



Introduction to the Special Issue: Mothers of children in foster care

Kathleen Wells^{a,*}, Maureen O. Marcenko^b

^a Case Western Reserve University, United States

^b University of Washington, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Available online 26 June 2010

Keywords:

Mothers
Foster care
Custody loss
Reunification

ABSTRACT

This article introduces the special issue of *Children and Youth Services Review* devoted to single mothers with children in foster care. It delineates the policy context in which mothers are operating; examines reasons for mothers' temporary loss of custody of their children, a loss that occurs when their children are placed in foster care; presents expectations of mothers once they enter the public child welfare system; and summarizes empirical and theoretical papers included in the volume intended to advance policy and practice for this population. Taken together, these papers reflect one over-arching theme—the need to re-orient child welfare policy and practice so that the rehabilitation, health, and well-being of mothers is one of the central aims.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Within the United States, it is difficult for mothers identified as abusive or neglectful whose children have been placed in foster care to reunify with their children. For example, only half (52%) of children who leave foster care in any one year are reunified with their parents or primary caretakers nearly all of whom are women (Courtney, McMurtry, & Zinn, 2004). The proportion of reunifications that are to biological mothers is unclear (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Local studies have found, however, that two thirds of children in foster care come from families headed by their unmarried biological mothers (Wells & Guo, 1999).

We have some knowledge of the child, family, and service-system characteristics linked to reunification (Child Welfare League of America, 2002; Courtney et al., 2004; Wulczyn, 2004) with, for example, single-parent families less likely to have their children returned to them than two-parent families (Courtney, 1994). Participation in experimental reunification programs, when compared to participation in standard child welfare services, does not increase mothers' (or other primary caretakers') chances, however, of having their children returned to them (Pine, Spath, Werrback, Jensen, & Kerman, 2009), pointing to the need for further research in relation to single mothers with children in foster care.

Indeed, knowledge of mothers with children in foster care is scant. For example, we lack knowledge of the relationship between a community's social structure, structures such as the proportion of single-mother families a community has, and the community's reunification rate; of the social and clinical characteristics of single-

mother families with children in foster care; of how such mothers respond to interventions designed to meet their unique needs; and of the complex social-psychological processes through which they reunify or fail to reunify with their children in foster care (Maluccio, Fein, & Davis, 1994).

This special issue of the *Children and Youth Services Review* addresses these issues. It presents emerging empirical and theoretical work on mothers with children in foster care with the broad goal of spurring research, policy analysis, and program development to promote reunification. Mothers who are unmarried and single are the focus because female-headed families comprise the dominant family form for children in foster care. Child welfare policy and practice within the United States are emphasized, although we draw on theoretical insights developed in other service-system contexts.

In this introduction to the volume, we lay out current public policy for this population, reasons for mothers' temporary loss of custody, a loss that occurs when their children are placed in foster care, and expectations of mothers once they enter the child welfare system, in order to place the papers included in this volume in an appropriate context.

2. Public child welfare policy

United States child welfare policy emphasizes the prevention of out-of-home placement of abused and neglected children through the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (U. S. Public Law 96-272). United States child welfare policy also emphasizes for children who are placed, the timely return of children to families in which they will be healthy and safe through the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) (U. S. Public Law 105-89). Within this

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: kathleen.wells@case.edu (K. Wells).

policy context, then, reunification of children placed in foster care with their biological parents is an important objective.

Although reunification of children placed in foster care with their biological parents is the goal of this policy, its provisions may inadvertently undermine this goal. For example, ASFA (U. S. Public Law 105–89) promotes termination of the rights of neglectful and or abusive parents whose children have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months: It also allows state agencies to plan simultaneously for family reunification and for adoption, and it provides financial incentives to states to increase rates of adoption but not rates of reunification.

Moreover, United States public welfare policy, for example, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (U. S. Public Law 104–193) requires poor mothers to be employed, irrespective of the employment opportunities in the communities in which they live, in order to receive cash assistance and limits the period of time during which they qualify for such aid. Together, these policies work to render mothers with children in foster care as fungible parents (Woodhouse, 2002).

3. Reasons for mothers' custody loss

Children are placed in foster care due to a mix of reasons pertaining to their parents' abusive treatment of them; their parents' dependence on substances; or their parents' life circumstances such as lacking a home or other resources needed to care for children (Pelton, 2008).

3.1. Maltreatment

Maltreatment of one's children, defined variously in relation to physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse and neglect, is a poorly-defined concept that is understood in differing ways in various cultural contexts (Stagner & Lansing, 2009). Its causes are cast frequently in relation to a developmental risk-protective factor model (Rizley & Cicchetti, 1981). Empirical investigations show that mothers of very young children; mothers with significant emotional vulnerabilities (vulnerabilities such as having a psychiatric disorder, being in a violent relationship, or having a child with a conduct problem; Barth, 2009) or who are socially isolated; and or mothers who live in communities characterized by social disorganization and or violence are especially at risk of maltreating their children and therefore of losing custody of them. Thus, such mothers may lack the emotional resilience, attachments to members of their families, knowledge of parenting, or social connections that protect against neglecting or abusing their children (Stagner & Lansing, 2009). Indeed, though mothers may minimize or provide differing interpretations of their behavior than those provided by child welfare authorities, few mothers with children in foster care contest the allegations that their children have been mistreated (Reich, 2005).

3.2. Poverty

Mothers with children in foster care are typically economically impoverished (Courtney, 1994; Lindsey, 1992; Wells & Guo, 2006). Although levels of poverty are likely to vary by time, period, and cohort studied, one county-based study showed that 81% of mothers with children in foster care had an average monthly income from wages and cash assistance that fell below the *extreme poverty level* (or half the poverty threshold) (Wells & Shafran, 2005). This same study showed that mothers have multiple obstacles to employment such as lack of transportation and low educational attainment (Wells & Shafran, 2005).

Although poverty is not a legally-justifiable reason for placement of children in foster care, ill-defined concepts such as "child neglect", "parental incapacity to earn an income", and "parental failure to take

responsibility for one's children" are, and these concepts are enshrined in the statutes of many states (Vesneski, in press).

3.3. Substance use

A substantial proportion of mothers with children in foster care use substances (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). For example, one report indicates that in California and Illinois approximately 66% of urban foster care caseloads involve parents whose drug use requires treatment (U. S. General Accounting Office, 1998). The proportion of unmarried mothers with children in foster care who meet criteria for a substance dependence disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), the most serious form of substance use, is unknown. Indeed, reported rates of substance use by single unmarried mothers (and other caretakers) of children in foster care are likely to vary in relation to the definition of "use" employed, method of assessment, timing of assessment, specific population studied, and prevailing ideologies and child welfare policies regarding how caretakers who use illegal substances should be treated. Nonetheless, there is agreement that substance use undermines the parenting of many mothers with children in foster care (Marsh & Smith, in press).

Preliminary reports of studies of mothers identified as having maltreated their children suggest that psychiatric disorders *other than* substance abuse or substance dependence are common among mothers with children in foster care (De Bellis et al., 2001; Famularo, Kinscherff, & Fenton, 1992). For example, one study showed that 72% had a mood disorder, and 58% had an anxiety disorder (De Bellis et al., 2001). A second study showed that 64% of maltreating mothers had a personality disorder (Famularo et al., 1992). These data are compatible with traits such as low self-esteem, impulsivity, and hostility found to characterize maltreating parents (National Research Council, 1993). As a result, it is not surprising that one large-scale study of substance-abusing mothers with children in foster care found a high incidence (92%) of co-occurring disorders (and problems such as domestic violence and lack of adequate housing) (Marsh, Ryan, Choi, & Testa, 2006).

In light of mothers' social-psychological difficulties, it is wise neither to valorize nor to demonize such a vulnerable population (Reich, 2005).

4. Expectations of mothers with children in foster care

Expectations of mothers are embedded in the dominant North American ideology of "intensive mothering" (Arendell, 2000) that holds primarily mothers responsible when their children are neglected or abused (Appell, 1998; Featherstone, 1999; Roberts, 1999), even when fathers are present or involved with their children (Strega et al., 2008). Once identified as a maltreating mother, the child welfare system considers mothers in relation to a set of risk factors that have to be managed and a set of professional discourses that cast mothers as objects of corrective treatment (Brown, 2006).

Mothers must submit to public accounting of their risk status and participate in multiple services. The environment is one that emphasizes regulation and renders the work that mothers must do to reduce their risk status invisible (Brown, 2006). Indeed, the "disconnections between the conceptually ordered realm of professional or managerial interests and the realms of women's lived experience require these mothers to maneuver between institutional and subjective modes of consciousness (Brown, 2006, p. 335)."

Once a mother's children are in foster care, the bar for minimally-acceptable parenting is raised (Reich, 2005). For example, a mother who had housing prior to her children's placement might find that after her children's placement, her dwelling is considered inappropriate because it is too small or has too few bedrooms in relation to the age and gender of her children. Indeed, the greater the number of

problems a mother has, the more likely she is to lose custody permanently of her very young children (Larrieu, Heller, Smyke, & Zeanah, 2008). Loss of custody of one's child, either on a temporary or permanent basis, comes with a high psychological cost (Schen, 2005).

5. Services for mothers

Although we have program models designed to promote family reunification (Child Welfare League of America, 2002), few programs have been tested rigorously: In one of the two that has, reentry into foster care approached 27% (Wulczyn, 2004). Indeed, the development of interventions that have withstood rigorous testing of their effectiveness has eluded the field. For example, a recent study of an experimental reunification program incorporating many of the programmatic elements believed to promote reunification, elements such as engaging early with families, providing concrete and clinical services, and promoting frequent parent–child visits, failed to increase the rate of reunification over that of matched controls receiving routinely-provided care (Pine et al., 2009).

Standard care for families within the child welfare system is designed primarily to protect children and only tangentially to rehabilitate and aid their mothers. As a result, mothers are typically provided parent education, supervision, and case management, services for which there is limited evidence of effectiveness in relation to child welfare outcomes (Barth, 2009; Waldfogel, 2009), supplemented by other services such as treatment for use of substances.

Some factors that may have brought mothers' children into foster care, factors such as inadequate income from paid employment, transportation, housing, or child care, may remain unaddressed because child welfare agencies do not have control over and sometimes do not have access to services designed to ameliorate these conditions.

The time-limited services for treatment of substance dependence that are available (Klingemann, 2000) fly in the face of emerging knowledge that dependence on substances is a chronic relapsing condition (Glantz & Hartel, 1999), and service providers often ignore or disavow the complex interactions that may occur for women among victimization, use of substances, recovery, re-emergence of trauma symptoms, and relapse into substance use (Quimette & Brown, 2003). Inadequate treatment for substance use disorders is especially problematic because severity of dependence among parents is a stronger predictor of loss of contact with their children than is other forms of mental illness (Jones, Macias, Gold, Barreira, & Fisher, 2008).

In order to navigate successfully the child welfare system, mothers need to deploy the very competencies, competencies such as managing their emotions, mastering child welfare policies and practices, and solving problems and communicating well, the evidence suggests they may either lack or be hard-pressed to show under threat of loss of custody of their children (Brown, 2006).

6. Reasons for mothers' reunification with their children

Studies of the processes through which reunification decisions are made are relatively rare. The ethnographic work of Reich (2005) is one notable exception. She found that mothers' acceptance of the authority of the child welfare agency, compliance with the case plans made by the agency for them, and enacting signs of acceptance of both facilitated mothers' reunification with their children. Wulczyn's (2004) summary of current knowledge of the decision-making process underscores the importance of mothers' compliance with their case plans to reunification with their children.

A range of child and family factors has also been found to be associated with reunification of mothers with their children: For example, mothers who are relatively unambivalent about reunifica-

tion with their children; mothers with fewer problems and greater contact with child welfare workers; and mothers whose children have relatively few behavioral, emotional, or health problems or disabilities are more likely to reunify with their children than are their counterparts (Wulczyn, 2004).

In short, those who are perhaps the most problematic and or vulnerable among the population of single unmarried mothers with children in foster care are the least likely to regain custody of their children. Indeed, one report shows that the factors Pelton (2008) found to be linked to custody loss, factors such as lower parental functioning, neglect of children, and homelessness, were also independently linked to lowered rates of reunification (Courtney et al., 2004).

7. Single-mother families and the child welfare system

Whether or not data pertaining to the proportion of children in foster care who return to their single-mother families and remain with those families over time reflect a failure of public policy depends on one's view as to whether or not the state should prioritize family reunification and one's ideology regarding poverty, motherhood, and morality to which this view is related (Reich, 2005). Our position is that prioritization of policies and practices to rehabilitate and to support mothers, constructed within an ideology in which it is assumed that nurturance and care of children must be shared by mothers and fathers and supported by their government and communities, is required. To facilitate that goal, we have included in this volume papers that address a range of policy and programmatic questions; that employ a wide range of research methodologies; and that, we hope, will help to chart a way forward in relation to improvements in family reunification policy and practice, especially at it pertains to families comprised of single unmarried mothers and their children.

To set the stage, Wulczyn and colleagues (Wulczyn, Chen, & Courtney, in press) examine the social structural context for reunification practice. Their interest is in whether U. S. counties (945 counties contained in 17 states) with above average reunification rates share social structural characteristics. Toward that end, the authors investigate whether family structure, poverty, racial composition, placement rate per 1000 children, and urbanicity, measured at the county level, influence reunification rates, after controlling for individual level characteristics of children found to be related to reunification in prior research. Relying on multi-level discrete time survival models, the authors find that counties with higher proportions of female-headed households and higher proportions of African American children, for example, have slower initial rates of reunification than their counterparts, but that the influence of these contextual variables attenuates, as duration in care grows longer. A county's poverty level is not associated with rates of reunification at any point in time.

In light of the variability between at least some aspects of a county's social structure and a county's initial reunification rates, this paper raises the question as to whether the quest for nationally representative findings is illusory, and it opens up an important area for future research—the nature of the social–psychological processes through which social structural variables and child welfare outcomes are related.

Focusing on one service-system context, Marcenko and colleagues (Marcenko, Lyons, & Courtney, in press) report findings from a large-scale study of mothers with children in the child welfare system in the State of Washington, comparing mothers whose children remained with them at home with those whose children were placed in foster care. The authors examine the concrete, psycho-social and service needs of both samples, concluding that a majority of mothers with children in foster care are economically impoverished (57% had an annual income equal to or less than \$10,000 and 56% needed help finding a place in which to live) and pointing to the amelioration of

poverty as an urgent need for this population. Moreover, 58% had been sexually abused as children, and a significant proportion has a problem with alcohol or drug use, depression, anxiety, and or domestic violence. This paper raises the question as to whether the needs of this population should be recast in relation to their human rights such as a right to affordable housing and re-calibrated so that mothers' material needs are addressed prior to their albeit significant psycho-social ones following the "housing first" approach to homeless adults with mental illness that has been implemented in the United States over the past twenty years (Padgett, 2007).

The papers by Wells, Sykes, and Hall and Slembrouck address in differing ways the institutional demand by child welfare agencies that mothers accept the socially-stigmatizing label, *maltreating (or failed) mother*, and all of the responsibility and associated shame for the ill treatment or lack of care experienced by her children. While shame serves a useful social function—to mark the boundaries for acceptable behavior within a community—its amelioration requires positive efforts to restore individuals' sense of self (Lewis, 1995). Taken together, these papers raise questions as to whether clinical services for single unmarried mothers with children in foster care need to be recast in order to promote healing and growth.

Building on narrative concepts and methods of textual data analysis, Wells (in press) reports a qualitative case study of the experiences with mothering of one woman who lost and regained custody of her children. Framing her study in relation to the theoretical literature on stigma and shame, she shows the utility of narrative concepts to understanding how this mother constructed a maternal identity in discourse—an identity that both reproduced and resisted cultural expectations of mothers—and asserted the grounds on which she could re-claim a moral life.

This study suggests that practitioners and policymakers may under-estimate the enormity of the task of maternal-identity construction that mothers identified as abusive or neglectful face. Arguing for the importance of studies of maternal experience, Wells notes that reunification research tends to conceptualize mothers in relation to narrowly-defined concepts such as age or socio-economic status and statistical probabilities rather than in relation to their individuality and life experience. Paraphrasing Nussbaum (1995), she cautions that if one reduces the mother in thought, it is easier to deny her respect in policy and practice.

Drawing on symbolic-interactionist theories of identity and interviews with mothers and caseworkers, Sykes (in press) shows how mothers, in order to resist being labeled as neglectful, question the legitimacy of child welfare policies and restrict their involvement in child welfare services, and how child welfare workers, in turn, find mothers unrepentant and unwilling. Thus, efforts to help children are diminished by unproductive cycles of defensiveness and blame. She argues that the child welfare system must reorganize so that it rejects the prevailing orientation to mothers, as mothers in need of correction, and endorses an alternative one: mothers in need of assistance. In this way, mothers could preserve non-stigmatizing identities that may well be central to their authentic engagement in services designed to help them and to protect their children.

Hall and Slembrouck (in press) draw on intellectual currents in the humanities and social sciences to propose a conceptual, methodological, and practice-related challenge to the field of child welfare—how to proceed in light of the misguided assumption that a mother has a stable perspective on her experience. They provide an answer by asserting that attention should shift from what a mother "reports" to how her views are negotiated in conversation with child welfare officials. Thus, the clinical skills of child welfare workers are critical to helping mothers to construct explanations of how they came to be involved in the child welfare system that will empower and heal rather than disempower and blame.

Re-conceptualizing points made by Wells and Sykes in relation to concepts in discourse and conversation analysis, Hall and Slembrouck

show how mothers think of themselves and how representatives of institutions think of them are intertwined and that these negotiated views have consequences for how mothers behave and are treated. Employing a detailed approach to the analysis of language, they conclude by suggesting the most radical re-direction of our efforts: Social work research and practice must be repositioned so that the "relational and dialogically-constructed self" is the central object of inquiry and practice.

The next two papers propose new approaches to the organization of child welfare practice. Marsh and Smith (in press), in light of the magnitude of the problem of substance use by mothers with children in foster care and the threat that maternal dependence on substances poses for maltreatment of children, advance a model for the integration of substance dependence and child protection services. Toward that end, they review the obstacles to integration of these systems such as differences in regulatory environments, treatment philosophies and time frames, assessment strategies, and standards of success, emphasizing how overly-narrow definitions of mothers' problems and inappropriate definitions of desired outcomes contribute to negative consequences for mothers and the child welfare system as a whole.

The model they propose addresses these obstacles by building on empirically-based guidelines for enhancing access to a comprehensive array of health and social services, individualizing services and goals, and enhancing client-provider relationships. This paper points to the importance of service-system reform for unmarried mothers with children in foster care and the inclusion, within a reformed system, of interventions found to be effective (Nixon & Northrup, 1997).

Echoing Barth (2009), Marsh and Smith also note that substance abuse treatment has been conceptualized traditionally as a route to safer parenting but that perhaps better parenting may be a route to recovery. As a result, efforts to strengthen mothers' bonds with their children may be central to reunification of mothers with their children.

Lawler and colleagues (Lawler, Shaver, & Goodman, in press) in fact, pursue this lead. They propose a theoretical framework for child welfare services that places mother-child attachment at the center of the service system. Arguing the prevailing policy outcomes of child safety, child well-being, and the provision of permanent homes are insufficient to guide the child welfare system, they advance, instead, outcomes pertaining to the quality of the parent-child relationship. Through a review of relevant literatures, they show that a maltreating mother and her child typically have an insecure attachment relationship; that insecure attachment relationships result in poor child outcomes; and that interventions to prevent child maltreatment must focus first on the mother-child relationship itself.

The authors describe several research-based intervention models that have helped maltreating mothers to develop protective and emotionally-responsive relationships with their young children. Most of these interventions focus on mothers' internal working models of relationships and the sensitivity they display toward their children. Emphasizing the importance of the mother-child relationship to child welfare practice, they propose, too, that relationship-based measures of attachment be added to the Child and Family Service Review. This paper raises the question as to how best to integrate foundational knowledge of child development into child welfare policy and practice.

Pelton (in press), building on his prior work on child welfare and poverty, places the collection of papers within a broad socio-economic context and further evaluates their contributions to child welfare policy and practice.

8. Conclusion

Our emphasis on mothers is not to deny the risk to children's safety and well-being their mothers (or other caretakers) may pose. It

is to assert, however, the aim of child welfare policy and practice must be broadened and specified to include the rehabilitation, health, and well-being of children's mothers (and fathers).

The work in this volume points to the differing directions this reconceptualization might take or strategic moves it might involve—critical assessment of the North American ideology of intensive mothering and the consequences of its reproduction within the child welfare system; integration of efforts by professionals to meet mothers' economic, housing, and health needs on a case-by-case basis; and deployment of highly skilled clinical social workers to help mothers strengthen the relationships they have with their children and to build positive identities as mothers.

In short, these papers argue for advancement of mothers' (and of fathers') ontological security, that is, “the feeling of well-being that arises from a sense of constancy in one's social and material environment which, in turn, provides a secure platform for identity development and self-actualization” (Padgett, 2007, p. 1926). Thus, a retrenchment from the provision of time-limited rule-bound “services”, provided within a legal framework, and a movement toward the provision of concrete assistance and, for some, long-term support and psycho-therapeutic help is warranted.

References

- American Psychiatric Association (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*, 4th ed. text revision. Arlington, VA: Author.
- Appell, A. (1998). On fixing 'bad' mothers and saving their children. In M. Ladd-Taylor, & L. Umansky (Eds.), *“Bad” mothers: The politics of blame in twentieth century America* (pp. 356–380). NY: New York University Press.
- Arendell, T. (2000). Conceiving and investigating motherhood: The decade's scholarship. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1192–1207.
- Barth, R. P. (2009). Preventing child abuse and neglect with parent training: Evidence and opportunities. *The Future of Children*, 19(2), 95–118.
- Brown, D. (2006). Working the system: Re-thinking the institutionally organized role of mothers and the reduction of “risk” in child protection work. *Social Problems*, 53(3), 352–370.
- Child Welfare League of America (2002). *Family reunification. Research to practice research—Roundup*. Washington, DC: Author Available online at www.cwla.org/programs/r2p
- Courtney, M. (1994). Factors associated with the reunification of foster children with their families. *Social Service Review*, 68, 81–108.
- Courtney, M. E., McMurtry, S. L., & Zinn, A. (2004). Housing problems experienced by recipients of child welfare services. *Child Welfare*, 83(5), 393–422.
- De Bellis, M., Broussard, E., Herring, D., Wexler, S., Moritz, G., & Benitez, J. (2001). Psychiatric co-morbidity in caregivers and children involved in maltreatment: A pilot research study with policy implications. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 25, 923–944.
- Famularo, R., Kinscherff, R., & Fenton, T. (1992). Psychiatric diagnoses of abusive mothers: A preliminary report. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 180(10), 658–661.
- Featherstone, B. (1999). Taking mothering seriously: The implications for child protection. *Child and Family Social Work*, 4(1), 43–63.
- Glantz, M., & Hartel, C. (Eds.). (1999). *Drug abuse: Origins and interventions*. WDC: American Psychological Association.
- Hall, C., & Slembrouck, S. (in press). Interviewing parents of children in care: Perspectives, discourses and accountability. *Children and Youth Services Review*.
- Jones, D., Macias, R., Gold, P., Barreira, P., & Fisher, W. (2008). When parents with severe mental illness lose contact with their children: Are psychiatric symptoms or substance use to blame? *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 13, 261–287.
- Klingemann, H. (2000). “To every thing there is a season”—Social time and clock time in addiction treatment. *Social Science and Medicine*, 51, 1231–1240.
- Larrieu, J., Heller, S., Smyke, A., & Zeanah, C. (2008). Predictors of permanent loss of custody for mothers of infants and toddlers in foster care. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 29(1), 48–60.
- Lawler, M., Shaver, P., & Goodman, G. (in press). Toward relationship-based child welfare services. *Children and Youth Services Review*.
- Lewis, M. (1995). *Shame: The exposed self*. NY: The Free Press.
- Lindsey, D. (1992). Adequacy of income and foster care placement decision: Using an odds ratio approach to examine client variables. *Social Work Research and Abstracts*, 28, 29–36.
- Maluccio, A. N., Fein, E., & Davis, I. P. (1994). Family reunification: Research findings, issues, and directions. *Child Welfare*, LXXIII(5), 489–504.
- Marcenko, M., Lyons, S., Courtney, M. (in press). Mothers' experiences, resources, and needs: The context for reunification. *Children and Youth Services Review*.
- Marsh, J., Ryan, J., Choi, S., & Testa, M. (2006). Integrated services for families with multiple problems: Obstacles to family reunification. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28(9), 1074–1087.
- Marsh, J., & Smith, B. (in press). Integrated substance abuse and child welfare services for women: A progress review. *Children and Youth Services Review*.
- National Research Council (1993). *Understanding child abuse and neglect*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Nixon, C., & Northrup, D. (Eds.). (1997). *Evaluating mental health services: How do programs for children “work” in the real world*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nussbaum, M. (1995). *Poetic justice: The literary imagination and public life*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Padgett, D. (2007). There's no place like (a) home: Ontological security among persons with serious mental illness in the United States. *Social Science & Medicine*, 1925–1936.
- Pelton, L. (2008). An examination of the reasons for child removal in Clark County, Nevada. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30(7), 787–799.
- Pelton, L. (in press). Concluding commentary: Varied perspectives on child welfare. *Children and Youth Services Review*.
- Pine, B., Spath, R., Werrbach, G., Jenson, C., & Kerman, B. (2009). A better path to permanency for children in out-of-home care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(10), 1135–1143.
- Quimette, P., & Brown, P. (Eds.). (2003). *Trauma and substance abuse: Causes, consequences and treatment for comorbid disorders*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Reich, J. (2005). *Fixing families: Parents, power, and the child welfare system*. New York: Routledge.
- Rizley, R., & Cicchetti, D. (Eds.). (1981). *Developmental perspectives on child maltreatment*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Roberts, D. (1999). Mothers who fail to protect their children: Accounting for private and public responsibility. In J. Hanigberg, & S. Ruddick (Eds.), *Mother troubles: Rethinking contemporary maternal dilemmas* (pp. 31–49). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Schen, C. (2005). When mothers leave their children behind. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 13(4), 233–243.
- Stagner, M., & Lansing, J. (2009). Progress toward a prevention perspective. *The Future of Children*, 19(2), 19–38.
- Strega, S., Fleet, C., Brown, L., Dominelli, L., Callahan, M., & Walmsley, C. (2008). Connecting father absence and mother blame in child welfare policies and practice. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30(7), 705–716.
- Sykes, J. (in press). Negotiating stigma: Understanding mothers' responses to accusations of child neglect. *Children and Youth Services Review*.
- U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (1999). *Blending perspectives and building common ground: A report to Congress on substance abuse and child protection*. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office.
- U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2010). *The AFCARS Report: Preliminary Fiscal Year 2008 Estimates as of September 30, 2008 [Electronic version]*. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report16.htm
- U. S. General Accounting Office (1998). *Foster care: Agencies face challenges securing stable housing of substance abusers*. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office.
- U. S. Public Law 105-89. *Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997*.
- U. S. Public Law 96-272. *Child Welfare Act of 1980*.
- U. S. Public Law 104-193. *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996*.
- Vesneski, W. (in press). State law and the termination of parental rights. *Family Court Review*.
- Waldfoegel, J. (2009). Prevention and the child protection system. *Future of Children*, 19(2), 195–210.
- Wells, K. (in press). A narrative analysis of one mother's story of child custody loss and regain. *Children and Youth Services Review*.
- Wells, K., & Guo, S. (1999). Reunification and reentry of foster children. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 21(4), 273–294.
- Wells, K., & Guo, S. (2006). Welfare reform and child welfare outcomes: A multi-cohort study. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 28(8), 941–960.
- Wells, K., & Shafran, R. (2005). Obstacles to employment among mothers with children in foster care. *Child Welfare*, 84(1), 67–96.
- Woodhouse, B. (2002). Making poor mothers fungible: The privatization of foster care. In F. Cancian (Ed.), *Child care and inequality: Re-thinking carework for children and youth* (pp. 83–98). NY: Routledge.
- Wulczyn, F. (2004). Family reunification. *The Future of Children*, 14(1), 95–112.
- Wulczyn, F., Chen, L., Courtney, M. (in press). Family reunification in a social structural context. *Children and Youth Services Review*.