

Study of Fathers' Involvement in Permanency Planning and Child Welfare Casework

Literature Review

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Abstract

This review summarizes existing literature and knowledge about noncustodial fathers in general and, in particular, how child welfare agencies identify, locate, and involve noncustodial fathers in casework when their children are in foster care. Noncustodial fathers are biological fathers who do not reside with their children because of divorce, separation or a nonmarital birth. Increased interest in fathers and acknowledgement of their contributions to family stability and children's healthy development have focused attention in the child welfare field on the tasks of locating biological fathers and involving them in case planning. While no national data exists on the percent of children in foster care who have noncustodial fathers, the likelihood of this being a significant portion is high. For the most part, the review revealed the dearth of research specific to the topic of noncustodial father involvement in the child welfare system. While a few studies have focused attention on fathers as placement resources for their children, there was no research about child-father visitation or on the effects of involving fathers in the lives of children being served by child welfare agencies. Additionally, while recent policy reforms and initiatives (e.g., expedited permanency planning, concurrent planning, and family group meetings) lead us to believe that child welfare agencies will increasingly identify, locate, and involve noncustodial fathers, the current lack of research means that there is no evidence to predict the likely effects of these shifts in case practice.

The literature review sets the stage for a three-year study being conducted by the Urban Institute and the National Opinion Research Center to provide the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and the Administration for Children and Families with a description of the extent to which child welfare agencies identify, locate, and involve noncustodial fathers in case decision-making and permanency planning. The review is organized around a number of pressing questions that policymakers interested in child welfare services would like answered. For each of the questions we summarize current knowledge and identify information gaps.

This report is available in its entirety on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Web site: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/CW-dads02/index.htm>

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