



LEARNING MODULE I

Seminar # 27

Foster Care Services in Substance Use Disorder

Learning Objectives

1. What is the issue.
2. How can the issue impact the family.
3. What are the options.

What is the issue?

Parental substance abuse is a factor in approximately 50-79% of child welfare cases in which young children are removed from custody. It is a factor in 25 percent of cases with substantiated maltreatment. In these cases, substance abuse treatment is usually an essential component of child welfare family plans.

Unfortunately, drug and alcohol treatment completion rates are low among substance abusing mothers who are involved in the child welfare system. A little over half (56.5%) of these mothers complete at least one treatment episode; 3 only 25% complete all treatment requirements. 4,5

Research has shown that substance abusing mothers who had a child removed from their care were twice as likely to have a subsequent birth, and three times as likely to have a subsequent alcohol or drug exposed birth.

For example, there is evidence that suggests that mothers who have a substance addiction tend to visit their children in care less often, further decreasing their chances for reuniting with their children (Leathers, 2002).

Often, parents struggling with substance abuse/dependency are also dealing with a complex array of other issues such as mental health issues, vocational or educational needs, or inadequate parenting skills, and lack concrete resources such as housing, childcare, and transportation (Choi & Ryan, 2006).

In addition, a study in which researchers focused on exploring systemic barriers to reunification for parents with substance abuse issues discovered problems with coordination between child welfare and substance abuse treatment providers (Smith, 2002).

How can the issue impact the family?

Family-level factors associated with delayed or non-reunification include economic status, substance abuse or addiction, emotional or psychological well-being, and family/household structure.

Economic status: In a study conducted in the early 1990s (pre-TANF), children removed from families eligible for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) were found to return home at a slower rate, or not at all, compared to children in non-poor families (Courtney, 1994; Courtney & Wong, 1996).

Researchers that looked at children and families receiving Medicaid or SSI funding found that these families were less likely to be reunited (Noonan & Burke, 2005).

In general, reunification rates have continued to decrease over time from pre-welfare reform (AFDC) to post-welfare reform (TANF; Wells & Guo, 2006). Specifically, mothers who lose cash assistance under TANF appear to reunite with their children at slower rates than mothers who continue to receive this support, and mothers with higher incomes reunite with their children more quickly than mothers with lower incomes (Kortenkamp et al., 2004; Wells & Guo, 2003, 2004, 2006).

In fact, for every \$100 increase in a mother's post-placement income, the reunification rate rises 11% (Wells & Guo, 2004). Poverty itself may not be a reason for removal, but it is associated with other challenges such as housing or homelessness, or parental incarceration, and can act as a barrier to providing an adequate, safe, and stable living environment for children so that they may return home (Courtney, McMurty & Zinn, 2004; Eamon & Kopels, 2004; Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007; Shdaimah, 2009). Substance abuse/addiction.

Parents with substance abuse/dependency issues experience: These parents major challenges in the path toward reunification as they seek to balance the competing demands of addiction treatment and parenting readiness (Carlson, Matto, Smith, & Eversman, 2006; Carlson, Smith, Matto, & Eversman, 2008; Hohman & Butt, 2001). A California study found that African American mothers with substance abuse issues were at particularly high risk for not reuniting with their children (Hines et al., 2007). Another study found that children removed from their home due to parental drug abuse had a low likelihood of reunification, but better chances for discharge to guardianship with a relative (McDonald, Poertner, & Jennings, 2007)

For example, there is evidence that suggests that mothers who have a substance addiction tend to visit their children in care less often, further decreasing their chances for reuniting with their children (Leathers, 2002). Often, parents struggling with substance abuse/dependency are also dealing with a complex array of other issues such as mental health issues, vocational or educational needs, or inadequate parenting skills, and lack concrete resources such as housing, childcare, and transportation (Choi & Ryan, 2006). In addition, a study in which researchers focused on exploring systemic barriers to reunification for parents with substance abuse issues discovered problems with coordination between child welfare and substance abuse treatment providers (Smith, 2002).

Emotional/psychological well-being: Parents who become involved with the child welfare system face emotional challenges associated with their experiences in the system (Haight, Black, Workman, & Tata, 2001). Some evidence suggests that the childhood experiences of parents and attachments with their own parents may affect their ability to build healthy relationships with their own children (Cordero, 2004). In one study researchers found that mothers with mental health issues reunited with their children at a slower rate than mothers without these issues (Wells & Guo, 2004).

In another study researchers identified a relationship between mothers' symptoms of depression and non-reunification with their children (Larrieu, Heller, Smyke, & Zeanah, 2008).

Parents struggling with mental illness also experience multiple problems and face unique systemic hurdles to reunification (Risley-Curtiss, Stromwall, Hunt, & Teska, 2004). Finally, families who are simultaneously experiencing multiple challenges or cumulative risks are associated with lower probabilities for reunification (Larrieu et al., 2008; Wulczyn, 2004).

Family/household structure: Some researchers have found that children removed from a single-parent household had lower chances of reunification than those coming from two-parent households, and children who had been living with adults other than their parents were the least likely to return home (Landsverk et al., 1996; Wells & Guo, 1999).

Other researchers have similarly found that single-parent households, especially father-only households, had lower reunification rates when compared to two-parent households (Harris & Courtney, 2003, Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007; Hines et al., 2007). In one study, however, researchers found that single parents reunited with their children more quickly than other family structure households (Davis et al., 1997).

Examining family structure and race revealed that African American single mothers had the slowest rate of reunification compared to all other parent structures (Harris & Courtney, 2003). Hispanic single fathers have also been linked with slower reunification rates (Harris & Courtney, 2003).

What are the options?

The characteristics of the child that have been associated with a lower likelihood of reunification include age, race and ethnic background, health and disability, and gender and sexual orientation.

Age: Most evidence suggests that children placed in care as infants are less likely to reunify with their families compared to children of other age groups (Courtney & Wong, 1996; GroganKaylor, 2001). Some researchers, however, have found that young children reunify with their families at a faster rate, or are more likely to reunify, than older children (Hines et al., 2007; Kortenkamp, Geen, & Stagner, 2004; Landsverk et al., 1996). Downloaded by [University of California, Berkeley] at 13:04 25 April 2016
ACHIEVING TIMELY REUNIFICATION 185

Race/ethnic background: Most studies find that African American children are over-represented among those who do not reunify or take longer to reunify with their families (Barth, 1997; Connell et al., 2006; Courtney, 1994; Courtney & Wong, 1996; Harris & Courtney, 2003; Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007; Kortenkamp et al., 2004; Lu et al., 2004; McMurtry & Lie, 1992; Noonan & Burke, 2005; Ryan et al., 2006; Wells & Guo, 1999; Wulczyn, 2003).

However, some studies find that the relationship between being African American and reunifying with one's family is not significant (Hines et al., 2007; Webster et al., 2005) or that the reunification rate does not differ

significantly from that of White families (Davis et al., 1997). Researchers examining race and age together have shown that African American infants have the lowest likelihood for reuniting with their families compared to other age or ethnic groups (Courtney, 1994).

However, Hines et al. (2007) found that young African American children had higher rates of reunifying than older African American children.

Research involving Latino or Hispanic children has also yielded mixed results. Studies have found Latino and Hispanic children to be both over-represented and under-represented with respect to reunification rates and timeliness; in some studies, these findings are dependent upon factors such as age of the child or placement in kin versus non-kin care (Courtney, 1994; Davis et al., 1997; Grogan-Kaylor, 2001; McMurtry & Lie, 1992; Noonan & Burke, 2005; Ryan et al., 2006).

In one study that included Asian children and families in its analysis researchers found that Asian families were less likely to reunite than White families (Hines et al., 2007)

Health/disability-related needs: Children with disabilities or health problems have been found to reunify less frequently or at a slower rate compared to non-disabled and healthy children (Courtney, 1994; Courtney & Wong, 1996; Davis et al., 1997).

Looking at mental health issues, researchers in one study found that the longer it took for a child to be referred to therapy while in care, the longer it took to be reunited with family (Gries & Cantos, 2008).

In another study researchers found that children with behavioral/emotional problems were half as likely to return home as children without (Landsverk et al., 1996).

Gender/sexual orientation: In most studies researchers have found that gender is not significantly associated with reunification outcomes. However, Harris and Courtney (2003) found that being male was related to a lower rate of reunification than being female. Some evidence indicates that sexual orientation may impact duration in care (Mallon, Aledort, & Ferrera, 2002).

Reunification with Parents with Substance Use Issues

In the context of child welfare, family reunification refers to the services that are provided for purposes of returning children who have been placed in out-of-home care to their families of origin.

Family reunification is the primary goal for the majority children who have been placed temporarily outside of their homes (DeMarco & Austin, 2002), with about half of children placed outside of their homes eventually returned to their families of origin (Berrick, 2009).

Contemporary arguments calling for a less compartmentalized approach have transformed the meaning of family reunification into a continuum that might include varied outcomes such as physical reunification of the family, periodic visitation with the family of origin, or maintaining partial contact via written address correspondence.

This perspective considers family reunification to be a dynamic process, and it acknowledges that each child and family has unique needs, that not every parent can be a full-time caregiver, and that families can still maintain attachment ties even when living apart (Whittaker & Maluccio, 2002).

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH NON-REUNIFYING FAMILIES

Although most children who enter foster care are reunited with their families of origin (CWLA, 2009; Pabustan-Claar, 2007), a substantial percentage are not.

While each child and family that becomes involved with the child welfare system brings with them a set of unique challenges and characteristics; studies have identified common individual and systemic factors associated with not achieving reunification.

It is important to note, however, that these studies have not fully identified direct causal mechanisms for no reunification (Biehal, 2007).

Agency/System Factors The agency- and system-level factors associated with non-reunification include reason for removal, and placement characteristics.

Reason for removal: Substantial evidence suggests children who are removed due to neglect are the least likely to return home or return home at slower rates than those experiencing physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse (Courtney & Wong, 1996).

However, some studies find that children removed due to physical abuse may have a lower likelihood of returning home compared to those removed due to neglect (Hines, Lee, Osterling, & Drabble, 2007; Noonan & Burke, 2005).

Other studies have found that children removed due to sexual abuse had a lower probability of returning home compared to children removed due to neglect (Connell, Katz, Saunders, & Tebes, 2006. Glisson, Bailey, & Post, 2000

Kindship: Studies examining the impact of kinship placement have typically found that children placed with relatives have a lower likelihood of returning home than children placed with non-relatives (Connell et al., 2006; Davis, Landsverk, & Newton, 1997).

More specifically, a study conducted in California found that the proportion of children placed in kinship placements that returned home within the first six months of care was considerably smaller than children placed with non-relatives (Courtney, 1994). At the 18-month mark, less than one-third of children living with kin had returned home to their families, while almost half of children placed with non-kin had returned home (Courtney, 1994).

A study examining data from six states found that children placed in kinship care in Arizona, Connecticut, and Illinois were less likely to be reunified than other children; while in Ohio, and Tennessee, children placed with non-relatives were less likely to be reunified (Koh, 2008).

Siblings: Researchers examining the impact of sibling placement found that separated siblings had a lower likelihood of reuniting than siblings who were kept together.

For siblings who enter care at different times, evidence further suggests that siblings who enter care within one month of each other have greater chances for reunification than others (Webster et al., 2005).

Placement stability. Placement stability also appears to be related to reunification, as studies have found that the more times a child is moved while in care the lower the likelihood there is for reunification (Goerge, 1990; Kortenkamp et al., 2004; Noonan & Burke, 2005) and the probability for reuniting decreases with each additional move (Hayward & DePanfilis, 2007).

Duration in care: The amount of time that a child spends in foster care continues to be a factor associated with non-reunification for families, despite ASFA's emphasis on timely reunification. In one large study conducted in the early 1990s researchers found that the probability of reunification is greatest during the first four months after a child is placed in care, but then drops dramatically and continues to decrease at a somewhat slower rate with each additional

Caseworker characteristics: Caseworker turnover was found to be associated with a decreased likelihood of reunification. About training, reunification outcomes were not generally affected by whether the caseworker had an MSW, although some impact was found among White caseworkers. The researchers noted in this study that race was likely a proxy for other factors.

Location: Researchers examining the association between location and reunification timeliness are mixed. Some studies have found that children in urban areas have more difficulties in achieving reunification with their families than those in rural areas (Goerge, 1990), while others have found that families residing in rural areas were less likely to be reunited (Courtney & Wong, 1996; Glisson et al., 2000).