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Evaluating Father Involvement in the Voluntary Family Maintenance and Reunification Process

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Collaborative Health & Human Services

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Evaluating Father Involvement in Voluntary Process

Abstract

ACTION's Community Case Management program works collaboratively with Monterey County Department of Social Services' Family and Children Services' Voluntary Family Maintenance and Voluntary Family Reunification unit, to keep children safe at home and out of the court system. Recurrent child maltreatment rates are too high in voluntary and court-ordered child protective services. Various factors contribute to father involvement and engagement in family stabilization efforts. This capstone was an exploratory research project that assessed father involvement in parent education services for families that were referred to voluntary child protective services in Monterey County. This project aimed to increase awareness on the importance of father involvement in prevention and intervention services, with a focus on engaging fathers, if present, in voluntary services. Findings suggest that father involvement is related to program completion, but additional research is recommended to prove the statistical correlation.

Key words: *father, child welfare, case plan services, participation, inclusion, voluntary services*

Evaluating Father Involvement in Voluntary Process

I. Agency and Communities Served

ACTION of Monterey County is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established in 1994 in Salinas, California. ACTION's efforts focus on community building through advocacy, development, and evaluation of community resources. ACTION's "mission is to enhance the quality of life and empower the people of the Monterey County." ACTION serves Monterey County residents, with a primary focus on the City of Salinas, making up about 37% (157, 218) of the county's population. They work with the community to incubate projects within the organization; some of which spin off into other organizations or become independent entities (Jason Hall, personal communication, February, 2018). One example is the program Pathways to Safety, Monterey County's differential response, an early intervention initiative to address the causes of child protective service reports, offering support and resources to families who do not meet the criteria for further child protective services (CPS) involvement (Door to Hope, 2017). Pathways to Safety was developed and implemented by ACTION and it was later transferred to one of its partnering organization, Door to Hope. ACTION's current community building programs include: Wraparound, Family Resource Center Network (FRC), Ingram Housing Fund (IHF), Building Healthy Communities (BHC), and Parents as Teachers (PAT) (ACMC, 2011).

ACTION has working partnerships with First 5 Monterey County, Door to Hope, and a subcontract with the Monterey County Department of Social Services (MCDSS) (R., Romero, professional communication, November, 2018). ACTION's Community Case Management (CCM) program was designed to work with MCDSS in voluntary child protective services, a prevention and intervention effort to help keep children safe at home and out of the court system

by providing services to families with open Voluntary Family Maintenance and Voluntary Family Reunification (VFM//VFR)[1] cases (E., Hill, personal communication, March, 2018).

ACTION serves families with children five years and under and low-income families through the First 5 Monterey County. ACTION's CCM unit works alongside MCDSS CPS VFM/VFR unit on non-court ordered voluntary cases. Through collaborative work, CCM serves families with open VFM/VFR CPS cases in meeting service case plan goal requirements through linkage to services, check-in progress, support, and advocacy, with the objective of keeping children safe at home. Currently CCM has one case manager, Elizabeth Hill-Serrano, who has an average caseload of 35 referrals per fiscal year with a current caseload of 18 families with pending referrals (E. Hill, personal communication, February, 2019).

II. Problem Description

Child maltreatment is a serious national issue with neglect being the most prevalent form of abuse, making up about 75% of child maltreatment allegations (CDSS, 2014). When child maltreatment is addressed by child welfare agencies, statistics show that child maltreatment recurrence is too high. In California, about 6% of families with substantiated allegations return to the child welfare system within 12 months after the completion of child welfare services (Webster et.al, 2018). Factors that may contribute to the likelihood of child maltreatment recurrence may include: Parental mental health, domestic violence, substance abuse/misuse, special needs care, socioeconomic inequity, social and cultural norms (Austin, M., Carnochan, S., Rizik-Baer, D., 2013), and unresolved issues (Fuller, Nieto, Zhang, 2012) among others. Not

[1] "VFM/VFR program provide time-limited services to children and families services may be offered when it is determined by social worker that there is "potential danger of abuse, neglect of exploitation" but there is no basis for filing a petition, the parents are willing to accept services and participate in corrective efforts, and it is safe for the child to remain in the home with the provision of services. VFM services are appropriate when the social worker assesses that it is unclear as to whether the allegations of abuse or neglect are true or not, and the allegation disposition is inconclusive (DFCS Online Policies & Procedures, 2015)."

addressing abuse recurrence may have the same consequences like those derived by initial abuse such as cycle of abuse, permanent removal of children (E. Hill, personal communication, 2018), high risk for substance use, behavioral and mental health problems, and physical health problems, including a lower life expectancy for children who have experienced maltreatment (WHO, 2016). The increased rate of recurrence became the basis of this exploratory research project focusing on contributing factors to recurrent allegations and its link to voluntary family stabilization and father involvement.

There are various factors that contribute to father involvement and engagement in family stabilization efforts. The agency problem addressed by this research project is the limited engagement of fathers in VFM/VFR parenting education programs and services. The little efforts gone into family inclusion in the VFM/VFR process, primarily the father, may have an impact on who can participate in voluntary services (D., Rosen, personal communication, February 12, 2019). According to VFM/VFR social workers, paternal figures are not offered services unless they are the biological father of the child. There are many contributing factors to the agency problem in regards to involving fathers in the VFM/VVR process and reducing the risk of maltreatment recurrence. Some factors that may impede father involvement in services include not having a present paternal figure, father attitudes and cultural norms towards child welfare services and their role as the male figure, social worker or community case manager to client communication dynamics and institutional pressures (E., Hill, personal communication, 2018). Not addressing this issue impacts the agency's purpose by not meeting the means of their mission, the risk for maltreatment recurrence, and the risk for permanent child removal increases (E. Hill, personal communication, 2018).

Evaluating Father Involvement in Voluntary Process

Parent-to-child and family positive dynamics are important in helping children reach crucial developmental milestones while fostering a safe and nurturing living environment. Parents who fail to protect, meet the needs of their children, or have risked the well-being and safety of their children may face intervention services (E., Hill, professional communication, February, 2018). Current research denotes the importance of positive father, biological or paternal figure, involvement and its impact on child development and family dynamics. A focus on the vital role of fathers in children remaining in the home during child welfare CPS involvement increases the likelihood for mother compliance (Gordon, Oliveros, Hawes, Iwamoto, and Rayford, 2014). Father involvement has shown to have positive impacts on their children's cognitive abilities, educational achievement, psychological well-being, and social behaviors, knowledge on such aspects may help CPS to create more effective case plan services involving fathers (Bradford, Rosenberg, 2006).

III. Project description and justification

This research project collected and analyzed qualitative data on father participation before and after CPS case plan delivery; evaluating the impact of father involvement in the successful completion of VFM service case plan goals and abuse prevention. The purpose of *Evaluating Father Involvement in the Voluntary Family Maintenance and Reunification Process* research project is to bring awareness and increase knowledge on the efforts of prevention and intervention services in including all family members, with the focus on engaging fathers, if present, in voluntary services. All findings were analyzed and documented in a report draft and approved by the agency field mentor.

CPS court ordered cases follow a set of regulatory child welfare institutional policies and procedures that require mandatory mother, father figures, and family involvement in the child welfare process; that is unless the father legally gives up his paternal rights (D., Bach, personal

communication, 2018). Such policies and procedures on family involvement in the court ordered process are not applied to VFM cases, as they are deemed "voluntary" due to CPS determining allegations as inconclusive. Use of the term "voluntary" may inadvertently indicate that the involvement of fathers or other family members is not important; reducing the likelihood of father participation in service case planning and services that aim to prevent future maltreatment and reduce the risk of child removal. The concept of "voluntary" services has resulted in minimal parent participation and engagement offered VFM/VFR services (E., Hill, personal communication, 2018).

Based on social worker recommendations, parents who decline VFM/VFR services may face CPS court-ordered interventions if it is determined that the children's well-being is at risk. Other recommendations may include immediate removal if allegations are brought to the attention of CPS after various referrals to VFM/VFR. At any given point, parents, can stop services but there must be someone present at home who can ensure the safety and well-being of the children. The VFM social worker must have attempted multiple and reasonable efforts prior to case dismissal (E., Hill, personal communication, 2019). Fathers like mothers are included in VFM/VFR service case plan but, their agreement to participate is not priority, as it is centered on mother participation in services. This may also diminish father involvement in parenting programs designed to support families such as Parents as Teachers (PAT), Positive Parenting Program (Triple P), Strengthening Families, or other offered services (Elizabeth Hill, personal communication, February, 2018).

Results of the research project was delivered to ACTION's community case manager and program director. This research project aims to increase knowledge on consistent father inclusion

in service case plans to better serve families with open VFM/VFR CPS cases in efforts to prevent future maltreatment allegations and or transition into court.

Project Implementation Plan

Implementation began with the capstone mentor's approval of the research project which required for access to terminated case files for data collection Selection of files was determined by family interaction domains where 5 families scored "baseline/adequate" and 5 families scored "moderate/mild problem" using the North Carolina Family Assessment (NCFAS-G) on agency's database[2] . Background information on topics were obtained through literature using online resources, books, and journals, ACTION's community case manager, and CPS workers. In addition, a set of questions was developed for case plan analysis, reviewing case plans, gathering demographic information, and status of parenting program PAT completion analysis. Implementation was completed through a final findings report.

Participants for this project included partnering agency PAT educator for input on father participation in parenting education. Resources used to complete the project primarily included access to case files, agency personnel time, and CSUMB faculty time for consultations. Personnel includes CCM Elizabeth Hill, ACTION's financial director Daniel Bach, CPS social workers, and CSUMB faculty Ignacio Navarro.

Challenges that rose during this project included not having enough or accurate data on the number of absent fathers in the MCDSS VFM/VFR process or sufficient evidence to support this research project. Other challenges include incorporating new VFM knowledge to work with

[2] North Carolina Family Assessment Scales (NCFAS-G), commonly known as FAST, is used to determine the family's current situation and the domain of focus for program services through an initial intake. These domains of focus include Environment, Parental Capabilities, Family Interactions, Family Safety, Child Well-being, Social/Community Life, Self-Sufficiency, and Family Health. Ratings of intake and assessment include, Clear Strength, Mild Strength, Baseline/Adequate (or unknown), Mild Problem, Moderate Problem, and Serious Problem.

the research area of focus. These challenges were addressed by speaking with mentor and professionals involved in case planning, and incorporating new findings as suggestions for further research. In regards to timeline/deadlines efforts were made to complete all activities within the proposed time. Unforeseen circumstances were communicated to the mentor, instructor, or other involved participants. Prior to implementation, deadlines were discussed with primary mentor

Scope of Work and Timeline

The primary activities for the initial capstone project were to obtain access to the agency database and client case file charts. Research on project related topics, developing a series of questions for case file review (Refer to Appendix A), and research project outline (Refer to Appendix D). These activities were carried out throughout Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 semesters. Case file data collection and analysis was conducted in December 2018 and January 2019. Literature review, case file review, and assessment database review for demographics to be completed by the end of February, 2019. All project activities and deliverables are summarized in Table 1 of Appendix C.

IV. Assessment Process

The primary expected project outcome is to increasing awareness and education on the importance of father involvement and the efforts gone into of prevention and intervention services in including all family members, with the focus on engaging fathers, if present, in voluntary services. The final report and findings were delivered to ACTION's Case Manager Assessment measure used to assess the projects progress towards achieving the expected outcome was an interview with mentor on the legitimacy of the issue that was addressed in this

research project. Due to this capstone project being a research project its direct impact cannot be measured immediately.

V. Findings and Results

Child maltreatment is a common global issue with a rise in child maltreatment recurrence after child welfare involvement; nationally, 16% to 42% of substantiated cases have a subsequent report (Dakil, Flores, Lin, Sakai, 2011). Recurrence rates range from 1–2% for low risk cases to 50% for high risk cases. In the state of CA, 60% of child maltreatment allegations where the children remain at home are re-reported within 5 years. Were another study found that of those 60% of allegations approximately 26% have a child maltreatment recurrence in the first 2 years after child welfare involvement. There are multiple factors that contribute to the risk of recurrence, major factors include: intimate partner violence and conflicts, neglect, parental mental health problems, and unaddressed problems (Hindley, Ramchandani, and Jones, 2016). Child neglect, being the most common form of child maltreatment has the highest rate of child maltreatment allegations (CDSS, 2014) and the highest rate for child maltreatment recurrence (Fuller, Nieto, Zhang, 2012). Intensity of services may be a factor on whether an allegation has a higher or lower risk of abuse recurrence. Father involvement serves as a protective factor in reducing risk of child maltreatment (CFRP, 2017). Furthermore, research has also shown that early interventions on increasing the knowledge of child development and the importance of father-to-child interactions may reduce the risk of child maltreatment (Bellamy, Guterman, Lee, 2009). Challenges and limitations to this project in regards to literature review was the minimal attention and research gone into voluntary family maintenance and voluntary family reunification child welfare service. Most statistics addressed came from CPS substantiated allegations. More research is recommended to address these issues in VFM/VFR.

Results following case file review out of 10 families selected, 7 families had active fathers involved in the child's life. 8 out of the 10 families had a successful program completion and of those 8 families 7 had an active father. Out of the 10, 2 families were dismissed into court for non-compliance; 1 of the 2 families had no active father. Suggesting that father participation in VFM services seems to be a factor in successful program completion or increased likelihood of mother participation in parenting education programs and services. However, the sample size was significantly small to be proven statistically. Nevertheless, past and present research denotes that active father involvement in child's life reduces the risk of recurrent maltreatment. The findings suggest that father involvement is related to VFM/VFR program completion, but additional research is recommended to prove the statistical correlation.

VI. Recommendations

An agency recommendation is for research on the impacts of father involvement and its link to child maltreatment recurrence and preventive service efforts. Including further research on voluntary services and its impacts on family stabilization after child maltreatment allegations. Other recommendations include to evaluate current voluntary service efforts and find effective ways to engage fathers in parenting services, further beyond "reasonable efforts."

Given the complexity of the child welfare system there is various policy loopholes that may intervene with child welfare agencies to meet its mission to serve underrepresented vulnerable populations, families and children, adequately. Regardless of whether they are voluntary or court ordered services. Because VFM has very little attention from child welfare, it is recommended that more consideration is but into this unit. To address this massive public health issue there should be more awareness of the importance of prevention services.

VII. Conclusion and Personal Reflection

From this research project, I learned the importance of prevention work and research when applied adequately. The impact that father involvement has on a child's life in and out of child welfare voluntary services and court ordered; from conception to adolescent years. Including the impact father involvement has in reducing the risk of child maltreatment. As the VFM/VFR unit undergoes changes such as the name, case plan composition, and bettering services I hope that there will be an increase in parental participation in voluntary services.

Through the course of this research project I have gained both personal and professional confidence. Initially I was doubtful of myself and the ability to communicate my capstone ideas and plan to my mentor. I gained the confidence and interest to continue my research project; witnessing it gradually progressing. I also gained more knowledge on the CPS and CCM fields practice and those in health and human services.

Finishing my project gave me the relief of completing something I have never done before. I knew that I would get lost in the process and I did, multiple and made me realize that there are still many areas in where I must improve. This capstone project to me was a glimpse of what can be done in research in the health and human services field and how it is used to address not only social issues but efforts in improving social services. Despite the many difficulties I faced and, I believe, the inability to be articulate my project well, I am proud with the outcome of it. It did not turn out to be what I expected but it turn out better from where I began. All I though was that perhaps with more time and organization this project can become presentable professional work. Lastly, to me this project was a reminder that we only learn and improve by doing.

Appendix A

Case File Review

1. MO Age: _____

2. MO Ethnicity/ Race: _____

3. Family Composition:

Number of children at home: 1 2 3 4>

Partner/ Spouse: Yes No

4. Intake Assessment for Environment:

Clear Strength Mild Strength Baseline Mild Problem Serious Problem

5. Exit Assessment Environment :

Clear Strength Mild Strength Baseline Mild Problem Serious Problem

6. Intake Assessment for Family Interactions:

Clear Strength Mild Strength Baseline Mild Problem Serious Problem

7. Exit Assessment for Family Interactions:

Clear Strength Mild Strength Baseline Mild Problem Serious Problem

8. Type of Allegation (Family Safety):

Neglect (N) Sexual Abuse (SA) Physical Abuse (PA)

Emotional Abuse (EA) Domestic Violence (DV)

9. Has father/ paternal figure participated in parenting program?

Yes No

Appendix B

Project Title: Evaluating Father Involvement in the Voluntary Family Maintenance and Reunification Process		
Problem Statement:		
CAUSES TO AGENCY PROBLEM	**AGENCY-SPECIFIC "MICRO-LEVEL" PROBLEM ADDRESSED BY PROJECT**	**CONSEQUENCES TO AGENCY**
● Little family finding efforts ● No present father ● Paternal figure declines services ● SW/CCM practice approach, time, and institutional pressures	Limited efforts by CPS to engage fathers in the VFM/VFR process.	● Social Service goals are not met ● High risk for re abuse (reentry into the child welfare system) ● High risk for child removal (extending program timeframe)
CAUSES TO BROADER HEALTH PROBLEM	**BROADER "MACRO-LEVEL" HEALTH/SOCIAL PROBLEM**	**CONSEQUENCES TO SOCIETY**
● Inadequate education ● Special needs care ● Difficulty bonding ● Lack of awareness of child development ● Substance abuse/misuse ● Domestic Violence ● Socioeconomic inequality ● Social and cultural norms	Many children experience maltreatment in the home before the age of 18.	● Cycle of abuse ● High risk for substance abuse ● High risk for behavioral and mental health problems ● Higher risk for physical health problems ● Poverty ● Lower life expectancy

Appendix C

Table 1. Scope of Work for Research Project		
Goal: Decrease risk of abuse recurrence through paternal involvement		
Primary objective of the project: Increase inclusion of father or paternal figure participation in the VFM/VFR process.		
Activities	**Deliverables**	**Timeline/deadlines**
1.Discuss capstone project ideas with mentor	1. Final capstone project idea approved	1. October 22, 2018
2. Ask staff about North Carolina Family Assessment (NCFAS-G) on agency's database	2. Access to demographics and completion of parenting programs approved by mentor	2. October 30, 2018
3. Request access to case files	3. Access to case file charts approved	3. November 1, 2018
4. Analyze 10 case plans, 5 scoring problem on family interaction and 5 scoring adequate in family interaction and discussion with mentor	4. Chart file analysis approved by mentor	4. January 3, 2019
5. Literature review on child welfare regulations and father involvement effects on child development	5. Preliminary information approved by mentor	5. January 16, 2019
6. Develop research outline and submit to mentor for approval	6. Research outline and components approved by mentor and Dr. Navarro	6. February 1, 2019
7. Document all findings in report	7. Draft of finings approved by mentor	7. March, 2018
8. Complete reporting requirements	8. Final agency and capstone report approved	8. May 3, 2019
9. Prepare capstone presentation in selected format	9. Instructor approved & Dress Rehearsal of final capstone presentation format (posters submitted for printing)	9. May 8-10, 2019

10. Final preparation for Capstone Festival	10. Final presentation at Capstone Festival	10. May 16

Appendix D

Research Project Document Outline

Introduction

Child Welfare & Support Services
- CWS process
- CCM and MCDSS
- Services and timeframe

Database Intake Assessment
- What is NCFAS-G?
- Scales rating
- CCM caseload rating
- Focus of research (case plan goals and parent participation)

Case Plan Brief Description
- How is it composed? Who is included? Why?

Parenting Programs
- PAT, Triple P, Strengthening Families
- Requirements
- Sessions
- Focus and completion; father participation

Method (Casefile Review)

Participants
- 10 casefiles
- 5 baseline, 5 moderate problem in family dynamics

Measure and Procedure
- Database
- Casefile chart review
- Who participated in parenting program?

Findings
- Father participation was inconsistent in comparison to mothers, in mental health services, parenting education, domestic violence education, so forth.
- fathers willingly participated in the proposed services and case plan goals
- not enough efforts in family finding and inclusion

Recommendations

Strengths and limitations

Timeframe

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Evaluating Father Involvement in the Voluntary Family Maintenance and Reunification Process

Elizabeth Crescencio-Garduno, Collaborative Health & Human Services BA undergraduate, Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy, California State University, Monterey Bay

Abstract

ACTION's Community Case Management program works collaboratively with Monterey County Department of Social Services' Family and Children Services' Voluntary Family Maintenance and Reunification unit, to keep children safe at home and out of the court system. Recurrent child maltreatment rates are too high in voluntary and court-ordered child protective services. Various factors contribute to father involvement and engagement in family stabilization efforts. This capstone was an exploratory research project that assessed father involvement in parent education services for families that were referred to voluntary child protective services in Monterey County. This project aimed to increase awareness on the importance of father involvement in prevention and intervention services, with a focus on engaging fathers, if present, in voluntary services. Findings suggest that father involvement is related to program completion, but additional research is recommended to prove the statistical correlation.

Key words: *father, child welfare, case plan services, participation, inclusion, assess, voluntary services*

Introduction

Child maltreatment is a serious national issue with neglect being the most prevalent form of abuse, making up about 75% of child maltreatment allegations (CDSS, 2014). When child maltreatment is addressed by child welfare agencies, statistics show that child maltreatment recurrence is too high. In California, about 6% of families with substantiated allegations return to the child welfare system within 12 months after the completion of child welfare services (Webster et.al, 2018). Factors that may contribute to the likelihood of child maltreatment recurrence may include: Parental mental health, domestic violence, substance abuse/misuse, special needs care, socioeconomic inequity, social and cultural norms (Austin, M., Carnochan, S., Rizik-Baer, D., 2013), and unresolved issues (Fuller, Nieto, Zhang, 2012) among others. Not addressing abuse recurrence may have the same consequences like those derived by initial abuse such as cycle of abuse, permanent removal of children (E. Hill, personal communication, 2018),

high risk for substance use, behavioral and mental health problems, and physical health problems, including a lower life expectancy for children who have experienced maltreatment (WHO, 2016). The increased rate of recurrence became the basis of this exploratory research project focusing on contributing factors to recurrent allegations and its link to voluntary family stabilization and father involvement. This research project collected and analyzed qualitative data on father participation before and after CPS case plan delivery; evaluating the impact of father involvement in the successful completion of VFM service case plan goals and abuse prevention. With the aimed at increasing awareness and education on the importance of father involvement and efforts of prevention and intervention services in including all family members, with the focus on engaging fathers, if present, in voluntary services.

There are various factors that contribute to father involvement and engagement in family stabilization efforts. The agency problem addressed by this research project is the limited engagement of fathers in VFM/VFR parenting education programs and services. The little efforts gone into family inclusion in the VFM/VFR process, primarily the father, may have an impact on who can participate in voluntary services (D., Rosen, personal communication, February 12, 2019). According to VFM/VFR social workers, paternal figures are not offered services unless they are the biological father of the child. There are many contributing factors to the this problem in regards to involving fathers in the VFM/VVR process and reducing the risk of maltreatment recurrence. Some factors that may impede father involvement in services include not having a present paternal figure, father attitudes and cultural norms towards child welfare services and their role as the male figure, social worker or community case manager to client communication dynamics and institutional pressures (E., Hill, personal communication, 2018). Not addressing this issue impacts the agency's purpose by not meeting the means of their mission, the risk for

maltreatment recurrence, and the risk for permanent child removal increases (E. Hill, personal communication, 2018).

Child Welfare System & Services

Child welfare is a complex system composed of various services developed to promote and ensure the safety and well-being of children (CWIG, 2012). These services focus on ensuring safety, permanency with caregivers, and encourage positive family dynamics of communication to create a more nurturing living environment for children. Many services are delivered by multiple organizations; public and private agencies (CWIG, 2012). Child welfare and community based organizations provide services to families, services which may include: in-home family services, foster care, residential treatment, substance abuse treatment, mental health care, parenting education, domestic violence services, employment assistance, and financial or housing assistance (CWIG, 2012).

Allegation Process

Child maltreatment reports made to public child welfare agencies are "screened in" when there is sufficient information to proceed an investigation or "screened out" when there is insufficient information (Child and Family Services Review, 2019). When reached to Emergency Response, investigation case worker respond to maltreatment allegations and decide the course of action, whether it is immediate removal due to clear and present danger towards the child, substantiate, unsubstantiated, or inconclusive based on the outcomes of the investigation. Investigation helps in keeping children safe and offering families in the child welfare system the adequate services needed to address the issue and ensure the safety and well-being of the child; protecting them from future maltreatment (CWIG, 2013).

MCDSS & ACTION of Monterey County

Evaluating Father Involvement in Voluntary Process

Public child welfare agency Monterey County Department of Social Services, Family and Children's Services (FCS), offers services designed to keep children from harm and ensure their well-being by providing services such as child protective services (CPS), foster care services, and adoption services to children in Monterey County. FCS mission is, "…to prevent the occurrence of child abuse and neglect. Service goals strive to keep children and youth safe and within the protection of a permanent family (MCDSS, 2008)." Parents who fail to protect, meet the needs of their children, present potential danger, or have risked the well-being of their children may face intervention services (Community Case Manager, E., Hill, professional communication, February, 2018).

ACTION Council of Monterey County's Community Case Management works alongside Child Protective Services (CPS) social workers of the Monterey County Department of Social Services (MCDSS) assigned to Voluntary Family Maintenance and Voluntary Family Reunification (VFM/VFR) cases. Community Case Management program serves families by addressing family needs and family support to ensure the safety and well-being of children (E. Hill, personal communication, 2018)). Through an intake assessment and collaborative work with social workers, community case managers become an advocate for families and link them to services to address their needs to complete service case plan goals in a time sensitive manner.

CPS court ordered cases follow a set of regulatory child welfare institutional policies and procedures that require mandatory mother, father figures, and family involvement in the child welfare process; that is unless the father legally gives up his paternal rights (D., Bach, personal communication, 2018). Such policies and procedures on family involvement in the court ordered process are not applied to VFM cases, as they are deemed "voluntary" due to CPS determining allegations as inconclusive. Use of the term "voluntary" may inadvertently indicate that the

involvement of fathers or other family members is not important; reducing the likelihood of father participation in service case planning and services that aim to prevent future maltreatment and reduce the risk of child removal. The concept of "voluntary" services has resulted in minimal parent participation and engagement offered VFM/VFR services (E., Hill, personal communication, 2018).

In VFM/VFR cases through institutional procedures parents agree to participate in voluntary services or decline services (E., Hill, personal communication, 2018). Based on social worker recommendations parents who decline VFM services may face CPS court ordered interventions if it is determined that the children's well-being is at risk. Other recommendations may include immediate removal if allegations are brought to the attention of CPS after various referrals to VFM. At any given point parents, can stop services but there must be someone present at home that can ensure the safety and well-being of the children. VFM social worker must have attempted multiple and reasonable efforts prior to case dismissal (Community Case Manager, E., Hill, professional communication, 2019). Fathers like mothers are included in VFM service case plan goals but their agreement to participate is not priority as it is centered on mother participation in services, this may result in little father involvement in parenting programs, such as Parents As Teachers (PAT), Positive Parenting Program (Triple P), Strengthening Families, or other offered services (E., Hill, professional communication, February, 2018).

Parent to child and family positive dynamics are important in helping children reach crucial developmental milestones while fostering a safe and nurturing living environment. Current research denotes the importance of positive father, biological or paternal figure, involvement and its impact on child development and family dynamics. A focus on the vital role

of fathers in children remaining in the home during child welfare CPS involvement increases the likelihood for mother compliance (Gordon, Oliveros, Hawes, Iwamoto, and Rayford, 2014). Father involvement has shown to have positive impacts on their children's cognitive abilities, educational achievement, psychological well-being, and social behaviors, knowledge on such aspects may help CPS to create more effective case plan services involving fathers (Bradford, Rosenberg, 2006).

Family Assessment Prior to Services

Current database used by the Community Case Management program at ACTION, ETO software database, which provides a North Carolina Family Assessment Scales (NCFAS-G), commonly known as FAST, assessment section where CCM determines the initial (intake) family performance, based on social service referrals, in different domains prior to services. These domains include Environment, Parental Capabilities, Family Interactions, Family Safety, Child Well-being, Social/Community Life, Self-Sufficiency, and Family health, with a narrative section and reason for referral. Ratings of intake and assessment include, Clear Strength, Mild Strength, Baseline/Adequate (or unknown), Mild Problem, Moderate Problem, and Serious Problem. NCFAS-G intake is used to determine the family's current situation and the domain of focus for program services. After the completion of service case plan goals an exit assessment is done to evaluate the family's performance after services and program completion.

Most clients referred to CCM support services, VFM/VFR cases, fall under the scales baseline, mild problem, and moderate problem in all domains. The *Evaluating Father Involvement in the Voluntary Family Maintenance and Reunification Process* project focused on two domains, Parental Capabilities and Family Interactions. With child well-being and parental capabilities being the domains of focus in services being provided to the family. Parental

capabilities address whether there is supervision of children, types of disciplinary practices, provision of development and support of opportunities, use of substances interfering with parenting, if parents promote children's education, monitoring of media use, and parent/ caregiver literacy. Family interaction domain assesses bonding with children, communication, expectations, mutual family support, parent relationship, family routines, and family recreation and play activities. As these domains of focus include parenting styles they all heavily relay on parent education.

Parenting Programs

Parental attitudes and behaviors impact a child's life, many of which can be positive while others can be detrimental to the child's safety and well-being. Addressing issues that affect the parental capability to parent, keeping children safe from harm, and building a positive living environment is highly important to foster overall positive child development in each childhood stage of life. Parent education are intervention efforts to help parents gain skills to improve their parenting and communication skills to better interact with their children and reduce the risk of child maltreatment and or address their children's disruptive behavior (CWIG, 2013). Studies have suggested that paternal education both in home and sites of service improve the effectiveness of parenting programs (CWIG, 2019). Parent education enriches the way parents interact with their children and or addressing the behavioral or medical needs of children.

Parent education programs used by the VFM unit include: Parents As Teachers (PAT), Positive Parenting Program (Triple P), and Strengthening Families. "Triple P helps parents create a stable, supportive and harmonious family, encourage positive behavior, deal appropriately and consistently with problem behavior, build positive relations with their children, and plan ahead to avoid or manage potentially difficult situations." "Strengthening Families Program (SFP)

reduces problem behaviors, delinquency, and alcohol and drug abuse in children, and improves social competencies and school performance. Parents also see improvements with SFP. Child maltreatment decreases as parents strengthen bonds with their children and learn more effective parenting skills (Community Human Services, 2017)." "Parents as Teachers educates parents in their own homes about child development, parenting practices and available community resources. Parents as Teachers also provide screenings for potential developmental delays and health issues (Door to Hope, 2005).

Case Plan Description

Commonly a voluntary case plan of service contains the name of the family members involved, followed by the responsibilities of each member and social worker assigned to the case. Majority of case plan goals include: expected ways for parents to treat their children and address the use of non-abusive discipline, care for children by taking them to dental and doctor visits regularly, mental health services (if applicable), attending YWCA education services, and parent education. Case plan includes a case plan agreement form that caregivers and social worker to sign, confirming that all participating individuals understand the terms of the case plan and agree to participate in voluntary services.

Methods

Primary method of research included casefile review of 10 families whose cases were dismissed in the year 2018 for completion of program or non-compliance. To reduce sample size bias selection, files were selected by family interaction domains where 5 families scored "baseline/adequate" and 5 families scored "moderate/mild problem." Sources such as the Child Welfare Information Gateway where utilized for the understanding of the child welfare system and the use of parent education in efforts to reduce the risk of maltreatment. CSUMB database

was used for literature search on the impacts of father involvement in and out of the child welfare system, and its link to recurrent abuse. Key terms used: child welfare divisions, child welfare, voluntary family maintenance, child protective services, parenting education, case plan, child well-being, father involvement, and child maltreatment recurrence. Other methods of research included interviewing agency personnel.

Findings & Discussion

Child maltreatment is a common global issue with a rise in child maltreatment recurrence after child welfare involvement; nationally, 16% to 42% of substantiated cases have a subsequent report (Dakil, Flores, Lin, Sakai, 2011). Recurrence rates range from 1–2% for low risk cases to 50% for high risk cases. Low risk cases are those typically referred to community resources such as the Monterey County's differential response, Pathways to Safety. In the state of CA, 60% of child maltreatment allegations were the children remain at home are re-reported within 5 years. Were another study found that of those 60% of allegations approximately 26% have a child maltreatment recurrence in the first 2 years after child welfare involvement. There are multiple factors that contribute to the risk of recurrence, major factors include: intimate partner violence and conflicts, neglect, parental mental health problems, and unaddressed problems (Hindley, Ramchandani, and Jones, 2016). Child neglect, being the most common form of child maltreatment has the highest rate of child maltreatment allegations (CDSS, 2014) and the highest rate for child maltreatment recurrence (Fuller, Nieto, Zhang, 2012). Intensity of services may be a factor on whether an allegation has a higher or lower risk of abuse recurrence. In addition, father involvement serves as a protective factor in reducing risk of child maltreatment (CFRP, 2017) and service compliance when in child welfare (E. Hill, personal communication,2018). Furthermore, research has also shown that early interventions on increasing the knowledge of

child development and the importance of father-to-child interactions may reduce the risk of child maltreatment (Bellamy, Guterman, Lee, 2009). Challenges and limitations to this project in regards to literature review was the minimal attention and research gone into voluntary family maintenance and voluntary family reunification child welfare service. Most statistics addressed came from CPS substantiated allegations. More research is recommended to address these issues in VFM/VFR.

Results following case file review out of 10 families selected, 7 families had active fathers involved in the child's life. 8 out of the 10 families had a successful program completion and of those 8 families 7 had an active father. Out of the 10, 2 families were dismissed into court for non-compliance; 1 of the 2 families had no active father. Suggesting that father participation in VFM services seems to be a factor in successful program completion or increased likelihood of mother participation in parenting education programs and services. However, the sample size was significantly small to be proven statistically. Nevertheless, past and present research denotes that active father involvement in child's life reduces the risk of recurrent maltreatment. The findings suggest that father involvement is related to VFM/VFR program completion, but additional research is recommended to prove the statistical correlation.

Recommendations

An agency recommendation is for research on the impacts of father involvement and its link to child maltreatment recurrence and preventive service efforts. Including further research on voluntary services and its impacts on family stabilization after child maltreatment allegations. Other recommendations include to evaluate current voluntary service efforts and find effective ways to engage fathers in parenting services, further beyond "reasonable efforts."

Evaluating Father Involvement in Voluntary Process

Given the complexity of the child welfare system there is various policy loopholes that may intervene with child welfare agencies to meet its mission to serve underrepresented vulnerable populations, families and children, adequately. Regardless of whether they are voluntary or court ordered services. Because VFM has very little attention from child welfare, it is recommended that more consideration is but into this unit. To address this massive public health issue there should be more awareness of the importance of prevention services.

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