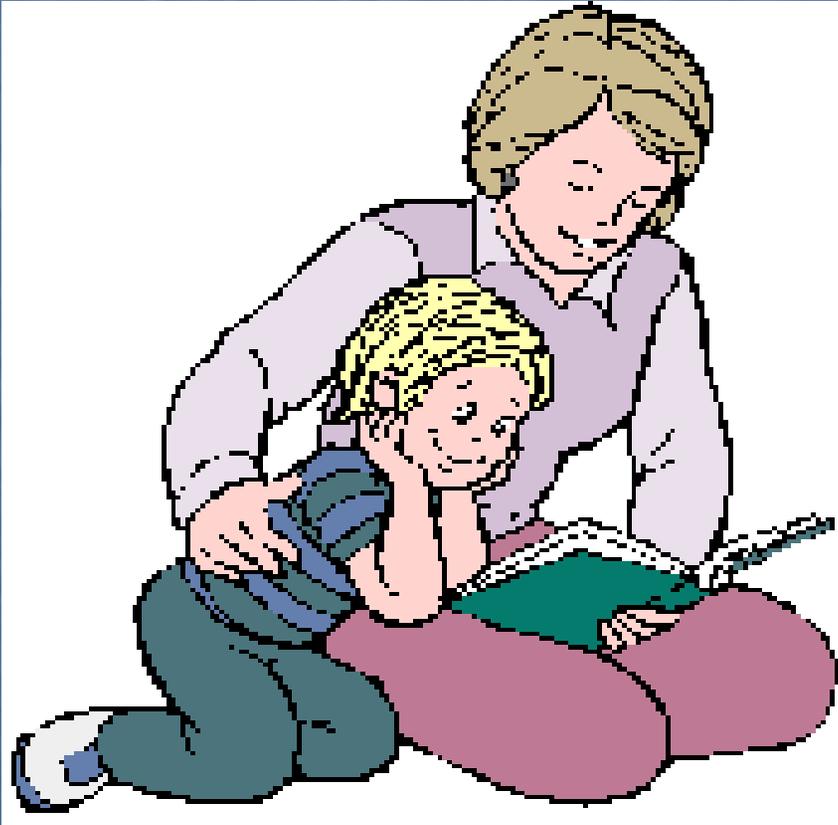
Relationship between reason removed and months in care

- An independent sample t-test was conducted to identify if there is a significant difference between the two groups identified by the reason for removal (neglect/other) in the number of months in care
- A non-significant relationship was found $t(33) = -.103$, $p = .919$, there is no difference between the two groups in the number of visits
- We fail to reject the null hypothesis of no difference between the two groups

Discussion

- Findings do not support hypothesis that the more visits a child has while in OOHC the quicker they will exit care
- The longer children are in care, the more visits they have
- There is not a significant relationship between the # of placements and reason the child was placed in OOHC
- There is not a significant relationship between the reason the child was placed into care and the length he/she remained in care.

Qualitative Research Question



- How do interactions between children and their family members influence children's length of stay in out of home care?

Qualitative Design and Sample

- 3 families selected purposively from quantitative sample based on amount of qualitative information available in case record
- Examined visitation using chart file review form
- All 3 families Caucasian
- Family 1 had 2 children ages 4 years and 6 years removed due to dependency
- Family 2 had 1 child age 15 years due to status offense
- Family 3 had 3 children ages 8, 14 and 17 years removed due to neglect
- Family 1 - children returned in 9 months
- Family 2 – child returned in 12 months
- Family 3 – children returned home in 7 months

Family 1

- Activities: Typically the children like to draw, color and write on the chalk board. Mom sits on the couch and watches them, saying “[she] likes to watch them play
- Affection: hug, kiss, smile, praise, verbalizes her love for them.
- Discipline: Very soft spoken. She does not talk excessively during the visits. Very seldom does she redirect negative behaviors (ie. Youngest child “bullies” the oldest)
- Overall Observations: “visits are very systematic”, “mom appears to be flat during the visit, she lacks empathetic responses”, “mom loves her children, but admits she cannot take care of their needs”

Family 2

- Activities: shopping, going out to eat, preparing for the baby
- Affection: Mom appears to be very loving toward daughter. She kisses, hugs, and praise very frequently.
- Discipline: Mom is somewhat timid with discipline. She feels that daughter has positive behaviors the majority of the time and if mom recognizes negative ones, she makes excuses for her daughter. "she only acts like that here, she is very stressed out, it is no wonder why she throws "fits" she wants to come home"
- Overall observations: Mom's relationship is very enmeshed with daughter. She views daughter as a friend and comrade. She wants to please daughter even if she knows it is not in her daughter's best interest.

Family 3

- Activities: Play game boards, write on chalk board, discuss the previous weeks activities.
- Affection: hugging and kissing children, hand shake by father (even with youngest child).
- Overall Observations: "Mom shows genuine concern for children's care, tries to make appropriate decisions for the families benefit not hers." "Dad is very active in wanting to know children's activities, thoughts and feelings. He tries to talk about the court proceedings, but is easily redirected."

Discussion

- All families seemed to engage in typical activities with their children and show some degree of affection
- Worker's overall observations seemed to be linked to child's length of time in care. Family 3 (7 m.) the worker felt that family bond was very strong, but felt that father did not take responsibility for his high risk behaviors. Family 1 (9 m.) was overall positive, but mom's flat affect placed a barrier between attachment. Family 2, whose child was returned after 12 months, had lower quality of visits in the beginning but improved significantly at the end.

Limitations/Suggestions for Further Research

- Used only existing data - often times documentation by workers was not completed so data may not be accurate
- Only gathered data for 12 month period after child entered care. Suggest additional longer term study - such as 24 months following entry into care instead of just 12 months
- Could observe visitation between parents and children for qualitative portion instead of relying on case documentation
- Additional study could examine why findings occurred in quantitative study