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THE UTILIZATION OF PARENT-CHILD VISITATIONS FOR
REUNIFICATION AND STABILITY AMONG
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Susanne Allison Jimenez

Lori Hai Stooksbury


June 2005

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Approved by:


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5/17/05
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to measure how effectively San Bernardino County, Department of Children's Services utilizes visitations for family reunification and stability. It is significant to child welfare practice because it may help decrease the amount of time children spend in foster care. A quantitative approach was used to analyze data extracted from two hundred fifty closed case files. Correlations, chi-squares, and t-tests were used to assess the bivariate relations. The results may contribute to social work practice, policy, and research by improving the quantity and quality of parent-child visitations and the maintenance and stability of reunification. This study found that San Bernardino County's Department of Children's Services was consistent with the findings of national data. It also found that the more visits the children receive, the more likely they will be to return home and remain home. An additional finding was that children who re-returned into the protective custody were less likely to reunify and remained in foster care twice as long.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have assisted us in making this research project possible. To the Department of Children's Services of San Bernardino County, thank you for allowing us to conduct our research and hopefully this study will be beneficial to your agency. Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, we appreciate all of your guidance, assistance, and time spent on this project. Last but not least, we would like to thank California State University's Department of Social Work for our educational foundation in our Master's of Social Work.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my husband, Mark, for his constant love and support. Thank you for always being there for me. You are the greatest! A special thank you to my research partner, Lori, I could not have done this without you.

I dedicate this to my loving mother, who taught me to be creative, to my father, who supported me, to my brother, his wife, and my sisters, who encouraged me. Thank you for believing in me! And to my research partner, I could not have done this without you. Thank you!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The United States Department of Health and Human Services reported close to one million confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect in the United States in 1997 (USDHHS, 2003). The Department of Children's Services of San Bernardino County is an agency within the Department of Human Services, Child Protection Services that provides safety, permanence and well-being to all children. Child Protective Services believes that all children have the right to be free from abuse and neglect and be able to live in a safe environment (Pecora, Whittaker, Maluccio, Barth, & Plotnick, 2000, p. 10). According to the California Welfare and Institution Code Section 300, abuse can be any of the following; physical abuse, physical/medical neglect, serious emotional damage, sexual abuse, severe physical/sexual abuse, and lack of supervision, provisions for support or care.

When abuse is substantiated, the children will be detained in the custody of the Department of Children's Services. After the children are detained, they can be placed in in- or out-of-home custody. Out-of-home custody

placements are alternative residencies that belong to relatives, non-related extended family members, or foster families. The term non-related extended family members is a term used by the court and the Department of Children's Services to recognize extended family members that are not related by blood and family friends as suitable placements for children.

Once placed in out-of-home custody, the goal of the Department of Children's Services is to reunify children with their families. According to Pecora and others (2000) there are three possible reunification plans: family reunification, family maintenance, and permanency planning (p. 331). Family reunification provides time-limited services to families with children that cannot remain safely in the home. These children are placed in foster family homes until they can be successfully reunified with their families. Family maintenance provides services for dependent children to remain in the home to help with preventing and correcting neglect and abuse (p. 357). Permanency planning helps find stable, permanent homes for children that cannot be successfully reunified with their families. A permanency plan may include adoption, guardianship, or long-term foster care (p. 301).

Terling (1999) found that on an average of two years after a case has been closed, abuse and neglect is likely to occur (p. 1360). When families reunify, there tends to be a high recidivism rate of children returning to the Department of Children's Services system due to lack of attachment with their parents. Attachment bonds should be maintained throughout the system and should be a priority during family reunification. One way these bonds could be maintained is through parent-child visitations.

The lack of attachment during family reunification can cause problems when transitioning into family maintenance. These problems can lead to old patterns and behaviors of abuse resulting in a possible second removal. Block and Libowitz (1983, p. 21) found that 86% of parents identified the reasons for recidivism as the inability to cope with their child after they reunified. This is a recidivism cycle that demonstrates how the system failed to properly prepare these families for successful reunification (see Figure 1). It is important to understand this cycle to insure faster and permanent reunification for parents and their children.

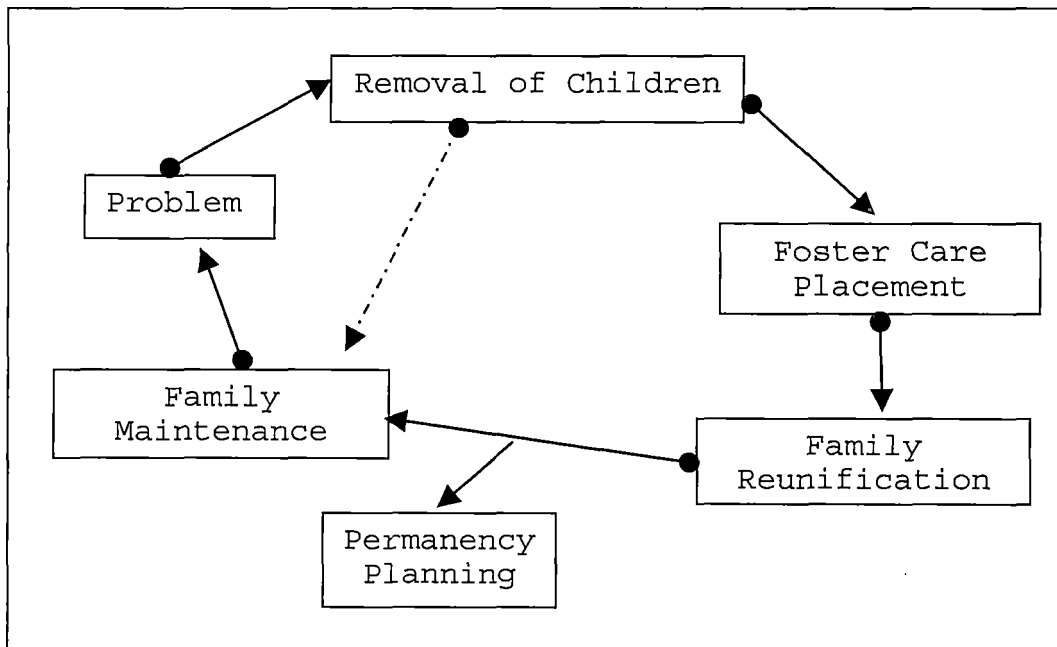


Figure 1. Recidivism Cycle

The Department of Children's Services of San Bernardino County has resulted in poor utilization of visitations during the process of family reunification. That policy relies exclusively on court orders to determine the frequency of visitations rather than creating their own method to ensure proper visitations. The amount of parent-child visitations may help increase reunification but only the minimal is enforced.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether increased parent-child visitations would increase reunification rates and maintain stability when the child

returns home. At this time, children spend an average of two years in foster care (Ansay & Perkins, 2001, p. 220). This study addressed the problems, needs, and issues of the client, practice, and agency.

Client problems included a decrease in parent-child attachment bonds and inability to utilize new skills learned during parenting classes due to the minimum amount of scheduled visitations. Client needs require an increase in the amount of visitations and collaboration on parental skills during visitations. The issues parents face are the inability to interact with and appropriately discipline their children upon returning home, which could lead to a second removal.

Parent-child visitations in San Bernardino County are currently unstructured and inconsistent. Practice should address the need for universal methods to conduct visits, increase the amount of, and provide parental guidance during parent-child visitations. Practice needs to renovate how parent-child visitations are implemented.

The problem with the Department of Children's Services policy is that it is simplistic in how visitations should be administered. The policy's regulation is according to court order but there is a need to enforce court orders and monitor how visitations are

controlled. According to the California Welfare and Institution Code 362.1(a), visitations should be as regular as possible to preserve parent-child bonds and to determine if and when a child should be returned.

The general rationale for this study is the recidivism cycle (see Figure 1), the length of time children spend in foster care, and the high number of children in the foster care system. At the end of 1999, there were approximately 568,000 children in foster care (National Clearing House on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, 2001). The goal is to increase reunification and maintain stability upon return.

A quantitative research method was utilized because there has been extensive research in the area of child reunification. This study assessed whether there is a relationship between parent-child visitations and reunification rates and stability. Family reunification case files from the Department of Children's Services of San Bernardino County was extracted from Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS), a statewide data base system containing client information. A systematic random sample was used to select closed case files to be studied. The researchers have developed a checklist to record the extracted information.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

This project addressed social work practice by determining how effectively San Bernardino County utilizes parent-child visitations for family reunification and stability after reunification. The results of this study may contribute to social work practice and policy by improving the quantity and quality of parent-child visitations and the maintenance of reunification. This study is relevant to child welfare practice because it may help decrease the amount of time children spend in foster care, which will reduce social workers' caseloads and the amount of funding spent on children in foster care. Family reunification and parent-child visitations provide safety, permanence, and well-being for all children involved with the system.

The evaluation and termination phases of the generalist intervention may be impacted by the results of this study. The Department of Children's Services of San Bernardino County were evaluated as to how their utilization of parent-child visitations affects family reunification. This helped determine how families maintain stability in the termination phase. Therefore, this study addressed the utilization of parent-child visitations for reunification and stability among children and families in

the Department of Children's Services of San Bernardino
County.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter Two consists of a discussion of relevant literature. It will review how parent-child visitations are utilized for reunification and stability among children and families in Departments of Children's Services. Specifically, it will review information about family reunification, parent-child visitation, factors that contribute to family reunification, the impact of parent-child visitation on family reunification, and a theory guiding conceptualization.

Family Reunification

Family reunification refers to the physical reunion of parents with their children who are placed with relatives, non-related extended family members, or in foster family care based on the idea that children should either be returned to their families or placed permanently elsewhere (Maluccio & Fein, 1994, p. 2). To ensure family reunification, programs began to emerge in the 1980s to assist families that had children in foster care and had a goal of reunification (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1995, p. 20). Those programs were to assist the

goal of reunification and to prevent re-entry into foster care after reunification had occurred (U.S. DHHS, 1995, p. 21). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1995), the services that were provided to families in reunification programs were to assist them with their problems that hindered their ability to care for their children (p. 20).

In 1989, forty percent of children in foster care spent about two years in placement (Ansay & Perkins, 2001, p. 220). The Adoptions Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (Public Law 96-272) required immediate action to maintain children in the home or if in foster care, return them safely to their caretakers as soon as possible (Courtney, 1994, p. 81). This was important because it has been established that the longer children remain in foster care, especially those that remained over two years, the less likely it was that they would be returned home (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1995, p. 20). As a result, caretakers were given a time limit to get custody of their children before termination of their parental rights by the Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-89). According to McWey and Mullis (2004, p. 293), parents were given one year to get custody before their parental rights were terminated unless the

agency failed to provide proper services to the family or if it was not in the best interest of the child.

Parent-Child Visitation

Parent-child visitations are scheduled face-to-face contacts between parents and their children that are in protective custody (Haight, Black, Mangelsdorf, Giorgio, Tata, Schoppe, & Szewczyk, 2002, p. 1). Family visiting helps maintain family relationships, empower clients, assure opportunities to practice new behaviors, and assess parental progress (Hess & Mintun, 1992, p. 2). Hess and Mintun (1992) also believe that visiting helps the child develop a greater sense of self, personal significance, and sense of identity (p. 2). The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (Public Law 96-126) emphasizes the importance of maintaining the stability of parent-child relationships (Ansary & Perkins, 2001, p. 221).

Parental visiting has also been known to decrease "externalizing and internalizing behavior problems" (Cantos & Gries, 1997, p. 1). McWey and Mullis (2004, p. 294) suggest that there are fewer behavior problems in children who have regular visits. Contrary to that statement, Leathers (2003, p. 54) suggests that visits

that occur over a long period of time create severe emotional and behavioral problems. The methodological limitation for Leather's study is that the Children's Symptom Inventory Scale was utilized to measure emotional and behavioral problems from the perspective of the foster parents. The problem with this is that the identification of emotional or behavioral problems may be viewed differently among various individuals.

Factors that Contribute to Family Reunification

Factors such as age, race and ethnicity, and gender may affect the outcome of reunification. Lahti, Green, Emlen, Zadny, Clarkson, Kuehnel, and Cascioto (1978, p. 5.5) indicated that older children were less likely to reunify and have visits with their parents. Courtney (1994) found that in 1985, children in out-of-home placement were on average nine years old and nineteen percent of those children were under the age of three (p. 82). By 1989, that number decreased to seven years old and twenty-eight percent of children were under the age of three (p. 82). Also, the age distribution in California has been getting younger (p. 82). Potter and Klein-Rothschild (2002, p. 126) found that older children have a tendency to re-enter the foster care system after

being reunited but age was not a factor related to reunification. Age has been under represented as a predictor of reunification rates, making it difficult to accurately determine outcomes.

When looking at race and ethnicity as a factor it has been discovered that African American children are over represented in the foster care system (Maluccio & Fein, 1994, p. 4). A study conducted by Barth, Snowden, Ten Broeck, Clancey, Jordan, and Barusch (1986, p. 35) found that African American children had extended foster care stays and were less likely than Caucasian children to be returned home. Finch and Fanshel's (1985, p. 6) study found that Caucasian children were reunified faster than African American or Hispanic children. In contrast, McMurtry and Lie (1992, p. 2) suggested that minority children advance faster through the foster care system than Caucasian children and African American children spend about nine and a half months less in foster care than Caucasian children. Potter and Klein-Rothschild (2002, p. 125) found that race and ethnicity is not a predictor of reunification from foster care. Little is known about other minority groups in the child welfare system (Lu, Landsverk, Ellis-McCleod, Newton, Granger & Johnson, 2004, p. 449).

There has been an insignificant amount of research in relation to gender. Most studies discuss male and female children but do not address their gender as a factor of reunification. More research in this area is needed to determine how reunification rates are affected.

Impact of Parent-Child Visitation on Family Reunification

Visiting maintains children's relationship with their parents and increases the probability of returning home. There is an abundance of information that supports this idea. Proch and Howard (1984, p. 139) suggest that successful reunification is possible when parent-child relationships are maintained through visitations. In fact, Leathers (2003, p. 53) states that the frequency of parental visiting is a strong predictor of reunification. An increase in parental visits is less disruptive for children and ends in fewer attachment conflicts and placement disruptions (Leathers, 2002, p. 598). Haight and others (2002, p. 174) suggest that parent-child visits are so "critical in the effort to reunite families" that the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 "explicitly requires their inclusion in family preservation efforts." Hess and Mintun (1992, p. 77) agree that parent-child visitations are the core determinant of

family reunification of children placed in out-of-home care. McWey and Mullis (2004, p. 293) stated that the contact between children and their parents is valuable to maintain physical and emotional growth.

The conflicts that may arise during parent-child visitations outlined by Loar (1998, p. 42) reveal that children often feel a "conflict of loyalty" (McWey & Mullis, 2004, p. 294) when caught between their biological and foster families and felt the associated competition between them. She also proposed that parents often feel "pain, anger, and humiliation" about losing custody of their children and how their visits are conducted. Also, children sometimes react in an adverse manner displaying negative behaviors during or after visitations.

Theory Guiding Conceptualization

From a child development viewpoint, Ansay and Perkins (2001, p. 223) described attachment theory as a progression of emotional and physical bonding. Attachment theory defined by Bowlby (1977, p. 201) states that humans tend to develop strong and affectionate bonds toward others. When separation and loss occur, those humans develop forms of emotional distress and personality dysfunction such as "anxiety, anger, depression and

emotional detachment" (p. 201). "Many of the most intense emotions arise during the formation, the maintenance, the disruption and the renewal of attachment relationship" (Bowlby, 1980, p. 40). According to Ansay and Perkins (2001, p. 222), parental-child visiting is used for maintaining and strengthening relationships and ties to the biological family. It facilitates children's expression of their emotional and mental energy dealing with the struggle of their feelings of abandonment (p. 222).

Mapp (2002, p. 176) emphasizes the need for consistent visitations to help prevent severed attachment bonds between children and their parents. These severed bonds create a sense of insecurity and negative expectations about others that form the basis for unsuccessful social relationships, and negative conceptions of the self, which results in low self-esteem (Mapp, 2002, p. 176). The child's well-being is improved by allowing the parent connections to give the children an opportunity to develop a permanent positive attachment and they gain support from those relationships. Keeping those ties helps children learn how to develop and maintain long-term relationships (Mapp, 2002, p. 176).

Summary

The literature important to the project was presented in Chapter Two. Family reunification emphasizes the importance of returning dependant children to their families. Parent-child visitations maintain the permanence and stability of family relationships. It also addressed the common factors that contribute to family reunification such as age, race and ethnicity, and gender. The impact of parent-child visitations on family reunification is important to help increase the probability of children returning home, maintaining attachment bonds, and maintaining stability. Attachment theory stresses the importance of maintaining the relationships and the emotional and physical bonds between parents and children.

reunification rates and stability. Data on closed family reunification case files from the Department of Children's Services of San Bernardino County was extracted from the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). The researchers developed a data extraction protocol to record the extracted information.

This study has both strengths and limitations. The strengths of this study are that the data extraction protocol is not based on human opinion and the outcome of the study was based on more than one factor. This study also has limitations. The information collected is limited only to San Bernardino County, the data extraction comes only from closed family reunification files, and the information collected may not be current due to failures in social worker data input.

Sampling

The sample came from two hundred fifty San Bernardino County family reunification files that had been closed after January 1, 2000 and before December 31, 2004. A selected county researcher compiled a list of 12,424 closed Department of Children's Services case files during the time frame between January, 1999 and December, 2004. Of the 12,424 cases the researchers selected only those

cases that were closed in family reunification. That reduced the number of cases to 7,755.

The researchers selected 2.5% of those closed family reunification cases by systematic random selection of every thirty-one out of 7,755. Two and one half percent of 7,755 cases were estimated to be about 250 cases. Out of the 250 cases, a total of 154 cases fulfilled the requirement information of the data extraction protocol. The information needed to complete the data extraction protocol looked at gender, race and ethnicity, age, reason for removal, perpetrator, location of placement, location of parents, duration of time child spent in foster care, number of placements, number of siblings, number of referrals, number of referrals after reunification, number of times placed in protective custody, number of times placed in protective custody after initial reunification, frequency of court ordered visitations, actual amount of visitations, and whether family reunification occurred. A total of 154 cases were selected for the family reunification closed case sample.

Data Collection and Instruments

The researchers created the Parent-Child and Family Reunification Data Extraction Protocol (see Appendix A).

This data extraction protocol was developed by determining which factors are known to lead to family reunification and stability. The Director and a supervisor of the Department of Children's Services of San Bernardino County conducted a pretest of the data extraction protocol. They agreed that it was suitable to measure the proposed factors for this study. The Director and supervisor provided written approval to conduct this study in San Bernardino County (see Appendix B).

The researchers examined the utilization of parent-child visitations and stability among children and families. The number of parent-child visitations was the independent variable and the dependent variables were family reunification and stability. To measure family reunification, duration of time spent in foster care and the number of visitations were analyzed. The measurement of family reunification was determined by whether an increased in visitations increased the amount of reunification. The longer children spend in foster care, family reunification was less likely to occur. Numbers of referrals (telephone calls placed to the Child Abuse Hotline on the family) after reunification and number of times placed in protective custody after initial reunification measured stability. The frequency of

court-ordered visitation and the actual number of visitations were interval measurements.

The following demographics were measured as nominal variables: race and ethnicity, gender, reason for removal, perpetrator, city location of the child's placement, city location of the parent, and whether family reunification occurred. Age, duration of foster care, numbers of placements, number of siblings, number of referrals, and numbers of times placed into protective custody were all measured as interval variables.

The strengths of this instrument were that it could be used as a general tool, it was self-explanatory, and it measured the significant information needed to determine the outcome. The limitations of this instrument were that additional information could not be added to potentially benefit the study and some of the desired information was not available on Child Welfare Services/Case Management Systems (CWS/CMS).

Procedures

The data were gathered by obtaining two hundred fifty closed family reunification files from the Department of Children's Services of San Bernardino County. A designated county researcher gathered all closed family reunification

case files for the given six year period from Child Welfare Services/Case Management Systems (CWS/CMS). The list of the files was first given to a supervisor of Department of Children's Services, then to the researchers of this study. The researchers then took a copy of the list and systematically selected every thirty-one cases until two hundred fifty cases were selected. Out of those cases, one hundred fifty four cases were qualified for this study. Those cases that did not qualify for this study were due to pending Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) status, death of a child, or lack of information input into Child Welfare Services/Case Management Systems (CWS/CMS), such as failure to input court reports or no specification of visitation requirements. Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) is when a placement is in the evaluation process for transfer to another state. The information from the closed cases was utilized to complete the data extraction protocol. The data collection took place at the county office located on Gifford Street in San Bernardino. The time allotted for data extraction was from January 1, 2005, until February 17, 2005.

Protection of Human Subjects

Individuals were studied via hard copy case records. The researchers assigned each analyzed case with an identification number. The identification number was recorded on the protocol form (see Appendix A). The researchers extracted the desired information on the Parent-Child Visitation and Family Reunification Data Extraction Protocol and recorded it on a protocol form. The protocol forms with the identification numbers were stored in a locked file cabinet. This ensured the confidentiality of the case files. The data extraction protocol did not provide any identifying characteristics to determine the identity of the case.

Data Analysis

Bivariate analyses used included correlations, chi-squares, and t-tests to test the purpose of the study. The duration of time spent in foster care was correlated with the age of the child, number of placements, and number of times the child has been placed in protective custody. Actual number of visitations and frequency of court ordered visitations were correlated with age and reason for removal. Actual numbers of visitations were also correlated with the number of times placed in

protective custody after initial reunification and the number of referrals after reunification. A chi-square was used to compare reason for removal by gender and race and ethnicity. T-tests were conducted on the following relationships; the actual amount of visits conducted was compared to gender, race and ethnicity, and whether reunification occurred. T-tests also examined the relationships between duration in foster care and number of placements compared to gender and race and ethnicity.

Summary

A quantitative approach was used in this study of a systematic random sample of one hundred fifty four closed family reunification case files from the Department of Children's Services of San Bernardino County. Data were extracted from the Child Welfare Services/Case Management Systems (CWS/CMS) and recorded on the Parent-Child Visitations and Family Reunification Data Extraction Protocol at the county office. Omission of identifying information and case names ensured confidentiality and anonymity. Correlations, chi-squares, and t-tests were used for bivariate analyses.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Included in Chapter Four is a presentation of the results. Correlations, t-tests, and chi-squares were used to analyze the results of this study. Last, the Chapter concludes with a summary of the significant findings.

Presentation of the Findings

Of the two hundred fifty cases selected for the study, one hundred fifty four were found to be eligible to complete the data extraction protocol. Due to pending Interstate Compact Placement of Children (ICPC) status, death of a child, or lack of information input into the Child Welfare Services/Case Management Systems (CWS/CMS) ninety six cases did not qualify to complete the data extraction protocol. The information needed to complete the data extraction protocol looked at gender, race and ethnicity, age, reason for removal, perpetrator, location of placement, location of parents, duration of time child spent in foster care, number of placements, number of siblings, number of referrals, number of referrals after reunification, number of times placed in protective custody, number of times placed in protective custody

after initial reunification, frequency of court ordered visitations, actual amount of visitations, and whether family reunification occurred. For the demographics that were measured, i.e., gender, race and ethnicity, age, reason for removal, perpetrator, duration of time spent in foster care, and number of referrals, the findings were that San Bernardino County (see Appendix C) did not differ from what is seen in national data (see Appendix D).

Duration of time spent in foster care was correlated with age, number of placements, number of referrals, and number of times placed in protective custody. The correlation between duration of time spent in foster care and age ($r = .113$, $p = .163$) was not significant. The correlations between duration of time spent in foster care with number of placements ($r = .527$, $p = .000$) and number of times placed in protective custody ($r = .364$, $p = .000$) were significant. The longer a child spends in foster care the more placements the child is likely to encounter. The more times a child is placed into protective custody, the longer the child is likely to spend in foster care. Also, the correlation between actual amount of visitations with age ($r = -.087$, $p = .281$), number of referrals after reunification ($r = -.015$, $p = .851$), and number of times

placed in protective custody after initial reunification ($r = -.016$, $p = .843$) were not significant.

T-tests examined duration of time spent in foster care with gender and race and ethnicity. Males (19.86 months) and females (21.84 months) were found to have a similar mean duration of time spent in foster care ($t = -.764$, $df = 152$, $p = .446$). For the purpose of this analysis, race and ethnicity was divided into two categories; minority (Hispanic, Black, and other) and non-minority (White). Minority (18.78 months) and non-minority (23.12 months) spent about the same amount of time in foster care and did not differ significantly ($t = 1.695$, $df = 152$, $p = .092$).

Number of placements was compared by gender and race and ethnicity using t-tests. Number of placements by gender, males (3.46) and females (3.72), were not significant ($t = -.415$, $df = 152$, $p = .679$). For race and ethnicity, minority (3.22) and non-minority (3.99), number of placements ($t = 1.265$, $df = 152$, $p = .208$) were not found to be significantly different as well.

T-tests were used to compare the actual amounts of visitations by gender and race and ethnicity. None of these differences were significant. For gender, males had 3.35 visits and females had 3.21 visits ($t = .363$,

df = 152, p = .717); for whether family reunification occurred, yes had 3.23 visits and no had 3.35 visits (t = -322, df = 152, p = .748); and for race and ethnicity, minority had 3.43 visits and non-minority had 3.57 visits (t = .589, df = 152, p = .556). Overall, whether family reunification occurred was not found to differ significantly by gender or race and ethnicity.

The chi-square test was used to compare the relationships between reason for removal, gender, and race and ethnicity. There was not a statistically significant relationship between reason for removal compared by gender (chi-square = 16.140, df = 17, p = .514) or race and ethnicity (chi-square = 31.695, df = 33, p = .532).

A significant finding in this study was the comparison of actual amount of visitation and family reunification rates. To determine whether actual amount of visitations influenced family reunification rates, the researchers developed two separate categories measuring the amount of visitations. The two categories consisted of two or more visits a month and visits one time a month or less. In this study, 90.7% of the children that had two or more visits a month reunified with their parents (Table 1). The hypothesis of this study was found to be true in

that the more visits children receive the more likely they will return home.

Table 1. Actual Amount of Visitations and Did Family Reunification Occur

			Did Family Reunification Occur		Total
			Yes	No	
Actual Amount of Visitations	2 times a month or more visits	Count	88	32	120
	1 time a month or more visits	Count	9	25	34
Total		Count	97	57	154

$\chi^2 = 24.957, df = 1, P = .000$

Another finding supporting the hypothesis was that the number of times placed in protective custody after initial reunification compared to the actual amount of visitations was significant. Seventy-nine point two percent of the children that visited their parents two or more times a month did not return to the custody of protective services (Table 2). The more parent-child visitations one receives in protective custody, the more likely children will remain in the custody of their parents after initial reunification, which increases stability and decreases recidivism.

Table 2. Number of Times Placed in Protective Custody After Initial Reunification and Actual Amount of Visitations

			Actual Amount of Visitations		Total
			2 times or more visits	1 time a month or less	
Number of Times Placed in Protective Custody after Initial Reunification	Zero	Count	76	11	87
		%	79.2%	68.8%	77.7%
	One or More	Count	20	5	25
		%	20.8%	31.3%	22.3%
Total		Count	96	16	12
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = .858$, $df = 1$, $P = .354$

In Table 3, a t-test looked at whether family reunification occurred and the number of referrals after initial reunification, number of times placed into protective custody after initial reunification and the duration of time spent in foster care. Reunited families averaged 3.99 referrals compared to 73.84 referrals for those not reunited. On average, reunited families had their children placed into protective custody 2.29 times after initial reunification while families not reunited experienced 71.65 placements. Reunited children spent an

average of 15.48 months in foster care compared to 30.25 months for those not reunited.

Table 3. Did Family Reunification Occur Compared with Number of Referrals After Reunification, Number of Times Placed in Protective Custody After Initial Reunification, and Duration of Time Spent in Foster Care

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Number of Referrals after Reunification	-15.5	152	.000
Number of times placed in Protective Custody	-14.9	152	.000
Duration of Time Spent in Foster Care	-6.17	152	.000

Summary

Chapter Four reviewed the results of this project. This study found that the Department of Children's Services of San Bernardino County was consistent with the findings of national data. It also found that the more visits the children receive, the more likely they will return home and remain home. An additional finding was that children who re-returned to protective custody were less likely to reunify and remained in foster care twice as long.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Included in Chapter Five is a presentation of the conclusions drawn from this project. Further, the recommendations extracted from this project are presented. Last, the chapter concludes with a summary of this project that looked at the utilization of parent-child visitations for reunification and stability among children and families.

Discussion

The conclusions of this project follow. Children who visit their parents two times a month or more were more likely to reunify with their parents, have increased stability, and decreased recidivism rates. These results are consistent with those of other studies that found that increased parent-child visitations increase reunification rates and stability (Ansay & Perkins, 2001; Hess & Mintun, 1992).

San Bernardino County's Department of Children's Services data t-test results were consistent with the findings of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' AFCARS Report. It found that patterns for age,

duration of time spent in foster care, race and ethnicity, and gender were consistent with national data. This finding was encouraging to San Bernardino County because it reinforced that it was not statistically unique.

Correlations between whether family reunification occurred and number of referrals after initial reunification, number of times placed in protective custody after initial reunification, and duration of time spent in foster were found to be significant. It found that children that re-returned to protective custody were less likely to reunify with their parents and remained in foster care twice as long. This is an important finding for the Department of Children's Services of San Bernardino County because the amount of time and money being spent on the families that continue to re-enter the system should be utilized elsewhere.

Limitations

The following limitations apply to this project. Pending Interstate Compact Placement of Children (ICPC) status, death of a child, or lack of information input into the Child Welfare Services/Case Management Systems (CWS/CMS) limited the researchers' ability to gather all the information needed to complete the data extraction

protocol from all two hundred fifty cases. Also, the researchers were not able to examine the location of the children verses the location of their parents to determine whether it influenced the amount of visitations the family received. This study was not designed to individually match the children with their parents in a case-by-case basis. That approach would be better suited as a qualitative study.

Most importantly, the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) was designed to measure quantity and not quality of parent-child visitations. Also, even though the quantity of the visits were measured, of those visits that did not take place there was not a way to determine why they did not occur. For example, there was not a way to determine whether the visits did not take place because the parents failed to appear, the children were not available, or due to lack of communication between the social worker, parents, and/or foster parents.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

The recommendations for social work practice, policy, and research are as follows. Both quantity and quality of parent-child visitations should be measured to determine

how visits affect family reunification rates. Visits should be utilized to benefit families during the reunification process.

Parent-child visitations in San Bernardino County should be structured and consistent. Social work practice should address the need for universal methods to conduct visits, increase the amount of, and provide parenting guidance during parent-child visitations. Also, social work practice should renovate how parent-child visitations are being implemented.

On average, for families in which reunification did not occur, their children were placed into protective custody for 71.65 times after initial reunification occurred. It is recommended that when children re-enter the foster care system, the time and money should be spent addressing the issues of whether parents would benefit from additional family reunification services. The Department should identify why children are returning to the system for an additional time and determine if it is possible to return home. If not, the time and money should be spent finding the children alternative permanent placements in order to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being.

Conclusions

The conclusions extracted from this project follow. The more parent-child visits occur, the more likely children will reunify with their parents, maintain stability, and decrease recidivism. Therefore, parent-child visitations help maintain the permanence and stability of family relationships. The impact of parent-child visitations on family reunification is to help increase the probability of children returning home and maintaining stability. This is important because it will help decrease the amount of time spent in foster care, which will reduce social workers' caseloads and amount of funding spent on foster care. Overall, the importance of parent-child visitations proves to be a factor in determining family reunification and stability.

APPENDIX A
PARENT-CHILD VISITATION AND FAMILY REUNIFICATION
DATA EXTRACTION PROTOCOL

ID: _____

Parent-Child Visitations and Family Reunification
Data Extraction Protocol

1. Gender:

1. Male 2. Female

2. Race/Ethnicity:

1. White
 2. Hispanic
 3. Black
 4. Other

3. Age of child at initial removal:

4. Reason for Removal

1. Neglect (N)
 2. Drug/alcohol (D/A)
 3. Physical abuse (PA)
 4. Sexual abuse (SA)
 5. Caretaker incapacitated/Abandonment (CI/A)
 6. Domestic Violence (DV)
 7. PA, CI/A
 8. PA, SA
 9. D/A, CI/A
 10. PA, DV
 11. SA, CI/A

5. Perpetrator

1. Father 2. Mother 3. Other
 4. Father/Mother

6. City location of placement: _____

7. County Location of Placemnt: _____

8. City location of parent(s): _____

9. County location of Parents: _____

10. Duration of time spent in Foster Care: _____

11. Number of placements

1. one
 2. two
 3. three
 4. four
 5. More _____

12. Number of Siblings: _____

13. Number of referrals: _____

14. Number of referrals after reunification: _____

15. Number of times placed in protective custody:

16. Number of times placed in protective custody after initial reunification: _____

17. Frequency of court-ordered visitations

1. daily
 2. biweekly
 3. weekly
 4. twice a month
 5. monthly
 6. no visits
 7. other

18. Actual amount of visitations:

1. daily
 2. biweekly
 3. weekly
 4. twice a month
 5. monthly
 6. no visits
 7. other

19. Did Family Reunification occur:

1. Yes 2. No _____

APPENDIX B
AGENCY LETTER

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES



COUNTY OF SAN BERNARDINO
HUMAN SERVICES SYSTEM

CATHY CIMBALO
Director

Dr. Rosemary McCaslin
Department of Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, CA 92407-2397

REPLY TO:

- 170 North Yucca Street
Barstow, CA 92311
- 1300 Bailey Avenue
Needles, CA 92363
- 6538 7th Street
Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91730
- 59311 Pima Trail
Yucca Valley, CA 92284
- 412 West Hospitality Lane, Second Floor
San Bernardino, CA 92415-0913
- 396 North "E" Street
San Bernardino, CA 92415-0084
- 825 East Hospitality Lane
San Bernardino, CA 92415-0079
- 1504 Gifford Street
San Bernardino, CA 92415-0058
- 15480 Ramona Avenue
Victorville, CA 92382
- 16519 Victor Street, Suite 323
Victorville, CA 92392

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(909)386-9780

(602)

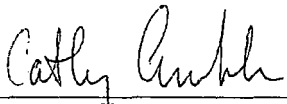
Dear Dr. McCaslin:

This letter serves as notification to the Department of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino, that Lori Stooksbury and Susanne Jimenez has obtained consent from the Department of Children's Services, San Bernardino County, to conduct the research project entitled "The Utilization of Parent-Child Visitations for Reunification and Stability among Children and Families."

If you have questions regarding this letter of consent, you may contact:

Cathy Cimbalo, Director at (909) 388-0242

Sincerely,



Signature
Cathy Cimbalo, Director

11/15/2004

Date

APPENDIX C
CORRELATION TABLE OF DEMOGRAPHICS

Correlation Table of Demographics

		Gender	Age of Child	Race	Reason for Removal	Perpetrator	Number of Referrals
Gender	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.062	.013	-.094	.021	-.064
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.447	.872	.244	.795	.429
	N	154	154	154	154	154	154
Age of Child	Pearson Correlation		1.000	.029	.278**	-.154	.336**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.722	.000	.056	.000
	N		154	154	154	154	154
Race	Pearson Correlation			1.000	.063	-.142	-.051
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.438	.078	.529
	N			154	154	154	154
Reason for Removal	Pearson Correlation				1.000	.141	.051
	Sig. (2-tailed)					.082	.528
	N				154	154	154
Perpetrator	Pearson Correlation					1.000	-.035
	Sig. (2-tailed)						.666
	N					154	154
Number of Referrals	Pearson Correlation						1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N						154

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

APPENDIX D

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN
SERVICES, THE ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE
ANALYSIS AND REPORT SYSTEM REPORT

The AFCARS Report

Preliminary FY 2002 Estimates as of August 2004 (9)

How many children were in foster care on September 30, 2002? 532,000

SOURCE: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data submitted for the FY 2002, 10/1/01 through 9/30/02.

NOTES: Data from both the regular and revised submissions received by August, 2004 are included in the estimates. Some percentages do not total 100% and/or the estimated numbers do not add up to the total number in the category due to rounding.

What were the ages of the children in foster care?

Mean Yrs	10.2	
Median Yrs	10.8	
Under 1 Yr	5%	24,290
1 thru 5 Yrs	24%	128,947
6 thru 10 Yrs	22%	116,802
11 thru 15 Yrs	30%	158,290
16 thru 18 Yrs	17%	92,091
19 + Yrs	2%	10,321

What were the placement settings of children in foster care?

Pre-Adoptive Home	5%	24,960
Foster Family Home (Relative)	23%	124,036
Foster Family Home (Non-Relative)	46%	243,505
Group Home	9%	45,464
Institution	10%	54,472
Supervised Independent Living	1%	5,676
Runaway	2%	9,459
Trial Home Visit	4%	18,809

What were the lengths of stay in foster care?

Mean Months	32	
Median Months	18	
Less than 1 Month	5%	23,948
1 to 5 Months	18%	94,399
6 to 11 Months	16%	84,707
12 to 17 Months	12%	62,036
18 to 23 Months	8%	45,008
24 to 29 Months	7%	36,236
30 to 35 Months	5%	27,196
3 to 4 Yrs	13%	70,754
5 Yrs or More	16%	87,694

What were the case goals of the children in foster care?

Reunify with Parent(s) or Principal Caretaker(s)	45%	238,331
Live with Other Relative(s)	5%	26,479
Adoption	21%	109,581
Long Term Foster Care	9%	46,119
Emancipation	6%	33,581
Guardianship	3%	16,389
Case Plan Goal Not Yet Established	10%	52,450

Children in Foster Care on September 30, 2002 (continued)

What was the race/ethnicity of the children in foster care?

AI/AN Non-Hispanic	2%	9,792
Asian Non-Hispanic	1%	3,423
Black Non-Hispanic	37%	195,040
Hawaiian/PI Non-Hispanic	0%	1,465
Hispanic	17%	89,177
White Non-Hispanic	39%	205,478
Unknown/Unable to Determine	3%	14,432
Two or More Races Non-Hispanic	2%	12,986

What was the gender of the children in foster care?

Male	52%	278,916
Female	48%	252,932

NOTE: Using U.S. Bureau of the Census standards, children of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Beginning in FY 2000, children could be identified with more than one race designation.

How many children entered foster care during FY 2002? 303,000

What were the ages of the children who entered care during FY 2002?

Mean Yrs	8.5	
Median Yrs	8.6	
Under 1 Year	14%	41,874
1 thru 5 Years	26%	77,623
6 thru 10 Years	20%	61,555
11 thru 15 Years	29%	87,416
16 thru 18 Years	11%	34,046
19 or more Years	0%	208

What was the race/ethnicity of the children who entered care during FY 2002?

AI/AN Non-Hispanic	2%	6,889
Asian Non-Hispanic	1%	2,855
Black Non-Hispanic	28%	83,585
Hawaiian/PI Non-Hispanic	0%	1,110
Hispanic	17%	51,330
White Non-Hispanic	46%	139,861
Unknown/Unable to Determine	3%	8,555
Two or More Races Non-Hispanic	3%	8,332

NOTE: Using U.S. Bureau of the Census standards, children of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Beginning in FY 2000, children could be identified with more than one race designation.

How many children exited foster care during FY 2002? 281,000

What were the ages of the children who exited care during FY 2002?

Mean Years	10.1	
Median Years	10.2	
Under 1 Year	4%	12,059
1 thru 5 Years	27%	76,993
6 thru 10 Years	22%	61,089
11 thru 15 Years	24%	67,388
16 thru 18 Years	20%	56,360
19 or more Years	2%	6,365

What was the race/ethnicity of the children who exited care during FY 2002?

AI/AN Non-Hispanic	2%	6,357
Asian Non-Hispanic	1%	2,739
Black Non-Hispanic	30%	84,366
Hawaiian/PI Non-Hispanic	0%	968
Hispanic	16%	44,931
White Non-Hispanic	45%	125,114
Unknown/Unable to Determine	3%	8,686
Two or More Races Non-Hispanic	3%	7,443

What were the lengths of stay of the children who exited foster care during FY 2002?

Mean Months	21.7	
Median Months	11.7	
Less than 1 Month	19%	52,819
1 to 5 Months	17%	46,751
6 to 11 Months	15%	43,186
12 to 17 Months	11%	32,291
18 to 23 Months	8%	22,364
24 to 29 Months	6%	16,776
30 to 35 Months	4%	12,464
3 to 4 Years	10%	28,302
5 or More Years	9%	24,434

NOTE: Using U.S. Bureau of the Census standards, children of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Beginning in FY 2000, children could be identified with more than one race designation.

What were the outcomes for the children exiting foster care during FY 2002?

Reunify with Parent(s) or Principal Caretaker(s)	54%	152,757
Live with Other Relative(s)	10%	27,750
Adoption	17%	48,871
Emancipation	7%	19,509
Guardianship	4%	10,136
Transfer to Another Agency	2%	6,797
Runaway	2%	4,695
Death of Child	0%	530

NOTE: Deaths are attributable to a variety of causes including medical conditions, accidents and homicide.

How many children were waiting to be adopted on September 30, 2002? 126,000

NOTES: Waiting children are identified as children who have a goal of adoption and/or whose parental rights have been terminated. Children 16 years old and older whose parental rights have been terminated and who have a goal of emancipation have been excluded from the estimate.

What is the gender distribution of the waiting children?

Male	53%	66,472
Female	47%	59,509

How old were the waiting children when they were removed from their parents or caretakers?

Mean Years	4.9	
Median Years	4.2	
Less than 1 Year	26%	31,659
1 thru 5 Years	37%	46,832
6 thru 10 Years	28%	35,572
11 thru 15 Years	9%	11,579
16 thru 18 Years	0%	343

How many months have the waiting children been in continuous foster care?

Mean Months	44	
Median Months	35	
Less than 1 month	0%	533
1 thru 5 months	4%	4,428
6 thru 11 months	7%	9,266
12 thru 17 months	10%	13,062
18 thru 23 months	11%	13,691
24 thru 29 months	11%	13,537
30 thru 35 months	9%	10,945
36 thru 59 months	24%	29,627
60 or more months	25%	30,904

What is the racial/ethnic distribution of the waiting children?

A/AN Non-Hispanic	2%	2,146
Asian Non-Hispanic	0%	533
Black Non-Hispanic	42%	52,935
Hawaiian/PI Non-Hispanic	0%	336
Hispanic	13%	16,324
White Non-Hispanic	36%	45,410
Unknown/Unable to Determine	4%	4,751
Two or More Races Non-Hispanic	3%	3,547

NOTE: Using U.S. Bureau of the Census standards, children of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Beginning in FY 2000, children could be identified with more than one race designation.

How old were the children on September 30, 2002?

Mean Years	8.5	
Median Years	8.5	
Less than 1 Year	3%	4,224
1 thru 5 Years	32%	40,204
6 thru 10 Years	30%	37,740
11 thru 15 Years	29%	36,310
16 thru 18 Years	5%	6,393

Where were the waiting children living on September 30, 2002?

Pre-Adoptive Home	16%	20,732
Foster Family Home (Relative)	16%	20,652
Foster Family Home (Non-Relative)	55%	69,448
Group Home	4%	4,837
Institution	7%	8,236
Supervised Independent Living	0%	151
Runaway	0%	627
Trial Home Visit	0%	437

**How many children in foster care had their parental rights terminated for all living parents?
67,000**

As of September 30, 2002, how many months had elapsed since the parental rights of these foster children were terminated?

Mean Months	25
Median Months	16

How many children were adopted from the public foster care system in FY 2002? 53,000

SOURCE: Adoptions can be reported to the AFCARS adoption database at any time after the adoption has been finalized. TAR 9 includes adoptions finalized in FY 2002 reported in regular and revised submissions by August 2004.

NOTES: The number of adoptions reported here do not equal the number of adoption discharges reported under foster care exits because the adoptions reported here include adoptions of some children who were not in foster care but received other support from the public agency. In addition, states have historically under reported adoption discharges. In contrast, states tend to more accurately report the adoptions to the AFCARS adoption database because those are the adoptions used to calculate adoption incentive awards. Some percentages do not total 100% and/or the estimated numbers do not add up to the total number in the category due to rounding.

What is the gender distribution of the children adopted from the public foster care system?

Male	50%	26,587
Female	50%	26,401

What is the racial/ethnic distribution of the children adopted from the public foster care system?

AI/AN Non-Hispanic	1%	685
Asian Non-Hispanic	1%	309
Black Non-Hispanic	36%	18,828
Hawaiian/PI Non-Hispanic	0%	169
Hispanic	16%	8,536
White Non-Hispanic	39%	20,833
Unknown/Unable to Determine	3%	1,745
Two or More Races Non-Hispanic	3%	1,831

How old were the children when they were adopted from the public foster care system?

Mean Years	7.0
Median Years	6.3

Less than 1 Year	2%	984
1 thru 5 Years	46%	24,412
6 thru 10 Years	32%	16,916
11 thru 15 Years	18%	9,313
16 thru 18 Years	2%	1,309
19 or more Years	0%	42

NOTE: Using U.S. Bureau of the Census standards, children of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Beginning in FY 2000, children could be identified with more than one race designation.

How many months did it take after termination of parental rights for the children to be adopted?

Mean Months	16
Median Months	12

What proportion of the children adopted are receiving an adoption subsidy?

Yes	88%	46,826
No	11%	5,849

Less than 1 Month	4%	1,894
1 thru 5 Months	18%	9,489
6 thru 11 Months	27%	14,268
12 thru 17 Months	19%	9,913
18 thru 23 Months	11%	5,676
24 thru 29 Months	7%	3,556
30 thru 35 Months	4%	2,288
3 thru 4 Years	6%	3,249
5 or more Years	2%	1,062

Children Adopted in FY 2002 (Continued)

What is the family structure of the child's adoptive family?			What was the relationship of the adoptive parents to the child prior to the adoption?		
Married Couple	66%	35,033	Non-Relative	15%	7,950
Unmarried Couple	2%	901	Foster Parent	61%	32,489
Single Female	30%	15,794	Step-Parent	0%	106
Single Male	2%	1,272	Other Relative	24%	12,508

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Susanne Jimenez & Lori Stooksbury

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Susanne Jimenez & Lori Stooksbury

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

a. Introduction and Literature

Team Effort: Susanne Jimenez & Lori Stooksbury

b. Methods

Team Effort: Susanne Jimenez & Lori Stooksbury

c. Results

Team Effort: Susanne Jimenez & Lori Stooksbury

d. Discussion

Team Effort: Susanne Jimenez & Lori Stooksbury