**Research Findings at the Intersection of Early Care and Education and Child Welfare
(Poster Symposium)**

Description

This poster symposium focused on emerging research findings in a new area of study: the intersection of early care and education (ECE) and child welfare (CW). Findings come from investigations of both the processes and outcomes of the intersection of ECE and CW issues. The studies examine collaboration among ECE and CW agencies, patterns and predictors of ECE use among families involved in CW, and implications of ECE for the school readiness of children involved in CW. Poster viewing was followed by an integrative summary of the research findings, with implications for policy and future research highlighted.

Presenters

Helen Ward, University of Southern Maine
Shannon Lipscomb, Oregon State University-Cascades
Laura Dinehart, Florida International University
Beth Meloy, Georgetown University

Discussant

Nilofer Ahsan, Center for the Study of Social Policy

Scribe

Nina Chien, Child Trends

1. **Documents in Session Folder**
   - "Research Findings at the Intersection of Early Care and Education and Child Welfare;" Helen Ward, Shannon Lipscomb, Laura Dinehart, and Beth Meloy (Handout)
   - "Early Care and Education for Children Involved in Child Welfare: Patterns, Predictors, and School Readiness Outcomes," Shannon T. Lipscomb
   - "The Effects of Center-Based Care Accreditation on the Development of Children in the Child Welfare System," Laura Dinehart, Louis Manfra, Lynne Katz (Poster)
   - "Children at Risk in the Child Welfare System: Collaborations to Promote School Readiness," Helen Ward, Sun Young Yoon, Erin Oldham, and Julie Atkins (Poster)
   - "Children at Risk in the Child Welfare System: Collaborations to Promote School Readiness," Helen Ward, J.D. (Poster)

2. **Summary of Presentations**
   - **Summary of Presentation #1:** Helen Ward
     - Helen's poster described a mixed method, exploratory case study conducted in Colorado that examined the degree to which collaboration is occurring between the child welfare system, the early intervention/preschool special education system, and

the early care and education system. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with medical providers, IDEA service coordinators and specialists, child care providers, child welfare caseworkers, judicial personnel, and foster and biological parents. Surveys were also conducted with foster parents and caseworkers. Findings include:

- Collaboration seems to be stronger between child welfare and early intervention programs than between child welfare and early care and education;
- Caseworkers lack training in early care and education, and early care and education providers lack training on the needs of children in the child welfare system;
- Caseworkers often don't recognize early care and education as an intervention for at-risk children; and
- Restrictions in eligibility for child care assistance reduce access to early care and education.

- **Summary of Presentation #2**: Shannon Lipscomb
  o ECE for Preschool-aged Foster Children: Patterns, Predictors, and School Readiness Outcomes. Shannon's poster summarized findings from two studies examining the patterns, predictors, and school readiness outcomes of early child care and education for preschool-aged children living in foster care and other out-of-home care situations.
  o Study 1 examined the ECE experiences of 192 preschool-aged children in foster care. 88% had attended Head Start, another center-based program, or both. Latent class analysis of ECE quantity, quality, type, and duration revealed three patterns: part-time Head Start, part-time other ECE, and full-time mixed ECE. Child and foster family characteristics predicted these patterns.
  o Study 2 used data from the Head Start Impact Study, with findings suggesting that Head Start had positive impacts on an array of school readiness outcomes.

- **Summary of Presentation #3**: Laura Dinehart
  o Recent policies in Florida have implemented requirements that children in child welfare attend accredited child care centers.
  o Findings suggest that attending an accredited child care center is associated with better outcomes for all children (both those in child welfare and those not). Unfortunately, children in child welfare were far less likely to attend accredited child care centers, and by the end of prek, children in child welfare demonstrate poorer performance.

- **Summary of Presentation #4:** Beth Meloy
  o Beth's poster presented findings from two studies on the relationship between the child care and ECE experiences of children in foster care and their outcomes, both developmental and "structural" (stability of foster care placements). The two studies linked child care experiences, including Head Start and CCDF subsidized child care, to improvements in language and cognitive development and foster care placement stability. These findings suggest that encouraging policies that support high quality

early care and education experiences for foster children could help to mitigate the negative outcomes associated with foster care involvement for young children.

3. **Summary of Discussion with Presenters and Participants**
   - Importance of coordination
     - What does being in child care mean about the larger support available from the community?
     - There needs to be more coordination and communication across the major systems. Coordinated services are where we need to go, but it's not there in most States.
     - Coordinated data would also be helpful.
     - How do we build a community-level approach? How do we do this in a way that is cost-effective for agencies and programs?
     - Caseworkers would ideally see themselves as brokers for the families, of all the available services that would benefit kids.
     - Need to unpack what support systems are available to the families, and how.
     - Geomapping is a potential analytic approach to studying how communities meet needs of children and families.
     - What are the specific child care needs of the kids who have experienced child abuse and neglect? Their greater needs cost more, and a coordinated system of services would also mean that those costs are spread out across more agencies.
   - Foster parents: How are we educating foster parents on how to access quality care, and increase awareness of why quality care is important? Need to understand who's getting into which programs. Some foster parents are more aware than others.
   - Children: Need to consider a more holistic picture of the child. Infant/toddler's developmental needs are often overlooked during caseworkers' trips to foster parents. The reason is that school-age kids' problems are more obvious (phone calls from school, etc.)
   - Type of early care and education: Good programs are better! The evidence from a couple of the studies presented here seems to converge, suggesting that Head Start is good for kids. Home-based and friend/family/neighbor-care serves many of these families. Need to consider this when we think about ways to improve quality.
   - Research: From a research perspective, the number of variables makes analysis very complex. Researchers need to keep an eye on the big picture and not get lost in the details. Recognizing pre-existing group differences – relationships may not be causal. Consider the intersection of child subsidy research and the child welfare system.
   - Policy: Eligibility for child care subsidy for foster families varies by State (categorical eligibility only in some States). What are existing Federal mandates on how child care can be responsive to the needs of children in child welfare? A challenge: Child Welfare's goal has traditionally been safety and permanency, with developmental well-being being a relative new goal; although the ACYF is now making that the central goal.