

Where are all the Dads?

Exploring the Barriers to Engaging Fathers In Child Protective Services Cases and
the Strategies to Overcoming the Barriers

By

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About the Author

Karen Ferrell worked for the Department of Family and Protective Services as a Conservatorship caseworker for four years. Before working for CPS, Karen also worked at the abuse hotline, Statewide Intake, where abuse/neglect reports are received. Karen has a strong passion for working with children and families and improving the quality and access to services children and families need. Karen graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in 2007 with a Bachelor's Degree in Government and Minor in Business. Karen can be contacted at Karen.ferrell@outlook.com.

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Abstract

Child Protective Services (CPS) attempts to make sure that children who are abused have a safe place to live. This requires CPS to work with parents to help them change unsafe behavior that resulted in their child's removal from their care. More often than not, the only parent cooperating and participating with CPS is the mother. A father's participation in CPS services can potentially drastically improve the future of his child.

This research study explores the barriers to engaging fathers in Child Protective Services cases and examines the strategies to overcoming those barriers. The mother's obstruction of the father's participation, caseworker and systemic bias and the father's distrust of the system are barriers identified by the literature and supported by the CPS caseworkers. Interviews of 18 current and former Child Protective Services caseworkers are used in this study. The results supported expectations that caseworkers have insights about the barriers to engaging fathers and strategies for overcoming these barriers. The strategies identified by the CPS Caseworkers include improving communication and cooperation between mothers and fathers, improving caseworker education, and creating father friendly practices.

Chapter 1: Introduction

A Typical CPS Scenario¹

Texas Child Protective Services (CPS) receives a referral stating that a 17 year old mother of three children (ages 8 months, 2 and 3) was seen using cocaine in front of the children. It was also reported that her current paramour is selling drugs out of the home. As a result, Child Protective Service becomes involved in the case and asks Ms. Orange, the mother, to find a placement for the children until she completes drug treatment. During an interview, Ms. Orange states that she does not know how to contact the children's father or his family and refuses to even provide the CPS caseworker with the father's name. The mother's parents, siblings, and close friends are deemed inappropriate and not considered for placement. Since there is no information about the father or his family the children are removed and placed into foster care. The children's father is located 10 months later after the mother has failed to participate in services and decides to disclose the information about the father in order to have her children placed with his family. Unfortunately at this point, Mr. Blue, the children's father, cannot participate in caring for his children because he has four years remaining in his prison sentence. Although the father's parents would like to care for their grandchildren, the children have been in the placement for over a

¹ This scenario is fictional but is comprised of situations that could occur and cause a child to be removed or parental rights to be terminated. The scenario was created using the writer's personal experience as a caseworker. The names are fictitious

year an ,CPS determined it is not in their best interest to be moved from foster care.

This scenario illustrates one of the barriers to getting fathers involved with their children's cases. The mother, Ms. Orange, withheld key information about her children's father so CPS could not work with him. It also shows the importance of locating fathers in Child Protective Services cases in a timely manner. If the father, Mr. Blue, had been contacted he could have placed the children with his parents. Even if Ms. Orange had not completed drug treatment, therapy, and the other court ordered requirements to regain custody of her children, the children could have remained with their father's parents until he was released from prison.

Scenario²

Mr. Scarlet has 2 children, ages 3 and 5, who live with their mother Ms. Green. CPS receives a referral stating that Ms. Green, the mother of the children, has been arrested for aggravated assault and possession of a controlled substance and does not have anyone to care for her children. When interviewed initially, Ms. Green states she does not know whom the father of the children is. She also states it could be multiple men and provides the caseworker with seven different names of potential fathers. The children are placed into foster care. While Ms. Green is incarcerated she changes her story and provides the

² This scenario is fictional but is comprised of situations that could occur and cause a child to be removed or parental rights to be terminated. The scenario was created using the writer's personal experience as a caseworker. The names are fictitious.

caseworker with the name of the father. The caseworker locates the father and attempts to work with him to get his children out of foster care. Mr. Scarlett has a history of assault and domestic violence and admits to occasional drug use. Mr. Scarlett is cooperative with the caseworker and agrees to go to therapy, parenting classes, complete anger management and submit to random drug tests. After finding out a court hearing is scheduled to discuss the progress of the case with the judge, Mr. Scarlett stops returning the caseworker's phone calls and does not show up for court. The father later tells his caseworker that he had warrants for not paying child support and was afraid of getting arrested. Mr. Scarlett continued to miss hearings and never completed the services he was ordered and agreed to complete. Mr. Scarlett failed to provide appropriate family members to care for his children. Ms. Green was sentenced to 5 years in prison. As a result, both parents' rights were terminated and the children were placed for adoption.

The second scenario illustrates another barrier to engaging fathers in CPS cases. The CPS system can be hard to navigate and understand. There can be confusion about the relationship between CPS, the Attorney General's Office and the criminal court system. Men with criminal histories or who are not current on child support are often afraid to participate in the CPS process. This makes it difficult to eventually reunite with their children.

Research Purpose

“Fathers exist in the lives of women and children involved with child welfare authorities, and yet they are rarely seen by child welfare. The invisibility exists whether or not fathers are deemed as risks or as assets to their family” (Brown et al 2008, 25). Higher levels of father involvement are associated with lower maternal depression which in turn is associated with less severe physical punishment and verbal discipline by the mother and as well as improved child outcomes (Marshall et al, 2001, 298). When fathers are engaged in the lives of their children involved with CPS they can have a positive affect on the entire family. The purpose of this research is to explore the barriers to engaging fathers in Child Protective Services cases. The research also explores the strategies to overcoming those barriers.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter Two discusses the settings for the research, highlights the Texas CPS system and defines key terms. Chapter Three reviews scholarly literature about the barriers to and strategies for engaging fathers in Child Protective Services cases. The literature defines and explores the research topic. This chapter also presents the working hypotheses and links them to the literature associated with the barriers and strategies. Chapter Four discusses the research methodology, or how the interviews were conducted. Chapter Five contains the results and analysis of findings. Chapter Six discusses the study’s major findings and limitations.

Chapter 2: Policy History and Texas CPS System

Chapter Purpose

This chapter provides background information about the history of child welfare and the policies that have created throughout the years to address child abuse. Although some of the barriers to engaging fathers are found within the family, others are institutionalized. Further strategies that overcome barriers and enable effective engagement of fathers (a true family) must emerge from the institution tasked with child safety (DFPS). Hence, this chapter also provides an overview of CPS because CPS is both a barrier and a strategy for greater father engagement.

Policy History

Federal policy has influenced the status of parents of children involved in protective services (Alpert and Britner 2005, 34). The importance of permanence for children in foster care came to the forefront of public policy in 1959 because of the “*Children in Need*” a study written by Maas and Engler (Alpert and Britner 2005, 34). The study was a catalyst for reform because it highlighted the physical, emotional, and intellectual disability of children who remained in foster care, compared to those who were returned home or adopted by new families. There continued to be reports about the psychological deterioration of children in foster care for long periods of time. In 1978 the Indian Child Welfare Act was created and in 1980 the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act was passed by Congress to encourage and facilitate permanence for foster children (Alpert and

Britner 2005, 34). In 1997 the Adoption Safe Families Act was passed. It was the only major child welfare legislation passed in the last two decades (Golden and Macomber 2009,9). The act sought to reduce the amount of time children spent in care and provide assistance to children once adopted. One of the major provisions in the legislation directed states to continue to make reasonable efforts to preserve and reunify families prior to placement or to allow the child to return safely home. The act required that the child's health and safety be the paramount concern.

In 2006, The U.S. Health and Human Services Commission found evidence that there is a very small amount of worthwhile engagement occurring between child welfare system professionals and fathers of children involved in the system (Hahn 2011, 4). Shortly after, the Children's Bureau created the Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC NRF) to conduct research and help address the absence of fathers (Thoeness, et al. 2011,30).

Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)

DFPS is one of five agencies that make up the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). Each one of the agencies provides a different service to members of the community. The DFPS client population includes children and adults who are over 65 or who are considered disabled (DFPS 2012). The Department's mission is "to protect children, the elderly, and people with disabilities from abuse, neglect, and exploitation by involving clients, families and communities" (DFPS 2012). The Department accomplishes this mission

through the administering of four programs: Child Protective Services (CPS); Adult Protective Services (APS); Child Care Licensing (CCL); and Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI)³.

Child Protective Services

The function of Child Protective Services is to investigate reports of abuse or neglect and to protect children from further abuse/neglect. CPS also promotes the safety, integrity, and stability of families as well as provides permanent placements for children who cannot safely remain with their biological family. Additionally it provides services to children and families in their own homes, places children in foster care or for adoption and provides services to children who are aging out of care and transitioning to adulthood. The mission of Child Protective Services is to “protect children and to act in the children’s best interest and to seek active involvement of the children’s parents and other family members to solve problems that lead to abuse and neglect (DFPS 2012).

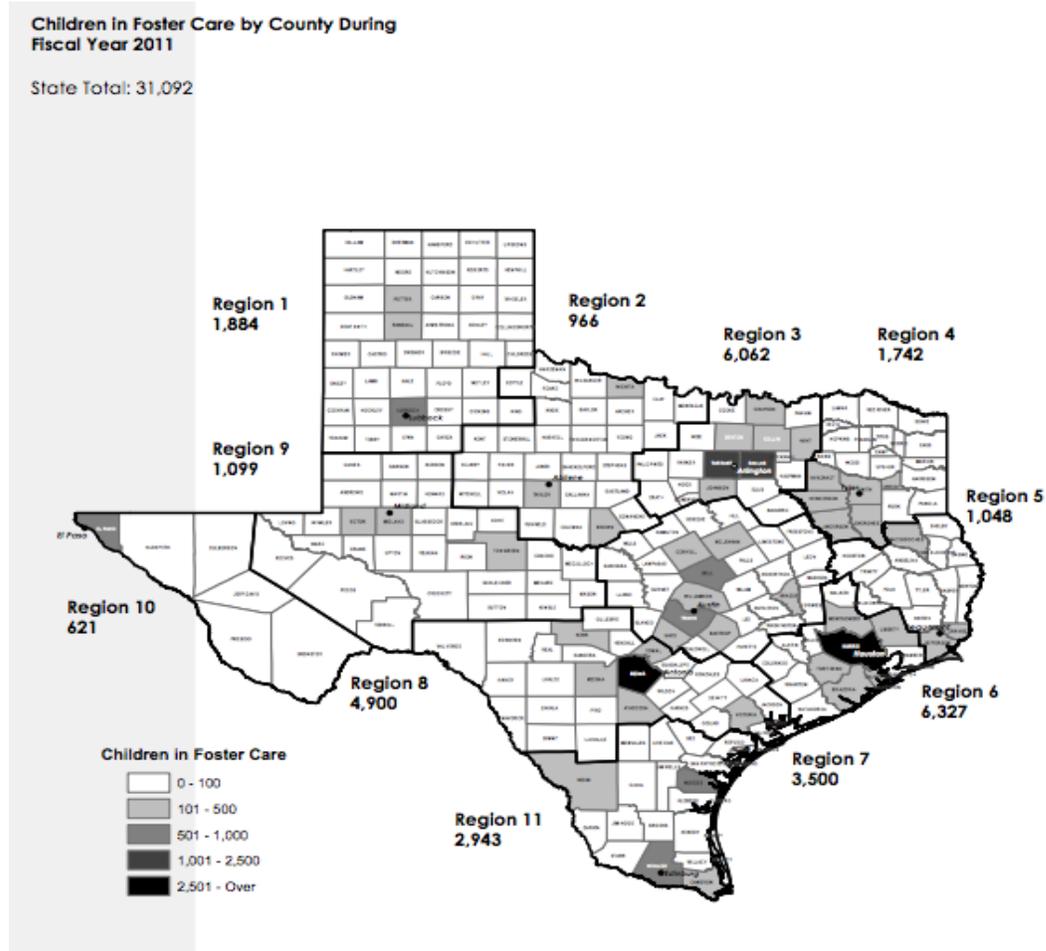
Children in Foster Care

There were 65, 948 confirmed victims of child abuse in 2011 (DFPS 2012, 44). 17,108 children were removed from their parents last year (DFPS 2012,44). The ages of these children ranged from newborn to 17 years old. The highest number of removals occurred in children aged 1-3. Out of the 65, 948 victims of child abuse, over 30,000 children are in the State of Texas foster care system

³ Information obtained from www.dfps.state.tx.us.

(DFPS 2012,50). 22.1% of children in foster care are under the age of 2 (DFPS 2012,53). 49% of the children in foster care had a case goal plan of adoption while only 31% had a goal family reunification (DFPS 2012, 58). In 2011, 33.4% of the children in foster care in Texas were returned home. The others were placed for adoption, permanently placed with a relative or remained in foster care (DFPS 2012, 62). The regions with the largest instances of abuse or neglect were Region 3 and Region 6. These regions include the Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston areas, respectively. Figure 2.3 shows how many children were in care by region and provides a total number of children in care.

Figure 2.3 Number of Children in Foster Care in the State of Texas in 2011



(DFPS 2012, 58)

Figure 2.3 provides a graphic representation of the number of children in care in the state and highlights how many children were in care by each region. The lightest areas on the map represent counties that have the least amount of children in care. The darker areas on the map represent the counties that have a higher number of children in care. Harris county in Region 6, Tarrant and Dallas County in Region 3, Travis County in Region 7, Bexar County in Region 8, El Paso county in Region 10 and Hidalgo County in Region 11 all have the highest

number of children in care compared to the other counties in their region. The caseworkers interviewed for this study worked in Travis, Harris, and Tarrant County.

Role of the Caseworker

A CPS caseworker's job can vary from investigating an initial claim of abuse or neglect to finding a permanent adoptive home⁴. In Texas, there are three types of CPS caseworkers, an investigator, family based safety services worker and Conservatorship worker. Despite, having differing levels of involvement with the family, each of these caseworkers work with families to attempt to reduce the risk of child abuse. A CPS case begins when an allegation of abuse or neglect is received. The allegation is investigated and if it is determined that abuse or neglect has occurred in the home or the home is unsafe for the child to stay then a case may be either referred for in home services or the Department may seek custody of the child to ensure safety (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, 2012). Whether the Department initiates a conservatorship case⁵ or family based safety services case⁶, the caseworker is responsible for working with family and offering services to help them eliminate the reason for CPS' involvement.

⁴ Knowledge about the role of a caseworker was obtained through the writer's four years of experience as a caseworker.

⁵ A conservatorship case is a legal civil case in which the Department is named the conservator of the child and has a legal responsibility for the welfare of the child. (DFPS 2012)

⁶ A family based safety services case is a case in which the Department allows the family to live in the same home with the child while the parents attempt to complete services. In some cases there is legal involvement. (DFPS 2012)

Flow of Case and Case Outcomes

In scenario 1, a neighbor witnesses Ms. Orange getting high in front of her children and calls the abuse hotline to make a report. After the report is made an intake worker screens the call to make sure the call meets the definition of abuse or neglect set forth by the Texas Family Code (DFPS 2012). If the report meets the definition then it is assigned to a caseworker and given a case number. After an investigation is initiated the case involving the suspected abuse or neglect of a child can proceed in many different ways. The results of the investigation could indicate that no abuse or neglect occurred and there are no safety issues. At this point the case would be closed without cause. If it is determined that abuse or neglect occurred but the child is safe at home then the family would be offered services while the child was still living in the home.

If it is determined that abuse or neglect occurred and it is not safe to live in the home then CPS will attempt to place the child out of the home with grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, or family friends while the parents participate in services. If there are no relatives or friends available then CPS petitions a judge for custody of the child and places the child in foster care. Services to change unsafe behavior are provided to the family while the child is in foster care. Caseworkers arrange these services, supervise visitation between the parent and the child, and monitor the progress of parents. 60 days after the removal of the child the caseworker presents a report to the court to explain the abuse that occurred and caused the removal and the service plan that the family has agreed to complete. The service plan outlines and explains to the courts

exactly what is expected of the parents to regain custody of their children. If the judge approves the service plan, then it becomes court-ordered obligation for the parents to complete.

Caseworkers are also responsible for developing and presenting to the court a permanency plan for the affected child. A permanency plan is simply a goal CPS is working towards that is in the best interest of the child, which in most cases includes family reunification. The plan is a flexible document, subject to change based on the progression of the parent(s). Note that in the second scenario, Mr. Scarlett stopped participating in services and did not attend court hearings. This is an example that illustrates a point in which it was necessary for CPS change a plan. Mr. Scarlett did not demonstrate that he could be an appropriate parent so the children were placed for adoption.

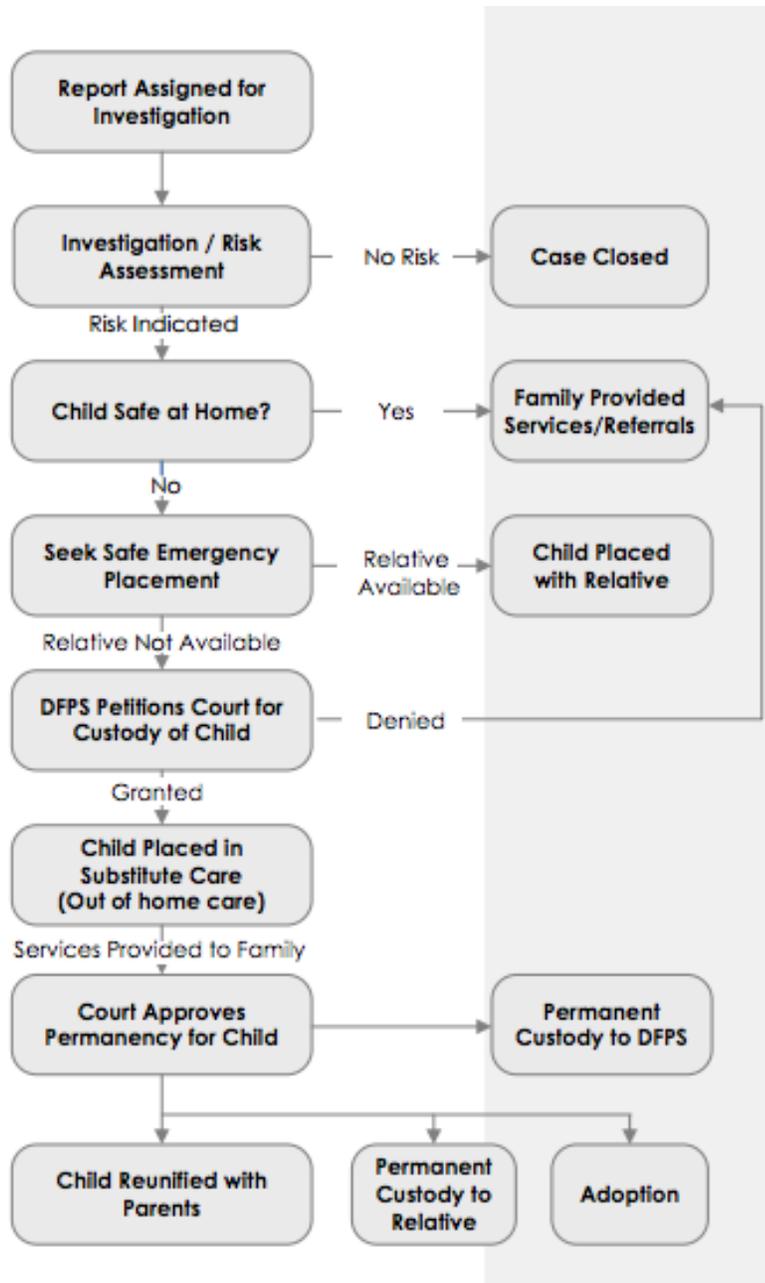
Every four months after the initial hearing, the caseworker writes and presents a report outlining the progress that the parents are making and updates the court on the well being of the child. A judge makes the final decision on the outcome of a case based on the information presented in court and through report written by the caseworker. If the parents complete services and eliminate all the safety issues CPS recommends to the judge that the children be returned home. If the child cannot be returned to his parents for safety reasons then the CPS makes a recommendation based on the concurrent permanency plan for the child. This may include going to trial to have the parents' rights terminated.

If this occurs then the child is placed for placed for adoption. When a parent is missing or uninvolved the potential for the child to be adopted by a

stranger increases. Children can be placed with relatives or friends of the family if they are deemed appropriate⁷. If a parent does not have any appropriate relatives or friends and CPS only has information about one parent this leads to more children entering and remaining in foster care. A figure illustrating the flow of a case is on Page 17.

⁷ An “appropriate” relative/friend is someone who does not have criminal history that may endanger a child or does not have history with CPS that has been given a determination of Reason to Believe.

Figure 2.2: Potential Flow of Case



(DFPS 2012, 134)

Services for Parents

In order to safely return a child to its home of removal, a parent must demonstrate that he or she can be a safe and stable parent. Child Protective Services provides parents with access to services to help improve their parenting or other problematic behavior. Caseworkers make an assessment in conjunction with a psychological evaluation or a psychosocial evaluation and create a service plan⁸. In collaboration with the parents, the plan identifies what factors need to be change to ensure the safety of the child if he or she is returned to the parents. Services are provided based on an identified need. For example, if the if the reason the child was removed centered around on drug use by their parent, then CPS would provide drug treatment services for the parents. The goal of CPS is to eliminate the safety issues that pose a risk to or lead to the harm of a child. In second scenario, Mr. Scarlett was given the opportunity to work services. He met with the caseworker and agreed on the services he would need to complete in order to get have his children.

These services include parenting classes, individual therapy, protective parenting, family therapy and one- on one parent training (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, 2012)⁹. Parenting classes teach parents basic knowledge of child development, and appropriate, non-aggressive discipline tools to help manage and correct misbehavior (Texas Department of Family and

⁸ A service plan is a document that outlines a goal for the family (i.e. reunification) and the actions and responsibilities that are necessary for the child's parents to take to achieve the plan goal during the period of the service plan and the assistance to be provided to the parents by CPS towards meeting that goal, The tasks are considered "services" and are referred to as such throughout the remainder of the case. (Texas Family Code, 2012)

⁹ Information obtained from www.dfps.state.tx.us.

Protective Services, 2012). These classes also help parents recognize and realize their strengths and utilize and teach them how to protect their child from other who can cause harm (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, 2012). Protective parenting classes teach parent how to identify dangerous partners and protect their children from other people who may put their child at risk of harm as well as focuses on negative behaviors of the parents that can be dangerous to a child. Clients are often recommended to complete individual or couples therapy. In these sessions parents work with professional counselors on their personal issues which create a barrier to the return of their child. Many clients suffer from mental illness or struggle with substance abuse issues. These services give the parents the opportunity to address their issues and make the appropriate changes. With the exception of Batterer's intervention most of the services provided are free to parents and paid for by CPS or the State of Texas. CPS also provides assistance with transportation on a case-by-case basis.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

Chapter Purpose

Child maltreatment is a social issue, impacting roughly 3.5 million children annually (Boden et, 2008,353) Child Protective Services (CPS) caseworkers are charged with working with families to attempt to reduce the risk of harm to the children involved in the CPS cases. If it is determined that a child cannot remain in a home because of safety issues, an out of home placement is made. CPS always attempts to find an absent parent or an appropriate relative to place the child with before placing the child in foster care. Often caseworkers work with the family and unfortunately are often unsuccessful in engaging the child's father.

Chapter Three reviews the literature on the barriers to engaging fathers in Child Protective Services (CPS) cases. The chapter will also explore strategies to overcoming the barriers in father engagement.

Definitions

Brown et al (2008, 26) define a father by his association with the mother involved in the case, through his demonstration of parental actions or through legal or administrative designations. A father is further broadly defined to include social fathers, step- fathers and biological fathers (Brown et al 2009, 26). There has been some research that indicates that biological fathers are more invested in the life of the child than social fathers because of genetic links (Berger et al 2009, 265). Social fathers are men who accept and demonstrate parenting responsibilities despite being unrelated to the child legally or biologically (Brown

et al 2009, 26; Berger et al 2009, 262). Brown et al's definition is used in this paper when the involvement of dad, non-resident father, and non-custodial father in CPS cases is discussed.

This paper examines the engagement of fathers in cases. Fathers can exert paternal influence through indirect or direct contact (O'Donnell et al 2005, 388). A father's direct influence is seen through his acceptance of parenting roles that involve parent child interaction or acting as the child's mentor or role model (O'Donnell et al 2005, 388). A father is said to have an indirect influence in child's life through his emotional and material support of the mother (O'Donnell et al 2005, 388). A father is considered engaged in a CPS case when he has contact with a child through face-to-face interactions, by phone, through written communication and paid child support. In addition he should have had contact with the caseworker and cooperate with the agency's goals. (Malm et al 2008, 4).

Importance of Fathers

Fathers are important to the lives of children in foster care. A study conducted by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services in 2008 found that when fathers are involved with their child in foster care there is a greater likelihood that the child will be successfully reunified and lower likelihood that the child will be adopted. Reunification was the outcome in 86% of the cases where the father had some degree of involvement (Malm, Zielewski, Chen, 2008 vi). Conversely in the same study, children who did not have an identified father

ended up being adopted quicker than children who had an identified and involved father (Malm, Zielewski, and Chen 2008, 13. In families where the mother is the only parent in the home, children do better when their non-resent father is actively involved on a consistent basis than when he is absent. (Lamb 2004, 311)

Father involvement in a CPS case can mean the difference between child entering or remaining in foster care or reunification with a parent or family members. Caseworkers have 50% fewer resources to help a child when there is no information about or participation by the father or his relatives. Caseworkers must find a way to overcome the barriers to engaging fathers to increase the chances of family reunification for children in care.

It is not surprising that caseworkers have a hard time engaging fathers in CPS cases. Gender bias is prevalent in social work research so there continues to be a lack of information on father participation in Child Protective Services and an overrepresentation of literature concerning mothers (Risley-Curtiss Heffernan 2002, 1). The lack of literature points to a lack of attention, especially to non-resident fathers in the social work field (Thoeness, et al. 2011, 31). There is however literature on the role and benefits of father engagement in the lives of their children. “Children growing up without a father are more likely to:

- Live below the poverty line and be poor as adults
- Perform poorly in school and even dropout of school
- Engage in delinquent behavior including substance abuse and violent behavior
- Be born with premature
- Have anxiety disorder
- Have problems interacting socially and low self-esteem.” (Shields 2010, 253).

Since scholarly and intuitional recognition that fathers are disengaged and absent from their children who are going through the CPS system or who are in foster care is relatively new the barriers to engaging fathers are poorly understood. Hence the next sections will develop the working hypotheses that focus on barrier to father involvement. These hypotheses will subsequently be used to develop interview questions with CPS caseworkers.

Barriers to Engaging Fathers (WH1)

The participation of fathers in CPS cases is very important to the successful outcome for a child in care. Due to the increase in children experiencing father absence in the United States, child welfare policy makers have had to address the lack of participation of fathers with children who have been placed in the foster care system (Sonenstein et al, 2002,4). Despite the lack of research findings, there are major national trends towards increased

engagement fathers in the life of their children who are involved in the child welfare system (English et al, 2009,216). The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services recognized the absence of fathers in cases and in 2009 hired a Fatherhood Specialist to address this issue (Department of Family and Protective Services 2011, 12). The Fatherhood Specialist helps shape DFPS policy to help workers better engage fathers and dads better understand the system.

Therefore one would expect:

Working Hypothesis 1 (WH1): The child welfare community recognizes that there are barriers to engaging fathers.

Obstruction of Father Participation (WH1a)

All of the information about the suspected abuse or neglect of child comes from the initial report of abuse or neglect. If the reporter does not know the father's information then it is not in the record when the case is assigned. The investigator's first job is to contact the child who is typically in the home with the mother. When information is not provided about the father in the initial intake the caseworker attempts to get information about the father during the interview with the mother. In 2011, 55% of the adults named as perpetrator of abuse in Texas were identified as single or unknown (Department of Family and Protective Services 2012, 47). In many CPS cases, the parents are not in a relationship and the mother has primary custody of the child. It is not unusual for a caseworker to accept the mother's explanation of the father's behaviors, location,

and level of interest in involvement in the case especially when there is not information available in public records or through a diligent search (Risley Curtiss and Heffernan 2003, 2). In a study conducted by Malm et al (2006 ,ix), 86% of caseworkers responded that they asked the mother for identifying information for the father and less than half actually used a locator service to help find dads that they did not have information for.

Mothers sometimes want to control the story about fathering that is told to workers and keep fathers undetectable by the system (Brown et al' 2005, 30). O' Donnell et al 2005, found that many mothers give a false name or withhold information that would enable the caseworker to locate the father. Additionally, O' Donnell et al (2005, 402) found that mothers may conceal information about the father due to:

- ❖ A general reluctance to provide any information to the caseworker about her history or circumstances;
- ❖ Anger at the father because he is involved in a new relationship;
- ❖ Fear that the father will be able to get custody of the child;
- ❖ Fear of the father's reaction to being identified, especially in situations in which the mother was a victim of domestic violence;
- ❖ Unwillingness to let the father know that she and their children are involved in the child welfare system.

Mothers may also be averse to disclosing location information about fathers out of fear he may get into legal trouble due to unpaid child support payments, immigration status or unresolved arrest warrants (Sonenstein et al 2002, 16). "Mothers may act as 'gatekeepers; by either facilitating or blocking access to the father." (Sonenstein et al 2002, 15). These actions prevent the caseworker from having meaningful contact with the father and therefore cannot encourage his participation in his child's CPS case.

Therefore one would expect:

Working Hypothesis 1a (WH1a): Caseworkers will observe that mothers obstruct the participation of fathers.

Caseworker and Systemic Bias (WH1b)

Research suggests that another barrier to the inclusion of non -resident¹⁰ fathers in casework may be related to systemic and caseworker bias (Sonenstein et al 2002, 10). Scourfield (2006, 41) claims the welfare state was “founded on the assumption that men would be the breadwinners and women would be full time mothers therefore, it should not be surprising that there is a deeply rooted legacy of men not being considered the business of child protection.” Historically child welfare systems have ignored fathers or labeled them as problematic (Huebner et al 2008, 89). Since fathers of CPS children are often absent from the home and have little contact with their offspring, they are often not apart of the abuse that led to CPS intervention. In spite of who has been designated as the perpetrator of abuse, the system tends to focus on working with mothers who are more likely to have perpetrated the abuse. (Daniel and Taylor 1999, 210).

There is abundant social work literature on the relative failure of social workers to involve men in the child protection process (Scourfield 2001,73). Once a family is involved in a CPS case, continued committed participation of a parent depends critically on the social exchange relationship between the caseworker and parent (Alpert and Britner 2005,39). Caseworkers often have a negative view of fathers and find them difficult to work with (Scourfield 2001, 81). In a study conducted by Scourfield (2001, 81) caseworkers described father as unable to cope, child like, deluded, obsessive and stubborn. Caseworker commented that fathers refused to take responsibility for problems that were their own making, blamed their partners or the social worker, and lacked commitment to the CPS

¹⁰ Non Resident Father- A father who does not live in the same home as the child

plan, which meant they lacked commitment to their children (Scourfield 2001, 81). These sentiments contribute to a caseworker's bias against working with fathers.

Franck (2001, 384) found that father's involvement in services was notably lower than mothers' and the caseworker directed more outreach efforts towards the mother. Caseworkers did not totally ignore fathers they just expected them to be harder to engage (O'Donnell et al, 2005, 389). Caseworkers felt that the effort needed to get a previously uninvolved father involved was not worth the time and energy (Sonenstein et al, 2002,12). Scourfield (2001, 82) asserts that caseworkers often see men as irrelevant. There are times when it does not appear necessary to workers to engage a father who is not a main caregiver for the child (Scourfield 2001, 82). Risley- Curtiss and Heffernan (2003, 2) contend that many workers do not make an effort to include fathers or document their non-participation in the records when they meet with supervisors or communicate with the father's family in his absence.

The system is set up to focus on mothers. The absence of documentation concerning fathers in records indicates the omission of fathers in the case planning process (Risley -Curtiss, Heffernan 2003, 2). For example, O 'Donnell conducted a study of fathers involved in CPS cases and concluded that many fathers did not participate in permanency planning or have any contact with the worker (Risley-Curtiss, Heffernan 2003, 2).

Caseworkers seldom have adequate guidance and training about how to involve fathers despite agency rules concerning contact with non-resident fathers

at certain times in a case (Sonenstein et al 2002, 11). The information and abilities needed to engage men are not regarded as essential learning objectives for staff (Scourfield 2006, 444). The mostly female caseworkers' ability to work with fathers is also affected by large workloads and concerns with the high percentage of instance of child maltreatment by men (Sonenstein et al, 2002, 12). The demands of CPS work including written reports tend to divert the worker's attention away from building a helping relationship with fathers (Maiter et al, 2006, 168). When caseworkers fail to involve dads who could have something to contribute, they decrease available resources to assist children in most need of fatherly contact, thereby diminishing their ability to efficiently work the case (Daniel and Taylor 1999, 211).

Therefore one would expect:

Working Hypothesis 1b (WH1b): Caseworkers will observe that caseworkers and the child welfare system are biased against fathers.

Fathers Distrust the System (WH1c)

“The issue with engaging men is not just about staff attitudes and practices but about real problems with real men as clients” (Scourfield 2006, 444). According to O'Donnell et al (2005, 399), men do not have faith in the welfare system and may avoid it. Men are easily annoyed by the system and dislike having to complete extra tasks or services especially if they were not

directly involved in the abuse of the child and did not have any contact with the mother at the time of the maltreatment (O'Donnell et al 2005, 397).

Fathers elude the system because they have been previously incarcerated or have some type prior involvement with the criminal justice system (O'Donnell et al 2005, 400). They are afraid that if they participate in the case they may have a higher chance of being arrested and incarcerated because of unresolved warrants or parole violations (O'Donnell et al 2005, 400). Fathers also fear that if they participate they will be mandated to pay child support, which they do not want to pay or feel they cannot afford to pay (O'Donnell et al 2005, 400).

O'Donnell et al's study (2005) found that caseworkers felt classes offered to fathers deterred father participation because the course curriculum failed to take into account the experiences and perspectives of fathers (O'Donnell et al 2005, 396). Many of the services did not include the parental role in the curriculum especially the parenting classes, which included mostly mothers (O'Donnell et al 2005, 397). The system treats men more harshly than mothers (O'Donnell et al 2005, 398). Unlike mothers, when a father wants to take responsibility for his child and child welfare system says no, the father must prove that he has the ability and the desire to be a good parent (O'Donnell et al 2005, 396).

Non- resident fathers personal issues may discourage them from participating in services (Sonenstein et al et al 2002, 11). Many fathers may be incarcerated, homeless, unemployed or abusing drugs, which renders them unable to provide emotional or financial support to the mother and the child.

Fathers may be battling depression and other mental illnesses (Clark and Cox 2011, 7). Despite an increase in men who have accepted parenting as their role, many non-white fathers continue to view their provider role as the primary contribution to the home (O'Donnell et al 2005, 409). When they are unable to, provide financially they view themselves as failure in fulfilling their role as a good dad (Brown et al 2008, 29). A father's motivation to participate in his child's case may be strongly influenced by his ability to fulfill his perceived role as the child's provider (O'Donnell et al 2005, 409).

Therefore one would expect:

Working Hypothesis 1c (WH1c): Caseworker will observe that fathers are distrustful of the CPS system.

I have identified the barriers to engaging fathers in CPS case. This is the first key to mitigating the problem. The next step is to develop strategies to overcome these barriers.

Strategies to Overcoming Barriers (WH2)

“The more that fatherhood is recognized and deemed as important the greater a father's involvement with his children regardless of family structure (Huebner et al 2008, 89)”. Huebner Et Al (2008, 89) argues that it is imperative

that social service agencies create policies and encourages practices that promote favorable conditions for father involvement “There are of course no easy answers to the problem of engaging men the child protection process. It is however a pressing problem that warrants more attention than it gets from policy-makers researchers and practitioners” (Scourfield 2006, 447). Research assert that the cooperation between the mother and father, caseworker education and the creation of a “father friendly” environment will be successful strategies to overcoming the barriers to engaging fathers.

Therefore one would expect

WH2: The child welfare community will have insight on the strategies to overcome barriers to engaging fathers.

Fostering Cooperation Among Fathers and Mothers (Wh2a)

Father participation is influenced by the quality of the relationship with their child’s mother, the mother’s attitude toward the father’s involvement and the father’s ability to provide support (O’Donnell et al 2005, 388). Both the mother and father should be involved therefore; workers need to encourage mothers to overcome their resistance to the inclusion of father in the case planning process and in the case in general (Huebner et al 2008, 98).

The child, mother and father are still a family even if the parents are no longer in a relationship. Fathers that are not living in the home of their child remain engaged when they have a positive relationship with their child’s mother

(O'Donnell et al 2005, 389). The benefit of a child's contact with its father is maximized when all the relevant parties have a clear understanding of the role the father is going to play in the child's life. (Daniel and Taylor 1999, 218). If a child's mother is unable to parent in the traditional manner, the inclusion of a father may be necessary in order to share the tasks involved with child care (Daniel and Taylor 1999, 218). Men should be able to identify ways that they can support and boost their child's resilience without having a romantic relationship with the child's mother (Daniel and Taylor 1999, 218). Parents should place the welfare of the family first and cultivate a good relationship or work on improving a bad relationship.

Therefore one would expect:

Working hypothesis 2a (Wh2a): Caseworkers will have insight on strategies to foster cooperation between fathers and mothers.

Caseworker Education (WH2b)

Huebner et al (2008, 100) found that caseworker workers had difficulties knowing how to work with fathers and expressed concerns about criminal involvement and domestic violence. The research suggests that a caseworker's motivation to engage a father diminishes over time, they have a limited view of a father's ability to care for and nurture the child and the prevalence of unfavorable labels hinder efficient casework practices involvement (English et al 2008, 233;

O'Donnell et al 2005, 410). This indicates a need for professional development to sustain father involvement (English et al 2008, 233; O'Donnell 2005, 410). "Staff training can have significant effects on worker attitudes and beliefs" (Alpert and Britner 2005,43). A study conducted by Rooney et al, found that 78% of caseworkers who completed trainings reported that the training had an effect on their thinking about foster care another 50% stated that it affected their actual casework (Rooney et al, 1984)

Huebner et al (2008, 100) argues that agency administrators should request and direct training and educational programs to assist caseworkers in understanding the techniques needed to invite dads to meetings and engage them in shared-decision making about issues surrounding safety. (Training should include discussions about the role of fathers in their child's life, worker bias against fathers, and worker fears of dealing with fathers (Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan 2003, 11). Staff members also need training on concrete ways to identify, locate, contact, and engage father and/or their paternal relatives (Thoeness, et al. 2011,41). Agency administrators should create and commit to transparent policies and procedures, supervisors should link caseworker efforts to engage dads to evaluations of performance (English et al 2008, 233).

Workers should also receive training on culturally sensitive interventions, the difficulties in communicating with fathers, respect for fathers' parental roles, practice principles for fathers that include a wide-ranging view of what it means to be involved (Risley -Curtiss and Heffernan 2003, 11). Training with a focus on father friendly practices can have an impact on father participation, success is

enhanced if embraced from both the top down and the bottom (English et al, 2008, 233).

Therefore one would expect.

Working hypothesis 2b (Wh2b): Caseworkers will have insight on strategies to improve caseworker education.

Creating Father Friendly Practices (Wh2c)

Since many services are not geared towards fathers, agencies would benefit from the creation of father specific programs (Risley- Curtiss and Heffernan 2002, 10). Huebner et al (2008, 100), suggests creating support groups for fathers across the state in social services agencies. These groups would guide community-based development, provide a forum for father support, empowerment and recognition of the importance of fathers.

One way to fully engage fathers is to create a father friendly environment through policy and practice so they feel empowered to get involved and stay involved in the lives of their children. Men want to be treated fairly in CPS cases. Many want to have equal visitation with their child, be invited to the same meetings, and provided with the comparable services and kept abreast of the case in the same way the mother is. Hardy and Darlington (2008, 255) concluded that parents greatly valued having access to workers who were able to meet their needs and keep their word about what they could provide the family. Parents,

including fathers, appreciated services and worker that were goal oriented and wanted CPS to involve them in the process and decision making instead of just telling them what to do. (Hardy and Darlington 2008,256, 257). Men are often denied significant involvement in important decisions about their children by participating enough in the statutory process (Scourfield 2006, 441). O'Donnell (2005, 406) found that the red tape involved in navigating the child welfare system appears to alienate and confuse fathers therefore workers should attempt to provide a clear picture of the possible outcomes and time frames associated with their case. Harper and Grossman (2011, 106) suggests that workers contact a father before the initial court hearing, provide him with a chance to tell his story and address his frustrations about being mandated to work with CPS and the courts.

Men need to be considered important whether or not they are acting in the role of the caregiver or not (Risely-Curtiss, Heffernan 2002,10; Scourfield 2006, 446). To overcome the systemic bias towards women, agencies should ensure that workers invite the father to any case planning meetings, also ensure that the father's name, location and his relation to the mother and the child are documented in the agencies database (Huebner 2008, 99). Consistent documentation would allow the agency to ensure that the father appears in the case record concerning his child. Risley- Curtiss Heffernan (2003, 10) suggests that agencies should label case records differently to teach and model the value of including both parents. However, this may be difficult when there are multiple fathers involved in a case. Worker should schedule appointments, therapy, and other evaluation

with the fathers work schedule in mind (Harper and Grossman 2011, 110). A father friendly environment is created when fathers feel included, they see themselves in the case and they can access services that are inclusive to their point of view.

Working hypothesis 2c (Wh2c): Caseworkers will have insight on strategies to create a father friendly environment at CPS.

Working Hypothesis

This section summarizes the working hypotheses that are used to structure the interviews with caseworker. Based on the scholarly literature, two research purposes were created. First, the barriers to engaging fathers in CPS cases are explored. Second, the project explores the strategies to overcoming those barriers.

Table 3.1 on the following page summarizes the working hypotheses used to investigate the barriers and strategies to engaging fathers in CPS cases. The hypothesis are linked to the literature.

Table 3.1 Conceptual Framework Linked to the Literature

Research Purpose 1: To explore Travis County CPS caseworker insight into the barriers to engaging fathers in CPS cases.

Research Purpose 2: To explore caseworker insight in strategies to overcoming the barriers to engaging fathers in CPS cases

Working Hypothesis	Sources in the Literature
WH1: The child welfare community recognizes that there are barriers to engaging fathers in CPS case.	❖ Sonenstein et al, 2002, Hahn 2011, Department of Family and Protective Services 2012
Wh1a: Caseworkers will observe that mothers obstruct the participation of fathers	❖ O'Donnell et al, 2005, Huebner et al, 2008, Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan, 2003, Brown et al, 2005, Sonenstein et al, 2002
Wh1b: Caseworkers will observe that caseworkers and the child welfare system are biased against fathers.	❖ Sonenstein et al 2002, Scourfield, 2001, Scourfield, 2006, O'Donnell et al, 2005, Franck 2001,
Wh1c: Caseworkers will observe that Fathers are distrustful of CPS system	❖ Scourfield, 2006, Scourfield, 2001, Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan, 2003 O'Donnell et al, 2005, Brown et al, 2008, Clark and Cox 2011
WH2: Caseworkers will have insight into the strategies to overcoming the barriers to engaging fathers	❖ Huebner 2008; O'Donnell' 2005
Wh2a: Caseworkers will have insight on strategies to foster cooperation between fathers and mothers.	❖ Daniel and Taylor 1999; O'Donnell et al 2005; Huebner et al 2008; Hardy and Darlington 2008; Brown et al
WH2b: Caseworkers will have insight on strategies to improve caseworker education	❖ Daniel and Taylor 1999; O'Donnell et al 2005; Hubner et al 2008; Risley-Curtiss Heffernan 2003, Thoeness et al 2011
WH2c: Caseworkers will have insight on strategies to create father friendly practices at CPS.	❖ Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan 2003; Daniel and Taylor 1999; Huebner et al. 2008; Scourfield 2006; O'Donnell et al 2005, Harper et al 2011

Conclusion

This chapter examines scholarly literature on the barriers of engaging fathers in CPS cases as well as strategies to engaging fathers in cases. It identifies the influence of mothers, caseworker and systemic bias, and the father's distrust of the system as barriers to their participation. The literature establishes increased caseworker training, relationship building with mothers, and changes in the child protection process as strategies to overcome these barriers. The next chapter discusses the methodology used in this study.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Chapter Purpose

Chapter Four describes the methodology use to explore the barriers and strategies to engaging fathers as identified from the literature in Chapter Three. The chapter also discusses the technique used to obtain data and the approval for use of human subjects. Finally the chapter addresses the population and limitations of the method selected.

Operationalization of the Conceptual Framework

This study uses structured interviews of Child Protective Services caseworkers. Current and former conservatorship and family based safety services caseworker will be asked to participate. Both research questions are investigated by utilizing interviews. Each interview question addresses the working sub-hypothesis found in the literature. For example, the interview question “How do you feel about working with fathers?” addresses Working Hypothesis 1b: caseworkers will observe that the child welfare system and caseworkers are biased against fathers. The information provided in the interview should show the perspective of the caseworker on the barriers to engaging fathers as well as the perspective of the caseworker on the strategies to overcoming barriers to engaging fathers. Table 4.1 on the next page, shows how Working Hypotheses 1 and 2 were operationalized into interviews questions.

Table 4.1 Operationalization Table Linked to the Literature

Research Purpose 1: To explore Travis County CPS caseworker insight into the barriers to engaging fathers in CPS cases

Working Hypothesis	Questions
WH1: The child welfare community recognizes that there are barriers to engaging fathers in CPS case.	What are the barriers to engaging fathers in CPS cases?
Wh1a: Caseworker will observe that mothers obstruct the participation of fathers	Explain your experience working with mothers to locating and involving fathers in cases?
Wh1b: Caseworker will observe that the child welfare system and caseworkers are biased against fathers.	How do you feel about working with fathers? What are your thoughts on the child welfare system and it's treatment of fathers?
Wh1c: Fathers are distrustful of he CPS system	What are your thoughts on how fathers feel about working with CPS?
WH2: Caseworkers will have insight into the strategies to overcoming the barriers to engaging fathers	What are strategies to overcoming the barriers in working with fathers?
Wh2a: Caseworkers will have insight on strategies to foster cooperation between fathers and mothers.	What strategies can be used improve mother and father communication and cooperation better during cases?
WH2b: Caseworkers will have insight on strategies to improve caseworker education	How would you improve caseworker education in working with fathers?
WH2c: Caseworkers will have insight on strategies to create father friendly practices at CPS.	How would you create father friendly practices?

Research Technique

The study uses interviews to determine caseworkers' perspectives on the barriers to engaging fathers in CPS cases. Interviewing is an appropriate method for the social researcher collecting original data from a larger population Babbie (2004, 243). This method is most appropriate because the goal of the both research purposes is to explore the perspective of the caseworker. Interviews will allow them to respond more freely to questions than if they were surveyed.

There are many advantages to conducting interview techniques (Babbie 2007, 274). This method allows the interviewers to clarify any questions that seem unclear to a respondent, thereby achieving higher completion rates compared to surveys and decrease the amount of "I don't knows" (Babbie 2007, 275).

Conversely there are weaknesses in using interviews to gather data. Field research measurements can be personal and sometimes biased due to the subjective tendencies of both the researcher and the interviewer. (Babbie 2007, 328).The observations of the researcher are not always reliable. There are other issues concerning reliability when using interviews are used because despite asked the same questions, each response may be different, however that is the intent of this research. Using the working hypotheses framework allows for the collection of data that may not fit into the "box" Shields and Heichelbech 2011, 34). The research is exploratory in nature and the goal is to learn about the insights of caseworker that actually work with fathers in CPS cases.

Interview Selection Process

The sample for this study is Child Protective Services caseworkers in the State of Texas. I want an in-depth exploration of this topic to explore the ideas of people close to the topic. To achieve this, caseworkers from Travis, Tarrant and Harris County were interviewed. The sampling method is purposive sampling. I chose my sample based on a judgment about which ones will be the most useful or representative. It is appropriate to select a sample based on the purpose of the study, knowledge of the population and its elements (Babbie 2007,193). The sample is made up of caseworkers that currently have been case assignable for at least one year and have in the past been case assignable for more than one year. A case assignable worker means that a caseworker has been able to work a case without supervision for at least a year. Most cases take one year to eighteen months. Choosing workers who have at least one year ensures that the respondents have had the opportunity to work with both mothers and fathers. The sample will include employees who are not currently working cases and/or no longer employed with the CPS but have been case assignable caseworkers in the past¹¹. Eighteen caseworkers were interviewed. Fifteen caseworkers were female and three were male. The caseworkers years of experience ranged from

¹¹ Many of the caseworkers working at the time that this project originally began, quit before the project was completed. The data reflecting this will not be available until 2013 when turnover statistics are published in DFPS's databook. The researcher has first hand knowledge because she was employed with DFPS.

1.5 to 6 years. The interviews took 10 minutes to complete on average and were conducted between July 1st and August 1, 2012.

Human Subjects Projection

Possible ethical concerns must be addressed due the use of human subjects for the purposes of this research. Ethical concerns in social research are voluntary participation, harm to the participants, anonymity/confidentiality, and deception (Babbie 2004, 64-68). In order to ensure voluntary participation, every caseworker will be given a complete description of the research purpose and a full description of how the findings of the research will be used. To address the issue of confidentiality, the researcher will not disclose the identities or contact information of the respondents or the individual responses. The researcher will only know identifying information, as no names of respondents will be recorded during this study. Participation in the interviews is completely voluntary and refusal to respond to the survey will not result in a penalty or loss of benefits to caseworkers asked to participate.

Chapter Summary

This project used the interviews of caseworkers to answer the two research questions. The interviews provided direct access to the insight of casework on the barriers to engaging fathers and the strategies to overcoming the barriers to engaging fathers in CPS cases. Chapter five discusses the results of the interviews.

Chapter 5: Results

Chapter Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from the interviews. The discussion of the insights of current and former caseworkers on the barriers to engaging fathers and the strategies to overcoming those barriers are organized using the Working Hypotheses (WH) established previously. Eighteen interviews were conducted between July 1, 2012 and August 1, 2012. The results of the interviews cannot be used to generalize as the caseworkers can only provide insight to the Texas Child welfare system. However their experience and opinions provide an important perspective.

Barriers to Father Engagement

The first research purpose of this project is to explore the barriers to engaging fathers in their child's CPS cases. The second purpose is to explore strategies to overcoming the barriers to engaging fathers in CPS cases. Two working hypotheses (WH1 and WH2) and sub-hypotheses for each were developed from the conceptual framework in order to obtain data and present results.

WH1: The child welfare community recognizes that there are barriers to engaging fathers in CPS case.

Mothers obstruct father participation (WH1a)

Many of the caseworkers observed that the mother acted as a barrier locating and working the fathers. 16 out of 18 interviewees indicated that the mother played some type of role in keeping the information about the father concealed. Only two respondents stated that they have had mixed results and reported some instances of cooperation by mothers.

One respondent stated “I have noted a pattern of mothers not wanting the fathers involved. There seems to be a reluctance to tell CPS who the father is or how to locate him.” Another one said “. Sometimes they will just refuse to tell you who the father is and that makes it harder”.

The majority of the caseworker characterized obtaining information from mothers as “difficult”. Either the mother refused to give up the father’s information out of fear, his lack of participation in the child’s life before the CPS case or the mother’s desire to have the father in the child’s life. For example, a respondent stated, “Many of the mothers said the fathers weren’t involved and mothers were often resistant to getting the fathers involved whether it was due to lack of involvement leading up to the case or other reasons.” Another respondent said, “It’s been difficult. Mothers sometimes don’t want to give information about the dad because maybe there has been times when the dad hasn’t been paying child support or it could have been a situation where the dad has been abusive in the past and they are afraid of the dad.” The results are summarized in Table 6.1

Table 6.1 Responses to WH1a

Wh1a: Caseworkers will observe that mothers obstruct the participation on fathers	Strongly Supported
Q1: Explain your experience working with mothers to locating and involving fathers in cases?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mothers are unaware of the father's location • Mothers do not want the father involved because he has not been involved in the past • Mothers say they don't have information about the father but communicates with him through facebook • Some mother's do not know the father's name or provide false names so he cannot be located

Caseworker and Systemic Bias (WH1b)

Most of the caseworkers indicated that they did not have any problems working with fathers and actually enjoyed when fathers did participate. A few respondents had negative feelings about working with dads but did not appear to be biased against working with fathers. For example, one caseworker expressed discomfort about going into unsafe neighborhoods alone to meet with fathers.

The caseworkers were asked how they felt about working with fathers and what they thought about the child welfare's treatment of fathers. One of the respondents said, "I'm fine with working fathers, I encourage it. To me it is better to have 2 parents working towards having their children in a healthy safe place then it is to have just one." Another respondent stated ". I feel comfortable working with dads the ones that did work with me and were cooperative were very successful. Dads can be just as successful but they have to want the responsibility and I something I ran into a lot is that dads didn't seem to want that

responsibility.” The caseworker showed mixed support for this sub hypothesis. They did not support the working hypothesis that caseworkers were biased against dads but they did support that the child welfare system was biased against fathers. The results are summarized in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Responses to WH1b

Wh1b: Caseworkers will observe that the child welfare system and caseworkers are biased against fathers	Mixed Support
Q2: How do you feel about working with fathers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel comfortable working with fathers • I have no problem working with fathers • I feel positive about working with fathers • I have always had positive experiences
Q3: What are your thoughts on the child welfare system and it's treatment of fathers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is not a genuine interest in engaging dads • Fathers are often forgotten about • Legal system is sometimes unfair to fathers • Fathers are more of an after thought

Father Distrust of CPS (Wh1c):

The majority of the caseworkers expressed that father's felt angry, discouraged and generally had negative feelings about working with CPS. One caseworker stated they had never worked with a father on a case. Very few caseworkers stated that they felt dads were open to working with CPS

One of the respondents stated “They feel that they are at disadvantage because we don't have appropriate or adequate amount of services for the fathers like we do for mothers. They feel that because the system isn't set up for

working with fathers they feel like their voices are not heard and that they can't get the services that the system offers to the mother." Another stated, "I think that a lot of them feel like that we are kind of like the police and we are going to arrest them and we are going to set them up and get them in trouble and not so much help them." According to the workers, the fathers feel left out and sometimes afraid to engage with CPS because of their past. The caseworkers responses support working hypotheses WH1c. The results of responses are summarized in Table 6.3 below.

Table 6.3 Results of WH1c

Wh1c: Fathers are distrustful of the CPS system	Supported
Q4: What are your thoughts on how fathers feel about working with CPS?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fathers feel left out. • Father thinks CPS will turn them in. • Fathers feel they are at a disadvantage. • Fathers feel resentful and unhappy.

Strategies to Overcoming Barriers to Engaging Fathers

The second purpose of this study was to explore strategies to overcoming the barriers to engaging fathers in CPS cases.

WH2: Caseworkers will have insight into the strategies to overcoming the barriers to engaging fathers

Strategies to foster cooperation (Wh2a):

Almost every caseworker responded that parents needed to participate in co-parenting, or family therapy whether they were going to be a couple or not. Most of the caseworker stated that the co-parenting was important because it teaches parents to work together and learn to communicate without being in a romantic relationship.

One respondent stated, "Most of our parents are single parents. I think they need to do some type of co-parenting classes. Something to where they can learn that they don't have to be together but they do have to parent together." Another worker thought that utilizing the family group decision bring parents together in a non-threatening way to discuss the case and get everyone on the on the same page. The result of the responses are summarized in Table 6.4 below

Table 6.4: Responses to WH2a

Wh2a: Caseworkers will have insight on strategies to foster cooperation between fathers and mothers.	Supported
Q5: What strategies can be used help to mothers and father increase cooperation and communication during cases?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co parenting education • Family therapy • More Family meetings facilitated by Family Group Decision Making team

Caseworker Education (Wh2b):

Many of the respondents expressed that there should be more training on how to work with dads when a caseworker first begins their initial training. Basic

Skills Development Training usually last 14 weeks. After the training has been completed, a new caseworker is allowed to work with clients without constant supervision. Several interviewees stated that they do not feel that the training during this period is adequate and caseworkers are sometimes unprepared to deal with difficulties in engaging fathers after they complete basic skill development training. Other respondents felt there should not be a formal training but rather a simple reminder that caseworkers should be trying to locate and engage fathers. Caseworkers were asked how they would improve caseworker education. One respondent replied:

“That’s a hard question because I feel like I should engage fathers the same way I engage moms. I don’t feel like there should be any special privileges or any type of special class that should be given for fathers, but I do think that when we were in training we didn’t learn any of this stuff. So I think that it would be helpful if that in training we learned how to go out and find missing people instead of just being thrown out there as caseworkers. Then we are looking for a father that is not out there or we are coming across a mom who doesn’t want to give up the dads information and then we are trying to figure out how we are going to find this father.”

Overall the responses from the caseworker supported the working hypothesis and the results are summarized in table 6.5 below.

Table 6.5: Responses to WH2b

Wh2b: Caseworkers will have insight on strategies to improve caseworker education.	Supported
Q6: How would you improve caseworker education in working with fathers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address barriers to engaging fathers in basic skill development training • Ongoing refresher training throughout the year • Reminder from supervisors to keep looking for fathers

Creating Father Friendly Practices (Wh2c):

Caseworkers were asked how they would create father friendly practices. Many caseworkers suggested having a roundtable and asking fathers who have worked with CPS to give feedback on what worked for them. One respondent stated, “We don't have alot of men and you know maybe if we had some men that are caseworkers it would kind of help bridge that gap.” A few caseworkers responded they communication with fathers should be increased so they feel hey are “in the loop” of what’s going on with their case. One interviewee stated they would create a father friendly environment by “trying to just make sure that they (fathers) are just as much of a priority in all of the services and then looking at them for support and for visits.”

One worker in particular responded “Try to explain his rights as a parent. Most men feel like the caregiver role goes straight to the mom and they don't really understand that they too have rights as a parent. The parent isn't just mom its also you. I think that we don't really sit down and explain to the fathers that you too have a role in this.”

Overall the responses from this question support the working hypothesis and the results are summarized in Table 6.6 below.

Table 6.6 Responses to WH2c

Wh2c: Caseworkers will have insights on strategies to create father friendly practices at CPS.	Supported
	• Ask fathers what they feel they

Q7: How would you create father friendly practices?	need to be successful <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase communication• Make them feel equal• Hire more male staff
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Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings from the interviews. The chapter contained a discussion about the insights and opinions of current and former Child Protective services caseworker about the barriers to engaging fathers and the strategies to overcoming those barriers. Chapter seven summarizes these suggestions and makes recommendations for future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Purpose

This chapter summarizes the applied research project, discusses how the findings relates to the research questions, makes recommendations based on the findings and suggestions for future research.

Research Summary

The purpose of this study was two fold. First, the research sought to explore the barriers to engaging fathers in case and second, to explore the strategies to overcoming those barriers. Current and former Child protective services workers were interviewed about their experience in worker with fathers. Due to the scope of the study the results cannot be generalized. The worker could only speak to the CPS system in the Texas and it cannot be assumed they her experiences are the same or similar to other workers in different states. The results must be interpreted with caution, however the results are still important to the discussion of how to better engage fathers in order to achieve better outcomes for outcomes for children in foster care.

Summary of Findings

The barriers to engaging fathers as reported by working as supported the responses of the worker were:

- Mother's obstruction of father participation
- Systemic and Caseworker Bias against fathers
- Father's own feelings about the system.

The interviews indicate a strong support for working hypothesis 1a that mothers obstruct the participation of fathers in cases. Many worker expressed frustration in the difficulty of getting mothers to provide information about fathers in order to get them involved in cases. The interviews indicated mixed support for working hypothesis 1b that the system and caseworker are biased against fathers. The interview supported the idea that the system is biased against dads but did not support the idea the caseworkers were biased against fathers. The interviews mostly supported working hypothesis 1c that fathers were distrustful of the system. Some caseworker responded that fathers fear the system because they do not understand how it works and feel that PCS will set them up to be arrested and other expressed that fathers were angry about having to work with CPS.

The strategies to overcoming the barriers to engaging fathers as supported by the responses of the workers were:

- Improving cooperation between mothers and fathers
- Improving caseworker education
- Creating father friendly practices

The interviews indicated supported all sub-hypothesis in working hypothesis 2.

The workers had insights to the strategies that were discovered in the literature.

The caseworkers overwhelmingly suggested that parents should participate in co-parenting classes or family therapy to improve communication and cooperation between mothers and fathers in case. They also supported more casework education. Many of them suggested that the training on how to work with and locate fathers occur during a caseworker's initial training. Lastly, the caseworker response indicated that they had insights on how to create father friendly practices. Several of the workers suggested getting fathers involved and asking them how they felt about the CPS system and process and using their feedback to make changes. Table 7.1 on the following page, summarizes the findings of each working hypothesis.

Table 7.1 Summary of Results

<u>Working Hypothesis</u>	<u>Finding</u>	<u>Recommendations</u>
Caseworkers will observe that mother obstruct the participating of fathers. (WH1a)	<u>Strongly support</u>	Encourage mothers to provide information, use other child welfare agencies and systems to aid in locating fathers
Caseworkers will observe that the child welfare system and caseworkers are biased against fathers. (WH1b)	<u>Mixed Support</u>	Create best practices for caseworkers to foster a “father friendly” environment.
Caseworkers will observe that fathers are distrustful by the CPS system. (WH1c)	<u>Mostly Support</u>	Increased communication between caseworkers and fathers.
Caseworkers will have insight on strategies to foster cooperation between fathers and mothers. (WH2a)	<u>Support</u>	Increase training for caseworkers on how to foster cooperation between mothers and fathers.
Caseworkers will have insight on strategies to improve caseworker education. (WH2b)	<u>Support</u>	Increase training for caseworkers on how to work with issues fathers .face.
Caseworkers will have insights on strategies to create father friendly practices at CPS. (WH2c)	<u>Support</u>	Implement father friendly best practices that encourage father participation.

Conclusion

The research conducted only addressed very few of the issues surrounding father involvement in Child Protective Services. Since this research is exploratory in nature, additional research should certainly be done to continue to the efforts to improve father participation and attempt to reduce the number of children in the foster care system. The research confirmed that the child welfare community recognizes that they are barriers to engaging fathers in CPS case. Interviews with caseworkers further confirmed that caseworkers had insights to the barriers and strategies to overcoming those barriers to engaging fathers in cases. Further research could be conducted to find out what motivates as well as discourages a father to cooperate with CPS. There could also be research to further examine the reasons why mothers obstruct the participation of fathers. This type of research project will be valuable to addressing the problem of father participation.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Explain your experience working with mothers to locating and involving fathers in cases?
2. How do you feel about working with fathers?
3. What are your thoughts on the child welfare system and its treatment of fathers?
4. What are your thoughts on how fathers feel about working with CPS?
5. What strategies can be used help to mothers and father increase cooperation and communication during cases?
6. How would you improve caseworker education in working with fathers?
7. How would you create father friendly practices?

Appendix B: IRB Exemption

Exemption Request EXP2012J2648 - Approval

AVPR IRB [ospirb@txstate.edu]

Sent: Friday, June 29, 2012 4:32 PM

To: Ferrell, Karen D

DO NOT REPLY TO THIS MESSAGE. This email message is generated by the IRB online application program.

Based on the information in IRB Exemption Request EXP2012J2648 which you submitted on 06/27/12 17:50:36, your project is exempt from full or expedited review by the Texas State Institutional Review Board.

If you have questions, please submit an IRB Inquiry form:

http://www.txstate.edu/research/irb/irb_inquiry.html

Comments:

No comments.

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Institutional Review Board

Office of Research Compliance

Texas State University-San Marcos

(ph) 512/245-2314 / (fax) 512/245-3847 / ospirb@txstate.edu / JCK 489

601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666

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