

What About the



Child Welfare Agencies' Efforts to Identify, Locate and Involve Nonresident Fathers



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What About the Dads?

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FINAL REPORT

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	vii
Chapter 1 Background	1
Introduction	1
Literature Review	3
Project Goals and Objectives	9
Methodology	12
Chapter 2 Results of Administrator Interviews	21
Agency Perception of Fathers and Their Involvement	21
Agency Role in Father Involvement	28
Description of Service System Linkages	41
Implications for Analyses of Case-level Data and Future Research	47
Chapter 3 Descriptive Analyses of Caseworker Interviews	50
Introduction	50
Description of Caseworker Respondents	56
Description of Children	60
Description of Resident Mothers	65
Description of Nonresident Fathers	73
Summary of Descriptive Analyses	92
Chapter 4 Additional Analyses and Conclusions	97
Overview	97
Comparison Groups	104
Case Characteristics	119
Caseworker Characteristics	124
Multivariate Analyses	127
Child Support Linkage	143
Summary and Conclusions	154
References	169

List of Figures and Tables

Chapter 1

Figure 1-1 Conceptual Framework

Table 1-1 Caseworker Interview Response Rates

Chapter 2

Figure 2-1 Flowchart of Father Involvement

Table 2-1 Key Factors on Nonresident Father Involvement by State

Chapter 3

Figure 3-1 Total Numbers of Fathers in Analysis Subgroups

Figure 3-2 Total Numbers of Mothers in Analysis Subgroups

Figure 3-3 Likelihood of Contact for Fathers Identified at Different Points

Figure 3-4 Breakdown of Cases by Timing of Father Identification

Table 3-1 Caseworker Respondent Characteristics

Table 3-2 Caseworker Training and Opinions

Table 3-3 Child Characteristics

Table 3-4 Child Placement Details

Table 3-5 Reasons for Placement and Perpetrator Type

Table 3-6 Case Permanency Goals

Table 3-7 Resident Mother Characteristics

Table 3-8 Status of Resident Mother Parental Rights

Table 3-9 Barriers to Contacting Resident Mothers

Table 3-10 Resident Mother Visitation

Table 3-11 Resident Mother Support

Table 3-12 Resident Mother Problems

Table 3-13 Paternity Establishment

Table 3-14 Status of Father Parental Rights

Table 3-15 Identifying Nonresident Fathers

Table 3-16 Nonresident Father Characteristics

Table 3-17 Locating Nonresident Fathers

Table 3-18 Locate Resources

Table 3-19 Nonresident Father Information in Case Record

Table 3-20 Barriers to Contacting Nonresident Fathers

Table 3-21 Nonresident Father Visitation

Table 3-22 Nonresident Father Engagement

Table 3-23 Nonresident Father Support

Table 3-24 Nonresident Father Problems

Figure 3-5 Father Engagement

Chapter 4

Table 4-1 Nonresident Fathers Characteristics-Legal and Alleged Fathers

Table 4-2 Locating Methods-Legal and Alleged Fathers

Table 4-3 Nonresident Father Engagement-Legal and Alleged Fathers

Table 4-4 Mother-Father Relationship-Legal and Alleged Fathers

Table 4-5 Status of Parental Rights-Legal and Alleged Fathers
Table 4-6 Barriers to Contact-Nonresident Fathers and Nonresident Mothers
Table 4-7 Problems-Nonresident Mothers and Nonresident Fathers
Table 4-8 Engagement-Nonresident Mothers and Nonresident Fathers
Table 4-9 Status of Parental Rights-Nonresident Mothers and Nonresident Fathers
Table 4-10 Barriers to Contact-Fathers Considered as Placement Resources
Table 4-11 Engagement-Placement and Non-placement Fathers
Table 4-12 Father-Child Visitation-Child Placed in Kin and Non-kin Placements
Table 4-13 Factors Associated with Father Identification
Table 4-14 Factors Associated with Father-Child Visitation
Table 4-15 Factors Associated with Father Support
Table 4-16 Results of Child Support Data Linkage- Number and Percent of Cases Included
Table 4-17 Results of Child Support Data Linkage – Percent Consistent
Table 4-18 Paternity Establishment – Inconsistent or Missing Data

Executive Summary

Over the past decade an interest in fathers and their contributions to family stability and children's healthy development has heightened the attention paid within the child welfare field to identifying, locating, and involving fathers. Many of the children served by child welfare agencies have nonresident fathers. In addition, the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 renewed focus on expediting permanency for children in out-of-home placement. Engaging fathers of foster children can be important not only for the potential benefit of a child-father relationship (when such a relationship does not pose a risk to the child's safety or well-being), but also for making placement decisions and gaining access to resources for the child. Permanency may be expedited by placing children with their nonresident fathers or paternal kin, or through early relinquishment or termination of the father's parental rights. Through engaging fathers, agencies may learn important medical information and/or that the child is the recipient of certain benefits, such as health insurance, survivor benefits, or child support. Apart from the father's potential as a caregiver, such resources might support a reunification goal or a relative guardianship and therefore enhance permanency options for the child.

While research is lacking on whether engaging fathers enhances the well-being or case outcomes of foster children, lack of father involvement means that caseworkers may never know whether a father can help his child. Few studies have examined nonresident fathers as placement resources for their children and there is no research about child-father visitation or research on the effects of involving nonresident fathers in the lives of children being served by child welfare agencies (Sonenstein, Malm, and Billing 2002).

The Urban Institute, with the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, conducted the *Study of Fathers' Involvement in Permanency Planning and Child Welfare Casework* to provide the Administration for Children and Families and the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, both components within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, with a description of the extent to which child welfare agencies identify, locate, and involve nonresident fathers in case decision making and permanency planning. The study was designed to:

- examine the extent to which child welfare agencies, through policies and practices, involve nonresident fathers of foster children in casework and permanency planning;
- describe the various methods used by local agencies to identify fathers of children in foster care, establish paternity, and locate nonresident fathers;
- identify challenges to involvement, including characteristics and circumstances that may be constraints and worker opinions of nonresident fathers;
- identify practices and initiatives that may increase father involvement; and
- explore how child support agencies' information resources may assist child welfare agencies to identify and locate nonresident fathers.

The results of this study provide empirical evidence on the steps that child welfare agencies currently take to identify, locate, and involve nonresident fathers in case planning; the barriers encountered; and the policies and practices that affect involvement.

Methodology

The study was conducted in four states, Arizona, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Tennessee, using three methods of data collection—interviews with child welfare administrators, case-level data collection through interviews with caseworkers, and data linkage between child welfare and child support systems. We interviewed local agency caseworkers about particular cases between October 2004 and February 2005 to examine front-line practices related to nonresident fathers. Cases were selected from among children who had been in foster care for at least 3 months but no more than 36 months. Children in the sample were all in foster care for the first time (first placement episode), and the child welfare agency’s records indicated that each of the children’s biological fathers were alive but not living in the home from which the child was removed. Additionally, only one child per mother was eligible for the study.

Description of Nonresident Fathers of Foster Children

Data on 1,958 eligible cases (83% response rate) were collected through telephone interviews with 1,222 caseworkers. The nonresident fathers of the children sampled represent a varied group. While most caseworkers, at the time of the interview, knew the identity of the fathers of children in the study’s sample (88%), paternity had not yet been established for over one-third of the total sample’s children (37%). A comparison with mothers found that demographic characteristics of identified nonresident fathers are similar to those of the resident mothers though fathers are slightly older (36 vs. 32 years old, on average) and more likely to have been married at some point. As expected, caseworkers appear to know less about nonresident fathers. The percent of “don’t know” responses is much higher for nonresident fathers than for similar questions about resident mothers.

Findings on Identifying Nonresident Fathers

Caseworkers provided detailed information on practices used to identify nonresident fathers of children in foster care. Below are findings from both the administrator and caseworker interviews include the following:

- ***Most nonresident fathers are identified early in a case.*** Caseworkers indicate that over two-thirds of nonresident fathers (68%) are identified at case opening. Many administrators reported that caseworkers begin trying to identify a child’s father during the child protection investigation. Many administrators thought efforts were stronger and more successful early in a case but after the investigation had ended. Case-level findings suggest that nonresident fathers not identified early on are less likely to have contact with the agency.
- ***Caseworkers ask a number of individuals for help in identifying the father but many do not provide information.*** For cases with fathers not identified at the time of case opening, the caseworker typically reported asking a number of different individuals—the child’s mother, mother’s relatives, other workers—for assistance in identifying the father. Only

one-third of the mothers who were asked to provide information on an unidentified father did so, and other sources were not very successful either.

Findings on Locating and Contacting Nonresident Fathers

Workers also reported on how they located nonresident fathers who had been identified and circumstances that may make contacting the father difficult. Findings include the following:

- ***Caseworkers ask a number of individuals for help in locating nonresident fathers.*** Caseworkers reported asking for help from the mother, the mother's relatives, the child, siblings, and other workers as well as the father's relatives to help locate the nonresident father. Workers also consulted a number of other sources including law enforcement, public assistance and department of motor vehicles records, and telephone books.
- ***Few caseworkers sought the assistance of the state's child support agency in locating the nonresident father.*** While over 60 percent of workers noted that their agency encouraged referrals to child support for help locating the father, in only 20 percent of the cases in which the father had not been located did the worker make such a referral. In 33 percent of the cases workers noted the state parent locator service was used.
- ***In slightly over half of all cases (55%), the nonresident father had been contacted by the agency or worker.*** Contact was broadly defined to include in-person contact, telephone calls, or through written or voicemail communication.
- ***Several circumstances make it hard to contact fathers.*** The most frequently reported circumstance that affected contact with the father was the father being unreachable by phone (60%); 31 percent of fathers were reported to have been incarcerated at some point in the case, although it was noted as causing difficulty with contact in only about half of these cases; and other circumstances—such as unreliable transportation, homelessness or unstable housing, and being out of the country—while cited less frequently caused greater difficulty with agency-father contact.

Findings on Father Involvement

When local child welfare administrators were asked about potential benefits and drawbacks to father involvement in child welfare cases they reported that involving fathers may benefit both the child and the father. However, administrators were quick to caution that this was true only when such involvement poses no safety risk to the child or mother. Almost three-quarters (72%) of caseworkers noted that father involvement enhances child well-being and in over 90 percent of cases in which the father was contacted the caseworkers reported sharing the case plan with the father and telling him about his child's out-of-home placement. However, only a little over half of caseworkers of children in the study sample (53%) believed nonresident fathers want to be a part of the decision-making process about their children and most reported that nonresident fathers need help with their parenting skills. Other findings include the following:

- ***Half of the contacted nonresident fathers expressed interest in having their children live with them (50% of contacted fathers or 28% of the entire sample.)***

- ***While 45 percent of the contacted fathers were considered as a placement resource, this represents only a quarter of all sampled cases.*** Caseworkers report a wide range of circumstances and problems that are likely to complicate any efforts to place the child in the home of his or her father, and some administrators seemed to favor paternal kin as a placement resource. However, administrators mentioned that even if a father cannot be a placement resource they could offer tangible benefits such as financial support or critical knowledge of the birth family's medical history.
- ***Over half of the contacted fathers (56%) had visited their child while he or she was in foster care.*** However, this represents less than one third (30%) of all fathers in the sample.

Issues Preventing Placement with Nonresident Fathers

For cases involving fathers with whom the agency had made contact, workers were asked to identify problems or issues that prevented the child from being placed with his or her father. Findings include the following:

- ***Many fathers are either substance abusers or involved in the criminal justice system.*** In over half the contacted cases (58%), workers noted fathers with drug or alcohol abuse problems and half of the fathers were involved with the criminal justice system in some way (i.e., incarcerated, on parole, or awaiting trial).
- ***Fathers are often non-compliant with services.*** Caseworkers reported offering services to fathers in over half of the cases (59%) but reported only 23 percent of the fathers had complied with the services offered.
- ***Many nonresident fathers have multiple problems.*** Workers reported that over forty percent of the contacted fathers (42%) had 4 or more of the 8 problems listed in the survey.

However, it should be noted that these are the same kinds of problems and issues that face mothers of children in foster care.

Caseworker Training on Father Involvement

While previous studies have noted a lack of training on father involvement, a significant portion of the study's caseworker respondents (70%) reported having received training on engaging fathers. At least for the four states studied here, training on fathers appears to be fairly widespread. And while few significant differences were found between male and female caseworkers or among groups of workers with differing opinions on working with fathers, several differences were found between trained and untrained caseworkers. Findings include the following:

- ***Caseworkers who received training were more likely than workers who did not receive training to report having located fathers of children in the study's sample.***

- ***Significant differences were found in some of the methods used to locate fathers.*** Workers who received training were more likely to seek help from the father's relatives, another worker, search public aid records, and phone books.
- ***Significant differences were also found between the two groups of workers with regard to a number of father engagement type activities.*** Workers reporting training were more likely than other workers to report sharing the case plan with the father and seeking financial assistance from him as part of the case plan. These workers were also more likely to report the agency considered placement with the father and that the father had expressed interest in the child living with him.

Results of Child Support Data Linkage

The linkage of cases between the child welfare and child support systems explored the potential for more extensive use of child support information by child welfare caseworkers. The results indicate that in many cases, child welfare workers do have information on paternity, location, and support that coincides with child support agency records. There were instances, however, in which child support records had information that was missing or conflicted with that recorded by child welfare workers. Given the importance of paternity establishment and the accuracy of this determination it seems prudent that child welfare workers utilize child support agencies as a means of obtaining this information and for confirming the accuracy of their own information.

Even if a child's mother or other sources provide information about a father's location, such information may be out of date or inaccurate simply because of the mobility of families and fathers. In many cases, child support administrative data systems may have more current information through either state or Federal Parent Locator Services. Recent advances in data sharing across states and on a federal level have allowed state child support systems to be a good source of information on nonresident fathers involved in child welfare cases. The data matching performed in this study indicated that on child welfare cases in which locate information through state or federal parent locator services was sought (about two-thirds of all cases in the matching sample, with some variation across states), these methods were successful in providing location information in 96 percent of cases. Information on official child support orders and collection on orders would also be beneficial to child welfare caseworkers as part of an overall assessment of the nonresident father as a placement resource for his child.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

This study is an exploratory look at nonresident fathers of children in the child welfare system. The findings provide a description of nonresident fathers of children in foster care from the perspective of caseworkers and administrators, what nonresident fathers can or cannot provide to their children, and where they fit within families served by child welfare agencies is the foundation of casework practice.

While the study findings do not define best practices, they can inform practice. Some practice areas that agencies should examine include the following:

- ***Search for nonresident fathers early in the case.*** Gathering information about a nonresident father's identity as part of case investigation or other assessment activities

appears to be effective since a majority of the fathers had been identified early in the case. Agencies should consider whether information about fathers is being sought consistently at (or before) the time a child is first placed in foster care.

- ***Provide guidance and training to caseworkers on identifying, locating, and involving fathers.*** Caseworker practice related to nonresident fathers appears case specific and variable. Agencies should make clear what steps caseworkers should consider when mothers do not know or share information about the child's father. Caseworker training appears to help caseworkers understand the importance of father involvement and facilitates consideration of a father placement option. Specialization of work with fathers may be worth exploring. A number of administrators reported that specialization proved helpful to their agencies, particularly with regard to seeking the location of missing fathers.
- ***Agencies may need to examine whether services offered to fathers are designed to engage fathers.*** The study found a small percent of nonresident fathers, when offered services, complied with all the services offered. Further attention may need to be focused on how caseworkers present service options to nonresident fathers and how societal expectations play a role in these interactions.
- ***Address domestic violence and worker safety concerns.*** Caseworkers and administrators expressed a reluctance to involve some fathers because doing so might reintroduce potential abusers into volatile family situations. Administrators also raised concerns regarding worker safety when contacting the fathers of children on the caseload. Unless safety concerns are effectively addressed, both those related to worker safety as well as those related to the safety of the child and mother, efforts to involve fathers are likely to stall. Safety concerns need to be acknowledged and assessed at a case level and, as previously noted, through training. However, that nearly half of the fathers were never contacted by the agency suggests that little assessment of the actual risk presented is occurring.
- ***Use child support data more consistently.*** Child support information, including father location, paternity, and financial support, can be a helpful tool in considering placements with fathers or other ways in which fathers can play a constructive role in their children's lives.
- ***Develop models for involving fathers constructively.*** Unless the child has a case plan goal of placement with his/her father or his kin, caseworkers often are not sure what, if anything, they should be doing beyond sharing the child's case plan or offering visitation. There is considerable room for programming that engages nonresident fathers on behalf of their children in ways that could extend beyond the child's stay in foster care and supports the child's best interests.

This study also serves as a starting point for further research. For example, using the same dataset, more detailed state-specific analyses would be helpful in examining how different policies affect casework practice toward nonresident fathers. State and local characteristics (e.g.,

rural/urban, poverty measures) could be added to the dataset and used in a variety of analyses to examine state and local practice differences. The regression models could be modified to include a different set of independent variables. While not a large sample, children who have a goal of placement with their father could be examined. Case outcomes could be examined for children reunified with mother and children placed with fathers.

Additionally, other research could include efforts to collect qualitative data to examine the relationship between permanency goals and casework, specifically casework involving fathers. Qualitative research could also examine specific methods of identifying, locating and involving fathers. Further examination of training opportunities for caseworkers and the impact on practice directed at nonresident fathers is also suggested.

Chapter 1 Background

Introduction

Recent interest in fathers and their contributions to family stability and children's healthy development has increased the attention of child welfare agencies on the tasks of locating biological fathers and involving them in case planning. Many, if not most, of the children served by child welfare agencies have nonresident fathers. Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) 2002 data on foster children reveal that a majority—between 50 percent and 80 percent—of the foster children in each state were removed from single-mother or unmarried couple families.¹ However, the child welfare field lacks information about current policies and practices, and efforts made to identify, locate, and engage fathers vary considerably from locality to locality. Few studies have examined nonresident fathers as placement resources for their children and there is no research about child-father visitation or the effects of involving fathers in the lives of children being served by child welfare agencies (Sonenstein, Malm, and Billing 2002).

Engaging fathers of foster children is likely to be important not only for the potential benefit of a child-father relationship (not possible or preferred in some cases), but also for making placement decisions and gaining access to resources. Permanency may be expedited by placing children with their nonresident fathers or paternal kin, or through early relinquishment or

¹ It is not known how many of the men who are part of the unmarried couples are the biological fathers of the foster children. In addition, an unknown number of "married couple" compositions do not consist of both birth parents. Data were compiled from 31 states (these states had less than 10 percent missing data for this AFCARS field). Many large states, including California, Illinois, and New York, have large amounts of missing data and were not included in the analysis. Urban Institute tabulations of the 1994 National Study of Protective, Preventive, and Reunification Services data, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and tabulations of Urban Institute's 1999 National

termination of the father's parental rights. Through engaging fathers, agencies may learn important medical information and/or that the child is the recipient of certain benefits (e.g., health insurance, survivor benefits, child support). While it is too soon to tell whether engaging fathers enhances the well-being or case outcomes of foster children, lack of father involvement means that caseworkers may never know whether a father can help his child.

The Urban Institute, with the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, conducted the *Study of Fathers' Involvement in Permanency Planning and Child Welfare Casework* to provide the federal government² with a description of the extent to which child welfare agencies identify, locate, and involve nonresident fathers in case decision making and permanency planning. For the purposes of this study, nonresident fathers include biological fathers who do not reside with their children, usually because of divorce, separation, or a nonmarital birth.³ The results of this study provide empirical evidence on the steps that child welfare agencies currently take to identify, locate, and involve nonresident fathers in case planning; the barriers workers encounter; and the policies and practices that appear to facilitate involvement. Because little information is available on whether child welfare agencies are using the Federal Parent Locator Service as provided under new legislative authority, the study is also designed to examine the use of child support resources to identify and locate fathers.

Recent child welfare policies and practices appear to have increased the focus on fathers. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) significantly reduced the time child welfare agencies have to make permanency decisions for children in foster care, which may

Survey of America's Families calculated 72 percent of children served by child welfare agencies and 80 percent of foster children have noncustodial fathers.

² The study is prepared under contract to the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and is funded by the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

affect how agencies identify, locate, and involve the biological fathers of foster children. For example, ASFA encourages child welfare agencies to use the Federal Parent Locator Service employed by child support enforcement programs to help locate fathers and other relatives. Concurrent planning,⁴ also encouraged under ASFA, may prompt earlier efforts to locate fathers because the father, or his relatives, may be identified as a placement resource even while the caseworker seeks to reunify the child with his or her mother. Moreover, if adoption becomes the case goal, a diligent search for the father must be undertaken. While judicial guidelines have long sought early identification of fathers, the implementation of ASFA may increase the likelihood that this is occurring more consistently.

ASFA also reemphasized that kin should be sought whenever possible when identifying placements for foster children. Paternity establishment becomes vital to identifying a father and any of his relatives as potential caregivers. Family group conferencing or family meetings are increasingly being used by child welfare agencies to involve these extended family members in the case decision-making process. Using these techniques puts agencies in a better position to identify, locate, and involve nonresident fathers in case planning.

Literature Review

Over the past two decades many studies have examined the role of noncustodial fathers in the lives of their children. The literature review conducted in Sonenstein et al. (2002) cited numerous studies that focused on father involvement as it relates to child well-being and the degree to which a variety of factors affect involvement. Studies examined paternity, marital status, race

³ More information on the sample of fathers analyzed in this study is included in the methodology section of this chapter.

and ethnicity, and payment of child support to determine nonresident father involvement. Research studies have examined fathers in both the general and the low-income populations. Child well-being was measured by examining outcomes such as academic performance, behavioral problems, and self-esteem.

For the most part, however, the literature review revealed the dearth of research specific to the topic of nonresident father involvement in the child welfare system. While we found a few studies that focused attention on fathers as potential placement resources for their children (Greif and Zuravin 1989; Rasheed 1999), there was no research about child-father visitation or the effects of involving fathers in the lives of children being served by child welfare agencies. A number of studies examined gender bias in general social work practice (Greif and Bailey 1990; Kahkonen 1997; Lazar, Sagi, and Fraser 1991; O'Hagan 1997). Only one study explored practices further by examining whether fathers were being ignored as a resource for discharge planning (Franck 2001).

We found some research on efforts to promote collaboration between child welfare and child support enforcement agencies. The results of a diligent search project in South Carolina appear promising; missing parents were located in over 75 percent of the cases referred by child welfare staff, and more than half of these cases were located in less than a month. However, the focus of the effort was on identifying and locating fathers primarily for the purposes of expediting the termination of parental rights, to hasten adoption proceedings (South Carolina Department of Social Services 2000). Research describes other collaborative efforts focused on increasing child support collections. Few programs, with the exception of a parental involvement

⁴ Concurrent planning enables states to seek an adoptive or other permanent placement for a child while pursuing efforts to preserve or reunite the family.

project in Illinois, focus attention on finding noncustodial fathers as placement resources (Roy 2000).

In the last several years, literature continued to examine the impact of family structure on child well-being and the nature of paternal involvement. One study found that father involvement, even if a child did not grow up in an intact family, was positively associated with educational outcomes (Flouri and Buchanan 2004). Research using the 1999 National Survey of America's Families (NSAF) indicated that the well-being of children raised in cohabiting biological or nonbiological families and single-mother families did not differ (Brown 2004). This research expands upon the ongoing discussion of comparisons of child outcomes in married versus non-married families.

Current research also delves deeper into factors that may affect paternal involvement, such as race, ethnicity, religion, age of a child, and gender ideologies held by fathers (Bulanda 2004; Hofferth 2003; Hofferth and Anderson 2003; Wilcox 2002). One study in particular examined the effects of race and ethnicity on noncustodial father involvement, determining that Hispanic children had the lowest levels of contact with their nonresident fathers (King, Harris, and Heard 2004). The study also found that when minority fathers do stay involved with their children, they are more likely than white fathers to engage in behaviors that most favor their children's well-being, such as talking about problems or attending religious services.

Attention continues to focus on the particular perspectives and circumstances of low-income fathers (see Nelson 2004 for a review of the literature on low-income fathers). In a series of interviews with low-income men receiving General Assistance, researchers interviewed men about their own fathers and their children. Of the interviewees with children, many said that the mothers of their children had limited their (father) contact, often as a result of unpaid child

support (Kost 2001). Another set of researchers interviewed low-income men whose children were enrolled in the Early Head Start program and found that most of the men were either living with or married to their children's mothers and said they had someone to talk to about being a father (Vogel et al. 2003).

Researchers have shown continued interest in the issues surrounding payment of child support. An Urban Institute study indicated that the proportion of children in low-income families receiving child support had significantly increased between 1996 and 2001, growing from 31 to 36 percent (Sorensen 2003). Still, recent research has underscored challenges to child support receipt, such as low male earnings and incarceration (Bloomer, Sipe, and Ruedt 2002; Cancian and Meyer 2004; Pearson and Hardaway 2000).

Since the 2002 literature review prepared for this study, the amount of research pertaining to fathers in the child welfare system has grown considerably, although the body of research is still relatively small. The Annie E. Casey Foundation funded a study to determine practitioners' perceptions of the state of child welfare practice on fathers (National Family Preservation Network 2001). Workers in child welfare systems and community organizations indicated unanimously that there was a need for more outreach to fathers with children involved in the child welfare system. Many said that fathers were hesitant to come forward and often assumed they were only sought for child support payments. Caseworkers indicated that they had had little to no training on father engagement. Some fatherhood program staff involved in the groups said that fathers need other men to talk to, leading to recommendations for more men as caseworkers in the child welfare system (National Family Preservation Network 2001).

More recent research examines specific child welfare practices on father engagement. Family meetings and conferences were designed to encourage family input. Recent studies

examined two such practices—family group conferences and family group decision-making—for the extent to which fathers and paternal relatives were contacted or present for the conference as well as how many children were subsequently placed with their fathers or paternal relatives (Shore et al. 2002; Thoennes 2003). While the rates of contact with fathers and paternal relatives were still lower than for mothers, the results reveal a willingness to reach out to fathers by agencies implementing a family meeting–type approach.

An early review of 22 states' Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs) noted a lack of father and paternal relative involvement in the case planning process.⁵ A more recent review of the 2001–2004 CFSRs noted concern about an overall lack of contact with fathers by caseworkers, even when fathers were involved with the family (National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning 2005). Analysis of National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being data found that almost three-quarters (72 percent) of children in foster care reported seeing their biological fathers twice per month or less, and 41 percent had never visited with their fathers (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

O'Donnell and colleagues (2005) examined front-line practices on fathers through focus groups with caseworkers. According to the caseworkers, fathers are generally peripheral to the child welfare system and often view the agency with distrust, especially if they have a criminal record. Workers also noted that they were less likely to initiate father involvement with families involving multiple fathers. Some young female caseworkers said they felt like fathers resented them or challenged their authority. Male caseworkers were less likely to voice frustration with involving fathers and more likely to support more gender-sensitive services to engage fathers. However, workers in four of the five focus groups generally said that fathers should not get child

welfare services that are different from those for mothers. Caseworkers also indicated that they thought mothers hinder fathers' involvement in child welfare. Mothers may restrict information they give to caseworkers out of anger, fear (perhaps of violence by children's fathers), mistrust of workers, or a preference that the father not know about the child welfare involvement.

Caseworkers also felt that many fathers have little commitment to their children. Participants in one group identified this issue as the primary reason for low paternal involvement, while the other four groups said it was a significant but not determining factor in involvement levels. Authors of the study said that caseworker responses indicated they did not have a unified way of thinking about fathers or their needs, signaling a need for more professional development on how to engage and involve fathers in casework practice.

Other recent studies have examined the location and involvement of nonresident or absent parents in child welfare services. In Washington, an evaluation of state policy and local practices on both custodial and noncustodial fathers identified reasons why fathers showed low levels of involvement or were not considered appropriate placement resources by the agency (English 2002). Reasons included an unwillingness to work with the agency, incarceration, a history of child or sex abuse, or unknown whereabouts. While most fathers in the study were identified, one-fifth to one-third in each study site were never located. Another study found that caseworkers in kinship foster care services had no contact with a majority of the fathers of children participating in the research. Caseworkers had more contact with fathers in cases in which all children in a family had the same father as opposed to multiple fathers (O'Donnell 2001).

⁵ Children's Rights report of results of CFSRs with 22 states for which final reports had been issued as of February 2003, New York City, NY.

Project Goals and Objectives

This study sought to examine how child welfare agencies identify, locate, and involve nonresident fathers of children in foster care in casework and permanency planning. The study also sought to determine the feasibility of using child support resources to aid in identifying and locating fathers of children in care. Specifically, the study was designed to:

- examine the extent to which child welfare agencies, through policies and practices, involve nonresident fathers of foster children in casework and permanency planning;
- describe the various methods used by local agencies to identify fathers of children in foster care, establish paternity, and locate nonresident fathers;
- identify challenges to involvement, including father characteristics that may be constraints and worker opinions;
- identify practices and initiatives that may increase father involvement; and
- explore how child support resources may assist child welfare agencies in identifying and locating nonresident fathers through case linkage.

Early on during the design phase, a conceptual framework was developed (figure 1-1). The framework outlined four broad domains that could affect nonresident father involvement.

Illustrated in the top rows of Figure 1-1, the domains are as follows:

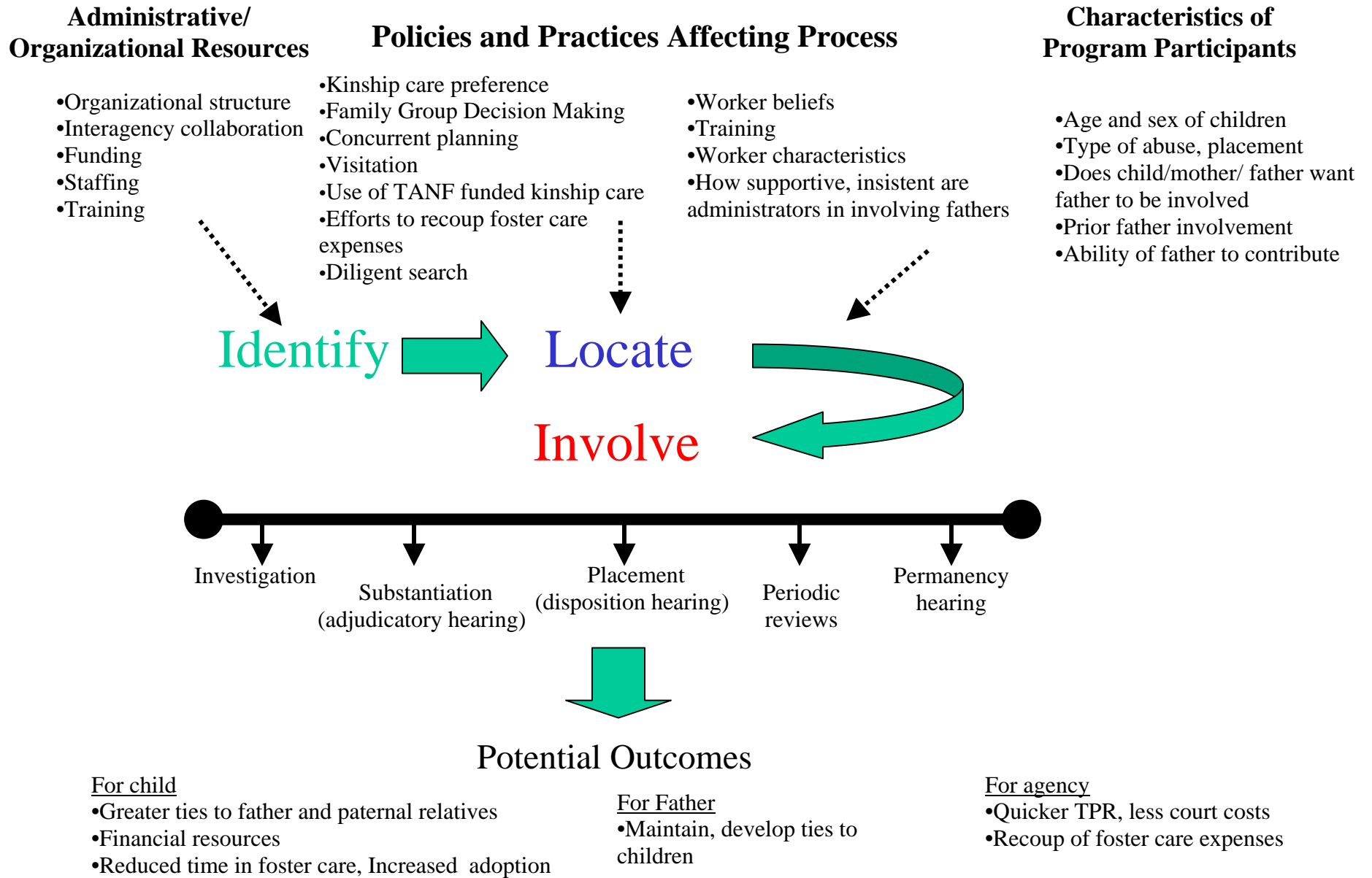
- *Policies.* Explicit statements about how nonresident fathers should be involved in case decisions. Usually they take a written form and can be found in policy statements, caseworker manuals, etc. Policies can vary by how recently they have been issued and how completely they have been implemented.
- *Practices.* What caseworkers do most commonly with cases. Practices may conform or diverge from official policy and can be a function of leadership (or lack thereof), the local office, the training and supervision of the workers, and the individual beliefs and opinions of the caseworkers.
- *Administrative/organizational resources and linkages.* The way programs, particularly child welfare and child support programs, are organized and linked together through communication and supervisory channels can facilitate or hinder the availability of resources and mechanisms for identifying and locating fathers. Relations between the child welfare agency and the court are also fundamentally important in determining how quickly and comprehensively fathers are identified and located.

- *Characteristics of program participants.* The involvement of fathers in child welfare cases can be helped or hindered by the characteristics of the population served. Whether the father was ever married to the mother, whether he was the perpetrator of abuse or neglect of the child or mother, and whether he is geographically close to the child will all affect his level of involvement. When cases involve mothers who are reluctant to identify or contact the father or who fear abuse, negotiation of father involvement may be especially problematic.

A caseworker's ability to involve a particular father in the casework process depends on whether or not the father of the child is identified and whether or not he is located and is geographically available. The likelihood that a child's father is identified and located is influenced by factors in the four domains listed above. Starting with the characteristics of the child and mother, we assume, for example, that the father will be identified, although not necessarily located, if the child was born within a marriage. The father is more likely to be identified, and perhaps located, if the child has been on welfare and the local child support enforcement program has worked the case. Policies and practices within the child welfare agency and the courts will affect how much effort caseworkers make to identify fathers and to locate them when this information is not readily available. If the policies and practices reflect minimal commitment to father involvement, then there is little likelihood that efforts will be made to locate and identify them. If policies and practices reflect more than minimal commitment, the ease or difficulty of identifying and locating the father could mean the difference between involvement and noninvolvement.

Even when a father is identified and located, the extent of his involvement in the case can vary substantially. The length of time the child was in foster care and the length of time the caseworker worked the case are likely to influence father involvement. Types of involvement are many and include sharing the case plan with both parents, identifying paternal and kinship placement resources, obtaining health insurance and/or financial support resources, child-father

Figure 1-1



visitation and providing services to both mothers and fathers. The bottom row of our conceptual figure illustrates the potential positive outcomes that are expected for the child, the father, and the agency.

Methodology

Our study of father involvement consisted of three methods of data collection—interviews with child welfare administrators, case-level data collection through interviews with caseworkers, and data linkage between child welfare and child support systems in four states. The interviews with local child welfare administrators were designed to collect information on policies and resources for fathers of children served by child welfare agencies. Caseworkers were interviewed about their opinions and front-line practice with nonresident fathers. In the sections below we describe state selection and the methodology we used to implement the administrator and caseworker interviews and data linkage components.

State Selection

Because state policy and local convention are believed to influence caseworker efforts with regard to nonresident fathers, the study was designed to assess how child welfare agencies are performing regarding father involvement. We decided against a nationally representative sample because we are particularly interested in the difference in performance among jurisdictions, differences that would be lost within a national sample. While budget constraints dictated the exact number of states chosen, we based our decision to examine only a select number of states primarily on the following:

- The study is exploratory in that many of these issues have not been previously researched. A study of this scale will allow the federal government to determine whether the proposed methods and questions are feasible before committing larger resources to the topic.
- Without being generalizable to the nation, results from four states will provide a sense of whether there is a range of practice in father involvement. Furthermore, the results will be generalizable to these four states and will provide practical information to inform state policies.
- The study will provide sufficient information upon which to generate hypotheses for further research should that prove warranted and will provide an indication of whether certain issues, practices, and populations merit more extensive focus.

In selecting our study states, we excluded a number from consideration because of limitations in their information systems or small foster care caseloads that would make the burden of this study greater than we could feasibly ask the states to agree to. We also eliminated some states due to the timing of their federal CFSRs. When the CFSR coincided with the preliminary stages of this study, we chose not to overburden state and local child welfare officials with involvement in a study demanding both their own and caseworker time.

Remaining states were stratified by size (under or over 5,000 foster care cases with a 3–36 month duration), by type of agency administration (state or county-administered child welfare system)⁶, and by whether the state had a known fathers initiative. Arizona, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Tennessee were selected as our study states. With regard to size, the four states represent two small (Minnesota and Arizona) and two large (Massachusetts and Tennessee) states. Minnesota has the only county-administered child welfare system and Tennessee was the only state in which a fathers’ initiative was not identified during the study’s preliminary stages.

⁶ We selected only one county-administered child welfare system (in Minnesota) due to the anticipated greater burden in recruiting individual county agencies for participation.

Administrator Interviews

We interviewed 53 local child welfare administrators between July 2004 and January 2005 (a 98 percent response rate). Administrators were selected slightly differently in each of the four states to accommodate differences in the structure of the child welfare agency. However, each administrator interviewed represented a local office included in the case-level data collection. In Minnesota, which has a county-administered child welfare system, state officials selected 10 local administrators to participate in the interviews based on size of the county office and the state's knowledge of the variability in casework practices. In Tennessee, all 13 regional administrators were asked to participate. In Massachusetts, administrators of the 15 local area offices in which case-level data collection took place were asked to participate. In Arizona, all six district-level managers were included and state officials identified 10 assistant district managers to participate in the interviews.

We designed the administrative interviews to collect information about

- policies and practices in effect in the office;
- administrative and organizational resources available to the office and caseworkers;
- general characteristics of the birth parents of foster children; and
- administrators' opinions and attitudes toward engaging fathers in the casework process and the likely outcomes of this involvement for the agency, the caseworkers, and the children.

We used a protocol for each interview that provided flexibility so differences between states and localities could be identified and examined.⁷ The length of the interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes.

⁷ The administrator protocol is available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov>.

Information obtained during each administrator interview was organized and summarized into individual Microsoft Office Word documents. The content of these documents was then coded and entered into a qualitative content analysis database (Nud*ist software). Findings from the administrative interviews are presented in chapter 2.

Case-Level Data Collection

Sample selection and design

We interviewed local agency caseworkers about particular cases in each of the four study states between October 2004 and February 2005 to examine front-line practices on nonresident fathers. We selected cases that met the following criteria:

- Children had been in foster care for at least 3 months but no more than 36 months.
- Children were in foster care for the first time (first placement episode).
- Only one child per mother was eligible for the study.⁸
- Biological fathers were alive but not living in the home from which the child was removed.

State child welfare information technology (IT) staff performed the initial task of extracting cases from their State Automated Child Welfare Information Systems that met the above criteria. States were able to extract cases meeting the first three criteria without difficulty; however, identifying children removed from homes in which their father did not reside proved more difficult. The data structure requested by the federal AFCARS process for “caretaker family structure” was helpful, though in most states additional programming was necessary using “relationships” data fields. Because of the variability of how states determined case eligibility on the last criterion, we built screening criteria into the caseworker questionnaire so

cases that did not meet the study criteria could be eliminated at the time of the interview. These cases constitute “ineligible” cases.

The fathers in the study are referred to as nonresident fathers. We feel this term best describes the group of fathers about whom information was provided through caseworker interviews. Central to our study was that children sampled were removed from homes in which their biological fathers did not reside. Thus, by definition, the fathers of the foster children in our study were “nonresidents” of the child’s home. Within the broad category, the sample includes fathers who are unmarried, married (either to the birth mother or someone else), divorced and widowed. The sample also contains children for whom paternity has and has not yet been established. The fathers of many children in the sample retain their parental rights, but in some cases parental rights have been terminated or relinquished.

Once the state extracted the universe of cases that met the above criteria, the study statistician developed the state sampling designs.⁹ In each state a two-stage design was developed. In the first stage, caseworkers managing at least two cases meeting the criteria were identified. Caseworkers managing only one case meeting the criteria were eliminated.¹⁰ All the children managed by the first-stage caseworkers constituted the second-stage sampling frame. Two children were selected randomly from each sampled caseworker. The design called for selection of 300 caseworkers per state, for a total of 2,400 cases.

⁸ We concluded that although some siblings would have different fathers for whom casework practices might differ, the likelihood of same fathers was high and would thus lessen the number of fathers in the study.

⁹ The sampling design is available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov>.

¹⁰ In Minnesota, our statistician had to modify the design due to a smaller than expected universe of cases meeting our study criteria. Circumstances in Hennepin County, Minnesota, meant that some workers there had to be interviewed on more than two cases. In addition, 18 of Minnesota’s 87 counties declined to participate; thus, the first-stage sample frame did not consist of the entire state.

Caseworker engagement and response rates

The survey contractor, NORC, mailed advance letters to selected caseworkers that identified the purpose of the study and the selected cases workers would be asked to discuss. In most of the localities, the NORC advance letters were mailed after correspondence about the study had been sent by the agency itself. The caseworker questionnaire contains separate sections designed to collect demographic and case-related information on the following individuals: caseworkers, foster children, nonresident fathers, and birth mothers.¹¹ We conducted a pretest in Baltimore, Maryland, and Fairfax County, Virginia, and incorporated recommendations into the final questionnaire. The final version was programmed into the Computer-Assisted Telephone Instrument (CATI) system used by NORC to administer complex telephone interviews. Telephone interviews with caseworkers averaged one hour.

Response rates for caseworker interviews in each of the four states are provided in table 1-1. The response rates included in the table include only eligible, completed cases. As discussed earlier, because of the difficulty states had in identifying households in which birth fathers did not reside, we included a series of screening questions. In total, 408 cases were determined to be ineligible due to the child having lived with the father at the time of removal (not considered a nonresident father), ineligible due to the father of the child having died prior to or within six months of case opening, or ineligible due to the child was in an adoptive home.¹² The majority (62 percent) of these cases were ineligible due to the child having lived with the father. Thus, while child welfare automated information systems have made considerable gains in accuracy

¹¹ The caseworker instrument is available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov>.

¹² Adoptive child cases were considered ineligible due to the complexity inherent in determining father relationships.

and completeness, information on a child’s household of origin, specifically, adults in the household, remains difficult to capture.

NORC provided case-level data and caseworker respondent information to the Urban Institute in both SAS and ASCII formats. Urban Institute staff members removed ineligible cases, conducted cleaning and edit checks, and then ran frequencies and cross-tabulations using all the data fields. Descriptive findings from the case-level data collection are presented in chapter 3, and results of additional analyses are presented in chapter 4 of this report.

**Table 1-1
Caseworker Interview Response Rates**

State	Total cases, <i>n</i>	Total cases minus ineligible completed cases, <i>n</i>	Total completed cases, <i>n</i> ^a	Total eligible, completed cases, <i>n</i> ^b	Response rate, % ^c
AZ	750	671	640	561	84
MA	756	617	662	523	85
MN	509	442	411	344	78
TN	758	635	653	530	83
All	2,773	2,365	2,366	1,958	83

^a Includes both eligible and ineligible cases.

^b Ineligible cases included cases in which the child’s father had been residing in the home at the time of removal, cases in which the child’s father died prior to or shortly after case opening, and adoptive homes.

^c Response rates were calculated using eligible cases (second column of numbers) only.

Child Support Data Linkage

In each study state, we sought to determine the feasibility of using child support enforcement data systems to assist child welfare agencies in identifying and locating fathers. We compared data collected from the caseworker survey on a variety of child support related issues—paternity, use of locating resources, collections—with similar data provided by child support data systems. In addition, state and local policies and practices for referring foster care cases to child support

for reimbursement of foster care costs were examined during administrator and caseworker interviews.¹³

We did not begin the data linkage process until caseworker interviews were complete. The caseworker interview has several questions that allow a caseworker to exclude a case from the data linkage component of the study. While we purposefully inserted questions designed to eliminate cases in which a referral to child support might bring harm to either the foster child or caregiver, workers were provided latitude in that no specific reason had to be given for asking that a case be excluded.¹⁴ A significant portion (30 percent) of the cases was excluded from the linkage based on caseworker responses. Caseworkers were more likely to have noted domestic violence as a problem for the father and more likely to have reported a bad relationship between the mother and nonresident father in the excluded cases than the cases included in the linkage component.¹⁵

Researchers constructed a separate file for each state that contained only the list of case identification numbers provided earlier for sampling purposes for the survey. Researchers then sent this file to each state's child welfare IT specialist to merge identifying information (child's name, Social Security Number, mother's and father's names, Social Security numbers, and employer information). State officials then transferred the completed file directly to the state's child support agency.

¹³ In Tennessee, we were told all foster care cases are routinely referred to child support to begin the process of obtaining reimbursement for foster care costs. In Minnesota, IV-E cases are automatically referred to child support. Arizona and Massachusetts did not appear to have any established policy of referring foster care cases to child support.

¹⁴ Only cases in which the caseworker responded 'no' to two questions: "Is there any reason why the information you have provided should not be used to facilitate a match with the parent locator services?" and "Do you think locating the father of this child might put the child or the mother at risk of physical harm?" were included in the data linkage.

¹⁵ See later discussion (page 88) for description of relationships.

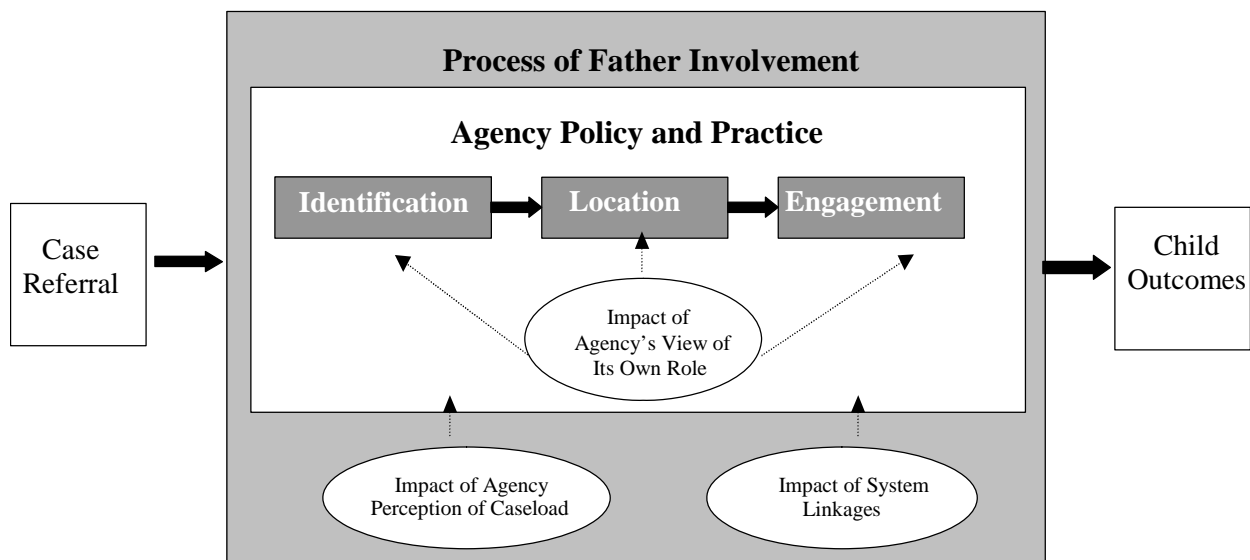
Child support IT staff added any child support information available in their automated system—paternity, child support order (attempted, established, collections), noncustodial parent located, state locator resources used/successful, and federal locator resources used/successful. Child support IT staff then removed identifying information from the file and transferred the file back to the Urban Institute for analysis.

The chapters that follow present findings from the administrator interviews, case-level data collection through caseworker interviews, and data linkage between child welfare and child support. Results from the administrator interviews are provided first in chapter 2 to provide policy and agency context for the case-level data collection. Descriptive analyses of the case-level data are then presented in chapter 3. Results of more extensive analyses using the case-level data and the child support case linkage, and a summary and conclusions are presented in chapter 4.

Chapter 2 Results of Administrator Interviews

The sections that follow present findings from the interviews with local child welfare administrators. The findings are organized around three central themes that arose in our examination of both policy and practice on fathers' involvement: an agency's perception of nonresident fathers and the impact on casework, an agency's view of its own role in father involvement, and an agency's description of other systems that involve fathers. We interpret these three themes as general agency philosophies that have an impact on both policy and practice on father involvement (figure 2-1). Throughout this chapter, we also contrast policies and practices among and within the study states when doing so helps illustrate important points.

Figure 2-1: Flowchart of Father Involvement



Agency Perception of Fathers and Their Involvement

How child welfare agencies approach involving nonresident fathers in casework practice is influenced by how they perceive the potential impact of fathers on children. In general, most administrators with whom we spoke thought the potential for father involvement in child welfare

casework and permanency planning was a positive thing. They often cited a general trend over time toward increased focus on fathers (particularly with special populations such as incarcerated fathers) or family-centered practice in their agencies. On the other hand, administrators often tempered their positive perception of the potential for father involvement with grounded examples of barriers to fathers' participation in a case. These factors may affect a caseworker's level of effort as well.

Caseload Information

Agency perception of who nonresident fathers are and what they can offer their children likely influences any efforts to involve nonresident fathers in casework. To illuminate this perception, we asked administrators about the size and composition of the nonresident father population. Administrators generally estimated that between 30 and 80 percent of the children in their care have nonresident fathers, a wide range that was consistent across all four states in the study.

The wide variety of special populations (e.g., incarcerated fathers, immigrants) mentioned by administrators, while changing from site to site, illustrated that administrators perceived the nonresident father population as having a diverse set of needs and experiences. They have a complex view of "father involvement" that incorporates flexibility for the specifics of each unique case. While administrators in all states said their caseloads included incarcerated fathers, estimates of the size of this group ranged from "a handful" to nearly half of the caseload. Some offices made a caveat that the number of unidentified fathers might conceal higher incarceration rates. Consistently, administrators cited drug charges, particularly methamphetamine usage in rural areas, and violent offenses as reasons for nonresident father incarceration. Many administrators, and nearly all of those in Massachusetts, mentioned serving

birth parents with a history of domestic violence. Some administrators, particularly those in areas along the U.S-Mexico border in Arizona, said their offices regularly deal with nonresident immigrant fathers. In Tennessee, a state that has seen striking growth in its immigrant population in recent years,¹⁶ administrators confirmed that immigrant fathers were a small but growing part of child welfare cases.

Perceived Benefits of Father Involvement

While recognizing the differing situations of nonresident fathers, administrators identified potential benefits of father involvement. First and foremost, administrators said that father involvement, provided it poses no safety risk, is beneficial to a child's well-being. Fathers can offer emotional, financial, and social support to their children. Even if a father cannot be the caretaker for his child, a child's knowledge of his or her father may help the child sort through abandonment or other emotional issues. Father involvement may have other, more tangible benefits for a child, such as critical knowledge of medical or genetic information or financial benefits, such as consistent child support payments or benefits for children of veterans.

Administrators said father involvement could be beneficial for the child welfare agency, birth mothers, and fathers themselves. Father involvement can allow some children to avoid out-of-home care altogether or can lead to quicker permanency when a child can be placed with his or her father or his kin.¹⁷ Administrators noted that quicker permanency saves child welfare agency resources, allowing agencies to use resources for other cases in need. Agencies could benefit from father involvement by reduced overall caseloads in the long run, even if more

¹⁶ Tennessee was one of the top 10 states with the fastest growth in immigrant population between 1990 and 2000, with a rate far exceeding 100 percent (Fix and Passel 2003).

intensive efforts increased time spent on cases in the short term. Administrators also said that father involvement could lead to a more positive work environment; if fathers are meaningfully involved in cases, administrators said work could be more fulfilling to a case manager with a social work background. Finally, a minority of administrators mentioned that birth mothers might feel less isolated or stressed if children's fathers were involved. A small number also mentioned that father involvement might lead to fathers feeling more empowered and responsible for their children.

In addition to the benefits they see from father involvement, most agency administrators said they had noticed an increase in agency and court focus on fathers in the past several years. Agencies have introduced new initiatives, such as family-group conferencing, that seek parent and kin involvement, and they have undertaken renewed efforts to search for fathers more diligently. Some administrators also said that there is increased emphasis on involving fathers earlier in a case. Some administrators in all states mentioned an increase in their agency or state's focus on serving fathers, particularly incarcerated ones. They noted that judges were more open to awarding custody to nonresident fathers than they were in the past. Many administrators said that child support enforcement agencies had become more aggressive in searching for fathers, too.

Administrators cited a number of reasons for an increased focus on fathers. Administrators often mentioned that judges and legal departments place pressure on agencies to abide by legal requirements for parental involvement, perhaps leading to earlier father identification or more diligent searches. In some cases, lawsuits against the child welfare agency prompted an increased focus on fathers. Administrators sometimes referred to state or local

¹⁷ Note that some administrators mentioned the benefits of father's kin as placement resources before mentioning the

leadership as an impetus for involving fathers, indicating that leadership tone has affected worker or agency efforts. Some administrators also pointed to federal legislation as a motivating force to improve father involvement. For example, some administrators in Massachusetts and Arizona mentioned that since the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, the agency has focused on quicker permanency and consequently on fathers and paternal kin who could act as placement resources. Other administrators depicted budget shortfalls, both in child welfare and child support, as reasons for an increased focus on recouping foster care expenses from birth parents (both mothers and fathers).

Drawbacks to or Costs of Father Involvement

In addition to the benefits of father involvement, the administrators with whom we spoke identified a variety of potential drawbacks or costs. One of the two most common concerns of administrators was that father involvement could reintroduce an abuser into a family or renew parental conflict. Administrators in all states repeatedly mentioned a danger of involving fathers with a history of domestic violence or violence to a child. A few administrators mentioned that some women involved with the child welfare agency had intentionally moved to their districts to escape abusive partners. In the words of one administrator, father involvement could “destabilize women who are already unable to care for their children.” One administrator also mentioned that female caseworkers might feel threatened by fathers with a history of domestic violence, thereby creating a difficult working environment. Even if birth parents merely argue, increasing a father’s involvement may require a worker to invest more time in a case to strike compromises between birth parents. Because of these drawbacks, administrators in all states routinely

father himself, which may be indicative of the agency’s perception of nonresident fathers.

mentioned parental conflict or a mother's safety as reasons for excluding nonresident fathers from the case process or at least approaching their involvement with caution.

An equally common concern voiced by administrators was that increasing father involvement would create more work for caseworkers, already described as overburdened by high caseloads. Involving a father and his kin in a case introduces more people with whom workers must consult. In addition, involving fathers, especially those out-of-state, may increase agency costs of providing services or transportation for visits. Some administrators stressed that the term "father involvement" evokes an image of a single father per case, whereas the reality is that a sibling group with the same mother may have multiple fathers. Involving each child's father in a case of this sort could overwhelm a caseworker, making his or her attempts to engage fathers less likely. If a nonresident father is not the best placement for a child, involving him in a case may create barriers to other permanency options, such as an adoptive or guardianship placement with the mother's kin, if the father decides to fight for custodial rights. Some administrators qualified their concern over burdens on worker time by saying that the increased workload that would occur in the short-term would likely be outweighed in the long-term by overall caseload reductions if children could be placed with fathers or paternal relatives or if fathers were to be located more quickly to expedite adoption proceedings, leading to more efficient uses of resources.

There are certain other situations that make working with fathers more difficult for child welfare agencies. Although several administrators noted that they find many fathers by working with the corrections agencies, once found, incarcerated fathers present unique challenges. Many administrators noted that involvement with the criminal justice system may make caseworkers less likely to engage a father. Some administrators noted an internal conflict between wanting to

put an incarcerated father in a child's case plan yet recognizing that an unrealistic service expectation would then follow (e.g., one Massachusetts administrator remarked that if a worker enters a father serving a life sentence into a case plan, the worker would then have to visit him once a month). Arranging for children to visit incarcerated fathers can be time-consuming if extensive travel is involved or prisons have complex protocols for admitting visitors. Some administrators also said that the process of visitation might be traumatic for children and intimidating to caseworkers.

Involving nonresident fathers with substance abuse issues may also present drawbacks for the agency and children. Quite a few administrators said that a history of substance of abuse would make workers less likely to involve a father in case planning. Attempts to engage fathers who are suffering from a drug addiction may be fruitless or require intensive services.

Administrators depicted some specific drawbacks or costs to involving immigrant nonresident fathers in a child welfare case. Certain characteristics of this population, such as potential language barriers or frequent migration, may cost the agency money and time in efforts to locate and engage fathers. A birth mother and other family members may be hesitant to provide any information about an undocumented father for fear that he will be deported. It may also be difficult to engage nonresident immigrant fathers in child welfare casework.

Administrators, particularly those in Tennessee, noted that a scarcity of local translation services made connecting with this population more difficult. Finally, agencies may be wary of placing children with undocumented fathers because of the lack of information available to the agency. Some administrators noted that it is difficult to do criminal background checks or prove that the men have steady income if they are paid "under the table." Others expressed concern over

placing a child with an immigrant father who could take the child and return to his native country, where U.S. courts would have no jurisdiction.

Each agency's perception of the nonresident father population involved in its cases can affect policy and practice in a number of ways. It can influence the types of efforts made to identify fathers and the supports agencies offer to fathers. Characteristics of this population may also influence the approach that the agency uses toward father engagement. In the end, the balancing act that agencies do to weigh the potential benefits of father involvement with the challenges that may exist for each father influences agency efforts to involve nonresident fathers. In the following section, we turn our attention to this dynamic: the way that an agency's view of its own role in facilitating or guarding father involvement affects policy and practice. We also highlight differences between states on key factors to provide a more in-depth look at each state's policies and practices on father involvement (table 2-1).

Agency Role in Father Involvement

Our administrator interviews reflect differences in how agencies view their role in affecting father involvement. Two separate factors appear to be at work—the balance between strict legal requirements and flexible social work practices, and the applied definition of client (e.g., a single child, an entire family including nonresident fathers and other kin, or the dyad of the child and the custodial parent from whom the child was removed).

Table 2-1: Key Factors on Nonresident Father Involvement by State

State	Timing of Father Identification	Case Plans and Nonresident Fathers	Father-specific Programming^a	Legal Representation	Information Sharing with Child Support and TANF to Identify and Locate Fathers
Arizona	Begins during investigation or petition phase; policy requires searches for missing parents at least once every 6 months	Case plans should include nonresident fathers but do not always do so in practice; administrators say it is difficult to create case plan for each parent	Administrators report little activity	Fathers receive court-appointed representation in child welfare proceedings	Administrators say sharing varies with child support enforcement and TANF, part of the Department of Economic Security, which includes the child welfare agency
Massachusetts	Begins during investigation but most thorough during assessment period (45 day period after case has been assigned for assessment)	Case plans do not always include fathers in practice; not difficult to create case plan for each parent, which is routine for cases with a history of domestic violence	Over half of administrators mention agency/CBO partnerships to provide programming	Fathers receive court-appointed representation in child welfare proceedings	Administrators say sharing with TANF varies by office, and some child welfare agencies have Memoranda of Understanding with TANF; sharing information with child support enforcement is fairly rare, though answering questions for child support is more common
Minnesota	Begins at intake, the point at which placement looks likely, or during the assessment	Nonresident father inclusion depends on variety of characteristics of father; reports of creation of separate plans varies widely across districts	Administrators mention father programming by TANF, child support, local organizations, and the agency itself	Fathers do not receive court-appointed representation in child welfare proceedings	Administrators rarely mention sharing information with TANF; relationship with child support enforcement is close and information-sharing common
Tennessee	Searches for fathers vary in timing; workers often ask about fathers at a meeting 7 days after child comes into care	Frequent reports of inclusion of fathers in case plans among study states, regardless of father characteristics; creation of separate plans depends on the region	Administrators report little activity	Fathers do not receive court-appointed representation in child welfare proceedings	Administrators say since the split of the department that contained TANF and child welfare, information sharing has become more difficult, although child welfare benefits workers still have some access to TANF data systems

Notes: TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; CBO = community-based organization.

^a We define father-specific programming to include any services targeted to fathers or non-custodial parents (who are likely to be fathers), some of whom may have children involved with the child welfare agency. For example, these services could include support groups, nurturing classes, batterers' intervention programs, or seminars on the rights of non-custodial parents.

In this section we discuss both of these factors and the potential impact on policy and practice. We divide father involvement into three distinct stages: identification, location, and engagement.

Father Involvement through a Legal or Social Work Lens

Administrators identified two philosophical influences on involving fathers: one that focused on the legal requirements of father involvement enforced by the courts and carried out by agency legal departments and one that focused on the social work framework of the agency's mission, with an emphasis on practice that engaged fathers apart from legal requirements. For example, when probed about father involvement, some administrators emphasized their agency's compliance with state law or district requirements to search for fathers within a given time frame. They referred often to agency legal departments and the pressures of the court system to find fathers. Through their descriptions of father involvement, these administrators revealed the influence of the legal aspects of child welfare casework. Other administrators tended to focus on the flexibility of the agency's approach to fathers, emphasizing family-based practice and meeting the needs of each individual father, particularly after identification and location had occurred. Some had a wide knowledge of father-specific programming available in their communities, or they had hired particular staff to serve fathers. These administrators revealed the influence of a social work philosophy on their policy and practice.

This is not to imply that administrators held only one of these philosophies. On the contrary, our interviews indicated that most administrators balanced these two philosophies given the context of the child welfare population and dynamics affecting the local agency.

Nonetheless, it is important to remember these influences as we explore the practical aspects of father involvement throughout this section.

The View of the “Client”: Who Do Agencies Serve?

Administrators differed in the way that they identified their clients. Some administrators emphasized that agencies work for each child rather than the parents and child. Of these administrators, some emphasized that this stance was particularly useful when trying to engage fathers, who may at first feel suspicious of a caseworker and the worker’s relationship with the child’s mother. Other administrators said their agencies focused on each child and those adults living with the child at the time of placement. Placing a premium on reunification, these administrators viewed nonresident fathers as outside the family unit and therefore less of a priority, particularly early in a case. Finally, some administrators stressed that their agencies approached families, defined broadly to include nonresident fathers, as the client, thereby making sure that father involvement was a priority with caseworkers. One administrator described this philosophy as a “the more the merrier” attitude toward father involvement. This view appeared to be the most prevalent of the three among administrators in our interviews. Administrators with this view often noted a bias in the system against nonresident fathers, seen even in small ways, such as organizing case records by a mother’s last name instead of a child’s. Again, it is important to remember the role that this philosophical orientation may have on practical efforts of agencies to identify, locate, and engage nonresident fathers.

The Agency's Role in Policy and Practice

The varying approaches cited above could affect policy and practice throughout all phases of father involvement: identification, location, and engagement (including receipt of services). In this section, we make extensive use of state examples to illustrate both the breadth of practice and the range of policies that agencies employ when involving nonresident fathers.

Identifying nonresident fathers

The point at which agencies attempt to identify nonresident fathers varies by state and, to a lesser extent, by local agency. (See table 2-1 for a description of each state's practices) While many administrators said workers begin trying to identify a child's father during the investigation phase, most seemed to think that efforts were stronger and more successful early in a case but after investigation. Arizona was unique in its widespread mention of a policy to look for absent parents at least every six months. Some offices in the state opt to do the search more frequently, an effort they call a best practice rather than district policy, while others said their offices searched for fathers less frequently in practice than policy dictated. Administrators in all states said court and legal pressure to identify fathers usually occurred toward the end of a case, although there is a trend in some courts and among agency attorneys to press for identification earlier.

States also vary in the ways they establish paternity, both for purposes of involving a father in a case and for the purposes of placement opportunities or relinquishment or termination of parental rights. The methods used to establish paternity varied more with the specifics of a case than by state or local office. Generally, agency administrators said that workers relied on birth certificates, voluntary recognition of parentage, and a mother's word to establish paternity.

Workers typically request birth certificates at the time that a placement looks likely, although in some cases, birth certificates may take a long time to reach local offices, particularly if a child was born out of state or outside the United States. A mother may identify a father in writing, and then the agency can pursue DNA testing if the alleged father denies paternity.

Most administrators said their offices rarely used DNA testing, although there were some (particularly in Tennessee) who said that it was used routinely to establish paternity. The person or agency financially responsible for paternity testing may differ by state or local office.

Administrators said that the child welfare agency, its legal department, or local court could be responsible for financing paternity testing; in Tennessee, some administrators said alleged fathers could be responsible for the cost of DNA testing in certain circumstances. Sometimes paternity establishment is listed as a task for the agency in a child's case plan when a father has not been identified by the time the case plan is created. Administrators in all states reported that agencies had encountered problems when men believed to be fathers of children served by the agency later turned out not to be; these problems typically arose when the children in question were placed with kin of the alleged fathers. In these cases, the agency originally relied on a mother's word (perhaps while an alleged father was missing) or birth certificates, and later DNA testing revealed that the men were not birth fathers.

Reliance on a child's mother for information about a nonresident father was a common refrain among agency administrators. Whether due to simple proximity or the likelihood of knowledge, agencies primarily rely on birth mothers for information about the identity of a child's father and his whereabouts. Several administrators noted that judges ask women about their children's fathers under oath; administrators said this approach placed more pressure on birth mothers who might not be as cooperative with a caseworker. In Tennessee, some

administrators mentioned that the agency's court liaisons often ask mothers about a child's birth father during the initial proceedings. Since the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which linked father identification more closely with a family's eligibility for welfare benefits, some Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agencies have assisted child welfare in identifying birth fathers.

Locating nonresident fathers

States vary widely in their use of staff to locate fathers. Overall, administrators said caseworkers were responsible for doing the first search for absent fathers. Some check a variety of sources, such as phone books, last known employers, and a diverse set of agencies. Most administrators noted that search efforts are dependent on the characteristics of a case and the individual caseworker.

After workers do an initial search, they may consult others within the child welfare or other agencies for assistance if they have not located the parent. In Arizona, which had a consistent process and timeframe for searching for fathers, workers rely on legal departments or clerical staff in the local office who are good at searches to find fathers. Arizona offices also have uniform access to the State Parent Locator service for a fee when local searches yield no results. In contrast, most Massachusetts administrators said there are no designated staff to search for fathers, although some administrators mentioned that kinship workers could take on this responsibility. In some Massachusetts offices without specific search workers, administrators said they wished they had kinship workers to do searches or thought that such staff would be more efficient for the agency.

Minnesota did not seem to have a specific process or pattern for staffing father searches. County directors mentioned a variety of staff positions that would aid in searches: case aides, workers particularly adept at searches, workers specializing in working with unmarried parents, legal staff, child support enforcement workers, and workers hired through a contracted community-based organization.

Most administrators in Tennessee said that no designated staff members search for fathers, although some directors mentioned agency legal staff assistance or a staff member hired by a contracted community-based organization for searches. Tennessee's child welfare benefits workers, who are part of the child welfare agency but are particularly adept in the family assistance (welfare) system, have access to some TANF information that might include information on fathers, so they can assist caseworkers in searches. One Tennessee agency recently received permission to create a diligent search staff position, and another area has considered creating a similar position.

Engaging nonresident fathers

Administrators focused less frequently on efforts to engage nonresident fathers than on efforts to identify or locate them. When they did mention father engagement, they often talked about policies requiring the agency to serve (e.g., by providing parenting classes) and visit incarcerated fathers. Worker training rarely focused on ways to engage fathers specifically, emphasizing engagement of kin more generally. An administrator in one state said training does not include very much father engagement material because engagement is not a legal matter. However, some administrators mentioned a trend toward greater father engagement. Others suggested the best approaches to engaging fathers include assuring fathers that the agency does not work for the

mother, offering services to fathers early in a case, and asking fathers about their own families as placement resources.

- *Including fathers in case plans.* One of the ways administrators noted to engage a father was to include him in the child welfare case plan. While some states appear to include fathers more frequently than others, administrators in all states acknowledged that fathers are not always included in case plans. (See table 2-1 for a description of each state's practices.) Reasons for fathers' exclusion could include incarceration, domestic violence, lack of paternal interest in the child, inability to identify or locate a birth father, and a father's proximity to the agency. Among the study states, Tennessee seemed most committed to including fathers, even those who were absent or alleged, in case plans.¹⁸ If fathers are unknown, workers are often expected to create tasks for the agency, such as a diligent search or paternity testing.

One potential concern noted about including nonresident fathers in case plans is that inclusion may compromise each parent's confidentiality or renew conflict in parents' relationships. All administrators, when probed, said it would be possible to create separate plans, but most often agencies create only one plan for each child. Arizona administrators said it was very difficult to create separate plans for each parent because of the state's data system, while Massachusetts seemed to do it easily and routinely. Administrators in Massachusetts repeatedly and without prompting mentioned a history of domestic violence as a reason to create separate case plans for parents. In Minnesota, some counties do not create separate plans for each parent (in some cases saying

¹⁸ As part of the Brian A. Settlement Agreement, administrative policies and procedures on engaging families require inclusion of all known parents in the permanency planning process. This includes biological parents, legal

domestic violence and confidentiality have not been problems); others seemed to create separate plans any time a nonresident father was involved, regardless of his relationship with the child's mother. In Tennessee, some agencies noted using only one plan, while others use two for separated parents or end up creating two if parents will not meet together.

- *Serving fathers.* Some administrators indicated a trend toward providing services to nonresident fathers more frequently. Some mentioned legal necessity, child well-being, or federal or agency reviews of their own deficiencies as motivating factors for increasing services. Services mentioned included parenting classes, batterers' intervention programs, therapy, and fatherhood programs. Particularly in Arizona, administrators expressed concern over serving undocumented immigrant fathers and remarked that state law¹⁹ may limit access to services such as housing subsidies and health insurance. Factors like substance abuse or fathers' aggression toward workers may also act as barriers to serving fathers. In Massachusetts, one administrator mentioned that fathers react more positively to services provided by community-based organizations than to agency programs. In Minnesota, several administrators mentioned ongoing efforts, sometimes in relationship to child support enforcement, to inform fathers of their legal rights and direct them to legal aid. Hennepin County, Minnesota (Minneapolis), has a pilot project that targets

parents, and alleged fathers. The procedural guidelines specifically mention that "unless contrary to the child/youth's best interest, incarcerated parents must be included in the development of the permanency plan."

¹⁹ In 2004, voters in Arizona passed Proposition 200, which prohibited offering some state and local government benefits to undocumented immigrants. At the time of our interviews, some administrators worried that the proposition would affect child welfare services or services to which the agency could refer undocumented fathers. While the proposition does not actually change child welfare services, it does limit access to some government benefits, such as utility assistance programs, which might be of use to noncustodial fathers providing placements for their children.

nonresident father engagement. Administrators in Tennessee mentioned community-based fatherhood programs (although administrators tended not to know much about them) and personalized services that fathers can receive (e.g., batterers' intervention classes). Some Tennessee administrators mentioned transportation or availability of services in rural areas as barriers to serving fathers.

In addition to more general services, many agencies either offer or refer fathers to father-specific programming. (See table 2-1 for a description of each state's practices.) These referrals may go to a community-based organization that works independently or in partnership with the child welfare agency or to other government agencies, such as TANF or child support. Among the states participating in our study, Massachusetts and Minnesota seemed to have the most organized systems of programming targeted to fathers. More than half of the Massachusetts administrators mentioned ongoing partnerships between local agencies and community organizations to provide father-specific programming. Often, the agency helped fund and organize a program, but providers were actually located in community organizations or split their time between the child welfare agency and the community provider. Some Massachusetts administrators mentioned having workers who were designated to serve fathers. Services include batterers' intervention classes or anger management programs, fatherhood classes, parenting lessons for fathers, reentry programs for incarcerated fathers, and programs targeting teenage fathers. Similarly, some Minnesota administrators mentioned father-specific services in the community, including efforts to reach fathers by child support and TANF. Several administrators mentioned legal aid services for fathers, and one county has a specialized worker to work with fathers. Ramsey County, Minnesota

(St. Paul), refers some fathers to a fatherhood program for African-American men with children in the child welfare system.

Administrators in Tennessee and Arizona appeared to be less knowledgeable of services available to fathers in the community, potentially because many of them oversaw larger districts than the administrators in Massachusetts and Minnesota. However, one district in Arizona was in the process of working with a behavioral health group to serve fathers with children involved in child welfare. In Tennessee, while some administrators knew of father-specific programs, most did not know whether the agency had referred fathers to the programs. None of the four states stood out as having widespread or strong father initiatives.

- *Placing children with fathers.* When a nonresident father is considered appropriate to care for his child, perhaps with the aid of available services, the agency may place a child with him. Administrators varied in the terminology they used for this process: Some considered it a placement as any other kin placement, while others were adamant that a child living with a nonresident father should not be called a placement at all. Policies also differed across and within states (except in Massachusetts, where responses were more consistent). In Massachusetts, where administrators commonly said a child living with a nonresident father is not a placement, agencies have fewer institutional barriers for the process. Fathers receive a home assessment to determine risk to a child, while other kin placements would receive a full home study. Fathers' criminal records are reviewed within the local agency, while criminal records of other potential kin require regional or area approval before a placement can occur. In contrast, while administrators in

Minnesota said that fathers are given preference as placement resources, most said that the standards and assessment procedures for fathers are the same as those for other kin.

- *Representing fathers in court.* States also differed in their policy on legal representation in court for nonresident fathers. (See table 2-1 for a description of each state's practices.) In Arizona, fathers often receive court-appointed representation in child welfare proceedings, though this may vary by judge or the point in a case at which a father expresses interest in becoming involved. One administrator mentioned that some appointed attorneys may search for missing fathers on their own. In Massachusetts, there is a state policy to appoint attorneys for fathers in child welfare cases, assuming the fathers are financially eligible for legal assistance. Two Minnesota administrators mentioned community programs they direct fathers to for legal assistance. No administrators in Tennessee mentioned court-appointed attorneys.
- *Recouping foster care expenses.* Some administrators indicated their states had placed new emphasis on recouping foster care expenses from nonresident fathers in recent years. In some cases, administrators said child support agencies initiated increased focus on recouping expenses, while child welfare agencies may have led the effort in others. States have different processes and criteria to determine whether or not a nonresident father will be responsible for the costs. Across states, administrators noted judicial discretion to waive the payment and a lack of an enforcement mechanism as reasons that the agency cannot recoup money. Additionally, some administrators who said that there was a process to recoup foster care expenses indicated that there was a lack of incentive on the

part of the agency to adhere closely with the policy, given that recovered money frequently goes directly back to the state rather than to the local agency.

In Massachusetts, administrators overwhelmingly had a negative view of the efficacy of the contracted agency to recoup foster care expenses, saying that little money was recovered. In Arizona, when a child comes into care, the caseworker is responsible for completing a parental assessment and determining how much each parent can pay. The worker then submits the assessment in the court report, leaving it up to each judge to actually order the repayment. Some judges (and workers) may see the process as unfair and not order the payments. Others may order the payments, but many administrators said the lack of an enforcement mechanism leaves the policy without much “bite.” In practice, most administrators said that the agency collects little money through this policy. Administrators in Minnesota said that the child support office does try to recoup foster care expenses from both parents and for both title IV-E and non-IV-E eligible children. While some administrators said efforts have remained the same in recent years, others said child support has stepped up its efforts due to budget pressures. Tennessee administrators said that caseworkers typically ask judges to order child support payments through the enforcement agency. Judges vary in how often they actually make the orders, and at least one administrator said the enforcement process is weak. (See table 2-1 for a visual depiction of state practices.)

Description of Service System Linkages

Interviews with child welfare administrators also focused on the service system linkages that child welfare agencies use to involve nonresident fathers. The way an agency perceives its

partners may affect how or whether that agency connects with other systems to engage fathers. In this section we address child welfare agency relationships with child support and TANF agencies and the court system. (See table 2-1 for brief overviews on sharing information with TANF and child support.) We also address other relationships that local administrators identified as important in their efforts to involve nonresident fathers in child welfare casework.

Child Support Enforcement

Minnesota and Tennessee highlighted descriptions of particularly active relationships with child support agencies. These two states consistently reported sharing information to identify and locate fathers. Administrators in Minnesota often referred to good relationships with child support, and most referred to some process that would allow them to get fathers' information from this agency. In fact, administrators often indicated that child support enforcement was a primary resource in agencies' efforts to identify fathers. A few administrators referred to an automatic information-sharing system in which child welfare contacts child support when a IV-E eligible child comes into care. One county administrator in Minnesota said that child support now sends one worker to all child protective services hearings to ensure child support is discussed at the hearing.

Administrators in Tennessee also reported established relationships with child support and widespread information sharing. The sharing may be informal, formal but direct (meaning that there is an established process or form to use to share information, but workers still do it themselves), or through the courts or agency attorneys. Child welfare benefit workers in Tennessee are privy to some child support data. The state also automatically refers cases to child

support when a child comes into care. In addition, the child welfare agency has court liaison staff attend child support hearings.

The relationship between child welfare agencies and their local child support agencies for sharing information about fathers appeared more tentative in Arizona and Massachusetts. In Arizona, the child support and child welfare agencies are both part of the Department of Economic Security. Administrators noted a decline in concern over information sharing with child support since child welfare became part of the same state department a couple of years ago. Provided that workers ask for child support information in their official capacity, all workers should theoretically be able to access information about fathers through child support. On the ground, though, while some Arizona administrators said their offices regularly worked with child support to identify fathers, others said they could not access this information but wished they could. Child welfare workers in some districts can ask district-level parent locator staff to access some available child support records, so the two agencies have at least some capacity to link data. Generally, though, Arizona administrators spoke of increasing collaboration with child support, including joint meetings or collocation.

Most administrators in Massachusetts reported obtaining some information from child support about fathers, although the practice appeared infrequent in some offices. One administrator noted that workers in the local office would have no idea how to get information from child support. In contrast, some administrators reported that child support asks the child welfare agency for information on fathers with relative frequency. Caseworkers who do obtain information on fathers from child support have a form they must complete and give to the child support agency. Child protective services appears to have no computer access to any child support records.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Some child welfare agencies also indicated sharing information about fathers with local welfare (TANF) agencies. This practice seemed most common in Arizona and least frequent in Minnesota. Some administrators in Arizona indicated, unlike in the case of the tentative relationship with child support, the child welfare agency could access some TANF information freely, particularly through shared data systems (even though all three are part of the same agency). Massachusetts and Tennessee both reported wide variation in the degree of collaboration between TANF and the child welfare agency. Some administrators mentioned that TANF sometimes pushed mothers to identify fathers. In Massachusetts, most administrators said they got information from TANF (or could do so in theory), but the formality of the process varied from established memoranda of understanding to informal caseworker interactions. Minnesota administrators did not mention working with TANF often. Those who did said the relationship to share information about fathers was mainly informal through caseworkers.

The relationship in Tennessee between child welfare agencies and TANF illuminates changes over time and factors influencing data sharing in a couple of ways. Previously part of the Department of Human Services, the Department of Children's Services was created in 1996. Administrators mentioned the fact that the two programs are now administered by separate agencies as a barrier to getting information to identify fathers. Second, Tennessee has specialized staff, the child welfare benefits workers, who have access to some TANF computer systems. Some administrators said that they use the benefits workers to search for fathers, while others either said benefits workers were no longer allowed to share information or appeared to have never shared information. Some administrators also reported that caseworkers foster informal relationships with TANF workers that allow them to access information about fathers.

Courts

Administrators with whom we spoke seemed to view the courts more as a source of oversight rather than a partner in father involvement. Respondents highlighted a variety of ways in which courts could influence father involvement: judicial pressure on or assistance to agencies searching for fathers, court involvement in efforts to recoup foster care expenses, court pressure to evaluate all potential child placement resources, the role of courts in establishing paternity, and the permission of the court to share information across agencies that might help locate fathers. Administrators varied in their assessments of judges—some judges ask early and often about a child’s birth father, while others rarely do or only do so late in a case. Administrators who noticed variation across judges sometimes mentioned the backgrounds of particularly aggressive judges (e.g., a father himself, a former child welfare agency attorney, etc.) as an explanation for their practice.

Some administrators depicted changes in judicial practice over time. A few expressed disappointment that the relationship with the court had become more litigious or that there were more “legal hoops” for the agency now than in the past. Administrators who said they noticed a difference in the aggressiveness of courts on father involvement said attention to fathers had increased or that fathers were more likely to receive custody now than in the past. Agency attorneys may also push workers to do more thorough searches. Some administrators mentioned pending lawsuits or judicial “scolding” as reasons for more diligent searches.

In general, we did not discover any court initiatives in the study states that were specifically seeking to improve nonresident father involvement in child welfare casework. However, in some states, court initiatives have improved father involvement indirectly. Three Minnesota administrators mentioned the Juvenile Justice Initiative, which placed an emphasis on

quicker permanency. As a result of this initiative, administrators said judges look more closely at fathers as placement resources now. In Arizona, the state passed legislation that provided parents, including noncustodial fathers, the right to a jury trial in decisions of termination of parental rights. On the other hand, the absence of court initiatives directed at fathers (and the preliminary evidence that judges can impact agency practice on fathers) may indicate that fostering court innovation and partnerships with child welfare agencies on father involvement could be an area of future growth.

Other Community Partners

In addition to child support, TANF, and the courts, agencies identified other community partners with which they worked or would like to work to involve fathers. Multi-agency collaboration varied widely within and across states. Some of the collaborative efforts to locate fathers mentioned included searches with the Department of Motor Vehicles, Department of Corrections or local law enforcement agencies, mental health agencies, or local school systems. Some Arizona respondents mentioned that they had contacts with the Mexican consulate or the Mexican agency dealing with child welfare to identify or locate fathers of immigrant children. Massachusetts is notable for its collaboration with local community-based organizations to create or support father-specific programming or services.

Administrator Perceptions of Facilitators and Barriers to Partnerships

Many administrators talked about confidentiality concerns as a major barrier when attempting to get information from other agencies (e.g., TANF, child support enforcement, schools) about nonresident fathers. Some administrators mentioned limited data access to child support or

TANF information, even if the departments were part of the same umbrella agency. Since some state administrators indicated that information sharing should not be a problem, local administrators' identification of confidentiality as an issue may reveal a misunderstanding of what is legally permitted.

Administrators mentioned that data sharing was more common in rural areas or in instances where child welfare workers had a good relationship with workers in other agencies. Administrators in rural areas said that child welfare workers may literally work alongside TANF or child support workers or may know them personally, due to the small size of their offices. This phenomenon may exist in some urban areas too, where some administrators said states have created multipurpose service centers for clients that include many agencies.

One additional barrier to agency collaboration that is of note is the impact of agencies' different missions. This issue was particularly important when child welfare administrators talked about the relationship with child support. In recent years, with state budget cuts and more federal and state emphasis on enforcing child support orders, administrators often depicted child support agencies as more aggressive with nonresident fathers. Some administrators noted that recouping money was not in the mission of child welfare agencies, where a parent's lack of income or resources such as housing is often a barrier to reunification or permanency for a child.

Implications for Analyses of Case-level Data and Future Research

The results of the administrator interviews provide a rich context upon which to interpret findings from the caseworker interviews and case linkage to child support information. During telephone interviews, caseworkers were asked about two children on their caseload—how the worker identified and located their fathers. Workers provided information on different agencies

they may have contacted such as child support and TANF, as well as different individuals they may have asked (e.g., mothers, relatives) for information. We examined a variety of father characteristics, many of them specifically mentioned by administrators. For example, workers were asked whether the child's father was involved with the criminal justice system, whether or not he was out-of-state or out of the country, and whether or not he was the perpetrator of child abuse or family violence. These data provide a more detailed description of fathers and potential challenges to father involvement. Of particular interest to administrators will be information on worker opinions on the benefits and drawbacks to involving fathers.

The results of our administrator interviews also provide context for our case-level data linkage to child support information. Each child case was linked to child support data to determine whether information exists on paternity establishment, the location of the nonresident parent, utilization of state or federal locating resources and whether the locating resources were successful. Information on whether a child support order was attempted, established, and collected upon was also sought. Results of these analyses provide case-level information on the feasibility and utility of using child support resources to increase father involvement.

Local agency practices on fathers differ across the four study states, as well as within states, on many levels. As our interviews with administrators show, some of the difference may be the overarching philosophy of the agency and courts. Differing practices may also reflect individual case differences, such as father characteristics and relationships between fathers and the mothers of children served. Case-level analyses provide a clearer picture of these factors since we asked caseworkers to provide information on both father and mother characteristics (including problems or issues that make it difficult to place the child in their home) as well as reasons why the parent is difficult to locate and involve (e.g., out-of-state, no transportation, no

phone). The results from the caseworker interviews and child support data linkage are presented in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 Descriptive Analyses of Caseworker Interviews

This chapter presents descriptive findings from the case-level data obtained through telephone interviews with caseworkers in the four study states. Caseworkers were asked about children on their caseload, the child's birth parents, and their own opinions about working with fathers.

Descriptive analyses are presented in this chapter with additional analyses, both descriptive and multivariate presented in chapter 4.

Introduction

Description of Subgroups

As discussed in chapter 1, a total of 1,222 caseworkers were interviewed. Data were compiled on a total of 2,366 foster children; 1,958 were eligible for analysis.²⁰ As shown in figure 3-1, in 1,721 (88%) of the eligible cases, caseworkers reported that the father had been *identified*²¹, and in 1,071 (55%) of the eligible cases the father had been *contacted*²² by the worker or agency at least once.²³ The results presented in this chapter reflect findings based on different groups of cases, depending upon the topic. For example, questions pertaining to child-father visitation were only asked of caseworkers that had made contact with the father at some point during the case.²⁴

²⁰ As described in chapter 1, ineligible cases included those with resident fathers, adoptive fathers, or deceased fathers.

²¹ Identified father cases include cases in which the worker said the father's name was known at case opening and cases in which the worker answered "yes" to whether the agency has identified an alleged father, i.e., does anyone at the agency think they know who the father is, at the time of the interview.

²² Contact was defined broadly to include in-person, telephone, voicemail or written communication with the caseworker or another staff member.

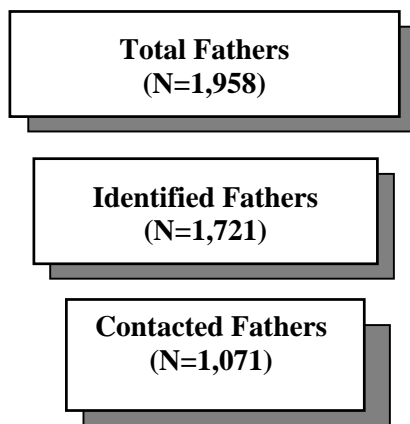
²³ Cases with fathers who died prior to case opening were considered ineligible and excluded from the sample. A small number (n=25, 1.7% of eligible fathers) died after case opening and are included in descriptive analyses.

²⁴ Exceptions are noted in the tables.

Caseworkers who cited no contact with the father would have no (or unreliable) information on recent visitation.

In this discussion of findings, percentages of the overall sample are provided in certain sections for context. For example, while contacted fathers comprise 62 percent of identified fathers, they represent 55 percent of all fathers in the sample.

Figure 3-1. Total Numbers of Fathers in Analysis Subgroups



A box at the beginning of each section informs the reader of the universe of case responses reported on in the section. Tables present unweighted Ns with percentages weighted to be representative of all foster care cases with nonresident fathers in each of the four states analyzed in the survey.²⁵

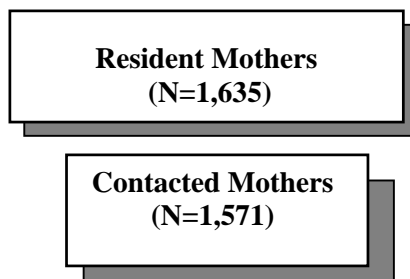
Study states were asked to identify children in out-of-home placement who had been removed from homes in which their biological fathers did not reside. The primary method states used to identify these cases in their state automated child welfare information systems (SACWIS) was a household composition data field. Single, female-headed households

²⁵ Tables report weighted percents and unweighted Ns so calculations made by the reader to determine numbers of cases in specific subgroups will provide the estimated Ns which may differ slightly from the actual number of completed interviews for that subgroup.

constituted the great majority of the cases. However, after conducting the pretest a subgroup of cases was identified—cases in which both the biological father and birth mother were not in the home from which the child was removed.

Thus, a new group of “nonresident” mother cases was identified. The entire population of mothers included 1,635 resident and 323 nonresident mothers.²⁶ As shown in figure 3-2, caseworkers reported that 1,571 of the 1,635 resident mothers (96%) had been contacted by the worker or agency. Unlike fathers, resident mothers were assumed to be identified and located at the time of interview (given the child had been removed from her household). Findings from descriptive analyses of resident mothers are presented in this chapter to provide context to the findings on nonresident fathers. For example, understanding what percentage of mothers had problems or issues similar to nonresident fathers is helpful. Because nonresident mothers are the group of mothers presumably most comparable to nonresident fathers, caseworkers with cases involving nonresident mothers were asked the same series of identification questions. Analyses involving nonresident mothers are presented in chapter 4. These analyses are of particular interest because comparisons between nonresident fathers and nonresident mothers can be made on agency identification, location, and engagement.

Figure 3-2. Total Numbers of Mothers in Analysis Subgroups



²⁶ Cases with deceased mothers (n=46, 2.2% of eligible mothers) remained a part of the sample in order to get information about the nonresident fathers in those cases. Of those deceased, 24 (52%) died prior to case opening and are excluded from subsequent analyses.

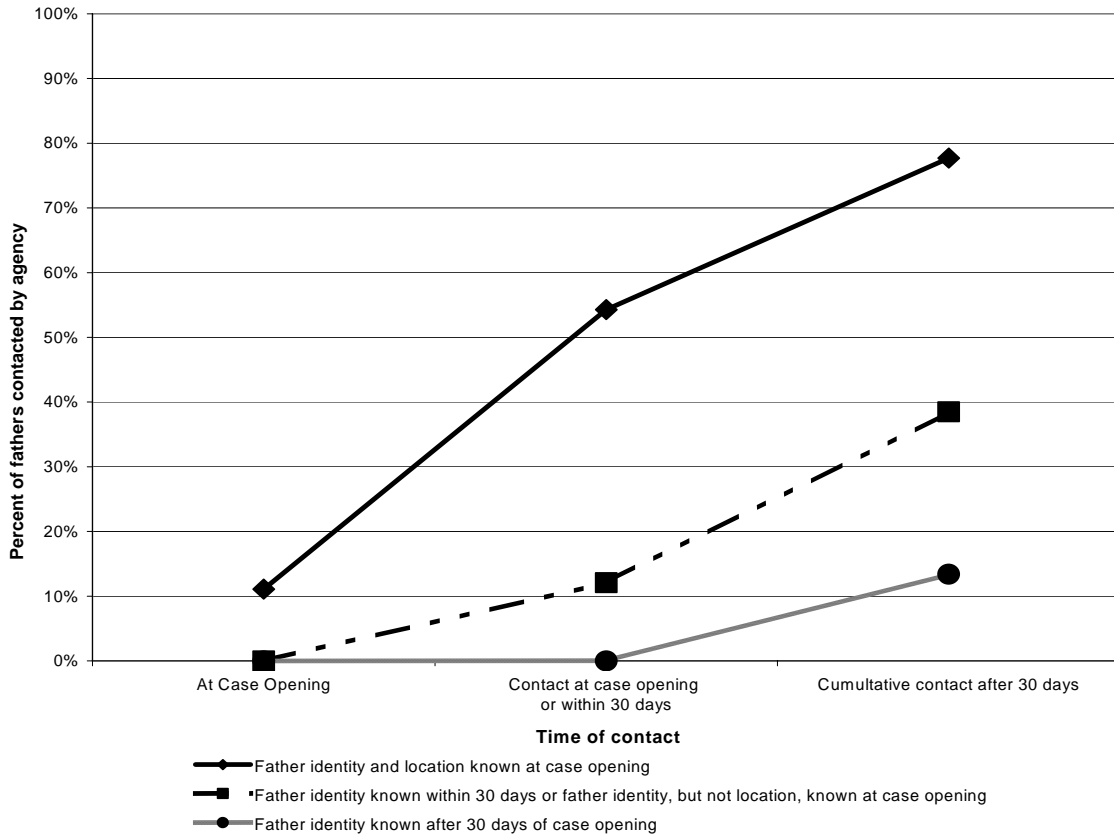
Timing of Father Identification and Contact

The study's goal was to examine fathers' involvement in permanency planning and child welfare casework. The timing of events such as identifying, locating and contacting the father is important to this chapter's discussion. An assumption is made that timing can directly impact the level of effort demanded of the child's caseworker. For example, some identified fathers may have presented themselves to the agency or worker at the time of placement or earlier in the case. Presumably, the child's foster care worker (the study's interview respondent) would expend little effort identifying or locating this type of identified father. And thus, caseworkers with cases in which the father was identified at the time of placement were not asked to respond to questions about whom they asked for assistance (See table 3-15). On the other hand, if the father had not yet been identified at the time of placement, what is the likelihood of that father ever having contact with the agency? How difficult might it be for a worker to identify a father later in the case? The contacted fathers (55%) can either be the result of casework practices that emphasize identifying and contacting all fathers or it could also be that the 55 percent of fathers contacted were those that made contact easy (i.e., identified themselves to the agency upon learning of the agency's involvement).

To examine this issue in more detail, we divided fathers into three categories depending upon the timing of their identification, location, and contact. Categories include (1) fathers identified and located at time of case opening, (2) fathers identified but not located at time of case opening and fathers not identified at time of case opening but identified within 30 days, and

(3) fathers not identified until after 30 days of case opening.²⁷ Figure 3-3 provides information on the likelihood of contact for fathers in each of the categories.

Figure 3-3. Likelihood of Contact for Fathers Identified at Different Points



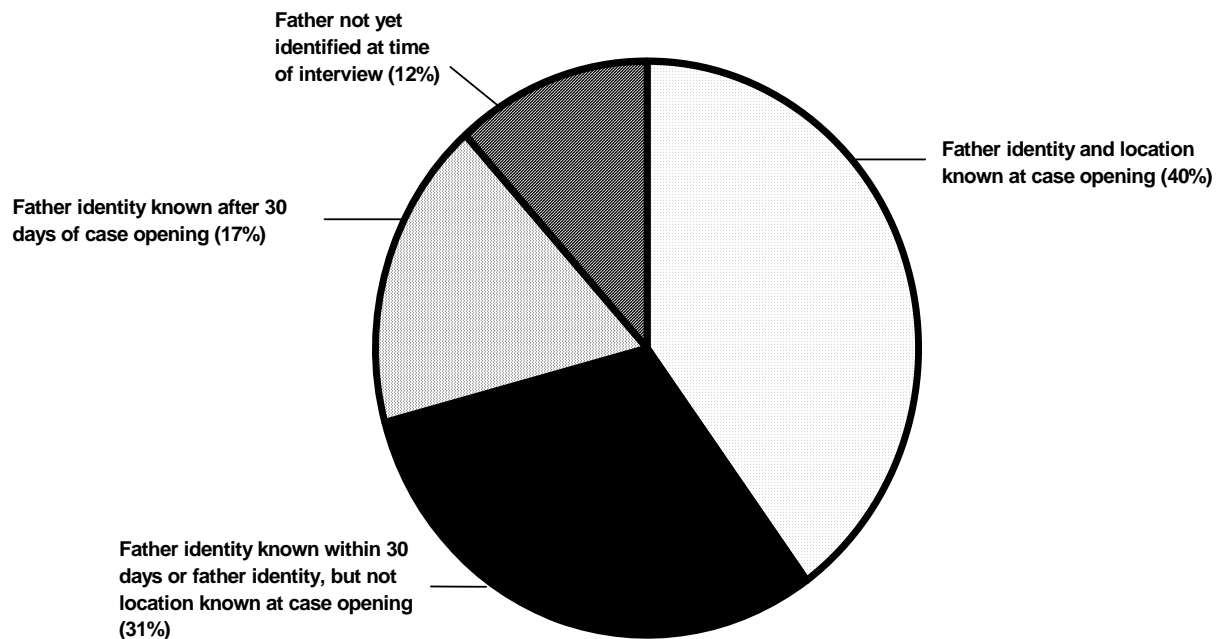
As shown, fathers most likely to be contacted by a worker are fathers who were identified and located when the case opened. Only 22 percent of these fathers have not yet had contact with the agency.²⁸ When identification occurred more than 30 days after case opening, contact was unlikely. Almost 90 percent (87%) of these fathers had not yet been contacted or the caseworker did not know whether contact had occurred. Later in this chapter we discuss the methods used by

²⁷ Cases with fathers in categories (3) and (4) were not asked about location of father at case opening because the identity of the father was not known at that time.

workers to identify and locate fathers and present circumstances of nonresident fathers that may make these tasks difficult.

The majority of fathers are identified at case opening or shortly thereafter—40 and 31 percent, respectively, in the first two categories. Cases with fathers whose identity was not known until sometime after 30 days from case opening represent 17 percent, and unidentified fathers comprise the remaining 12 percent (See figure 3-4).

Figure 3-4. Breakdown Cases by Timing of Father Identification



When reviewing the findings on fathers in this chapter, it is important to keep in mind the heterogeneity of each subgroup of analysis. For example, *identified* fathers (N=1,721) include

²⁸ The caseworker noted no contact yet or did not know whether contact had been made with the father.

both fathers who have had contact with the agency as well as fathers who have not had contact. Likewise, *contacted* fathers (N=1,071) include fathers who, according to caseworkers, visited with their children since case opening as well as fathers who have not visited with their children.

Organization of Chapter

The descriptive findings from the case-level data provide information on a wide range of topics. Information on the caseworker respondents, child demographic and case information, and resident mothers is presented first to provide context and is contained in the following three sections. Descriptive information about resident mothers is provided in this chapter for context for interpreting the information on fathers. State-by-state data are not presented in the tables but variation is discussed in the text.

The final section presents study findings on fathers. Many of the findings presented will be examined in more depth in the next chapter. For example, whether the type of father (alleged or legal²⁹) affects agency interactions and father-child visitation will be examined in the next chapter. Also, in the next chapter, direct comparisons between nonresident fathers and nonresident mothers are examined.

Description of Caseworker Respondents

The sample of caseworker respondents is similar to child welfare workers nationwide. Survey respondents were slightly more likely to be female (81% vs. 72%) than workers overall. Our respondents had one more year of experience than the general population of social workers in

²⁹ The difference between alleged and legal fathers is whether the caseworker reported that paternity had been established in the case.

public child welfare agencies (8 years vs. 7 years).³⁰ The racial breakdown of caseworkers is somewhat diverse with a fairly large group of African American caseworkers (20%). However, ethnicity is less diverse, only 8 percent of workers noted they were of Hispanic origin.

While a sizable majority of caseworker respondents reported having received training on identifying, locating and involving nonresident fathers, fewer had received specific training on referring cases to child support for locate assistance. Overall, the sampled caseworkers feel strongly that father involvement is good for children but many also feel that fathers need help with parenting skills. Perhaps intuition tells these workers that children need their fathers, but the reality of working cases means they have experience with fathers who are unable to successfully parent their children.

Characteristics

Table 3-1 presents a description of the caseworker respondents. As shown, most respondents were female (81%). Relatively little variation in caseworkers' gender was found among the study states—Massachusetts had the most male respondents (22%) versus a low of 16 percent in Minnesota. White workers made up the largest racial group (69%) while African-American workers comprised almost 20 percent. However, the race of caseworkers varied greatly among the study states—Tennessee had the largest percentage of African-American workers (42%) while Minnesota had the lowest percentage (8%). Similarly, 8 percent of caseworkers were Hispanic, but this varied from a low of 1 percent in Tennessee to a high of 16 percent in Arizona. The majority of workers had bachelor's degrees (73%), 17 percent of which were bachelors of social work. Workers had an average of 8 years of experience in child welfare. Minnesota's

³⁰ Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2003. "The Unsolved Challenge of System Reform: The Condition of the Frontline

workers were most experienced (12.6 years) and Tennessee workers least experienced (5.2 years). Minnesota also had more workers with master’s degrees (44%).

<i>N=1,222</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Gender, % female</i>	81.2
<i>Race (N=1,222)</i>	
White	69.3
African American	18.4
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1.4
Mixed	1.8
Other	6.2
Missing	2.9
<i>Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin (N=1,222)</i>	
	7.6
<i>Highest Level of Education (N=1,222)</i>	
Bachelor’s	73.4
Master’s	22.7
Doctoral	0.5
Other	3.3
<i>Years in child welfare (mean)</i>	8.1

Training and Opinions

Caseworkers were asked questions about whether they had received training on identifying or locating fathers. A series of questions were also asked to elicit each worker’s opinions about involving fathers in casework. Table 3-2 presents the findings related to workers’ training and opinions.

Overall, 70 percent of workers said they had received training on how to identify, locate, or engage fathers. Far fewer caseworkers (32%) noted having received training on how to refer cases to child support for assistance locating the father. Caseworkers in Minnesota and Tennessee were more likely to report having received training on father engagement or child support. Massachusetts had the lowest proportion of caseworkers that received training in each

Human Services Workforce.”

area. Massachusetts also had a notably lower proportion of caseworkers that indicated their agency encourages referrals to the child support agency for locating services (46%, compared to 76% in Minnesota).

Overall, most caseworkers thought that father involvement enhances child well-being (72%), though only about half (53%) reported that nonresident fathers want to be part of the decision-making process with regard to their children. Workers in Minnesota were the most likely to report that father involvement enhances children’s well-being and that nonresident fathers want to be involved in decisions regarding their children.

Table 3-2	
Caseworker Training and Opinions	
<i>N</i> =1,215	%
<i>Training on. . .</i>	
How to identify, locate, or engage fathers	69.9
Procedures for referring to child support for locate services	32.3
<i>Opinions</i>	
	<i>% agree or strongly agree</i>
Nonresident fathers need help with their parenting skills	81.7
Involvement of nonresident fathers enhances a child’s well-being	72.2
Nonresident fathers want to be part of decision-making process with regard to their children	53.3
Dealing with nonresident fathers makes a case more complicated	43.6
Working with nonresident fathers is more trouble than it’s worth	6.2
<i>Note:</i> Seven caseworkers did not respond to the training and opinion section of the questionnaire.	

Many workers noted that working with fathers can be difficult. The vast majority of caseworkers agreed that fathers need assistance with their parenting skills (82%) and 44 percent noted that working with nonresident fathers makes a case more complicated. However, only 6 percent of caseworkers reported that working with nonresident fathers is more trouble than it’s worth.

Description of Children

The following tables (tables 3-3 through 3-6) provide a description of the children about whom caseworkers were interviewed.³¹ Compared to 2003 national Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data, the sampled children are somewhat younger (8.6 vs. 10.2). However, this is likely due to the sample selection criteria regarding children's length of time in care (children were to have been in care 3-36 months) and that all were in foster care for the first time. The gender breakdown was similar (52% male vs. 48% female) but race/ethnicity varied considerably from AFCARS data. Our sample is more white (60% vs. 39%) and less African American (21% vs. 35%). The survey instrument disaggregated Hispanic origin from race that may account for some of these differences as well as the less diverse populations in the four study states. The placements settings for sampled children did not differ much from AFCARS data. Permanency goals varied slightly with sample children somewhat less likely to have a goal of reunification with birth parents (39% vs. 48%).

The reasons for placement differ only slightly from national data with more caseworkers noting higher levels of neglect (82% vs. 60%). However, the study definition of neglect included emotional abuse and while AFCARS breaks this type of abuse out from the others. Much like the national data, mothers represent the largest group of perpetrators. Biological fathers were not in the household, thus, the cases sampled do not reflect similar rates of fathers as perpetrators and likely to be higher rates of other male perpetrators (i.e., mother's boyfriends, stepfathers).

³¹ The reader is reminded that children in the sample were all children who had been in out-of-home care for 3 to 36 months, who were removed for the first time (first placement episode) and who were removed from households in which the father did not reside.

Demographic information is presented in Table 3-3. The remaining tables provide case information including whether paternity was established, the reason for the placement, current placement, and permanency goals.

The average age of the children was almost nine years old (8.6), with Massachusetts’s children the oldest on average of the study states (9.6 years) and children in Arizona the youngest (7.1 years). Gender distribution was relatively equal in all states, with Massachusetts having the most extreme split of 54 percent female to 46 percent male. Children with siblings made up the vast majority (83% or above) in all four states.³²

There was considerable variability in the race/ethnicity of the foster children in the study within the four states. Arizona caseworkers reported that 40 percent of the study children in their state were Hispanic, compared to 25 percent in Massachusetts, 13 percent in Minnesota, and 3 percent in Tennessee. White children comprised the largest proportion in all four states, followed by African-American children. The state with the highest proportion of African-American children was Tennessee at 36 percent and the lowest proportion was 11 percent in Arizona.

<i>N</i> =1,958	
<i>Age</i> (mean)	8.6
<i>Gender</i> , % female	51.6
<i>Race</i>	%
White	60.2
African American	21.3
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2.8
Asian	.7
Mixed	8.6
Other	1.1
Missing	5.3
<i>U.S. citizenship</i>	98.3
<i>Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin</i>	23.1
<i>Have at least one sibling</i>	85.4

³² While the majority of children in the sample had siblings, only one child from any sibling group was included in the sample.

Children were in care for almost two years, on average. The amount of time caseworkers reported being responsible for the case averaged just less than one year (11 months), but varied from six months in Arizona to 14 months in Tennessee. Table 3-4 provides details on the placements in which the sampled children were living at the time of the caseworker interview. Across states, 65 percent of children were eligible for Title IV-E. The proportion of eligible children varied greatly from 42 percent in Massachusetts to 69 percent in Tennessee, with Minnesota and Arizona both over 74 percent.

	%
<i>N</i> =1,958	%
<i>Title IV-E eligible</i>	64.8
<i>Current Placement</i>	%
Non-kin foster home	38.0
Kin foster home	28.1
Other	17.7
Group home or residential treatment	11.1
Adoptive placement ^a	4.8
Don't know	.4

^a Adoptive placements are pre-adopt placements, not post-finalization.

Traditional, non-kin foster care was the placement setting of 38 percent of the children in the study. Non-kin foster care placements varied from 34 percent of children in Arizona to 45 percent in Tennessee. Over a quarter of children were placed with kin ranging from 20 percent in Massachusetts to 38 percent in Arizona. Of the children placed with kin, 21 percent were placed with paternal relatives (ranging from 17% in Minnesota to 24% in Arizona). Other placements comprised 34 percent of children in this study. These placements included runaways, children

who had been reunified³³, and children placed in residential care, group homes, or independent living.

Caseworkers reported on why children came into care (Table 3-5). The large majority of children were placed because of neglect (82%), physical abuse (16%) or sexual abuse (9%). Twenty percent were placed for other reasons including (in order of descending frequency), parental substance abuse, emotional or verbal abuse, medical neglect, domestic violence, educational neglect, abandonment, parental mental illness, and abuse of the child's siblings. Children may have suffered more than one type of maltreatment. There was only slight variation between the states in the type of abuse/neglect. The most variation was seen in the "other abuse" category, ranging from 18 percent in Massachusetts to 27 percent in Minnesota.

Perpetrators of physical abuse were most often the mother (57%), followed by her boyfriend or husband (35%), then "other" perpetrators (15%), which included other relatives, caregivers, or acquaintances through parents or other family members. "Other" and "stepfather or mother's boyfriend" (38% each) were the most frequent perpetrator category for sexual abuse. The mother was the overwhelming perpetrator of neglect (95%), followed to a much lesser degree by fathers (11%), her boyfriend or husband (8%), and "other" adults or caretakers (6%). State variation for perpetrator type for specific types of abuse/neglect is difficult to examine due to small numbers.

³³ This includes children who had been reunified after sampling occurred, as well as children on trial home visits (Massachusetts retains this information in administrative data for 6 months preceding reunification.)

<i>N=1,958</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Neglect (all that apply, N=1,580)</i>	<i>82.1</i>
<i>Types of perpetrators</i>	
Mother	95.0
Father	11.4
Stepfather or mother's boyfriend	7.7
Other	6.3
No perpetrator identified	0.2
<i>Physical Abuse (all that apply, N=311)</i>	<i>15.6</i>
<i>Types of perpetrators</i>	
Mother	57.2
Stepfather or mother's boyfriend	34.7
Other	14.7
Father	8.1
No perpetrator identified	3.2
<i>Sexual Abuse (all that apply, N=179)</i>	<i>9.4</i>
<i>Types of perpetrators</i>	
Other	37.9
Stepfather or mother's boyfriend	37.7
Father	14.2
Mother	5.3
No perpetrator identified	10.6

Because the study criteria defined sample fathers as not residing in the home from which the child was removed, it is not surprising that these fathers are less likely to physically or sexually abuse their children than are other men in relationships with the child's mother. This was not the case with neglect with more similar percentages of caseworkers noting the nonresident father as the perpetrator of the neglect (11%) than the child's stepfather or mother's boyfriend (8%). Some state differences did exist. Caseworkers indicated the father was the perpetrator of sexual abuse in 26 percent of cases in Arizona, while the other three states were 19 percent or less, but overall levels of abuse by fathers were low.

Caseworkers were asked about the child's permanency goal and the responses were coded to several categories (table 3-6). The most frequent permanency goal was reunification with the mother (35%) followed by non-relative adoption (19%). Only 4 percent of cases with

nonresident fathers were aiming to reunify the child with the father. Permanency goals varied slightly among states. Reunifying the child with his or her mother ranged from 23 percent in Minnesota to 44 percent in Tennessee while non-relative adoption varied from 16 percent in Arizona to 28 percent in Minnesota.

<i>N=1958</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Reunify with mom</i>	35.3
<i>Non-relative adoption</i>	18.8
<i>Relative adoption</i>	10.5
<i>Independent living</i>	6.2
<i>Relative guardianship</i>	7.9
<i>Reunify with dad</i>	4.2
<i>Non-relative foster care</i>	2.8
<i>Relative foster care</i>	1.1
<i>Non-relative guardianship</i>	1.1
<i>Other</i>	11.3
<i>Don't know</i>	0.8

Description of Resident Mothers

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, because mothers most likely had custody of their children (that is, they lived in the household from which the child was removed), it is unlikely that caseworkers have to spend time identifying or locating these mothers; caseworkers were not asked about these activities. Contacting the mother would have most likely occurred during the initial investigation phase. As discussed earlier, nonresident mothers will be compared with nonresident fathers in analyses presented in chapter 4.

The findings in this section further describe the cases we sampled. Resident mothers are the birth parents from whom the child was removed given our criteria that the biological father not live in the household. Much of the data that follows was expected. For example, according to caseworkers, almost half (48%) of the mothers were never married. Other findings such as the percent of mothers who had been incarcerated at some point during the case process (29%) may

come as a surprise to some policymakers in the field. The majority (60%) of mothers faced four or more problems.

While they face many barriers, it seems clear that many mothers still have strong connections to their children in care. Almost three-quarters (74%) still had parental rights to the child. The vast majority of the mothers had visited with their children (only 4 percent had no visits at the time of the worker interview) at some point during the case process. And while only 20 percent of mothers provided financial support at some point since the child was in care, nearly half the mothers had provided non-financial support during the out-of-home placement.

Characteristics

Resident Mothers

Tables 3-7 and 3-8 provide information on characteristics of the study children's mothers. Table 3-7 includes a range of information including demographic characteristics, the mother's current living situation, and marital status. Table 3-8 provides information on the status of their parental rights.

Mothers were an average of 32 years old, ranging from 15 to 64. Most mothers were white (67%), 20 percent were African-American. Almost 20 percent of the mothers were of Hispanic origin (18%). Over 90 percent of all resident mothers were U.S. citizens, either through birth or naturalization. Most mothers had a high school education or less, if the mothers educational attainment was known to workers. Caseworkers reported that they did not know the mother's education in over a quarter of the cases.

Never-married mothers comprised the largest group (47%) of resident mothers. Almost 20 percent were married. Six percent of these mothers were married to the child's biological

father. Another 18 percent of mothers were divorced, ranging from 12 percent in Arizona to 23 percent in Minnesota.

Table 3-7
Resident Mother Characteristics

<i>N</i> =1635	
Age (mean)	32.4
<i>Race</i>	%
White	66.7
African American	20.2
American Indian or Alaskan Native	3.6
Asian	.5
Mixed	2.3
Other	1.1
Don't know	5.6
<i>Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin</i>	17.8
<i>U.S. citizenship</i>	%
Yes	95.0
No	2.4
Don't know	2.6
<i>Highest level of education</i>	%
Less than 12 years	37.0
High school diploma or GED	28.7
Some college, vocational school	6.8
College degree/graduate school	1.2
Don't know	26.3
<i>Marital status</i>	%
Never married	47.4
Married to someone other than child's father	12.8
Married to, but separated from, child's father	5.8
Divorced from child's father	9.7
Divorced from someone other than child's father	7.9
Separated	3.6
Widowed	0.4
Don't know	12.4
<i>Living situation</i>	%
Living alone	18.5
Living with father of child ^a	2.6
Living with another male	23.3
Other	21.4
Don't know	34.2

^a Sampled cases were selected because the child's father was not living in the home. However, during the interim between sample pull and interview, the living arrangement could have changed.

Almost 20 percent of mothers lived alone. A few mothers lived with the child’s father.³⁴ Overall, almost a quarter of the resident mothers (23%) lived with a man other than the child’s father, ranging from 18 percent in Minnesota to 28 percent in Massachusetts. Nearly half the mothers (49%) of the mothers living with another man also lived with others, usually her other children or his children, friends, or relatives.

Almost one third (31%) of caseworkers reported that mothers lived in some other living situation including being incarcerated; living with family members, friends, or female partners; living in a shelter or other group care environment; or being homeless.

Table 3-8 provides information on whether the resident mothers had parental rights to their child in foster care at the time of our interviews. As shown, the majority of resident mothers (74%) still have parental rights to the study child, ranging from 50 percent in Minnesota to 79 percent in Tennessee. Most mothers also have parental rights to their other children (64%).

Table 3-8	
Status of Resident Mothers’ Parental Rights	
<i>N</i> =1,635	
<i>Parental rights to this child</i>	%
Still has parental rights	73.5
Mother’s rights were terminated	18.4
Mother relinquished her rights	5.9
Don’t know	2.2
<i>Rights of mother to her other children</i>	%
Still has rights to other children	64.2
Relinquished or terminated	24.8
N/A mother has no other children	5.3
N/A not known if mother has other children	1.3
Don’t know	4.4

³⁴ Sampled cases were selected because the child’s father was not living in the home. However, during the interim between sample selection and interview, the living arrangement could have changed.

Barriers to Contacting Mothers

Resident Mothers

Table 3-9 presents findings on circumstances that made contacting mothers difficult for the agency or worker. Overall, workers noted a quarter (26%) of the resident mothers faced none of the

circumstances, 21 percent of mothers faced only one barrier, 41 percent of mothers faced two or three circumstances, and 12 percent of mothers had four or more circumstances apply. The most frequently cited circumstances were mothers who had transportation difficulties (52%) and were unreachable by phone (50%). A third of mothers were homeless and 29 percent had been incarcerated at some point during the case process. States varied considerably on the percent of resident mothers who had been incarcerated during the case process (from a low of 16% in Massachusetts to 37% in Tennessee). Caseworkers reported having great difficulty in contacting mothers when they were unreachable by phone, homeless, or lived out of state.

Table 3-9
Barriers to Contacting Resident Mothers

<i>N=1,635</i>		
<i>Type of circumstance (all that apply)</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>% caused difficulty</i>
Transportation difficulties	51.6	61.8
Unreachable by phone	50.2	94.2
Homeless/unstable address	33.5	83.2
Incarceration ^a	28.9	45.4
Out of state	15.8	75.0
Out of country	2.0	44.8
Language barrier	1.6	44.0

^a Twenty-one percent of those “incarcerated at some point during the case process” were incarcerated at the time of the survey.

Child-Mother Visitation

Contacted Mothers

Table 3-10 provides information on children’s visitation with their mothers.³⁵ Caseworkers reported that the majority of mothers had visited their children since case opening (88%). Eighty-two percent of mothers who had visited their child since case opening maintained monthly contact over the prior six months, and 45 percent had at least weekly contact. Almost all (96%) of the mothers with phone contact had visited with their child.

	%
<i>N=1,571</i>	%
<i>Percent of mothers who have visited with child (since case opening)</i>	87.5
<i>Visitation (w/in past 6 months) (N=1,370)</i>	%
Always or almost always attends planned visits	50.8
Sometimes attends	13.3
Rarely attends	9.9
Never attends or has no planned visits	22.2
Don’t know	3.8
<i>Frequency of visitation (w/in past 6 months)(N=1,020)</i>	%
No visits	4.8
One visit	11.9
Monthly	20.1
Twice a month	17.6
Weekly	29.6
More than once a week	15.0
Don’t know	1.1

Note: All workers who had been in contact with mothers were asked whether the mother has ever visited the child (N=1,571). If the mother had ever visited, workers were asked about her attendance for planned visitations (N=1,370). If mothers rarely, sometimes, almost always, or always attend planned visitation (N=1,020), workers were asked the frequency of visitation.

Caseworkers reported that half (51%) the mothers who had visits with their children over the past six months always or almost always attended planned visitation. Mothers in

³⁵ As discussed earlier in the chapter, certain questions were only asked of caseworkers who had been in contact with the parent. Questions about the resident mother visiting with the child were only asked for “contacted mothers.” As shown 1,571 of the total 1,635 resident mothers (96%) were “contacted mothers.”

Massachusetts always or almost always attended visitation more frequently than the other states (59% versus a low of 43% in Minnesota).

Financial Support by Mothers

Contacted Mothers

Based on several assumptions, caseworkers carrying cases involving resident mothers were asked slightly different questions concerning agency engagement. Caseworkers were asked questions pertaining to financial assistance from the mother (Table 3-11) under the assumption that since the child had been removed from her home, the mother, in addition to the father, would be looked to as a source of financial support.³⁶

<i>N</i> =1,571	
<i>Ever provided financial support</i>	%
Yes	20.1
No	75.7
Don't know	4.2
<i>Type of financial support (N=321)</i>	%
Regular (weekly or monthly)	21.9
Some, not regular	19.5
Occasional, sporadic	44.1
None of these options	10.9
Don't know	3.6
<i>Ever provided non-financial support (diapers, etc.)</i>	%
Yes	46.7
No	51.3
Don't know	2.0

As shown, about 20 percent of mothers provided financial support at any point since the child was in care. However, nearly half provided non-financial support at some point during the

³⁶ We cannot determine from the data whether the financial support provided by mothers was collected through the child support agency.

child’s stay in placement. Of those providing financial support, 22 percent provided weekly or monthly support. There were few state variations on mother’s financial assistance with the exception of Arizona, which reported fewer mothers providing both financial and non-financial support (11% vs. 16-22% for the other states).

Mother Problems

Contacted Mothers

As shown in Table 3-12, mothers had a range of problems or issue areas that caseworkers felt were reasons why the child was not currently placed with the mother. A prior finding of abuse/neglect and substance abuse were the most frequent problems cited by caseworkers. Almost 40 percent of mothers were noted as having criminal justice involvement. Inadequate housing, unemployment, and mental or physical health concerns were cited in over half of the cases.

Table 3-12
Resident Mother Problems

<i>Type of Problem</i>	<i>%</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
Alcohol/drugs	65.4	1.5
Prior finding of abuse/neglect	58.6	1.4
Unemployment	58.1	3.0
Inadequate housing/homelessness	57.4	2.6
Mental/physical health	54.1	3.1
Domestic violence	39.7	6.8
Criminal justice involvement	37.5	4.4
No child care	26.2	4.8
<i>Agency offered services for all problems</i>	83.7	1.6
<i>Mother complied with all services offered</i>	40.3	1.3

Casework practice likely becomes more difficult when parents have multiple problems. The range of services that must be coordinated and provided is more complicated for the mother to

navigate and the agency to manage. Workers noted 24 percent of the mothers had two or three of the problems and 60 percent reported mothers with four or more problems.

Description of Nonresident Fathers

The nonresident fathers of the children sampled represent a varied group. While most workers, at the time of the interview, knew the identity of the fathers (88%), over one-third of the total sample (37%) had not yet established paternity. Like the resident mothers, most nonresident fathers still retained their parental rights (66%). Demographic characteristics of identified nonresident fathers are similar to those of the resident mothers though fathers are slightly older (36 vs. 32 years old) and less likely to have never married (30% vs. 48%). As expected, caseworkers appear to know less about nonresident fathers, as the percent of “don’t know” responses is much higher than for similar questions for resident mothers.

Cases involving unidentified or not located fathers means the caseworker may have to perform tasks to identify and locate the father. A variety of individuals and resources were noted by caseworkers as methods they used to obtain information on fathers. As previously discussed, the likelihood of a worker having contact with a nonresident father diminished greatly if the identity and location of the father was not known at, or shortly after, case opening.

While the vast majority of caseworkers noted sharing the case plan with contacted fathers and telling fathers about their child’s placement (94% and 96%), they noted only half of contacted fathers expressed an interest in the child living with him. Caseworkers noted a number of barriers to contacting fathers. The most frequent barrier, father unreachable by telephone, was also the barrier that workers reported as causing the most difficulty. Given the saturation of cell phone use within the general population, this barrier might seem outdated. Perhaps this new

technology that allows for caller identification and frequent changes in numbers has affected caseworker expectations. Caseworkers themselves are likely to be more accessible by cell phone making them doubly frustrated by clients who are not equally accessible.

Like mothers, nonresident fathers face numerous challenges to having their children live with them but far fewer fathers are visiting their children. For cases in which fathers had been contacted, over 40 percent (42%) of caseworkers noted fathers with four or more problems—the most frequently cited problem was alcohol and drug use (58%). Not surprisingly, nonresident fathers were less likely to have visited their child at least once than resident mothers. Still, over half (55%) of the contacted fathers had done so. And of the fathers who had visited, almost a third (31%) visit at least weekly. While most of the contacted fathers were not providing financial or non-financial support, some were doing so. Almost thirty percent (29%) had provided financial support at some point since case opening and almost a third (32%) had provided non-financial support.

The sections that follow provide detailed tables and discussion of these issues.

Paternity Establishment

Total Fathers

Table 3-13 provides information on whether the fathers in our study were only alleged to be the fathers or had paternity established

(which we refer to as legal birth fathers). Caseworkers were asked whether paternity had been established for the child and if so, by what method.³⁷ Likewise, if the caseworker responded that

³⁷ For study purposes, paternity was established if the caseworker responded in the affirmative to the question. Subsequent analysis of ways in which paternity was established (e.g., genetic testing, signing of voluntary paternity document, father's name on birth certificate, self-declaration by father, default order) did not negate a caseworker's

paternity had not yet been established, a series of questions were asked to examine why this had not yet occurred. These data reveal that the majority of nonresident fathers had established paternity and were known to workers at the time of placement. Sixty-three percent of nonresident fathers were fathers with established paternity; the balance remained alleged. In only a small minority of cases (3%), did mothers claim exemption from identifying the father based on a threat to herself or her child. Multiple possible fathers were identified in 25 percent of the cases, with considerable variation among states (17% in Tennessee to 32% in Arizona).

Table 3-13
Paternity Establishment

<i>N</i> =1,958	
<i>Type</i>	<i>%</i>
Legal	62.8
Alleged	37.2
<i>More than one potential father identified</i>	24.8
<i>Mother claim exemption from identifying father</i>	2.9
<i>How was paternity established? (N=1239)</i>	<i>%</i>
Father's name on birth certificate	42.0
Genetic/DNA testing	24.4
Voluntary paternity document	16.1
Father states he is the father and/or signed non-legal documents	5.8
Established by default order	0.6
Other	8.2
Don't know	3.0
<i>Why paternity not established (all that apply, N=718)</i>	<i>%</i>
Other	57.8
Unable to locate alleged father	35.1
Alleged father denies paternity	21.3
Alleged father unaware of child	18.9
Action in progress	7.3
DNA excluded alleged father	8.5

Of cases with paternity established, 42 percent of workers cited paternity had been established through the father's name on the birth certificate and 24 percent noted genetic testing. Determination of paternity through having the father's name on the birth certificate

response. Thus, while we recognize that self-declaration of fatherhood is not the same as legally established paternity, for purposes of the study, these cases were considered to have had paternity established.

varied from 26 percent in Minnesota to 49 percent in Tennessee. Genetic testing as the method ranged from 14 percent in Tennessee to 39 percent in Arizona. For children whose paternity had not been established (37% of the overall sample), caseworkers most frequently cited “other” reasons (58%) than those offered in the question posed to them. “Other” reasons why paternity was not established included not knowing who the father was, alleged fathers failing paternity tests, not having the father’s name on the birth certificate, the alleged father abandoning the child, or the mother or father refusing to cooperate. Inability to locate the alleged father (35%), and the alleged father being unaware of the child (19%) or his denial of the child (21%) were also frequently cited reasons for not establishing paternity. A relatively small proportion of cases had a paternity action in progress (7%).³⁸

Status of Fathers’ Parental Rights

Total Fathers Important to the discussion of nonresident fathers is whether or not the father has parental rights to his child in foster care. Analyses were conducted on all cases because parental rights can be terminated when diligent search efforts fail to identify a father. Findings from more detailed analyses of this issue are presented in chapter 4. As shown in table 3-14, most of the cases in this study involved nonresident fathers (66%) with parental rights to their children still intact. All states have relatively low levels of nonresident fathers relinquishing their rights, ranging from 3 percent in Arizona to 9 percent in

³⁸ While terminology differs between child welfare and child support agencies, for study purposes, fathers for whom the child’s caseworker cited “paternity has been established” are considered legal birth fathers; all other fathers are considered to be alleged fathers. The use of the term “birth father” is prevalent in child welfare agencies as the term applied to the biological father of an adopted child. There is no equivalent term used for biological fathers of foster children and thus, survey questions often used the term “birth father.”

Minnesota. Termination of rights is more prevalent than relinquishment in each of the states, and highest in Minnesota at 37 percent.

<i>N</i> =1955	
<i>Parental rights to this child</i>	%
Still has parental rights	65.9
Father's rights were terminated	20.3
Father relinquished his rights	4.8
Don't know	9.0
<i>Rights of father to his other children</i>	%
Still has rights to other children	41.9
Relinquished or terminated	8.7
N/A father has no other children	3.6
N/A not known if father has other children	19.1
Don't know	26.7

Note: N does not equal 1958 due to 3 fathers who died since the case was opened.

Identifying Nonresident Fathers

Total Fathers

Table 3-15 presents information provided by caseworkers on efforts to identify the study children's fathers. That is, for cases in which the father's identity was not known at case opening (a minority of the cases), workers were asked whom they contacted in an attempt to identify him.³⁹ As one would expect, the birth mother is likely to be the first person the worker asks about an unidentified father. Indeed, caseworkers reported asking the birth mother to identify the father in the vast majority of cases (84%). However, when asked, a little less than one third (31%) of the mothers provided information that could identify the father (e.g., name, SSN). Practices aimed at asking other individuals to identify the father appear to be less consistent and vary across states. In 44 percent of the cases, workers asked maternal relatives (ranging from 29% in Massachusetts to 50% in Arizona). In 40

³⁹ Fathers identified through consulting birth records are likely to be subsumed in the "identified at time of case opening" category if birth records were consulted at any time in the case preceding placement. The survey does not allow for delineation of this identification method.

percent of cases the worker asked another worker about the identity of the father. Children were consulted in 38 percent of cases, leading to a positive identification almost a quarter (23%) of the time. States varied in the degree to which they sought information from the child’s siblings (84% had at least one sibling, although not all were old enough to have assisted in identifying the father). Tennessee asked siblings in 20 percent of cases, Minnesota asked siblings in about 10 percent of cases, and workers in Massachusetts and Arizona asked siblings in less than 6 percent of cases.⁴⁰

Table 3-15
Identifying Nonresident Fathers

<i>N</i> =446		
<i>Who was asked to identify father?</i>	<i>% asked</i>	<i>% provided information (of those who were asked)</i>
Child’s mother	83.7	30.9
Mother’s relatives	44.4	20.9
Another worker	39.7	30.4
Child (only asked on children over 6)	37.9	23.4
Child’s sibling	10.8	21.1
Father’s relatives ^a	9.6	38.2
Other	18.5	23.2

Note: These questions were only asked for cases in which the fathers had not been identified at the time of case opening. See Figure 3-3 for the cumulative percentage of identified fathers over time.

^a Caseworkers who responded to this question may be referring to paternal relatives of the study child’s siblings. While the father of the study child was not identified, it could be that the caseworker believes the child has the same father as one or more of the child’s siblings and asks these relatives for help in identifying the study child’s father.

The most effective method of identifying the father was asking paternal relatives, though caseworkers are unlikely to use this method because the father is unidentified.⁴¹ However, when asked, 38 percent of paternal relatives provided identifying information. Other sources child

⁴⁰ Some siblings may have been too young to assist with locating the father. Unlike the “ask child” question, the “ask sibling” question did not consider the age of siblings (i.e., only with cases involving children over 6 were caseworkers asked whether the child was asked about the father’s location) because information on sibling age was not collected.

⁴¹ Caseworkers who did respond to this question may be referring to paternal relatives of the study child’s siblings. While the father of the study child was not identified it could be that the caseworker believes the child has the same father as one or more of the child’s siblings and asks these relatives for help in identifying the study child’s father.

welfare workers used to identify fathers (19%) included friends of the mother, fathers of other children and ex-husbands or boyfriends. Other methods lead to identification information in about 23 percent of cases that used them.

Characteristics

Identified Fathers

Table 3-16 provides demographic characteristics of the identified fathers (that is, the 1,721 fathers who were identified at some point prior to the caseworker interview). These fathers were an average of 36 years old, with a range of 14 to 78. Just over half were white, 21 percent were Hispanic, and 23 percent were African-American. Arizona had the largest proportion of Hispanic fathers (37%) while Tennessee had the smallest (3%). Tennessee had the largest proportion of African-American fathers (37%) while Arizona had the smallest (13%). Minnesota had the smallest proportion of white fathers (45%) while Arizona had the largest (60%).

The vast majority of nonresident fathers were U.S. citizens, either by birth or naturalization. However it should be noted that workers did not know the father's immigration status in 22 percent of the cases in which they knew the father's identity. Only 4 percent were known to be non-citizens. Most caseworkers knew the educational attainment of few nonresident fathers in our study (30%). The vast majority of those with known education levels were at or below high school equivalency.

Table 3-16
Nonresident Father Characteristics

<i>N</i> =1,721	
Age (mean)	36.3
Race (<i>N</i> = 1,720)	%
White	53.9
African American	23.0
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2.2
Asian	.6
Mixed	1.0
Other	2.1
Don't know	17.2
Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin	20.9
U.S. citizenship	%
Yes	74.1
No	4.0
Don't know	21.9
Highest level of education	%
Less than 12 years	13.1
High school diploma or GED	15.0
Some college, vocational school	2.2
Don't know	69.7
Marital status	%
Never married	29.9
Married to, but separated from, birth mother	10.9
Married to someone other than birth mother	11.7
Divorced from birth mother	11.6
Divorced from someone other than birth mother	4.7
Separated	1.3
Don't know	29.9
Living situation (<i>N</i> =1,056) ^a	%
Living alone	13.9
Living with birth mom of child ^b	4.0
Living with woman other than birth mom (romantic)	22.4
Other	24.1
Don't know	35.6
^a These questions were only asked for cases in which the fathers had been identified and the agency or worker had made contact with the father in the past 6 months.	
^b Length of time between sample selection and interview means living arrangements may have changed.	

Caseworkers reported almost a third of the cases (30%) involved fathers who were never married. Almost a quarter (23%) were married, 11 percent still married to the birth mother. Another 12 percent were divorced from the birth mother. The proportion of married fathers was

largest in Tennessee (28%) compared to a low of 15 percent in Minnesota. Tennessee had the largest percentage of divorced fathers (24%) and Arizona had the lowest (13%).

Caseworkers reported not knowing the living situation of 36 percent of the identified nonresident fathers in the study. Twenty-two percent of fathers were reported to live with a woman who was not the child's mother, 14 percent lived alone, and 4 percent lived with the birth mother. As noted with resident mothers' living situations, while cases were eligible only if the biological father was not living in the home from which the child was removed, due to the length of time between sample pull and interview date, living arrangements may have changed. Almost one-quarter (24%) of the fathers did not live in any of the previously mentioned living situations. Other arrangements include incarceration, living with adult family members, and military deployment.

Locating Fathers



**Identified
Fathers**

Earlier we noted the methods caseworkers used to identify nonresident fathers. This section describes methods used to locate fathers. The base population for these analyses is the 1,721 fathers (88%) identified at any point before the interview with the caseworker. Slightly over half of the identified fathers (52%) were located at case opening and thus, the worker did not have to locate the father.

For cases involving identified fathers not located at the time the case opened, caseworkers were asked questions about methods used to locate fathers who had been identified. Similar to findings on identifying methods, almost all caseworkers (86%) reported asking the child's mother how to locate nonresident fathers (table 3-17). Caseworkers reported less than

half of the mothers (40%) who were asked, provided information on the father's location and there was considerable state variation (from 34% in Arizona to 51% in Minnesota) in this practice. Workers also asked other workers (40%), mother's relatives (33%), and the child (34%). Minnesota workers were most likely to ask other workers (53%) and Massachusetts' workers were least likely to ask other workers (28%). While the states were similar on the percent of workers asking children, the percent of success with this method varied greatly, from only 10 percent in Arizona to 38 percent in Tennessee. The most successful resources were paternal relatives, giving location information 60 percent of the time, although these relatives were only utilized by 20 percent of caseworkers.

Table 3-17
Locating Nonresident Fathers

<i>N</i> =802		
<i>Who was asked about father's location? (all that apply)</i>	<i>% asked</i>	<i>% provided information (of those who were asked)</i>
Child's mother	86.0	39.8
Another worker	40.0	40.3
Mother's relatives	33.4	28.6
Child (only asked if child is 7 or older)	34.3	27.6
Father's relatives	20.4	60.3
Child's sibling (only asked if child had siblings)	9.6	22.8
Other	29.8	49.1
<i>What records were searched? (all that apply)</i>		
Law enforcement records	44.4	30.7
Public aid (TANF, Food stamps, Medicaid)	34.4	14.2
Telephone books	30.7	10.2
DMV records	22.1	18.4
Utility company records	11.0	7.8
Other	21.6	23.2

Note: Only cases in which fathers were not located at time of case opening were included in these analyses.

There was considerable variation across states in other resources searched to find fathers. Arizona consistently utilized resources from other departments in a greater proportion of cases when compared to the three other states. Law enforcement records were most frequently

searched (22% in Massachusetts to 57% in Arizona), followed by public aid files (10% in Massachusetts to 56% in Arizona).

Child welfare workers also found means of locating fathers that were not originally included in the survey responses. These resources included newspaper ads, bankruptcy records and credit bureaus, other benefits workers, “calling every surname in town,” family and friends, Internet searches, and putative father registries.⁴²

Table 3-18 provides information on locating resources. Overall, caseworkers contacted the state child support offices in 20 percent of cases. Interestingly, when asked whether the agency encouraged them to make referrals to child support, 63 percent of all caseworkers responded “yes.” Minnesota (39%) and Tennessee (33%) were more likely to refer cases to child support than Arizona (18%) and Massachusetts (3%). Caseworkers who heard back from child support offices at the time of the interview averaged 43 percent across the states, ranging from 35 percent in Arizona to 78 percent in Minnesota.

<i>N</i> =802	%
State child support office contacted	20.1
State parent locator service	33.4
Federal parent locator service	7.5
Other locating resource	7.6

Note: Only cases in which fathers were not located when the case opened were included in these analyses.

Thirty-three percent of caseworkers reported that the state parent locator services had been used to locate the father in the case.⁴³ There was considerable variability among states in the use of both the state and federal parent locator services. Use of the state locator services was reported in

⁴² Putative father registries are listings of non-legal fathers. This is, the father has been named, but the father has not established paternity.

79 percent of Arizona’s cases while use of the state locator services was only reported in 3 percent of Massachusetts’ cases. Caseworkers reported not knowing whether state locator services were used in a substantial portion of cases including 32 percent in Minnesota and 23 and 21 percent in Tennessee and Massachusetts, respectively. Federal parent locator services (FPLS) were also most frequently used in Arizona cases.⁴⁴ In 18 percent of Arizona’s cases, workers reported use of the FPLS while the other states ranged from 0 to 2 percent. The proportion of “don’t know” responses was substantial averaging 31 percent across the four states.

Caseworkers were asked what types of identifying and locating information on fathers were located in the case record (table 3-19). Most caseworkers reported having the full name (87%)⁴⁵ and date of birth (77%) of the child’s identified father in the case file. The presence of other information was less frequent, but included social security number (44% total, ranging from 27% in Massachusetts to 58% in Arizona), address (38% total, ranging from 30% in Massachusetts to 43% in Tennessee), names of paternal relatives (35%), phone number (34%), and other information (18%).⁴⁶ Relatively few caseworkers had information about the father’s employment (12% total, ranging from 6% in Massachusetts to 17% in Tennessee).

⁴³ The question read, “To your knowledge, was the state/federal parent locator services used by your agency to locate the father?” While it is unlikely that child welfare caseworkers could use the service directly, we did not want workers to report on possible child support locate activities undertaken for child support purposes.

⁴⁴ Federal data confirm extensive use of the federal parent locator service (FPLS) in Arizona.

⁴⁵ This number does not equal the number of “identified” fathers. Identified fathers comprise cases in which the father’s name was known at time of case opening and cases for which the agency (at time of interview) had identified a father of the child. The worker may have identified a father but not yet have the father’s name in the case record.

⁴⁶ “Other information” caseworkers have about fathers included some background and assessment information, criminal history, paternal relative and significant other contact information, and physical description.

<i>N</i> =1,721	%
Full name	87.3
Birth date ^a	77.2
Social security number	43.6
Address	38.1
Paternal relatives	35.1
Phone number	33.9
Employer information	11.8
Alias	9.7
Other information	18.0

^a Caseworkers were asked the father's age. When a father's age was provided either through preload data or through asking the worker respondent it was considered having date of birth in the case record.

Agency Contact with Fathers and Barriers to Contact

Identified Fathers

Table 3-20 provides information on worker and agency contact with identified fathers. Barriers to contact were asked of all cases whether or not the agency had made contact with the father. Caseworkers were asked which circumstances posed a barrier to contacting nonresident fathers. Caseworkers were also asked to report on the type of relationship between the mother and nonresident father.

<i>N</i> =1,721	%	% caused difficulty
<i>Type of circumstance (all that apply)</i>		
Unreachable by phone	59.9	94.0
Out of state	31.4	80.5
Incarceration ^a	30.5	53.1
Problem transportation	21.5	70.0
Homeless/unstable address	10.6	84.5
Out of country	5.1	93.9
Language barrier	3.1	78.3

^a Of the "ever incarcerated," 43 percent were incarcerated at the time of the survey. All other incarcerated fathers had been incarcerated at some point since the case opening.

If caseworkers indicated fathers were affected by any circumstance, they were asked if the circumstances made contact difficult. Sixty percent reported that fathers were unreachable by

phone, which caused difficulty in almost all (94%) cases. Thirty-one percent of fathers were out of state, which caused difficulty in 81 percent of cases. This finding argues for making more extensive use of the Federal Parent Locator Service, since state locator services cannot locate out-of-state parents. Thirty-one percent of fathers had been incarcerated at some point since case opening, and 43 percent of those were currently incarcerated. The proportion of currently incarcerated fathers ranged from 32 percent of total incarcerated (since case opening) in Minnesota to 48 percent of total incarcerated in Tennessee. Incarceration caused difficulty in 53 percent of cases.

Language barriers, being out of the country, and being homeless were circumstances that affected relatively small proportions of fathers, although they made contact difficult. Of the circumstances listed, incarceration and transportation issues created the least difficulty for caseworkers.

Though some workers reported that some fathers experienced no circumstances that affected contact (14%), many workers reported multiple circumstances that may cause barriers to contact. In 42 percent of the cases, workers reported two or three barriers and in 7 percent of the cases, four or more barriers.

Another barrier to contact with the nonresident father is the relationship between the birth mother and nonresident father. Almost two-thirds of the cases were reported to involve relationships in which parents are hostile with one another, hardly ever or never talk to one another.⁴⁷ Workers did not know the type of relationship between the parents in 9 percent of the cases. The type of relationship does appear to affect agency-father contact. Fathers in

⁴⁷ A father is classified as having a good relationship with the child's mother if the caseworker reported that the mother and father are friends, are romantically involved on a steady basis, or involved in an on-again/off-again romantic relationship.

relationships reported to be friendly or romantic were more likely to have contact with the agency than fathers in relationships reported to be less positive (92%** vs. 65%).

Child-Father Visitation



**Contacted
Fathers**

Caseworkers were asked to describe visitation between the nonresident father and his child in foster care (table 3-21). Before presenting the findings it is important to note that a nonresident father's visitation with his child in foster care is not unrestrained. Custody and visitation orders often dictate visitation for separated and divorced fathers. Fathers may also be restrained due to protection orders established to prohibit contact with the child's mother. Kinship arrangements with maternal kin may also create some restraints for fathers in visiting their children. Even non-kin foster care arrangements can set up constraints to father-child visitation. Over fifty (56%) percent of nonresident fathers who had been identified and had at least one contact with the agency had visited their child at least once since the child had been in foster care. This represents only 30 percent of the total sample of nonresident father cases. The analyses in this section included cases in which the father had been contacted at least once during the case (at the time of the interview). Forty percent of these fathers always or almost always attend planned visits while almost a third (29%) never attend planned visits or have no planned visits. While this figure seems somewhat promising in terms of fathers engaging with their children while the children are in foster care, the 40 percent who always or almost always visit are only 13 percent of the total sample of nonresident fathers. Most fathers had at least one visit with clusters of responses at one visit (21%), monthly (23%) or weekly (19%) visitation. Twelve percent of caseworkers reported nonresident fathers see their children more than once a week. Similar to resident

mothers, the vast majority (84%) of the fathers who had phone contact also visited with their children.

<i>N</i> =1,071	
<i>Percent of fathers who have visited with child (since case opening)</i>	55.5
<i>Visitation (w/in past 6 months)(N=608)</i>	%
Always or almost always attends planned visits	40.3
Sometimes attends	14.3
Rarely attends	13.5
Never attends or has no planned visits	28.5
Don't know	3.5
<i>Frequency of visitation (w/in past 6 months)(N=400)</i>	%
No visits	6.4
One visit	20.9
Monthly	23.1
Twice a month	15.5
Weekly	19.2
More than once a week	12.1
Don't know	2.9
<i>Note: All workers who had been in contact with fathers were asked whether he ever visited the child. If the father had ever visited, workers were asked about his attendance for planned visitations (N=608). If fathers rarely, sometimes, almost always, or always attend planned visitation (N=400), workers were asked the frequency of visitation.</i>	

Father Engagement

Contacted Fathers Tables 3-22 and 3-23 provide findings on engaging nonresident fathers in casework. Again, workers were only asked to respond to these questions if the father of the case in question had had contact with the worker or agency; thus, the questions were asked in 1,071 cases. Important to remember is that the contacted fathers represent just over half (55%) of the total sample.

Caseworkers with cases involving fathers whom the agency had not yet contacted were not asked questions about father engagement. For cases in which fathers had been contacted, a range of issues representing possible engagement both between the worker and the father as well as between the father and his child were examined. Types of agency engagement include

whether the agency shared the case plan with the father and whether or not the agency considered placing the child with his or her father or paternal relatives. Father engagement includes whether a father had expressed an interest in having his child live with him and whether he provided the child with financial or non-financial support.

<i>N</i> =1,071	%
Father told of child's out-of-home placement	95.9
Agency shared plan with fathers	93.5
Father expressed interest in child living with him	50.3
Agency considered placing child with father	45.1
Agency considered placing child with paternal relatives (<i>N</i> =791) ^a	53.9
Agency sought health care coverage from father as part of the case plan	14.3
Agency sought financial assistance from father as part of the case plan	36.6

^a Only asked of cases in which the child was not in paternal kin placement.

Caseworkers report telling almost all contacted fathers about the child's out-of-home placement (96%) and sharing the case plan with them (94%). Half of the contacted fathers expressed an interest in having the child live with them. Caseworkers reported considering placement with 45 percent of contacted fathers, ranging from 34 percent in Massachusetts to 51 percent in Minnesota. Workers initiated an assessment for 87 percent of fathers the agency considered as potential placement resources, and performed a child protective services (CPS) clearance on 83 percent of them. The proportion of cases in which a CPS clearance check was conducted varied by state—from 71 percent in Massachusetts to 89 percent in Tennessee. Consideration of paternal relatives as placement options varied from 44 percent of cases with

contacted fathers in Massachusetts to 67 percent in Minnesota, with an average of 54 percent across the study states.⁴⁸

There was considerable variation between states in whether or not caseworkers sought health care coverage or financial assistance from nonresident fathers. Seeking health insurance coverage was part of the case plan in 9 percent of the contacted father cases in Massachusetts, but 21 percent in Minnesota. In Massachusetts, 11 percent of case plans included obtaining financial assistance from the father, compared to 38 percent in Minnesota, 41 percent in Arizona, and 55 percent in Tennessee.

The proportion of cases with contacted fathers who ever provided financial support (table 3-23) was largest in Tennessee (35%) and smallest in Arizona (21%). In most cases where the father had provided financial support, the support came regularly (43%) or occasionally (33%). Almost one-third of contacted fathers (32%) had provided non-financial support such as clothes, diapers, child care, food, or health insurance. Almost a quarter (23%) of the fathers provided both financial and non-financial support; 9 percent only financial, and 12 percent only non-financial. States varied somewhat with Arizona having only 18 percent of fathers providing both financial and non-financial support while in Massachusetts and Tennessee, a quarter of fathers (25%) provided both. Arizona workers reported only 5 percent of fathers providing only financial support while 14 percent of Minnesota workers reported fathers providing only financial support.

⁴⁸ Only included cases in which the child was not currently placed with paternal relatives.

**Table 3-23
Nonresident Father Support**

<i>N</i> =1,071	
<i>Ever provided financial support</i>	%
Yes	29.0
No	58.9
Don't know	12.1
<i>Type of financial support (N=349)^a</i>	%
Regular (weekly or monthly)	43.2
Some, not regular	12.4
Occasional, sporadic	32.8
None of these options	8.0
Don't know	3.7
<i>Ever provided non-financial support</i>	%
Yes	31.5
No	56.4
Don't know	12.2

^a Only cases in which the father had ever provided financial support were asked about the type of support.

Father Problems

Contacted Fathers

Caseworkers were asked questions regarding the problems or issues of concern that affect whether or not a child can be placed with the father.

As shown (table 3-24), the most frequently cited problem for fathers was alcohol/drug abuse (58%). Slightly over half the contacted fathers were reported to have problems associated with criminal justice involvement.⁴⁹ States varied slightly in the problems noted for fathers. Unemployment was reported less in Massachusetts' cases (32% vs. 39-46% in the other states) and a prior finding of abuse/neglect was cited more frequently as a problem in Massachusetts' cases (40% vs. 25-27% in the other states). Arizona reported more cases in which fathers had alcohol or drug problems (64%) while Massachusetts and Tennessee had the least with 54%.

⁴⁹ Criminal justice involvement was meant to include a wide range of possible involvement including fathers who might have been arrested, were pending trial, incarcerated, or on probation.

**Table 3-24
Nonresident Father Problems**

<i>N</i> =1,071	%	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
<i>Type of Problem (all that apply)</i>		
Alcohol/drugs	58.2	15.2
Criminal justice involvement	52.5	13.3
Inadequate housing/homelessness	41.7	12.4
Unemployment	40.7	15.1
Domestic violence	33.3	17.9
Prior finding of abuse/neglect	29.6	8.5
Mental/physical health	22.9	15.4
No child care	21.2	15.1
<i>Agency offered services for all problems</i>	58.6	5.1
<i>Father complied with all services offered</i>	22.5	3.5

Note: Caseworkers were asked about the problem areas of fathers with whom they had been in contact (*N*=1,071). If a father had a problem in one or more areas, workers were asked whether or not services were offered to him (*N*=929). If services were offered, workers were asked whether or not he complied with provided services (*N*=522).

Multiple problems almost certainly impact fathers’ ability to care for and visit their children. In 14 percent of the cases, workers noted fathers with no problems but in over 40 percent (42%) workers report fathers with four or more of the problems listed. There was some variation in the proportion of fathers with multiple problems. Tennessee reported slightly less fathers (35%) with four or more problems than the other states (42-46%).

Caseworkers were asked whether services were provided to nonresident fathers to assist them in overcoming the problems identified and whether or not fathers had complied with services. In almost 60 percent (59%) of the contacted father cases caseworkers reported offering services to fathers but workers reported only 23 percent of fathers had complied with all the services offered.

Summary of Descriptive Analyses

This chapter presented findings on the case-level data collection effort conducted in four states—Arizona, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Tennessee. Data on 1,958 eligible cases were collected through telephone interviews with 1,222 caseworkers. Workers provided detailed information on

casework practices regarding nonresident fathers of children in foster care and the characteristics and potential limitations of these fathers.

Nonresident fathers had been identified by local child welfare agencies in almost 90 percent (88%) of the cases by the time of the interview (see figure 3-5) and most were identified early on in the case process. As the case unfolds it becomes less likely that an unidentified father will be identified even though workers are making efforts. For cases with fathers not identified at the time of case opening, the caseworker reported asking a number of different individuals—the child’s mother, mother’s relatives, other workers—for assistance in identifying the father. Less than a third of the mothers (31%) who were asked provided identifying information on the father, and other sources were not very successful either. We examined whether practices differed by whether or not the child’s mother provided information under the assumption that if the mother did not provide information, the caseworker would have more incentive to ask for assistance from other individuals. The assumption held true for some categories—for example, caseworkers reported seeking help from a mother’s relatives in only about a third of cases (31%) in which mothers provided identifying information and in over half the cases (55%) in which mothers did not provide identifying information ($p < .01$). Caseworkers were also more likely to report seeking help from the child and siblings in cases in which the mother did not provide information on the father. However, workers were not more likely to seek help from another worker in these cases. It appears as if casework practice regarding identifying fathers is case specific and variable.

Workers also reported on how they located fathers who had been identified. Similar to the questions related to identifying fathers, caseworkers reported asking for help from the mother, the mother’s relatives, the child, siblings, and other workers as well as the father’s

relatives. Workers also consulted a number of other sources including law enforcement, public assistance and department of motor vehicles records, and telephone books. Caseworkers were more likely to report seeking help from a variety of sources including mother's relatives, siblings, DMV records, public assistance records, telephone books and utilities, when the mother did not provide locate information on the father than when the mother did provide such information. However, the percent of cases in which workers asked these sources is low. And, while over 60 percent of workers noted that their agency encouraged referrals to child support for locating the father, in only 20 percent of the cases in which the father had not been located did the worker refer the case to child support. In the next chapter, findings from the child support data linkage are presented and a more detailed discussion is provided.

Workers were asked to report on circumstances that may make contact with the nonresident father difficult. The most frequently reported circumstances were fathers who were unreachable by phone (60%). While incarceration was cited as a circumstance in almost a third of cases (31%), it was noted as causing difficulty with contact in only about half of these cases (53%).⁵⁰ Other circumstances—such as unreliable transportation, homelessness or unstable housing, and being out of the country—while cited less frequently caused greater difficulty with agency-father contact. The type of relationship between the mother and nonresident father also affects agency-father contact. Fathers in relationships perceived as hostile by the caseworker or fathers who hardly ever or never talk to the mother were less likely to have had contact with the agency.

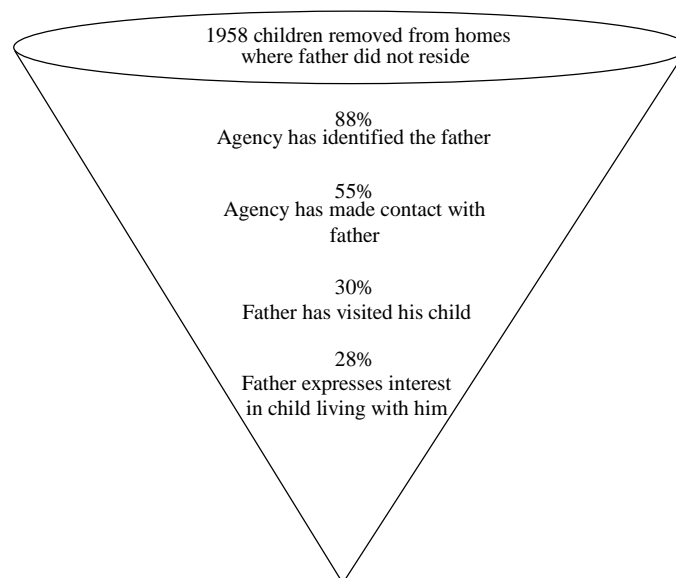
Slightly over half of all cases had fathers who had been contacted by the worker (55%) (See figure 3-5). Workers were asked specific questions related to agency-father engagement and

⁵⁰ Incarcerated at some point since case opening.

father-child visitation for the contacted fathers. Over 90 percent of caseworkers reported sharing the case plan with these contacted fathers and telling him about his child's out-of-home placement, though this represents only about half of the entire sample. Far fewer of the contacted fathers had visited their child (56%) representing only 30 percent of all fathers in the sample.

Caseworkers reported half of the contacted fathers expressed an interest in having the child live with them (28% of entire sample). For cases involving fathers with whom the agency had made contact, workers were asked to identify problems or issues that prevented the child from being placed with his or her father. In over half the contacted cases (58%), workers noted fathers with drug or alcohol abuse problems and half of the fathers were involved with the criminal justice system in some way (i.e., incarcerated, on parole, awaiting trial). Caseworkers reported offering services to fathers in over half of the cases (59%) but reported only 23 percent of the fathers had complied with the services offered.

Figure 3-5. Father Engagement



Many nonresident fathers have multiple problems. Workers reported over forty percent (42%) of the contacted fathers had four or more of the problems listed. It is important to emphasize that these data represent only the fathers with whom the agency or worker had contact. Fathers who have not been identified, located, or contacted by the agency may have more or fewer problems than the contacted fathers. However, it is interesting to note that caseworkers reported a similar frequency of problems for resident mothers. Comparisons between nonresident mothers and nonresident fathers are presented in chapter 4.

Overall the caseworkers interviewed appear to have conflicting opinions about father involvement. Most reported that father involvement enhances child well-being (72%) but only about half (53%) reported that nonresident fathers want to be part of the decision making about their children. In the next chapter, we examine whether worker bias may affect whether nonresident fathers are identified and contacted.

Engaging and involving nonresident fathers of foster children in permanency planning and casework is important and challenging for child welfare agencies. The findings presented in this chapter provide a first step in understanding this issue. While it may be tempting to use these data to paint a picture of casework practice and fathers that is not flattering (e.g., agencies must not be doing their best to engage nonresident fathers if only 55 percent of fathers have been contacted, and nonresident fathers must not care about their children because only 30 percent of fathers have visited their child), it would be premature. Findings from this exploratory study provide a first sketch, yet further analyses are needed in order to examine specific questions about casework practices. The analyses presented in chapter 4 provide some preliminary results for the next step in the process.

Chapter 4 Additional Analyses and Conclusions

Overview

In chapter 3 we presented descriptive information about the study children’s nonresident fathers—the fathers’ characteristics, contact with the child welfare agency, and involvement with their children. This chapter presents findings from analyses conducted on subgroups of nonresident fathers to determine if differences exist. We also compare and contrast nonresident fathers and nonresident mothers for context.⁵¹ Comparisons across groups of cases with differing child, case, and caseworker characteristics are also examined. Finally, multivariate analyses were conducted to examine factors associated with identified and involved fathers.⁵²

This chapter also presents findings from the study’s child support linkage component. This component, described in more detail in chapter 1, was implemented to examine the feasibility of using child support information to assist in identifying and locating nonresident fathers of children in foster care. Lastly, a summary of all study findings is provided.

Research and Practice as Guides

Examining nonresident parent and caseworker characteristics through comparative analyses of certain subgroups will help us understand factors that might influence caseworker activities (i.e., casework practices). Gaining a more complete understanding of how caseworkers identify, locate, and involve nonresident fathers will move the field closer to effectively utilizing all available resources, both maternal and paternal, to ensure the best outcomes for children in out-

⁵¹ Please note the discussion of nonresident mothers in chapter 3.

of-home placement. In part because there is so little research to guide these analyses, we relied more heavily on our knowledge of practice to guide the analyses presented in this chapter. Where research findings do exist, we attempted to incorporate such findings into our analysis plan.

First we tried to compare groups that, for casework purposes, might present differently. Nonresident fathers were grouped by whether they were reported to be the child's alleged or legal birth father. A legal father of a child in foster care might have more interest in and involvement with the child welfare agency. A caseworker may be required to (by policy or protocol) or feel more obligated to provide case information to a legal, rather than an alleged, father. Administrators noted problems occurring when children were placed with kin of men believed to be their fathers but later discovered not to be. Clearly, casework practices directed at nonresident fathers may differ by whether or not paternity is established.

Casework practices toward nonresident mothers and nonresident fathers and characteristics of the two groups were also examined. Child welfare policies and practices are often described as being maternally focused.⁵³ While resident mothers were described in chapter 3, comparing mothers and fathers in similar situations (i.e., not living in the home from which their child was removed), provides a more unbiased examination of casework practices. For example, caseworkers in a recent study on fathers in child welfare cases noted that a father's incarceration might be cause for less engagement (O'Donnell 2005). The analyses presented in this chapter will examine whether incarceration is reported by caseworkers as a barrier to contact for both nonresident mothers and nonresident fathers.

⁵² That is, the caseworker thought he or she had identified the study child's father. Involved fathers are defined as fathers caseworkers reported as visiting with their children frequently (twice a month or more) or supporting their children financially or non-financially.

⁵³ "Fatherhood Training Curriculum: Principles, Policies and Practices to Engage Fathers in their Children's Lives," National Family Preservation Network, 2005.

Caseworkers were asked whether or not the father was ever considered as a placement resource. These responses led to the creation of two subgroups of fathers—those who were considered as a placement option and those who were never considered or dismissed early in the case.⁵⁴ And while it would seem likely that the fathers' characteristics would affect whether they were considered as a placement resource, local agency policies and protocols are also likely to impact this determination. In fact, child welfare agencies routinely identify and assess nonresident parents as potential placement resources, and some states' policies explicitly give them preference. (Sonenstein et al. 2002).

Case characteristics including type of placement, permanency goal, length of placement, and child's age were also examined through comparative analyses. For example, we wanted to know whether nonresident fathers are more likely to visit their children if the children are placed with kin versus with non-kin. Past research has shown children visit with parents more frequently when placed with kin (Geen 2003). However, given the majority of kin placements are with maternal family, visits with fathers could be less affected or even negatively affected if the relationship between the father and mother's kin is poor. We also examined whether identifying and locating methods differ if the child was living with kin. If a child is placed with kin, do caseworkers make fewer efforts to identify and locate the father?

Casework practice is premised on the case plan or permanency goal for the foster child. That is, if the case goal is to reunify the child with his or her mother, then services and practices are directed at that goal. Would a case plan goal of adoption translate into more aggressive

⁵⁴ It is important to remember that the caseworker respondent is the ongoing or foster care worker. It is not possible to determine whether the caseworker respondent is reporting on whether the father had ever been considered as a resource at some point in the case prior to the worker being assigned.

efforts to identify and locate nonresident fathers to meet diligent search requirements for adoption? Would visits between the child and his or her father be less frequent?

Given the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act and the renewed focus on expedited permanency for children in placement it seems likely that the length of placement could affect caseworkers' actions, particularly as they attempt to identify and locate fathers. And while focusing on permanency would appear to increase attention on nonresident fathers (due to the father being a potential placement resource and the caseworker needing access to paternal kin) caseworkers might react differently. Clearly, many caseworkers (44% of respondents) feel that involving nonresident fathers makes a case more complicated (See chapter 3, page 57). Perhaps the expedited nature of today's casework means workers have less time to devote to father inclusion.

Similar to other casework practices, a father's involvement is likely to be influenced by his child's age. Fathers may be more or less likely to visit their child depending upon the age of the child. Older children may have weaker ties to their nonresident fathers or, conversely, older children may be more emotionally ready to initiate or continue a relationship with a nonresident father. Older children may also be less likely to have a goal of adoption and, thus, the caseworker may make fewer efforts to identify the father to terminate his parental rights.

Caseworker characteristics may also influence practice with nonresident fathers. A recent study noted in the literature review in chapter 1 examined differences in practices related to fathers by caseworkers' gender. Male caseworkers were less likely to voice frustration with involving fathers (O'Donnell et al. 2005). Responses to our training and worker opinion questions provide additional ways to group caseworkers for analysis. Caseworkers who received training on how to identify, locate, and involve nonresident fathers would likely do so more

competently. Caseworkers reporting more positive opinions of nonresident fathers may also be more likely to engage fathers. We categorized workers according to their responses to two opinion questions: caseworkers who “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that (1) nonresident fathers want to be part of the decision-making process with regard to their children, and (2) involvement of nonresident fathers enhances a child’s well-being. Workers who responded “neither agreed or disagreed,” “disagreed,” or “strongly disagreed” with both of the statements were grouped together. Caseworkers were also grouped according to whether they had received training on how to identify, locate, or engage nonresident fathers.

The comparison group analyses were conducted to identify certain factors we could further examine through multivariate analyses. With the logistic regression, factors that might be associated with the identified and involved nonresident fathers of children in foster care could be examined. Involved fathers were defined in two ways—through visiting with the child and through support provided to the child. Previous studies on nonresident fathers have examined their involvement by similar means (Lerman and Sorensen 2000).

Limitations

There are several limitations to the data presented in this chapter. Unlike the descriptive analyses presented in chapter 3, the comparison group and multivariate analyses required constructs be developed. Results of prior research studies would usually guide such construct development. However, little research has been conducted on this study’s population of nonresident fathers (i.e., fathers of children in foster care who were not residing in the home from which the child was removed). Some studies noted in the literature review section of chapter 1 and in this chapter’s overview section guide our analyses. For example, caseworkers in a recent study on

fathers in child welfare cases noted that a father's incarceration might be cause for less engagement (O'Donnell et al. 2005). Criminal justice involvement is examined as it relates to barriers to contact for the worker and as one of the reasons why the child cannot be placed with his or her father. We also obtained data on whether the nonresident father perpetrated the abuse or neglect. Both these factors may be associated with fathers' involvement and are included in the logistic regression. When we were unable to base the specific analyses on past research we examined the data from a general knowledge of casework practice.

Much of the general father involvement research is premised on the belief that father involvement affects child well-being, either positively or negatively. Our study is different in many ways. First, the population of nonresident fathers includes only fathers of children served by child protection agencies. Father involvement is defined differently for a family being served by a child welfare agency than it would be for a family not involved with child welfare. Visitation may be quite different—it is planned and often supervised by agency staff.⁵⁵ Visitation may only be allowed for fathers with whom the child has an established relationship or for legal fathers. A permanency goal of adoption by a non-relative may preclude visitation between the father and child. Caseworkers' efforts to contact a nonresident father may be directed at terminating his parental rights, not fostering the father-child relationship.

In addition to the different context in which we are examining father involvement, all our data is obtained through the lens of the child welfare caseworker. Some caseworkers responded “don't know” to certain questions. Caseworker responses to questions about practices (e.g., Did you share the case plan with the father?) were less likely to be “don't know” responses than

⁵⁵ Caseworkers may supervise a visit, or visits may occur in a supervised visitation center. Parent visitation often differs by whether the child is placed with kin or is placed in a non-kin foster home or other setting.

questions about the father’s characteristics and the problems that affected whether the child could be placed with him.

Some prior research findings could not be examined with our data. For example, some research suggests that a father’s marital status is a factor in whether he gains custody of his children when they are removed from the mother’s custody due to abuse or neglect (Greif and Zuravin 1989). However, caseworkers were unable to provide marital status for 30 percent of all nonresident fathers in the study sample. The percent of missing data is substantially higher for alleged fathers and fathers who were not considered as a placement resource.

Another important limitation to this chapter’s findings is the structure of the caseworker questionnaire. To obtain the most accurate and updated information, we limited certain questions to caseworkers who had been in “contact” with the nonresident father. We did not want caseworkers who had never been in contact with a nonresident father to respond to questions such as his marital or housing status, whether he had ever expressed interest in his child living with him, and the like. We were certain that responses to these types of questions—without actual contact with the father—would likely be secondhand from the child’s mother or guesswork on the part of the caseworker. Contact was defined broadly. The frequency of contact may have varied considerably but these data were not collected. For our study, the distinction is whether contact had ever been made.

The “contact” determination is likely to bias findings because of differential contact rates for certain subgroups. For example, while 73 percent of legal fathers had contact with the worker or agency, only 35 percent of alleged fathers did. Every nonresident mother had been contacted versus only 55 percent of all nonresident fathers. It is important to note that the “contact” differential only affects the analyses conducted on questions about “contacted father” cases (see

discussion in chapter 3, page 49). Comparisons between fathers considered for placement and those not similarly considered, are not affected by the “contact” differential. The question on whether placement had been considered was only asked of cases involving contacted fathers; however, our inability to determine the frequency and duration of contact does affect the interpretation of the findings. It could well be that fathers whom the worker considered as a placement for the child were fathers with whom the worker had fairly frequent contact while fathers not considered for placement had only minimal contact with the worker. As discussed later in this chapter, large percentages of “don’t know” responses on problem areas of fathers the agency did not consider for placement preclude a comparison of problems across the two groups of fathers.

Comparison Groups

In the following sections, findings from analyses on efforts to identify, locate, and involve nonresident fathers are presented. Comparisons across subgroups are presented first. First alleged and legal father subgroups are examined. Then nonresident fathers are examined in relation to nonresident mothers and finally, cases are examined by whether the father was ever considered as a placement resource.

Alleged vs. Legal fathers

As noted in chapter 3, all fathers for whom paternity was established were considered to be the study child’s legal birth father.⁵⁶ Fathers for whom paternity had not yet been established or for

⁵⁶ See footnote on page 75 in chapter 3.

whom caseworkers did not know whether paternity had been established were considered alleged fathers.

Demographic characteristics

Some differences were found between alleged and legal fathers (table 4-1). Significant differences were found in age. Legal birth fathers were on average slightly older than alleged fathers. Legal fathers were also more likely to be white and not Hispanic. Differences in level of education, marital status, and living situation cannot be examined due to high levels of “don’t know” responses for cases with alleged fathers.⁵⁷

	<i>Legal fathers (N=1,240)</i>	<i>Alleged fathers (N=481)</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Age (mean)</i>	37.0**	34.0
<i>Race</i>		
White	60.3**	38.3
African American	21.7	26.2
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2.4	1.5
Asian	.7	.3
Mixed	.9	1.1
Other	1.7	3.1
Don’t know	12.2**	29.5
<i>Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin</i>	17.5**	29.2
<i>U.S. citizenship</i>		
Yes	81.9	55.0
No	3.4	5.4
Don’t know	14.7	39.6
<i>Highest level of education (% don’t know)</i>	62.7	87.0

Based on t-tests, statistically significant differences between the alleged and legal father groups are denoted as * = $p < .05$ and ** = $p < .01$.

⁵⁷ Caseworkers did not know the father’s level of education in over 87 percent of alleged father cases and 63 percent of legal father cases. Father’s marital status was not known in 45 percent of alleged father cases and 27 percent of legal father cases.

Locating methods

Overall, caseworkers reported that fewer alleged fathers than legal fathers had been located at case opening: over half (62%) of legal fathers compared to 29 percent of alleged fathers.⁵⁸

Methods used to locate nonresident fathers are shown in table 4-2. As shown, caseworkers reported asking mothers for help locating the child’s father in the vast majority of

	<i>Legal fathers (N=465) %</i>	<i>Alleged fathers (N=337) %</i>
<i>Who was asked about father’s location? (all that apply)</i>		
Child’s mother	84.9	87.4
Another worker	37.8	42.8
Mother’s relatives	27.4	41.4
Child (only asked if child is age 7 or older)	34.0	34.7
Father’s relatives	26.7**	12.2
Child’s sibling (only asked if child had siblings)	9.1	10.4
Other	28.0	32.1
<i>What records were searched? (all that apply)</i>		
Law enforcement records	45.3	43.3
Birth certificate, vital stats	39.8	44.9
Public aid (TANF, Food stamps, Medicaid)	29.7**	40.7
Telephone books	27.6	34.8
DMV records	18.9*	26.3
Utility company records	9.0	13.7
Other	21.2	22.2
<i>Locating resources utilized (all that apply)</i>		
State parent locator	26.6**	42.4
Federal parent locator	5.7	9.9
Other locating resource	6.4	9.2
Based on t-tests, statistically significant differences between the alleged and legal father groups are denoted as * = $p < .05$ and ** = $p < .01$.		

both groups of fathers (85% and 87%). The same holds true for asking children for help locating their fathers. In similar portions of both groups of fathers, workers asked children for help (34%).

⁵⁸ Significant at $p < .01$.

Workers did report searching public aid records (30%** vs. 41%, $p < .01$), DMV records (19%** vs. 26%, $p < .05$), and use of the state parent locator (27%** vs. 42%, $p < .01$), more frequently in alleged father cases than legal fathers.

Not shown in table 4-2 is the percentage of sources that provided location information. As one might expect, caseworkers reported that mothers, mother's relatives, other workers, children, and siblings were all more likely to provide locate information for legal fathers than for alleged fathers. And, while use of some sources was more prevalent among cases involving alleged fathers, law enforcement records and public aid records were more likely to provide locate information for legal fathers than alleged fathers.

Barriers to contact

Barriers to contact with the worker were also examined for the alleged and legal fathers; however, "don't know" responses accounted for the majority of responses for alleged fathers. This is predictable if caseworkers have not yet determined if the alleged father is the child's legal father, the worker is likely to know less about the father. The percent of "don't know" responses for alleged fathers ranged from a low of 14 percent for "unreachable by phone" to a high of 71 percent for "problem transportation."

One noteworthy finding was that incarceration made contact difficult more frequently in cases involving alleged versus legal fathers (66%** vs. 50%, $p < .01$). This is likely the result of limitations on staff visits and contact with fathers who have not established paternity. Policies

and procedures for prison visitation by caseworkers and by children are variable across states, communities, and individual jail or prison facilities.⁵⁹

Problems

Large numbers of “don’t know” responses also made examining differences in problem areas and in services offered to legal and alleged fathers difficult to interpret. Due to frequent “don’t know” responses for alleged fathers, legal fathers (for whom more caseworkers answered the questions) were reported as being more likely to have each of the problems. As noted earlier, both groups represent “contacted” fathers; however, alleged fathers were less likely to have been contacted and thus are disproportionately represented.

Engagement

We conducted analyses to examine agency engagement with both groups of fathers. As shown in table 4-3, the overwhelming majority of both groups of nonresident fathers was told of the out-of-home placement and shared the case plan.⁶⁰ However, significant differences exist between the two groups of fathers in the father’s interest in the child living with him and the agency considering placing the child with him.⁶¹ Both of these questions had similar, low percentages of “don’t know” responses for both groups. Not shown in table 4-3 is the percentage of fathers assessed by the agency. If considered as a placement resource, legal fathers were more likely to be assessed by the agency than alleged fathers (89%* vs. 73%, $p < .05$). Caseworkers also

⁵⁹ Per communication with Amy Solomon, Justice Policy Center, Urban Institute and Betsey Nevins, Council of State Governments.

⁶⁰ Please note the earlier discussion of differential contact rates between alleged and legal fathers. While the percentages are similar for contacted fathers of both groups, the percentages differ across the larger groups, i.e., a caseworker cannot share a case plan with a father with whom there has been no contact.

⁶¹ These questions had low rates of “don’t know” responses for both legal and alleged fathers (2% for both questions and types of fathers).

reported legal fathers were far more likely to have provided financial or non-financial support since the case opened.⁶²

Table 4-3
Nonresident Father Engagement—Legal and Alleged Fathers

	<i>Legal fathers</i> (N=902) %	<i>Alleged fathers</i> (N=168) %
Father told of child’s out-of-home placement	96.2	94.1
Agency shared plan with fathers	93.4	93.8
Father expressed interest in child living with him	54.2**	31.0
Agency considered placing child with father	47.5**	32.5
Agency considered placing child with paternal relatives ^a	55.9*	43.2
Agency sought health care coverage from father as part of case plan	16.1**	5.1
Agency sought financial assistance as part of case plan	38.1*	28.8
Father ever provided financial support	33.6**	5.5
Father ever provided non-financial support	35.8**	9.6

Based on t-tests, statistically significant differences between the alleged and legal father groups are denoted as * = $p < .05$ and ** = $p < .01$.

^a Only asked of cases in which the child was not in paternal kin placement.

We asked caseworkers about the status of the relationship between the father and mother for a number of reasons (table 4-4). For many nonresident fathers, the mothers of their children have considerable control over when and if he visits the child. While the children in the study sample are in out-of-home placement, the relationship between the father and mother may still impact the father’s engagement with his child. Though caseworkers noted a greater percent of alleged fathers never talk to the mother of their child (43%** vs. 32%, $p < .01$), a small, but statistically significant percentage of legal fathers were reported to be in a “hostile” relationship with the mother of their child (14%** vs. 3%, $p < .01$). A similar percentage of legal fathers were reported by caseworkers to be “just friends” with the mother of their child (10%** vs. 1%, $p < .01$).

⁶² Analyses of the regularity of financial support could not be conducted due to small numbers of alleged fathers.

Table 4-4
Mother-Father Relationship—Legal and Alleged Fathers

	<i>Legal fathers</i> (<i>N=1,005</i>)	<i>Alleged fathers</i> (<i>N=292</i>)
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Never talk to each other	32.1**	42.7
Hardly ever talk to each other	19.6	17.7
Hostile toward each other	13.6**	3.4
Just friends	9.3**	1.2
On-again/off-again relationship	6.0	7.0
Steady relationship	4.1*	1.8
Other	8.2	13.1
Don't know	7.2	13.7

Based on t-tests, statistically significant differences between the alleged and legal father groups are denoted as * = $p < .05$ and ** = $p < .01$.

Termination of parental rights

Even when paternity has not been established (i.e., the child's father is "alleged") or in cases where the father is unknown, a father's parental rights can be terminated. However, as expected, legal fathers retained their parental rights more often than alleged fathers (71%** vs. 57%, $p < .01$) (See table 4-5). Caseworkers reported that parental rights had been terminated for one-quarter of alleged fathers.

Table 4-5
Status of Parental Rights—Legal and Alleged Nonresident Fathers

	<i>Legal fathers</i> (<i>N=1,239</i>)	<i>Alleged fathers</i> (<i>N=716</i>)
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Still has parental rights	71.1**	57.2
Father's rights were terminated	17.0**	25.8
Father relinquished his rights	6.1	2.4
Don't know	5.8	14.4

Based on t-tests, statistically significant differences between the alleged and legal father groups are denoted as * = $p < .05$ and ** = $p < .01$.

Nonresident fathers vs. nonresident mothers

As noted in chapter 3, cases involving “nonresident” mothers were identified during interviews with caseworkers.⁶³ Because these cases involved both mothers and fathers who were not living in the same household as the child prior to the child’s removal from the home, agency and worker practices toward these two groups of parents may be similar.

Nonresident mothers differ slightly from resident mothers (see tables 3-7 through 3-12 for a complete description of resident mothers). Nonresident mothers were slightly older (34 vs. 32) and more likely to be African American (26% vs. 20%) and Hispanic origin (23% vs. 18%). As one would expect, the percent of “don’t know” responses are greater in some categories for cases with nonresident mothers. Caseworkers did not know the nonresident mother’s level of education for more than half (52%) of cases compared to 26 percent for resident mothers. The percentage of “don’t know” responses was also greater for living situation and marital status of nonresident mothers compared to resident mothers.

Identifying and locating methods

Only 5 of the 323 (1.5%) nonresident mothers were unidentified at case opening compared to 446 of the 1,958 (23%) nonresident fathers. Comparative analyses on identification methods between unidentified nonresident mothers and fathers cannot be conducted because of the very small number of nonresident mothers unidentified at case opening. Nonresident mothers were more likely to have been located at case opening compared to nonresident fathers (78%** vs. 52%, $p < .01$).⁶⁴ While caseworkers asked the same types of individuals and used similar

⁶³ There were a total of 323 nonresident mother cases.

⁶⁴ These figures represent percent of identified nonresident fathers and nonresident mothers who were located at case opening. Caseworkers reported 73 nonresident mothers who had not been located at case opening.

resources in trying to locate both nonresident fathers and nonresident mothers, though they asked more frequently for nonresident mothers. For example, workers reported searching public aid records for both nonresident mothers and nonresident fathers but more frequently for nonresident mothers (51%* vs. 34%, $p < .05$). Children were more likely to be asked to help locate their nonresident mother than nonresident father (62%** vs. 34%, $p < .01$). Siblings were also more likely to be asked to help locate nonresident mothers (26%* vs. 10%, $p < .05$).

Barriers to contact

Among parents identified by caseworkers, nonresident mothers appear to share circumstances with nonresident fathers that might pose barriers to contact by caseworkers (see table 4-6). For both, workers most frequently noted that the nonresident parent was unreachable by telephone, which caused the most difficulty (94% and 95% respectively) for contact. It is important to note that in all the categories caseworkers responded “don’t know” more often for nonresident fathers than for nonresident mothers.⁶⁵ Overall, nonresident fathers were more likely to be out of state. Among parents for whom caseworkers had some information, nonresident mothers were more likely to be incarcerated (40%* vs. 31%, $p < .05$) and have transportation and housing issues.

⁶⁵ “Don’t know” responses constituted 30 percent of the overall responses for nonresident fathers and only 12% for nonresident mothers.

**Table 4-6
Barriers to Contact—Nonresident Fathers and Nonresident Mothers**

<i>Type of circumstance (all that apply)</i>	<i>Nonresident mother (N=281) %</i>	<i>Nonresident father (N=1,719) %</i>
Unreachable by phone	66.3	59.9
Out of state	23.9*	31.4
Incarceration	39.2*	30.5
Problem transportation	50.1**	21.5
Homeless/unstable address	39.2**	10.6
Out of country	3.4	5.1
Language barrier	1.8	3.1

Based on t-tests, statistically significant differences between the alleged and legal father groups are denoted as * = $p < .05$ and ** = $p < .01$.

Problems and services

Caseworkers reported more problems for nonresident mothers than nonresident fathers on all problems except criminal justice involvement (table 4-7). The percent of “don’t know” responses was greater for nonresident father cases than for nonresident mothers. The percentage of “don’t know” responses for nonresident fathers ranged from 9 to 18 percent for the types of problems.⁶⁶ While caseworkers reported a lower percentage of “don’t know” responses for nonresident mothers, the same categories elicited the least (prior finding of abuse) and the greatest (domestic violence) number of “don’t knows.” It is also important to note that the phrasing of the question may have impacted caseworker response. Caseworkers were asked about problems of each parent that made the child’s placement with them difficult.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ The greatest percent of “don’t know” responses was in the category of domestic violence while a prior finding of abuse had the lowest percent of “don’t know” responses.

⁶⁷ The question was, “We want to know if the child’s father has ever had any problems (of the following list) affecting whether his child can be placed with him.” That few fathers were considered as a placement resource may affect how caseworkers interpreted the question.

Table 4-7
Problems—Nonresident Mothers and Nonresident Fathers

<i>Type of problem (all that apply)</i>	<i>Nonresident mothers (N=251) %</i>	<i>Nonresident fathers (N=1,071) %</i>
Alcohol/drugs	79.0**	58.2
Criminal justice involvement	50.5	52.5
Inadequate housing/homelessness	66.8**	41.7
Unemployment	68.5**	40.1
Domestic violence	37.4	33.3
Prior finding of abuse/neglect	59.7**	29.6
Mental/physical health	53.3**	22.9
No child care	33.1**	21.2
<i>Agency offered services for all problems</i>	<i>80.5**</i>	<i>58.6</i>
<i>Father/mother complied with all services offered</i>	<i>31.7*</i>	<i>22.5</i>

Note: Caseworkers were asked about the problem areas of fathers/mothers with whom they had been in contact (N=1,071 fathers, 251 mothers). If a father had a problem in one or more areas, workers were asked whether or not services were offered to him/her (N=929) fathers, 241 mothers). If services were offered, workers were asked whether or not he/she complied with provided services (N=522 fathers, 187 mothers).

Based on t-tests, statistically significant differences between the alleged and legal father groups are denoted as * = $p < .05$ and ** = $p < .01$.

Engagement

For those with contact, caseworkers were as likely to tell a nonresident mother as a nonresident father that her child is in out-of-home care (98% vs. 96%, respectively, see table 4-8). Workers also share the case plan with an equally large percentage of nonresident mothers as nonresident fathers. There is, however, a large difference in the percent of workers noting that the nonresident mother has expressed an interest in having the child live with her, compared to the nonresident fathers (68%** vs. 50%., $p < .01$). Similar percentages of nonresident mothers and nonresident fathers were considered as a placement resource by caseworkers (52% vs. 45%).

While caseworkers noted more nonresident fathers had provided financial support since the case opened, nonresident mothers were somewhat more likely to have provided non-financial support to the child.

Table 4-8
Engagement—Nonresident Mothers and Nonresident Fathers

	<i>Nonresident mothers (N=251)</i>	<i>Nonresident fathers (N=1,071)</i>
	%	%
Father (mother) told of child’s out-of-home placement	97.7	95.9
Agency shared plan with fathers (mothers)	96.0	93.5
Father (mother) expressed interest in child living with him (her)	68.4**	50.3
Agency considered placing child with father (mother)	51.6	45.1
Agency considered placing child with paternal (maternal) relatives ^a	54.1	53.9
Agency sought health care coverage from father (mother) as part of the case plan	12.4	14.3
Agency sought financial assistance from father (mother) as part of the case plan	35.5	36.6
Father (mother) ever provided financial support	23.6	29.0
Father (mother) ever provided non-financial support	36.1	31.5

^a Only asked of cases in which the child was not in paternal (maternal) kin placement.

Based on t-tests, statistically significant differences between the alleged and legal father groups are denoted as * = $p < .05$ and ** = $p < .01$.

Termination of parental rights

An examination of termination of parental rights (table 4-9) found that while there was a slight difference in percentages of nonresident mothers and nonresident fathers who retained rights to their child in foster care, a greater percentage of “don’t know” responses for nonresident father cases could mediate this finding.

Table 4-9
Status of Parental Rights—Nonresident Mothers and Nonresident Fathers

	<i>Nonresident mother (N=283)</i>	<i>Nonresident father (N=1,955)</i>
	%	%
Still has parental rights	73.4*	65.9
Parental rights were terminated	18.3	20.3
Father (mother) relinquished his (her) rights	6.7	4.8
Don’t know	1.7**	9.0

Based on t-tests, statistically significant differences between the alleged and legal father groups are denoted as * = $p < .05$ and ** = $p < .01$.

Visitation

Overall, a greater percentage of nonresident mothers had visited with the child at least once since case opening (77%** vs. 56%, $p < .01$).⁶⁸ Caseworkers report that nonresident mothers have similar attendance at planned visits to nonresident fathers (i.e., always, sometimes, or rarely attends planned visits). Nonresident mothers are more likely than nonresident fathers to have phone contact with their children (49%** vs. 28%, $p < .01$).

Fathers as Placement Resources

Caseworkers were asked whether the agency had ever considered placing the child with his or her father. Cases in which the agency had considered placing the child with his or her father were grouped as “placement father” cases. Cases in which the caseworker responded “no” were assigned to the “non-placement father” group.⁶⁹ Analyses were conducted to examine differences between the two groups of fathers.

Demographic characteristics

Few differences were found in the demographic characteristics of placement and non-placement fathers.⁷⁰ We examined marital status to determine whether there were any differences between the two groups. Previous research has noted the presence of a female partner to be a factor in whether fathers gain custody of their children (Greif and Zuravin, 1989). Significant differences

⁶⁸ Questions pertaining to visitation were only asked of caseworkers who had contact with the nonresident father or nonresident mother.

⁶⁹ The case breakdown between the two groups was nearly equal—48 percent of caseworkers responded “yes” and 50 percent responded “no.” “Don’t know” responses constituted the remaining 2 percent of responses.

⁷⁰ Nonresident fathers of Hispanic origin and non-citizen fathers were both less likely to be considered for placement but the Ns for both categories are small.

were found in the nonresident fathers in our study sample. Nonresident fathers considered for placement were more likely to be living with another woman (27%** vs. 17%, $p < .01$). Fathers considered for placement were also more likely to be divorced from the child’s mother (16%** vs. 8%, $p < .01$).

Barriers to contact

Caseworkers noted circumstances that might pose barriers for contact with nonresident fathers of children in foster care. Table 4-10 provides the results from comparative analysis of placement and non-placement groups of cases. Significant differences were found in frequency of incarceration and being unreachable by phone. Fathers considered for placement were less likely to be incarcerated at some point during the case (27%** vs. 47%, $p < .01$) and less likely to be unreachable by phone (47%* vs. 57%, $p < .01$).

Table 4-10
Barriers to Contact—Fathers Considered as Placement Resources

<i>Type of circumstance (all that apply)</i>	<i>Father was considered for placement (N=493)</i>	<i>Father was not considered for placement (N=557)</i>
	%	%
Unreachable by phone	47.1**	57.1
Out of state	27.5	26.2
Incarceration	26.8**	46.8
Problem transportation	29.9	29.3
Homeless/unstable address	14.4	15.4
Out of country	2.2	3.6
Language barrier	2.7	4.3

Note: Caseworkers responded “don’t know” to the question regarding whether the agency had considered the father as a placement resource in 21 identified and contacted father cases.

Based on t-tests, statistically significant differences between the alleged and legal father groups are denoted as * = $p < .05$ and ** = $p < .01$.

Problems and services

Due to the large percent of “don’t know” responses for non-placement father cases, examining data on problem areas across the two groups of cases is difficult. Overall, the data suggest that workers reported more problems for fathers with whom the agency considered placing the child. As discussed in the overview section of this chapter, caseworkers are likely to have less contact with fathers with whom the agency did not consider placing the child and thus, less likely to know of the father’s problems. In only one category—mental/physical health problems—did caseworkers report a higher percentage for fathers not considered for placement.⁷¹ Workers reported mental/physical health issues for 22 percent of fathers considered for placement and 35 percent of fathers not considered for placement.

Engagement

As shown in table 4-11, fathers with whom the agency considered placing the child were significantly more likely to have been told about the child’s placement even though both groups were told in over 90 percent of the cases. Caseworkers noted sharing the case plan more often with these fathers as well. Perhaps not surprising is that a greater percent of fathers considered for placement expressed an interest in the child living with them, according to caseworkers (77% ** vs. 29%, $p < .01$). Fathers considered for placement were more likely to provide financial support (39% ** vs. 21%, $p < .01$) and non-financial support (46% ** vs. 20%, $p < .01$).

⁷¹ The percentage of caseworkers reporting “don’t know” responses for both categories was relatively low (less than 15%) and similar for both groups of father cases.

Table 4-11
Engagement—Placement and Non-placement Father Cases

	<i>Father considered for placement (N=493)</i>	<i>Father not considered for placement (N=557)</i>
	%	%
Father told of child’s out-of-home placement	98.0**	94.1
Agency shared plan with fathers	99.0**	89.1
Father expressed interest in child living with him	77.2**	28.6
Agency considered placing child with paternal relatives ^a	61.1**	47.4
Agency sought health care coverage from father as part of the case plan	19.1**	9.9
Agency sought financial assistance from father as part of the case plan	48.2**	26.7
Father ever provided financial support	39.0**	20.5
Father ever provided non-financial support	45.5**	20.4

Note: Caseworkers responded “don’t know” to the question regarding whether the agency had considered the father as a placement resource in 21 identified and contacted father cases.

^a Only asked of cases in which the child was not in paternal or maternal kin placement.

Based on t-tests, statistically significant differences between the alleged and legal father groups are denoted as * = $p < .05$ and ** = $p < .01$.

Case Characteristics

Kin vs. Non-kin Placement

We examined cases where children were placed in kin and non-kin placements to determine whether differences exist. First, we examined methods of identifying and locating nonresident fathers by type of placement. We also examined father-child visitation by whether the child was in a kinship or non-kinship placement. In addition, we examined problems or issues for nonresident fathers of children in the two types of foster care placements.

Identifying and locating fathers

Methods of identifying nonresident fathers did not differ greatly by whether or not the child was placed with kin. Not surprisingly, workers did seek help from the mother’s relatives to identify the father in cases in which the child was living with kin (54%* vs. 41%, $p < .05$). There were

more significant differences found in locating methods. As with identifying, caseworkers noted seeking the help of the mother's relatives more often in cases in which the child was living with kin (51%** vs. 27%, $p < .01$). They also more frequently noted seeking help with locating from the father's relatives (27%* vs. 18%, $p < .05$).

Workers also were more likely to search law enforcement (54%** vs. 41%, $p < .01$), DMV (31%** vs. 19%, $p < .01$) and public aid (48%** vs. 30%, $p < .01$) records for nonresident fathers of children placed with kin. State and federal parent locator services were used more often for locating nonresident fathers of children placed with kin (state: 49%** vs. 28%, $p < .01$ and federal: 13%* vs. 5%, $p < .05$).

Visitation

As shown in table 4-12, caseworkers noted only a slightly greater percentage of cases in which the father is visiting the child if the child is in a kinship placement. Nonresident fathers with children in kinship placements were also more likely than their counterparts with children in non-kin placements to have always or almost always attended visits. Caseworkers reported that children living with kin were almost twice as likely than children living in a non-kin placement to visit with their father weekly or more frequently (45%** vs. 24%, $p < .01$). Telephone contact between child and father was only slightly more likely when the child was in a kinship placement (31% vs. 27%).

Table 4-12
Father-Child Visitation—Children in Kin and Non-kin Placements

	<i>Child in kinship placement (N=512) %</i>	<i>Child in non- kinship placement (N=1,432) %</i>
<i>Percent of fathers who have visited with child (since case opening)</i>	60.0	53.8
<i>Visitation (w/in past 6 months)</i>		
Always or almost always attends planned visits	46.9	37.1
Sometimes attends	16.5	13.3
Rarely attends	11.8	14.3
Never attends or has no planned visits	22.3	31.6
Don't know	2.6	3.7
<i>Frequency of visitation (w/in past 6 months)</i>		
No visits	3.6	7.3
One visit	16.2	23.4
Monthly	21.4	24.2
Twice a month	10.6	18.3
Weekly	25.5*	15.8
More than once a week	19.0*	8.5
Don't know	3.7	2.5

Note: Of the 1,958 nonresident father cases, caseworkers responded “don't know” for the type of placement the child is currently residing in 14 cases.

Based on t-tests, statistically significant differences between the alleged and legal father groups are denoted as * = $p < .05$ and ** = $p < .01$.

Fathers' problems

Overall, caseworkers' reports of fathers' problems did not differ greatly by whether or not the child was living with kin. However, a greater percentage of fathers of children placed in kinship care were reported to have problems with alcohol/drug use compared to fathers of children in non-kin care but the difference is not significant.⁷²

⁷² “Don't know” responses were similar for the two groups of cases—13-14 percent for both.

Case Plan Goal

As discussed in chapter 3, the most common permanency goal for children in the study was reunification with the mother (35%); the second most common was a non-relative adoptive placement (19%). We examined locate methods for both groups of cases and found few differences between the two groups.

Cases with a goal of reunification with the mother were more likely than cases with a goal of adoption by a non-relative to have a father located at case opening (55%** vs. 45%, $p < .01$). While few differences were found in the types of resources contacted (e.g., law enforcement or DMV records) and use of state and federal parent locator services, a significant difference was found with regard to asking the child. Cases with a goal of reunification with the mother were more likely than cases with a goal of non-relative adoption to seek help from the child in locating the father (38%** vs. 15%, $p < .01$).

Length of Placement

We categorized cases according to whether, at the time of sampling, the child had been in foster care more or less than one year.⁷³ We thought that identifying and locating methods might be different based on length of placement. While there were few differences in the methods used to identify nonresident fathers between the two groups of cases there were several differences found in locating methods. The only significant difference found in identifying methods was that cases in which the child had been in care for more than one year were more likely to have sought help identifying the father from another worker (47%* vs. 34%, $p < .05$).

⁷³ Please note that study criteria called for cases in out-of-home care between 3-36 months; however, we did not eliminate cases if the length of placement fell outside of this range. No placements were less than 3 months but there was a small percentage that are over 36 months.

Children in care less than one year were more likely to have had a father located at case opening than children in care for more than one year (56%* vs. 48%, $p < .05$). We also found differences in locating methods. Caseworkers reporting on children in placement more than one year were more likely to search all types of locating resources including law enforcement records (51%** vs. 39%, $p < .01$), public aid records (43%** vs. 26%, $p < .01$), phone book (36%* vs. 26%, $p < .05$), DMV records (29%** vs. 16%, $p < .01$), and utility records (16%** vs. 6%, $p < .01$). State and federal parent locator resources were also more likely to be used with cases in out-of-home placement for longer periods of time. Caseworkers noted that state and federal parent locator resources were used more frequently for cases of children in placement more than one year (state: 40%** vs. 26%, $p < .01$, federal: 10%* vs. 5%, $p < .05$).⁷⁴

Age of Child

We examined possible differences in how workers seek out and involve fathers of younger and older children by categorizing children into two age groups—0 to 5 years and 6 years and older—to determine whether differences could be detected on a number of casework dimensions. The two groups of children had similar case lengths—children 5 and younger had an average case length of 1.8 years while children 6 and older had an average case length of 2.2 years.

The two groups of children did not differ in terms of visits with the father. Caseworkers reported 54 percent of fathers of children 0 to 5 had visited their child since case opening and 56 percent of fathers of children over 5 years of age had visited. As expected, workers reported a larger percent of fathers had had phone contact with older children (32%** vs. 9%, $p < .01$).

Identifying and locating methods were similar for the two groups of cases except where

⁷⁴ Significant at $p < .05$.

differences were expected because of younger children's developmental limitations (e.g., workers reported asking siblings for help identifying fathers more often in older child cases). Other slight differences were likely the result of a somewhat longer case length for older children. For example, for cases involving older children, more caseworkers reported not knowing when in the case process the father was identified. Caseworkers were also more likely to respond "don't know" to a number of the questions about methods used to locate the father on cases involving older children (e.g., Were father's relatives sought for assistance in locating the father?). The number and frequency of fathers' problems did not appear to differ much between the two groups of child cases.

Caseworker Characteristics

Results of analyses of the worker subgroups are presented below. Findings of analyses by caseworkers' gender are presented first. Then caseworkers were grouped by whether or not they received training in involving fathers and their opinions about working with nonresident fathers.⁷⁵

Gender

Overall, there were only slight differences between male and female caseworkers on most casework dimensions.⁷⁶ Similar percentages of cases for both male and female caseworkers involved sharing the case plan with the father, telling the father his child was in out-of-home placement, and fathers expressing interest in having his child live with him. The one significant

⁷⁵ Because caseworkers responded to questions regarding multiple cases (See chapter 1 for more detail), the possibility arises that responses to each caseworker's cases are correlated with each other (intraclass correlation). We take intraclass correlation into account by calculating clustered robust standard errors.

difference was with regard to the agency considering placing the child with the father. Cases with male caseworkers were more likely to have fathers considered as a placement resource (55%** vs. 43%, $p < .01$). Cases with male and female caseworkers had similar percentages of fathers who had contact with the agency and fathers who visited with their children since case opening.

More specific analyses of different identifying and locating methods (e.g., Did the worker ask the mother for help identifying/locating the father?) revealed only one significant difference. The one difference noted was that cases with male caseworkers were less likely to have obtained identifying information from the child (6%** vs. 28%, $p < .01$).

Worker Training

Worker training did appear to impact some casework practices.⁷⁷ Differences were found between cases with workers who had received training on identifying, locating, and engaging nonresident fathers and cases in which the worker did not receive training. Workers were more likely to seek assistance with locating the father from other workers, the mother's relatives and father's relatives in cases in which the worker reported having received training. Workers were also more likely to report having used telephone books to locate the father in cases involving trained workers. The case plan was more likely to be shared in cases involving a worker who reported receiving training than in cases in which the worker did not receive training (95%** vs. 89%, $p < .01$). These workers were also more likely to report that the agency had considered placing the child with the father (48%** vs. 37%, $p < .01$), the father had expressed in interest in having the child live with him (53%* vs. 43%, $p < .05$), and the agency sought financial

⁷⁶ See chapter 3, page 56 for gender breakdown for caseworker respondents.

assistance from the father as part of the plan (40%** vs. 27%, $p < .01$). A significant difference was also found between the two groups of cases with regard to whether a CPS clearance check was performed on the nonresident father for whom placement was considered (86%* vs. 74%, $p < .05$).

While cases with workers who received training were somewhat more likely than other cases to have fathers who had visited with their child (58% vs. 51%), the difference was not significant. A greater percentage of cases with trained workers had a nonresident father whose location was known at case opening (54%* vs. 48%, $p < .05$). Methods used to identify fathers were similar across the two groups of workers. However, significant differences were found with methods used for locating fathers—seeking help from father’s relatives (25%** vs. 10%, $p < .01$), seeking help from another worker (43%* vs. 34%, $p < .05$), and searching public aid records (38%** vs. 26%, $p < .01$), and telephone books (38%** vs. 26%, $p < .01$).

Caseworker Opinions

Caseworker opinions about father involvement do not appear to have a large impact on casework practices identifying and locating nonresident fathers. As noted previously, workers were grouped according to their responses to a series of opinion questions.⁷⁸ The two groups of caseworkers reported similar percentages of fathers being told about the child’s out-of-home placement and sharing the case plan with the father. The first group of workers was more likely to report the agency considered placing the child with the father (49%** vs. 34%, $p < .01$).

⁷⁷ See table 3-2.

⁷⁸ The small number of workers (N=133) who neither disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed to the opinion questions made some detailed analyses difficult.

Slight differences, though not significant, were found with fathers expressing interest in having his child live with him. Fifty-three percent of cases with workers who reported positive opinions had fathers who had expressed an interest in his child living with him while only 47 percent of the cases with workers who reported less positive opinions did.

Very few differences were noted in how workers identified and located nonresident fathers. The one significant difference found between the two groups of workers involved locating methods. Workers with more positive opinions reported searching public aid records more often than other workers (39%**, 23%, $p < .01$).

Multivariate Analyses

In this section we present findings from multivariate analyses examining factors associated with identified father cases, cases in which the nonresident father is reported to be visiting with his child, and cases in which the nonresident father is reported to be supporting his child. Three logistic regression models are presented.

Sample

As discussed in detail in chapter 1, the sample consists of data on 1,958 cases obtained during telephone interviews with caseworkers in each of the four study states—Arizona, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Tennessee.⁷⁹ Sampled cases met a variety of criteria. The one criterion unique to this sample of foster care children is that in each case the biological father was a nonresident, i.e., not living in the home from which the child was removed. Chapter 3 presents findings from detailed descriptive analyses of the sample.

The three models presented use samples of different sizes due to the way in which the caseworker questionnaire was structured. In all 1,958 cases, caseworkers were asked questions about whether or not the nonresident father was identified. However, questions on father-child visitation and father support were only asked if cases involved identified fathers and fathers with whom the agency or worker had contact.⁸⁰ Thus, while the samples are smaller, the number of independent variables is greater for the models on visitation and support. The father identification model, while using a larger sample, contains fewer independent variables.⁸¹

Measures

The analyses focused on three dependent measures: fathers who were identified; fathers who were reported to be visiting their children twice a month or more; and fathers who were reported to be providing financial or non-financial support⁸² to their children. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, we chose to incorporate a large number of independent variables in the logistic regression models. Categories of independent variables include case characteristics and characteristics of the children, fathers, and caseworkers.

Case characteristics include state, case length, the type of maltreatment, perpetrator, current placement type, permanency goal, and whether the case had a resident mother (the

⁷⁹ See chapter 1 for a complete description of the sample selection and design, response rates and weighing procedures.

⁸⁰ A sample size of 400 was used for the father visitation model and a sample of 844 was used for the father support model.

⁸¹ Many of the variables that may affect father identification could not be included because the information could only be collected if the father was identified. For example, whether the father was ever married to the child's mother was only collected on identified fathers. In addition, questions pertaining to father problems, circumstances that could be barriers to contact with the agency, child support, and questions of whether he had expressed interest in having his child live with him, and whether the agency had ever considered placing the child with him, were asked only if the father had been identified and contacted by the worker or agency. Thus, the father identification model could not include these variables.

⁸² Non-financial support was described as provision of clothing, diapers, child care, food or health insurance.

mother was in the home from which the child was removed).⁸³ Child characteristics include gender, age, and race. Caseworker characteristics include gender, race, years of experience in the child welfare field, and whether the worker received training on how to identify, locate, and involve nonresident fathers. Father characteristics include age, type of father (alleged or legal), whether he still maintains parental rights to the child⁸⁴, whether he was ever married to the mother of the child, whether he ever expressed interest in his child living with him, and whether or not the agency ever considered placing the child with his or her father.⁸⁵ We also recoded variables on circumstances that could be barriers to contact between the father and agency (see chapter 3 page 83) to create a multi-circumstance variable. Three or more circumstances, regardless of whether the caseworker reported it as a barrier, were considered to be multi-circumstance cases. Caseworkers reported on fathers' problems that were reasons why the child could not be placed with him (see chapter 3 page 88). Three or more problem areas were recoded as a multi-problem father case.⁸⁶ We also include a relationship variable. This variable was coded from caseworker responses to a question about the relationship between the nonresident father and birth mother of the child.⁸⁷

⁸³ See discussion of resident and nonresident mother cases in chapter 3.

⁸⁴ Termination of parental rights was included as a control variable because of the likelihood that it can explain a lot of the variance in which fathers are visiting their children. While a father whose parental rights have been terminated would be less likely to visit his child and in some cases may be legally prohibited from doing so, the cross-sectional dataset does not allow examination of the timing of events. The small percent of fathers whose rights are terminated but visited their children could have done so prior to the termination of rights. In other cases, fathers who no longer have parental rights may still be visiting their children.

⁸⁵ Father's race/ethnicity was not included in the model due to its high correlation with child's race/ethnicity. Consideration of placement was included as an independent variable but could also likely be a dependent variable. Caseworkers are likely to decide whether a father should be a placement resource on whether or not he is visiting or supporting his child. Likewise, after a father is considered a placement resource the caseworker might encourage (or actually schedule) visits between him and his child. The survey instrument did not collect data on the timing of these caseworker decisions.

⁸⁶ Caseworkers had to report three or more of the problems in order for the case to be deemed a multiple problem case.

⁸⁷ A "good relationship" was defined as whether the caseworker responded to one of the following about the nonresident father and birth mother: 1) they are romantically involved on a steady basis; 2) they are involved in an

Lastly, father support and father visitation variables were included. As mentioned earlier, the father support variable was defined to include fathers providing financial support or non-financial support. Father visitation was defined in two different ways. For the dependent variable used in the father visiting model, visitation was defined as cases in which caseworkers reported fathers visiting their child twice a month or more. However, for the independent variable used in the family support model, a more generic definition was used. Using the frequency of visits definition of father visitation made the number of usable observations extremely low so the definition used in the family support model was broadened to include cases in which the caseworker reported the father had ever visited the child since case opening.

Analyses

We conducted logistic regression analysis to examine which factors were associated with our three dependent measures. We ran three separate models to measure the relative odds that a father would be identified, visiting, or supporting his child. It is important to note that the cross-sectional dataset does not allow examination of the timing of events. Without knowledge of the timing of caseworker decisions and other events such as termination of parental rights, causality cannot be determined for associated factors.

Results

Results from a logistic regression model examining factors associated with father identification are shown in table 4-13. Several independent variables were found to be significant. Two child

on-again off-again relationship; or 3) they are just friends. Other caseworker responses included 1) they are hostile toward each other; 2) they hardly ever talk to each other; 3) the never talk to each other; or 4) other. These responses were coded as a “bad relationship.”

characteristics—age and race—were significant. Case characteristics found to be significant include current placement type and whether the case had a resident mother. Caseworker characteristics found to be significant include gender and race.

The child's age was positively associated with an identified father. Older children had an increased likelihood of having an identified father. Cases involving African American and Hispanic children were associated with decreased odds of having an identified father. Cases in which the child was in a non-relative foster placement, adoption or guardianship placement, or other placement⁸⁸ were also associated with decreased odds of having an identified father compared to children in relative foster care. Cases in which there was a resident mother (child was removed from a home in which the child's mother resides) were associated with increased odds of having an identified father than cases involving nonresident mothers. Cases involving male caseworkers and African American caseworkers (compared to white caseworkers) were associated with decreased odds of having an identified father.

Table 4-14 presents results from a logistic regression model identifying factors associated with father visitation. Multiple factors were found to be associated with whether or not a nonresident father is visiting his child.⁸⁹ Several factors were associated with increased odds of the father visiting using the reference variables presented. Compared to cases in Massachusetts, Arizona cases were more likely to have a father visiting his child. Cases with a goal of reunifying with the father or placement/guardianship with a relative were also associated with increased odds of having a father visiting. Cases with fathers who were older, who had expressed an interest in the child living with him, or who had provided support to the child were all more

⁸⁸ Other placements included group homes, residential treatment centers, and children reunited with mother.

⁸⁹ It is important to remember that the data represent caseworker responses to the questions on visitation. Responses might likely have been different if the questions were asked of the fathers, mothers, or other caregivers.

likely to have a visiting father. Cases involving fathers with multiple problems were also more likely to have a visiting father.⁹⁰ Cases with Hispanic caseworkers were also more likely to have a visiting father.

Factors associated with decreased odds of father visits include cases involving older children, cases with the father as perpetrator, cases in which the father had multiple circumstances that could pose barriers to contact, and cases with more experienced caseworkers. In addition, cases in which the current placement type was “other”, the child’s permanency goal was non-relative adoption as a permanency goal, and cases where the mother resided in the home at the time of the child’s removal were less likely to have a visiting father.

Results from a logistic regression on father support⁹¹ are provided in table 4-15. Multiple factors were associated with whether or not the father is supporting the child. In this model, several case and father characteristics, and one caseworker characteristic were associated with father support. With regard to case characteristics, compared to cases in Massachusetts, Arizona cases were less likely to have a father supporting his child. Cases involving sexual abuse and cases in which the permanency goal was non-relative adoption were both less likely to have a father supporting the child. Father characteristics associated with increased odds of supporting his child include whether he was ever married to the mother, whether he expressed an interest in the child living with him, whether the agency had considered placing the child with him, and whether he has visited with the child. Hispanic workers, compared to white workers, had decreased odds of having a father supporting his child.

⁹⁰ See page 118. Cases in which the father was considered as a placement resource were more likely to have multiple problems. This is likely due to less “don’t know” responses, i.e., the caseworker has had greater access to the father and more time to identify and assess various “problems.”

Discussion

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the lack of previous research on father involvement within the child welfare system means we must rely on our anecdotal knowledge of practice to examine and interpret these findings. Father identification and a father visiting with the child appear to have some association with characteristics of the child, case, and caseworker. Father support appears to have some association with case and caseworker characteristics, as well as father characteristics.

It is important to note again that the lack of data on father characteristics available for inclusion on the father identification regression model (due to not being able to collect this information on unidentified fathers) limits our ability to interpret the findings from this model. Both African American and Hispanic children are far less likely than white children in the sample to have an identified father. Father's marital status and problems or circumstances faced by fathers may explain these differences.

The findings on caseworker characteristics are also difficult to explain. Cases involving male caseworkers or African American caseworkers compared to white caseworkers were both negatively associated with fathers being identified. Urban/rural differences in casework practices may affect the findings on caseworker race and ethnicity. Additional analyses will be conducted as a follow-up to this study in order to examine urban/rural practice differences.

Findings on case characteristics—current placement type and whether the child's mother was in the home—make practical sense. Compared to children in relative foster care, children in non-relative care or adoption/guardianship homes are less likely to have identified fathers. It is not feasible with these data to determine whether the placement type led to differences in

⁹¹ It is important to note that the definition of "support" included both financial and non-financial support.

casework practice or whether differences in case circumstances led to a different placement types. For example, caseworkers may be able to more easily identify a child's father when the child is living with kin due to greater access to sources of information. Identifying the child's father would presumably be easier in cases in which the mother was in the home at the time of the child's removal ("resident mother" cases constitute the vast majority of our sample) due to her proximity and the worker's ability to ask the mother for information on the father.

While some findings from the visiting father model seem consistent with anecdotal practice knowledge, other findings are more difficult to interpret. Some factors associated with increased odds of the father visiting are easy to understand—when the child's permanency goal is placement with his or her father, the father is visiting with the child or, given that we do not know the timing of events, it could be that when the father visits the child there is a greater likelihood of the permanency goal being reunification with father. Other findings easy to interpret include cases involving fathers who are providing support to their children and fathers who expressed interest in living with their children were both far more likely to have a father who visited his child.

Factors associated with decreased odds of father visits include a variety of case and father characteristics. Cases with a goal of non-relative adoption were far less likely to have a father visiting his child than a case with reunification with the mother as the goal. Cases involving multiple circumstances that pose barriers to contact between the agency and the father are less likely to have a visiting father. Again, this finding is easy to interpret. A father with whom the agency or worker has difficulty contacting would presumably be less likely to be visiting his child.

The negative association between residential mother cases and the likelihood of a father visiting is difficult to explain. Perhaps the relationship between the mother and father in resident mother cases (i.e., cases in which the child's mother was in the home from which the child was removed), is more hostile or less friendly and therefore the father-child relationship was never formed or continued. Perhaps cases with residential mothers are more likely to involve a stepfather or live-in boyfriend that could negatively affect the father-mother relationship. There could also be unique aspects of the non-resident mother cases such as a greater likelihood of a paternal kinship care placement that could affect visitation positively.

The direction of the effects for fathers' problems were not as expected. Fathers whom caseworkers noted as having multiple problems were more likely to be visiting their child than fathers with fewer problems though the effect is not significant. A caveat to this finding is that a number of caseworkers provided "don't know" responses in answering questions pertaining to problem areas of nonresident fathers (e.g., substance abuse, unemployment, domestic violence). Having more problems identified by the caseworker may merely be the result of greater contact with the caseworker. Visiting fathers may, through greater contact with the caseworker, be described as having more problems than non-visiting fathers. Similar problems were encountered in the interpretation of findings presented earlier in this chapter on fathers with whom the agency considered placing the child (see page 112).

Similar to the father identification model, findings on caseworker characteristics are again somewhat difficult to understand in the father visiting model. Cases involving Hispanic caseworkers are much more likely to have a visiting father while cases involving workers with more experience are somewhat less likely to have a visiting father.

Some of the findings from the family support model make practical sense (e.g., the positive association between a father providing support and having been married to the mother at some point, a father expressing interest in the child living with him, or being considered for placement). Other findings such as Arizona cases being less likely to involve a father supporting the child are difficult explain. This finding is particularly troublesome given that Arizona cases were far more likely to have a visiting child and support and visitation were positively associated with each other in both models.

Type of abuse is difficult to interpret. Cases involving sexual abuse were reported to be less likely to have a father providing support than cases involving physical abuse. It should be noted, however, that the group of cases involving sexual abuse is small and likely to be quite different from the sexual abuse cases in the greater child welfare case population due to our case criteria that the child's father not be living in the home from which the child was removed. The small number of cases in this subgroup may skew these findings.

There are several limitations that affect interpretation of findings from the logistic regression models. Most importantly, in the father identification model there are many father characteristics we were unable to include due to their unavailability in cases involving unidentified fathers. Collection of longitudinal data instead of cross-sectional data would allow examination of causality. We also want to examine rural and urban differences and other measures that may impact on the percent of single-female headed households on the agency's caseload. It seems likely that case practices may differ depending upon the extent to which the caseload is comprised of cases involving nonresident fathers.

Tables

Table 4-13
Factors Associated with Father Identification

Obs = 1,568

Variable	Odds Ratio (SE)	Sign. * = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$
<i>Child Characteristics</i>		
Age	1.08 (0.02)	**
Male	1.30 (0.23)	
<i>Race^a</i>		
Black	0.53 (0.12)	**
Hispanic	0.35 (0.12)	**
Other Race	0.95 (0.24)	
White (Reference)		
<i>Case Characteristics</i>		
<i>State</i>		
Minnesota	1.35 (0.45)	
Arizona	0.67 (0.18)	
Tennessee	0.77 (0.20)	
Massachusetts (Reference)		
Length of Case	1.00 (0.01)	
<i>Type of Abuse^b</i>		
Sexual	0.74 (0.31)	
Neglect	0.86 (0.28)	
Other/No Reported Abuse	0.86 (0.37)	
Physical (Reference)		
<i>Perpetrator of Abuse^c</i>		
Boyfriend/Stepfather	1.00 (0.33)	
Other Individual(s)	0.97 (0.29)	
Mother (Reference)		
<i>Current Placement</i>		
Non-relative Foster Care	0.62 (0.15)	**
Adoption or Guardianship ^d	0.34 (0.12)	**
Other	0.54 (0.16)	**
Relative Foster Care (Reference)		
<i>Permanency Goal^e</i>		
Relative Adoption or Guardianship	0.70 (0.19)	
Non-relative Adoption	0.86 (0.23)	
Independent Living/Other	0.80 (0.19)	
Reunify with Mother (Reference)		
Residential Mother ^f	2.10 (0.48)	**
<i>Caseworker Characteristics</i>		
Male	0.67 (0.16)	*

Table 4-13
Factors Associated with Father Identification

Obs = 1,568

Variable	Odds Ratio (SE)	Sign. * = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$
<i>Race</i>		
Black	0.48 (0.12)	**
Hispanic	0.64 (0.21)	
Other	0.65 (0.19)	
White (Reference)		
Years in Field	0.98 (0.01)	
Received Training on Fathers	0.82 (0.16)	

^a Race- Individuals are classified as White or Black if they report only one race. Individuals reporting multiple races are classified as Other. Any individual reporting that they are Hispanic is classified as Hispanic.

^b Type of Abuse- Any child for whom sexual abuse was reported was classified as being abused sexually. Children who were abused physically but not sexually were classified as physically abused. Children who were neglected but not sexually or physically abused were classified as neglected. Finally, children who were abused in other ways only or not abused were classified as being victims of other or no abuse.

^c Perpetrator- Any child reported by the caseworker to have been abused by an individual who was not the mother, father, or the mother's boyfriend/stepfather was classified in the other category. This includes cases in which the perpetrator was reported to be another individual and some combination of mother, father, boyfriend, or stepfather. Cases with no identified perpetrator were also placed in this category. Cases in which children were abused by a stepfather or mother's boyfriend are placed in their own category. Cases were classified as stepfather/boyfriend perpetrator when both the stepfather/boyfriend and mother were reported as perpetrators in the case. Mother perpetrator cases are cases where only the mother is reported as a perpetrator. All cases with the father reported as the perpetrator were identified. The father perpetrator cases were not used in the model.

^d Includes relative and non-relative adoption/guardianship.

^e Cases with permanency goal of placement with father were perfectly correlated with father identification and were removed from this model.

^f Residential Mother- The vast majority of mothers in the cases were residing in the home from which the child was removed. However, there were 323 mothers who did not reside in the home from which the child was removed and these mothers are categorized as "nonresident" mothers. See chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the two groups.

Table 4-14
Factors Associated with Father-Child Visitation

Obs = 242

Variable	Odds Ratio (SE)	Sign. * = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$
<i>Child Characteristics</i>		
Age	0.86 (0.04)	**
Male	2.12 (0.95)	*
<i>Race^a</i>		
Black	1.02 (0.58)	
Hispanic	4.08 (4.66)	
Other Race	0.75 (0.54)	
White (Reference)		
<i>Case Characteristics</i>		
<i>State</i>		
Minnesota	1.75 (1.54)	

Table 4-14
Factors Associated with Father-Child Visitation

Obs = 242

Variable	Odds Ratio (SE)	Sign. * = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$
Arizona	5.15 (3.30)	**
Tennessee	1.68 (1.06)	
Massachusetts (Reference)		
Length of Case	1.00 (0.01)	
<i>Type of Abuse^b</i>		
Sexual	0.74 (0.54)	
Neglect	0.28 (0.22)	
Other/No Reported Abuse	0.31 (0.30)	
Physical (Reference)		
<i>Perpetrator of Abuse^c</i>		
Father	0.26 (0.19)	*
Boyfriend/Stepfather	0.35 (0.30)	
Other Individual(s)	0.39 (0.32)	
Mother (Reference)		
<i>Current Placement</i>		
Non-relative Foster Care	0.44 (0.26)	
Adoption or Guardianship ^d	1.90 (3.65)	
Other	0.34 (0.22)	*
Relative Foster Care (Reference)		
<i>Permanency Goal</i>	3.70 (2.63)	*
Reunify with Father	7.69 (6.77)	**
Relative Adoption or Guardianship	0.06 (0.06)	**
Non-relative Adoption	1.43 (0.92)	
Independent Living/Other		
Reunify with Mother (Reference)		
Residential Mother ^e	0.09 (0.08)	**
<i>Father Characteristics</i>		
Birth Father	2.47 (2.94)	
No Longer Has Parental Rights	0.24 (0.24)	
Age	1.05 (0.03)	*
Ever Married to Birth Mother	1.11 (0.54)	
Expressed Interest in Child Living with Him	5.19 (3.74)	**
Agency Considered Father for Placement	0.82 (0.43)	
Multiple Circumstances Affecting Contact ^f	0.05 (0.03)	**
Multiple Problems ^g	3.61 (1.61)	**
Provides Support ^h	4.88 (3.06)	**
Mother and Father Have Good Relationship ⁱ	1.52 (0.75)	
<i>Caseworker Characteristics</i>		
Male	1.39 (0.94)	

Table 4-14
Factors Associated with Father-Child Visitation

Obs = 242

Variable	Odds Ratio (SE)	Sign. * = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$
<i>Race</i>		
Black	0.97 (0.54)	
Hispanic	5.30 (4.67)	*
Other	1.31 (0.88)	
White (Reference)		
Years in Field	0.91 (0.03)	**
Received Training on Fathers	0.69 (0.35)	

^a Race- Individuals are classified as White or Black if the caseworker reported only one of these race categories. Individuals reporting multiple races are classified as Other. Any individual reporting that they are Hispanic is classified as Hispanic.

^b Type of Abuse- Any case for which sexual abuse was reported was classified as sexual abuse. Cases involving physical abuse but no sexual abuse and cases involving physical abuse and neglect are classified as physical abuse. Cases involving only neglect with no sexual or physical abuse are classified as neglect. Finally, cases involving other types of abuse or cases in which the caseworker reported no abuse were classified as other/no reported abuse.

^c Perpetrator- Any child reported by the caseworker to have been abused by an individual who was not the mother, father, or the mother's boyfriend/stepfather was classified in the other category. This includes cases in which the perpetrator was reported to be another individual or some combination of mother, father, boyfriend, or stepfather. Cases with no identified perpetrator were also placed in the other category. Children abused by a father and stepfather/boyfriend were also placed in the other category. Cases were classified as father perpetrator when both the father and mother were reported as perpetrators in the case. Cases were classified as stepfather/boyfriend perpetrator when both the stepfather/boyfriend and mother were reported as perpetrators in the case. Mother perpetrator cases are cases where only the mother is reported as a perpetrator.

^d Includes relative and non-relative adoption/guardianship.

^e Residential Mother- The vast majority of mothers in the cases were residing in the home from which the child was removed. However, there were 323 mothers who did not reside in the home from which the child was removed and these mothers are categorized as "nonresident" mothers. See chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the two groups.

^f An individual is classified as having multiple circumstances affecting contact if the caseworker notes three or more circumstances. Circumstances include living out of state, living out of the country, incarceration, homelessness, being unreachable by phone, not having adequate transportation, and having a language barrier.

^g An individual is classified as having multiple problems affecting the child's placement with him if the caseworker notes three or more problems. Problems include homelessness/inadequate housing, unemployment, abuse or neglect, alcohol/substance abuse, criminal justice involvement, domestic violence, lack of child care, and mental/physical health problems.

^h Provides either financial or nonfinancial support to child.

ⁱ A father is classified as having a good relationship with the child's mother if the caseworker reported that they are friends, are romantically involved on a steady basis, or involved in an on-again/off-again romantic relationship.

Table 4-15
Factors Associated with Father Support

Obs = 406

Variable	Odds Ratio (SE)	Sign. * = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$
<i>Child Characteristics</i>		
Age	0.99 (0.04)	
Male	0.68 (0.21)	
<i>Race^a</i>		
Black	0.64 (0.26)	
Hispanic	0.80 (0.52)	

Table 4-15
Factors Associated with Father Support

Obs = 406

Variable	Odds Ratio (SE)	Sign. * = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$
Other Race	0.95 (0.42)	
White (Reference)		
Case Characteristics		
<i>State</i>		
Minnesota	1.08 (0.66)	
Arizona	0.40 (0.17)	**
Tennessee	0.86 (0.38)	
Massachusetts (Reference)		
Length of Case	0.99 (0.01)	
IV-E Eligible	0.99 (0.41)	
<i>Type of Abuse^b</i>		
Sexual	0.24 (0.16)	**
Neglect	0.66 (0.30)	
Other/No Reported Abuse	1.39 (0.99)	
Physical (Reference)		
<i>Perpetrator of Abuse^c</i>		
Father	0.80 (0.37)	
Boyfriend/Stepfather	0.60 (0.32)	
Other Individual(s)	0.71 (0.35)	
Mother (Reference)		
<i>Current Placement</i>		
Non-relative Foster Care	0.69 (0.27)	
Adoption or Guardianship ^d	0.48 (0.41)	
Other	1.93 (0.93)	
Relative Foster Care (Reference)		
<i>Permanency Goal</i>		
Reunify with Father	2.03 (1.09)	
Relative Adoption or Guardianship	0.69 (0.35)	
Non-relative Adoption	0.34 (0.15)	**
Independent Living/Other	1.49 (0.76)	
Reunify with Mother (Reference)		
Residential Mother ^e	1.74 (0.97)	
Father Characteristics		
Birth Father	2.55 (1.59)	
No Longer Has Parental Rights	0.63 (0.26)	
Age	1.00 (0.02)	
Ever Married to Mother	2.63 (0.94)	**
Expressed Interest in Child Living with Him	2.23 (0.86)	**
Agency Considered Father for Placement	2.42 (0.90)	**

Table 4-15
Factors Associated with Father Support

Obs = 406

Variable	Odds Ratio (SE)	Sign. * = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$
Multiple Circumstances Affecting Contact ^f	0.56 (0.20)	
Multiple Problems ^g	0.64 (0.24)	
Has Visited Child During Case Period	3.74 (1.33)	**
Mother and Father Have Good Relationship ^h	1.04 (0.36)	
<i>Caseworker Characteristics</i>		
Male	0.70 (0.26)	
<i>Race</i>		
Black	1.27 (0.65)	
Hispanic	0.20 (0.13)	**
Other	2.24 (1.25)	
White (Reference)		
Years in Field	0.99 (0.02)	
Received Training	1.04 (0.34)	
^a Race- Individuals are classified as White or Black if the caseworker reported only one of these race categories. Individuals for whom caseworkers reported multiple races are classified as Other. Any individual reported by the caseworker as Hispanic is classified as Hispanic.		
^b Type of Abuse- Any case for which sexual abuse was reported was classified as sexual abuse. Cases involving physical abuse but no sexual abuse and cases involving physical abuse and neglect are classified as physical abuse. Cases involving only neglect with no sexual or physical abuse are classified as neglect. Finally, cases involving other types of abuse or cases in which the caseworker reported no abuse were classified as other/no reported abuse.		
^c Perpetrator- Any child reported by the caseworker to have been abused by an individual who was not the mother, father, or the mother's boyfriend/stepfather was classified in the other category. This includes cases in which the perpetrator was reported to be another individual or some combination of mother, father, boyfriend, or stepfather. Cases with no identified perpetrator were also placed in the other category. Children abused by a father and stepfather/boyfriend were also placed in the other category. Cases were classified as father perpetrator when both the father and mother were reported as perpetrators in the case. Cases were classified as stepfather/boyfriend perpetrator when both the stepfather/boyfriend and mother were reported as perpetrators in the case. Mother perpetrator cases are cases where only the mother is reported as a perpetrator.		
^d Includes relative and non-relative adoption/guardianship.		
^e Residential Mother-The vast majority of mothers in the cases were residing in the home from which the child was removed. However, there were 323 mothers who did not reside in the home from which the child was removed and these mothers are categorized as "nonresident" mothers. See chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the two groups.		
^f An individual is classified as having multiple circumstances affecting contact if the caseworker notes three or more circumstances. Circumstances include living out of state, living out of the country, incarceration, homelessness, being unreachable by phone, not having adequate transportation, and having a language barrier.		
^g An individual is classified as having multiple problems affecting the child's placement with him if the caseworker notes three or more problems. Problems include homelessness/inadequate housing, unemployment, abuse or neglect, alcohol/substance abuse, criminal justice involvement, domestic violence, lack of child care, and mental/physical health problems.		
^h A father is classified as having a good relationship with the child's mother if the caseworker reported that the mother and father are friends, are romantically involved on a steady basis, or involved in an on-again/off-again romantic relationship.		

Child Support Linkage

As discussed in Chapter 1, the study's child support linkage component was designed to explore how child support resources may assist child welfare caseworkers in identifying, locating, and involving nonresident fathers. Topics of interest include paternity establishment, whether locator resources are utilized, and whether child support orders are established and paid. Determining whether paternity has been established is an important first step to locating and involving fathers. ASFA both allowed and encouraged state child welfare agencies to use the Federal Parent Locator Services (FPLS) employed by child support enforcement programs to locate fathers and other relatives. States can also use their in-state child support locate resources to assist child welfare cases. Additionally, determining whether nonresident fathers are providing financial support to their children could be an important component of a father assessment.

Before we present the findings from the data linkage, we draw on the contextual information obtained through discussions with local child welfare administrators (see chapter 2) to present state-specific child support findings from the case-level data collection. We then present findings from the case linkage.

State-specific Child Support Findings

Results of discussions with local child welfare administrators in the four states are generally consistent with findings from the case-level data collection effort. As discussed in chapter 2, state child welfare agencies vary in the ways they establish paternity, both for purposes of involving a father in a case and for purposes of placement opportunities or relinquishment or termination of parental rights. Generally, local administrators said that workers relied on birth certificates, voluntary recognition of parentage and a mother's word. Case-level data confirmed

that workers rely heavily on birth certificates (see table 3-13) but also make use of genetic/DNA testing and voluntary paternity documents in many cases. State laws govern voluntary paternity establishment and court proceedings and voluntary paternity establishments are considered court judgments. Additionally for children born after 1993, a father's name cannot appear on a birth certificate unless a voluntary acknowledgement is filed. These records may be obtained through the child support agency or directly from the court or state vital records office. DNA testing is not necessary for legal paternity to be established and is generally not used when paternity is established through voluntary acknowledgement.

Arizona administrators noted consistently that workers rely on legal departments or clerical staff to find fathers. They also noted uniform access to the State Parent Locator service for a fee when local area searches yield no results. Case level results show overwhelmingly that in comparison to workers in the other study states, Arizona workers reported high levels of use of state parent locator services (77% compared to 3-12% in the other states) in cases with no father identified at time of case opening. Arizona also had the lowest percent of "don't know" responses for this question. Nine percent of caseworkers in Arizona reported not knowing whether state parent locator services were used compared to 19-30% in the other states.

Recouping foster care expenses from birth parents was also discussed with local administrators. Practices varied across states. Massachusetts's administrators had a negative view of the efficacy of a contracted agency responsible for the recouping costs. Minnesota administrators noted the child support office does try to recoup expenses. Arizona caseworkers are responsible for completing a parental assessment and determining how much each parent can pay. Tennessee administrators discussed caseworkers having to ask judges to order child support payments through the enforcement agency. Using case-level data, there was some variation

across states with regard to caseworkers noting that seeking financial assistance from the father was part of the case plan (10% in Massachusetts to a high of 21% in Minnesota).⁹²

An issue that is of concern when discussing establishing child support orders is whether or not the father has a history of domestic violence, specifically, whether ordering child support may heighten the risk of domestic violence to the child's mother or other guardian. Over the past two decades, Massachusetts has been identified as a state with policies in place to address domestic violence and its overlap with child maltreatment and the impact on families served by child welfare agencies (Findlater et al. 1999). This history of awareness and training may be reflected in the administrator interviews and case-level data. While nearly all administrators in local Massachusetts offices mentioned serving birth parents with a history of domestic violence, the same was not true for the other three states. Administrators in the other states, while mentioning domestic violence, did not do so as consistently as administrators in Massachusetts. In addition, administrators in Massachusetts noted creating separate case plans for each parent in order to not compromise confidentiality or otherwise renew conflict between parents. Domestic violence was identified as a problem area for nonresident fathers in all study states; however, Massachusetts and Minnesota caseworkers were more likely to identify domestic violence (44% of cases in Massachusetts and 43% in Minnesota identified domestic violence as a problem area for the nonresident father, compared to approximately 30% in Arizona and Tennessee).

During the early phases of the study there was discussion of whether child support officials would choose to establish a child support case on a nonresident parent identified through the study's data linkage process. No state decided to pursue such activity; however,

⁹² Caseworkers were asked if seeking financial assistance from the nonresident father was ever part of the case plan. The question did not specify whether the financial assistance would be sought through a child support order established through the child support agency or through informal mechanisms.

screening questions were added to the caseworker questionnaire so that any caseworker concerns about risk to the mother or child would be addressed. Thus, before sending a data file to the child support agencies in each study state, a percentage of cases were removed. Cases in which the caseworker did not know if there was risk were also removed.⁹³ In each state between 30 and 32 percent of all completed eligible cases were excluded from the linkage.⁹⁴

Child Support Case Match and Data Consistency

The caseworker survey collected data on a number of issues important to the child support field—paternity, locate activities, financial and non-financial support provided by the father. The linkage component was designed to match survey cases with cases from the states' child support administrative data systems. The caseworker survey data was then checked against data in similar fields in the child support data file to determine whether information was consistent and/or complete across systems. While the objective was to determine whether using child support data systems could assist child welfare agencies in identifying and locating fathers, in order to be useful, information available from child support resources would need to be more complete or accurate than information available in the child welfare record. If child welfare workers could access such information, would it supplement or supplant information already available to them? That is, are caseworkers likely to benefit from use of child support resources?

Overall, information on paternity establishment is likely to be more reliable from the child support system than from the child welfare record because it is more reflective of legal

⁹³ Only cases in which the caseworker responded 'no' to two questions: "Is there any reason why the information you have provided should not be used to facilitate a match with the parent locator services?" and "Do you think locating the father of this child might put the child or the mother at risk of physical harm?" were included in the data linkage.

paternity than information likely to be available in the child welfare record. Information on the father's location may be more complete and accurate as well. A child welfare caseworker may have information on the father's location but given that workers often rely on information provided by the child's mother (see table 3-17), the data may be outdated, inaccurate, or incomplete. Caseworkers may have little or no information on fathers living out-of state or those not living in the community.

The caseworker survey collected informal data on a nonresident father's financial support and this makes the comparison of these data across systems difficult to interpret. Child support systems collect information only on official financial support provided by the father to the child. The caseworker survey asked caseworkers if the father had provided financial support to the child during the child's time in placement, not whether there was an established child support order on which he was paying. Thus, the data collected by the caseworker survey cannot be considered a proxy for official child support payments. However, both formal and informal forms of support are generally considered to indicate a father's commitment to his child.

Matched cases

As discussed, a number of cases were removed from this component of the study as a result of caseworkers' response to questions regarding potential risk to mother or child. Once these cases were removed, a separate file was constructed for each state that contained a list of case identification numbers of children in the sample to be included in the child support match process. This file was then sent to each state's child welfare IT specialist who added into the file identifying information on the child and his or her birth parents (to which the researchers did not

⁹⁴ State percentages of excluded cases are as follows: Arizona 31%, Massachusetts 31%, Minnesota 30% and

have access). The file was then sent directly to the corresponding state child support agency where the cases were “matched.”⁹⁵ The extent to which the child welfare system contained identifiers for the case principals affected whether or not a case could be “matched” with child support information. State policies on referral of foster care and TANF cases to child support agencies also affects this “match.”

After the cases were matched, the child support data was merged with the file. Identifiers were again removed to protect families’ privacy, and the files were sent back to the researchers. The overall number of cases matched varies greatly across states. Table 4-16 provides the number of cases matched compared to the number of cases sent to child support to be matched. Only 25 percent of Massachusetts cases and 36 percent of Arizona cases matched, compared to all sent cases in Minnesota and Tennessee.

Table 4-16
Results of Child Support Data Linkage – Number and Percent of Cases Included

	<i>Total # of Cases in the Study Sample</i>	<i>Total # of Cases Sent to Child Support (after caseworker exclusions)</i>	<i>Total # of Cases Successfully Identified in Child Support Files</i>	<i>% Cases Successfully Identified Across Agencies (of total sent)</i>
Arizona	561	387	138	36
Massachusetts	523	361	91	25
Minnesota	344	243	243	100
Tennessee	530	362	362	100
Total	1958	1353	834	62

The results shown in table 4-16 mirror information provided by local administrators.

Administrators in Minnesota and Tennessee consistently reported sharing information with child support agencies to identify and locate fathers. Tennessee automatically refers cases to its child

Tennessee 32%.

⁹⁵ A child welfare case “linked” with information in the child support data system does not equate to a child support order having been attempted or established. Referral to child support could have happened for locate or other purposes. Cases could also have been referred to child support by local TANF agencies.

support agency when a child enters out-of-home placement. Some administrators in Minnesota also noted an automatic referral process when IV-E eligible children come into care. As noted in chapter 2, the relationship between child welfare agencies and their local child support agencies in Arizona and Massachusetts appeared more tentative.

Before presenting findings from the case matching it is important to describe some differences in the child support data received from the four states. Three of the four states (Arizona, Minnesota and Tennessee) were able to provide detail on whether a child support order was attempted, established (if attempted), and paid upon (if established). Overall for the three states, 71 percent of the matched cases had a child support order attempted. Over half (53%) of those orders attempted were established, and of those established, 38 percent had been paid upon. State variation was greatest in the “percent of orders attempted” which ranged from 70 percent in Minnesota to 87 percent in Arizona. However, given the fact that Minnesota had 100 percent of their cases successfully identified across agencies, Minnesota’s results are, in fact, superior to Arizona’s in terms of orders attempted.⁹⁶ There was less state variation in percent of orders established—from 50 percent in Tennessee to 58 percent in Minnesota.

Child support data also contained information on whether the State Parent Locator Service (SPLS) and Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS) methods had been used and whether they were successful in providing information on the father’s location, generally either his address or that of his employer. Overall in three states (Arizona, Minnesota, and Tennessee), state locate methods had been used in 67 percent of the cases.⁹⁷ There was a 10 point range

⁹⁶ Overall, Minnesota attempted to establish orders in 70 percent of their cases (100 percent of which were identified in child support files) while Arizona attempted to establish in 31 percent of their cases (87 percent of the 138 cases identified in child support files).

⁹⁷ Massachusetts data contained information on whether state or federal locate resources had been used but not whether these efforts were successful.

across states (62 to 72%). In 96 percent of the cases in which the state locate methods were used, the methods were successful in locating the father. Federal locator resources were used somewhat less frequently, in 60 percent of the cases. However, these resources were also successful in 96 percent of the cases in which they were used.

Data consistency across systems

Table 4-17 presents findings on the consistency of information across systems. This analysis involved comparing the data from the caseworker survey with child support administrative data to determine if the information was consistent (that is, was the information in the child support file the same as that provided by the child welfare caseworker).⁹⁸ Inconsistent data indicates the two sources could be relying on different information. For example, if during the interview, a caseworker noted paternity had been established and data collected from the child support system notes the same result, i.e., paternity established, this was considered “consistent” data. It is important to note however, that we cannot determine the source of the caseworker respondent’s information. That is, child support data could very well have been the source of the caseworker’s response.

As shown in table 4-17, almost three-quarters of paternity data were consistent across systems. However, in the remaining one-quarter of cases, child welfare workers’ responses conflicted with the information contained in the child support administrative data. Overall, data on father location and father’s child support matched in 63 and 51 percent of the cases, respectively. As discussed previously, due to the differences in definitions of location and support, interpreting the meaning of inconsistencies in these types of data is more difficult. It is

also difficult to interpret state variation except through administrator opinions as discussed above. However, state differences can be presented and may raise questions that future research efforts can examine. While Massachusetts had a small percentage of inconsistent data with regard to paternity, a much greater consistency was found with regard to child support in that state. Arizona’s data was the opposite—a high percent of the data was consistent on paternity, but less than a quarter (23%) of the data on child support was consistent.

Table 4-17
Results of Child Support Data Linkage – Percent Consistent

	<i>% Data Consistency between Caseworker Survey Data and Child Support Data</i>				
	<i>AZ (N=138)</i>	<i>MA (N=91)</i>	<i>MN (N=243)</i>	<i>TN (N=362)</i>	<i>All States (N=834)</i>
Paternity establishment	79	31	76	79	73
Father location ^a	75	44	61	64	63
Child support ^b	23	69	41	62	51

^a Fathers are considered "located" by child welfare if their location was known at time of placement, or if any of the locator efforts provided information on the non-custodial father's whereabouts.

^b The caseworker survey definition of child support was whether the caseworker responded “yes” to whether or not the nonresident father ever provided financial support to the child. Reports of non-financial support were not included as “child support” for purposes of these analyses.

Inconsistent and missing data

Inconsistent information is important for two reasons. First, it may mean that child welfare data are inaccurate (e.g., child welfare data indicates paternity has been established but child support data shows paternity has not been established). Secondly, inconsistent data represents information that child welfare caseworkers might benefit from by utilizing child support resources (e.g., child welfare data is missing but the child support system contains data). Breakdowns by type of inconsistency are provided in Table 4-18.

⁹⁸ Matched cases are those in which both sources contained “yes” responses, “no” responses, or “missing”

Table 4-18 Inconsistent or Missing Data					
	<i>AZ</i> (<i>N=138</i>)	<i>MA</i> (<i>N=91</i>)	<i>MN</i> (<i>N=243</i>)	<i>TN</i> (<i>N=362</i>)	<i>All States</i> (<i>N=834</i>)
<i>Paternity Establishment</i>					
<i>Inconsistent</i>	%	%	%	%	%
Paternity established by child welfare, not established by child support	4	66	12	9	15
Paternity established by child support, not established by child welfare	17	2	4	11	9
<i>Missing</i>					
Paternity information missing by child welfare, not missing in child support	0	0	2	1	1
Paternity information missing in child support, not missing in child welfare	0	0	7	0	2
<i>Consistent</i>	79	31	76	79	73
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Father Location</i>					
<i>Inconsistent</i>	%	%	%	%	%
Location known by child welfare, not by child support	12	23	6	27	18
Location known by child support, not by child welfare	9	3	4	8	6
<i>Missing</i>					
Location information missing by child welfare, not missing in child support	0	0	0	1	0
Location information missing in child support, not missing in child welfare	4	30	28	0	12
<i>Consistent</i>	75	44	61	64	63
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Father Support</i>					
<i>Inconsistent</i>	%	%	%	%	%
Collection noted by child welfare, not by child support	0	19	7	7	7
Collection noted by child support, not by child welfare	30	4	16	25	21
<i>Missing</i>					
Support information missing in child welfare, not missing in child support	4	8	8	5	6
Support information missing in child support, not missing in child welfare	43	0	28	0	15
<i>Consistent</i>	23	69	41	62	51
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100

As shown, for all three categories of data—paternity, location, and support—there are cases in which data was available in the child support system yet the child welfare caseworker reported a

responses.

lack of information. For example, in 17 percent of the matched Arizona cases, child support data shows paternity establishment while the child welfare caseworker reports it has not been established. Similarly, in 9 percent of the Arizona cases, father location is known to the child support system but the child welfare caseworker reported that the father was not located.⁹⁹ Overall, paternity and location were more often known by the caseworker and not found in the child support data than visa versa. Perhaps not surprisingly, collection of support was more often noted in the child support system and not reported by the child welfare worker. The category of father support also has the greatest percent of cases in which the caseworker data was missing yet child support data contained such information. However, in Arizona and Minnesota, a significant percentage of cases contained “missing” data on collections in the child support system yet the caseworker respondent reported the father providing support to his child. Again, this may be due to the differing definitions of “child support” between the two systems.

While these analyses are exploratory the findings suggest the need for continued collaboration between child welfare and child support systems. The intent was to determine whether child support data could be helpful to child welfare agencies for locating nonresident fathers. Indeed, with regard to paternity establishment and father location, information available in the child support agency’s administrative data system can be useful to child welfare caseworkers. It is also important for assessment purposes that child welfare caseworkers have more complete and accurate information about the status and regularity of a nonresident father’s provision of financial support.

⁹⁹ Father was reported not located at time of case opening and all reported efforts to obtain locate information did not provide information.

Summary and Conclusions

This study explored casework practices involving nonresident fathers through both qualitative and quantitative research methods. In-depth discussions with 53 local child welfare administrators provide an overview of policies and practices related to fathers and provide state context and across-state variation. Case-level data collection in the four study states provides rich, detailed information on characteristics of the nonresident fathers of the sampled children, case characteristics, and the actions of caseworkers in these cases. Survey data were compared to available child support information to determine if child support information can be of assistance to child welfare caseworkers.

The case-level data collection includes sampled children in foster care who had been removed from households in which their biological father did not reside. While this population of cases allowed for the rich data obtained, it also limits the implications of the findings. Study findings cannot describe how caseworkers interact with fathers who lived in the home with the child prior to removal. Local administrators reported a significant portion of their cases involve nonresident fathers—estimates ranged from 30 to 80 percent of cases. Thus, in some localities, nonresident fathers are the norm. Below, a summary of the study's findings is provided. Findings are presented along the continuum of casework practices regarding nonresident fathers—practices aimed at identifying, locating, and engaging fathers.

Identifying and Locating Nonresident Fathers

This study examined practices used to identify and locate nonresident fathers with regard to the timing of these activities and whether there are certain case, father, or child characteristics that affect when these fathers are sought, how many methods a caseworker uses to search, and

whether searches are successful. Caseworker bias was examined by comparing practices used with nonresident mothers and nonresident fathers and by grouping caseworkers according to gender, training, and opinions. Workers reported having identified the fathers in 88 percent of the cases in the study sample, although workers had contacted only 55 percent of the fathers.

Timing of identification

While many administrators reported that caseworkers begin trying to identify a child's father during the investigation phase, most seemed to think that efforts were stronger and more successful early in a case but after the investigation was complete. According to caseworkers, the majority of nonresident fathers had been identified at case opening (68%). It is likely that while most nonresident fathers are identified early, efforts needed to identify a father later become more time-consuming and less successful. Fathers identified and located at the time of case opening were more likely to be contacted by the caseworker and engaged in the case in ways such as visitation with the child.

Factors that may affect practices to identify and locate nonresident fathers

While slightly over half of all identified nonresident fathers had been located at case opening, this varied considerably by whether the identified father was the legal birth father or whether he was an alleged father. Results of our multivariate regression found several significant factors related to father identification. Father identification does appear to be associated with case and caseworker characteristics. Case characteristics associated with father identification include the age and race of the child and current placement type. Cases in which the child was currently placed in a non-relative foster home were less likely than children living with kin to have an

identified father. Cases assigned to male caseworkers or African American caseworkers were also less likely to have an identified father.

Cases with a case plan goal of reunification with the mother were more likely than cases with a goal of non-relative adoption to have a father who was located at the time of case opening. However, different case plan goals appear unrelated to caseworkers' methods to locate nonresident fathers except with regard to asking the child for assistance. Children were more likely to be asked to help locate the nonresident father in cases in which the goal was reunification with the mother than in cases in which the goal was non-relative adoption. Differences in locating methods were found when length of placement was taken into account. Caseworkers were more likely to utilize many locating resources—law enforcement and public assistance records, DMV records, phone books, and utility records—for cases involving children in placement a year or more. State and federal parent locator resources were also more likely to be used when children had been in placement more than one year.

There were a few differences found in locating methods utilized by caseworkers when cases were analyzed by whether the child was living with kin or living in a non-kin placement. Not surprisingly, workers were more likely to seek help from the mother's relatives in cases in which children were living with kin. Workers were also more likely to search law enforcement, public assistance records, state and federal parent locator services for help in locating nonresident fathers of children placed with kin.

Caseworker bias in practices to identify and locate nonresident fathers

In order to examine whether there are caseworker biases against nonresident fathers we compared caseworker actions toward nonresident fathers and nonresident mothers and conducted analyses for subgroups of caseworkers. While some comparisons can be drawn between nonresident fathers and resident mothers, as discussed in chapter 3, the sample of “nonresident” mother cases also allowed for comparison of caseworker practices directed at nonresident fathers and nonresident mothers.¹⁰⁰

A comparison of nonresident mothers and nonresident fathers found that nonresident mothers are more likely to be located at case opening than nonresident fathers. There were some slight differences in how caseworkers attempted to locate nonresident mothers and nonresident fathers. Not surprisingly, public aid records were searched more frequently to help locate nonresident mothers than fathers. Children were asked to help locate nonresident mothers far more often than they were sought to help locate their fathers. Caseworkers reported that not all individuals asked to help identify or locate nonresident fathers are forthcoming with information. Mothers in particular are not always helpful in providing locating information on the father. This finding concurs with other recent research that found that caseworkers noted that mothers often hinder the involvement of fathers in child welfare casework (O’Donnell et al. 2005).

The comparison analyses conducted using different groupings of caseworkers by gender, training and opinions found that caseworkers who received training were more likely than other workers to have cases involving fathers located at case opening. However, caseworker training was not found to be significant after considering other factors associated with father identification. Workers were more likely to seek locating assistance from other workers, the

¹⁰⁰ See definition of “nonresident” mother in chapter 3.

mother's relatives and father's relatives in cases in which the worker reported having received training.

Caseworker gender was examined to determine whether a gender bias exists in relation to identifying and locating nonresident fathers. Previous research found that caseworkers orient services to mothers, regardless of gender of the caseworker (Lazar, Sagi, and Fraser, 1991). While recent research found that male caseworkers were less likely to express frustration with involving fathers (O'Donnell et al 2005), overall, our comparison group analyses found no significant differences between male and female caseworkers on most of the casework dimensions examined.

More specific analyses of different identifying and locating methods revealed only one significant difference—male caseworkers were less likely to have obtained identifying information from the child. And, as mentioned earlier, male caseworkers were somewhat less likely than their female counterparts to have an identified father case.

Father Involvement

Engaging fathers is an important, but in many cases, difficult task. Administrators perceived the nonresident father population as having a diverse set of needs and experiences. Case level data reinforce this perception though it should be noted that caseworkers were only asked about fathers' problems in cases involving identified fathers who had been contacted.¹⁰¹ Caseworkers reported a number of circumstances that posed barriers to contact with nonresident fathers including fathers being unreachable by phone, living out of the state, and being incarcerated. The type of relationship the mother and nonresident father had also affects agency-father contact with

fathers more likely to have had contact with the agency in cases involving a good relationship with the child's mother. While a substantial group of fathers express interest in having their children live with them or were considered as a placement resource (approximately one quarter of all cases), caseworkers report in many instances a wide range of circumstances and problems that are likely to complicate any efforts to place the child in the home of his or her father.

Administrator and caseworker opinions on father involvement

When local child welfare administrators were asked about potential benefits and drawbacks to father involvement in child welfare cases, they reported that involving fathers may benefit children. However, administrators were quick to caution that this was true only when such involvement poses no safety risk to the children or mothers. Administrators mentioned that even if a father cannot be a placement resource they could offer tangible benefits such as financial support or critical knowledge of the birth family's medical history. While administrators noted fathers as potential placement resources, some administrators mentioned the benefits of paternal kin as placement resources before mentioning the father himself. A small number of administrators noted that involving fathers may make fathers feel empowered and responsible for the care of their children. Almost three-quarters of caseworkers believed that father involvement enhances child well-being, but only a little over half believed nonresident fathers want to be a part of the decision-making process about their children and most reported that nonresident fathers need help with their parenting skills.

¹⁰¹ Fifty-five percent of the entire sample of cases involved fathers who had been contacted by the agency or caseworker (this represents 62% of identified fathers). The frequency and duration of contact was not determined.

Fathers' problems and needs

Nonresident fathers who had been identified and in contact with the caseworker or agency have a diverse set of needs and problems. The most frequently cited problem for fathers was alcohol/drug abuse, a factor in 58 percent of cases in which the father had been in contact with the agency. In slightly over half the contacted father cases, workers cited problems associated with criminal justice involvement.¹⁰² Caseworkers were asked whether services were provided to nonresident fathers to assist them in overcoming the problems identified and whether or not fathers had complied with services. Caseworkers reported offering services to almost 60 percent of the contacted fathers but they reported only 23 percent of those offered had complied with all the services offered.

Examining problems of subgroups of nonresident fathers proved difficult. Comparative analyses of legal and alleged fathers found caseworkers reported more problems for legal fathers than alleged fathers. This may be because legal fathers actually have more problems but another plausible explanation is that the caseworker may have had greater contact with legal fathers, and therefore more opportunity to assess his problems. Caseworkers reported far less “don’t know” responses for legal fathers than for alleged fathers.

Father-child visitation, support, and interest in living with children

Caseworkers reported 56 percent of contacted fathers had visited their child but this represents less than one third (30%) of all fathers in the sample. As one might expect, more resident mothers than nonresident fathers were visiting with their children. This is likely due to the child having a permanency goal of reunification with mother. However, caseworkers reported that

nonresident mothers were also more likely to have visited their child than nonresident fathers (a statistically significant difference). Less than one third (29%) of the contacted fathers were reported to have provided financial support to their children representing only 16 percent of all fathers in the sample. Non-financial support was provided by almost one third (32%) of the contacted fathers with almost a quarter (23%) providing both types of support. Clearly, there is a group of nonresident fathers who are visiting and supporting their children. When compared to nonresident mothers, caseworkers noted nonresident fathers were slightly more likely to have provided financial support since the case opened but nonresident mothers were more likely to have provided non-financial support to the child.

Caseworkers reported half of the contacted fathers expressed interest in having their children live with them though this represents only 28 percent of the entire sample. Legal fathers were more likely to express such an interest compared to alleged fathers. Caseworkers also reported nonresident mothers were more likely than nonresident fathers to express an interest in having their children live with them. Interestingly, caseworkers reported similar or greater percentages of problems for nonresident mothers than for nonresident fathers but this could similarly be due to greater contact with the nonresident mother and increased opportunity to assess problem areas.

Caseworker bias against father involvement

Caseworker bias against father involvement has been researched as a barrier to fathers' participation in child welfare casework. Prior research has found that caseworkers do not pay as much attention to birth fathers as birth mothers but fathers also do not respond to outreach efforts

¹⁰² Criminal justice involvement was meant to include a wide range of possible involvement including fathers who

as well as mothers (Franck 2001; O'Donnell et al. 2005). Some gender differences among caseworkers were noted (O'Donnell et al. 2005). Our logistic regression models of father-child visitation and father support offer additional research on this topic but do not support the prior findings of gender differences among caseworkers. Caseworker gender was not found to be significant in the father visiting or father support models. In addition, similar percentages of nonresident mothers and nonresident fathers were considered as a placement resource by caseworkers (44% vs. 48%).

While previous studies have noted a lack of training on father involvement (Hairston 1998), in the four study states, caseworker training on fathers appears fairly widespread. More than two-thirds of the caseworker respondents (70%) noted having received training on identifying, locating and involving fathers.¹⁰³ Significant differences were found between cases involving workers who did and did not report having received training about fathers. The case plan was more likely to be shared with the father and the agency was more likely to consider placing the child with the father in cases involving workers who reported having received training. Significant differences were also found between cases with workers who received training and those who did not with regard to whether the father expressed interest in having the child live with him (workers with training regarding fathers were more likely than workers who did not receive training to report cases in which the father had expressed such interest), and whether the agency sought financial assistance from the father as part of the plan (workers reporting training about fathers were more likely than other workers to report cases in which this occurred).

might have been arrested, pending trial, incarcerated, or on probation.

¹⁰³ The question asked of caseworkers was "Have you ever received training on how to identify, locate, or engage nonresident fathers?"

Child Support Case Linkage

The linkage of cases between the child welfare and child support systems explored the potential for more extensive use of child support information by child welfare caseworkers. The results indicate that in many cases, child welfare workers do have information on paternity, location, and support that matches the information in the child support agency's files. However, the number of cases with conflicting information is not trivial. Given the importance of paternity establishment and the accuracy of this determination it seems prudent that child welfare workers utilize child support agencies to obtain new information and to confirm the accuracy of their own information about the location and paternity status of fathers of children in foster care.

Data resources specifically designed to provide locate information make it likely that child support administrative data systems have more reliable information about fathers' locations than do child welfare agencies, particularly in cases where the mother has lost contact with the father. And child support systems may be more able to obtain information on out-of-state fathers through the use of the Federal Parent Locator Service. Recent advances in data sharing across states and on a federal level have allowed state child support systems to be a good source of information on nonresident fathers involved in child welfare cases. Information on official child support orders and collection on orders would also be beneficial to child welfare caseworkers as part of an overall assessment of the nonresident father as a placement resource for his child.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

This study has been repeatedly described as an exploratory look at nonresident fathers in child welfare casework. The findings provide a more comprehensive picture of fathers of children in

foster care than has been presented previously. And because the case-level data come directly from caseworkers, the picture is from the perspective of the caseworker. While the accuracy of certain types of information can be questioned based on caseworker lack of knowledge or potential bias against nonresident fathers, the perceptions of caseworkers, the front-line workers who have direct interactions with nonresident fathers, are key to understanding how fathers are identified, located and involved in permanency planning and casework. Caseworkers' and administrators' expectations of nonresident fathers, what they can or cannot provide to their children, and where they fit within families served by child welfare agencies is an important component of casework.

While the study's findings cannot define best practices, they can inform practice. In particular, findings indicate a need to:

- ***Search for fathers early in the case.*** Most successful information gathering about a nonresident father's identity and location occurs very early in the case either as case investigation or other assessment activities. If a nonresident father's identity and location are not determined early on, there is less of a chance he will have contact with the agency.
- ***Provide guidance and training to caseworkers on identifying, locating, and involving fathers.*** Casework practice related to identifying, locating and involving fathers appears case specific and variable. Agencies and courts should make clear what steps caseworkers should consider when mothers do not know or share information about the child's father. Even when mothers do provide information on the child's father, workers may want to reach out to other individuals (e.g., relatives, former caseworkers) in order to confirm and expand upon the

information provided. Significant differences were found between workers who reported being training on fathers and those who did not receive such training in terms of father location and involvement. For example, the agency was more likely to have considered placing the child with father in cases involving trained workers. Overall though, the percentage of involved fathers was low.

- ***Agencies may need to examine whether services offered to fathers are designed to engage fathers.*** The study found a small percent of nonresident fathers, when offered services, complied with all the services offered. Further attention may need to be focused on how caseworkers present service options to nonresident fathers and how societal expectations play a role in these interactions.
- ***Address domestic violence and worker safety concerns.*** Caseworkers and administrators expressed a reluctance to involve some fathers because doing so might reintroduce potential abusers into volatile family situations. Administrators also raised concerns regarding worker safety when contacting the fathers of children on the caseload. Unless safety concerns are effectively addressed, both those related to worker safety as well as those related to the safety of the child and mother, efforts to involve fathers are likely to stall. Safety concerns need to be acknowledged and assessed at a case level and, as previously noted, through training. However, that nearly half of the fathers were never contacted by the agency suggests that little assessment of the actual risk presented is occurring.

- ***Use child support data more consistently.*** Child support information, including father location, paternity, and financial support, can be helpful in considering placements with fathers or other ways in which fathers can play a constructive role in their children's lives. The frequency with which caseworkers sought available information from child support agencies varied by state and was related to administrators' views of the relationship between the two agencies and the ease with which caseworkers (or other staff at the child welfare agency) could request locator services.
- ***Develop models for involving fathers constructively.*** Unless the child has a case plan goal of placement with his/her father or paternal kin, caseworkers are unlikely to know what, if anything, they should be doing to involve nonresident fathers. The case plan was shared with the father in almost all cases in which the father was contacted. However, we cannot determine from these data whether the case plan is mailed to the father or whether the worker meets with the father to share and explain the plan. Caseworkers may offer visitation to the father in some cases but there does not appear to be clear guidance on when, and in what instances, this should be offered. Family court decisions may also vary regarding father involvement. Less intensive forms of involvement such as obtaining the father's medical background and obtaining access to benefits are also not likely to be routine. There is considerable room for programming that engages nonresident fathers on behalf of their children in ways that could extend beyond the child's stay in foster care and supports whatever permanency goal is in the child's best interest.

This report has noted several areas that warrant further research and we hope this study serves as a starting point for such research. Additional research can be conducted using this dataset, which will be available to researchers through the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. For example, more detailed state-specific analyses would be helpful in examining how different policies affect casework practice toward nonresident fathers. State and local characteristics (e.g., rural/urban, poverty measures) could be added to the dataset and used in a variety of analyses to examine state and local practice differences. The regression models could be modified to include a different set of independent variables. While not a large sample, children who have a goal of placement with their father could be examined. Case outcomes could also be examined for children reunified with mothers and children placed with fathers.

Other research could include efforts to collect qualitative data to examine the relationship between permanency goals and casework, specifically casework involving fathers. Qualitative research could also examine specific methods of identifying, locating and involving fathers. Further examination of training opportunities for caseworkers and their impact on practice directed at nonresident fathers is also suggested.

In addition to caseworker actions, caseworker expectations of nonresident fathers are important in examining practices and policies. Perhaps equally important is how agency and family expectations of fathers get articulated during agency and family-directed approaches (e.g., permanency planning reviews and family group conferences). Are nonresident fathers expected to be an integral part of family group conferences? Is the expectation that fathers as well as mothers have primary responsibility for the care of their children? Kinship care has become an invaluable placement resource for child welfare agencies but has the focus on kin affected workers' expectations for placing children with nonresident fathers? Are agency expectations

such that grandparents and other kin are looked to as placement resources, even before nonresident fathers? Qualitative research methods could be used to explore expectations.

While our findings do not indicate biases in casework practices involving nonresident fathers, low expectations of fathers may be ingrained in agency policies and practices. Caseworkers reported that nonresident fathers have a wide range of problems and face a variety of circumstances that impact on their ability to care for and visit their children. However, similar problems were also reported for both resident and nonresident mothers. Protocol may dictate that caseworkers invest more heavily in remediation of a resident mother's problems given that returning the child to the mother's care is likely to be the permanency goal. Indeed, the vast majority (84%) of resident mothers were offered services for all reported problems. At the same time, agencies offered more services to nonresident mothers than nonresident fathers (79%** vs. 59%). Societal expectations that mothers know how to care for children and fathers are less capable may also affect these practices. Perhaps workers feel that less effort is needed to help mothers since the expectation is that the mother already knows how to be a mother, she just needs some help getting "back on track."

This study found nonresident fathers less likely than both resident and nonresident mothers to visit their child or express an interest in having their child live with them. Some of these differences could be due to fathers' lack of a prior relationship with the child and additional research should examine this issue. It could also be that caseworkers do not have the same expectations for fathers as they do for mothers. Perhaps nonresident fathers are simply responding to low expectations—expectations that likely mirror those of the community and society in general.

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