Self-Efficacy and Human Caring Correlates of Child Welfare Caseworker Performance in the Juvenile Courts.

Sue Duvall Steib
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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SELF-EFFICACY AND HUMAN CARING CORRELATES OF CHILD WELFARE CASEWORKER PERFORMANCE IN THE JUVENILE COURTS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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in

The School of Social Work

by

Sue Duvall Steib
B.A., Louisiana State University, 1970
M.S.W., Louisiana State University, 1983
May, 2001
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationship between personal characteristics of casework staff in a public child welfare agency and the way in which they work with the courts and legal system. A set of six measures was developed or adapted for this research to explore theoretical linkages between the personal psychological variables of self-efficacy and human caring, and the way in which caseworkers participate in the formulation of agency decisions concerning families and children as well as the way in which their performance is assessed by judges hearing child dependency matters. The research also addressed the reliability and construct validity of these measures and tested a response stem for the measurement of self-efficacy which is more consistent with the theoretical definition of that construct as a system of beliefs than have been response formats used in most earlier studies. Differences among caseworkers based on demographic variables such as education and experience were also examined.

Results of the study showed reasonable reliability and validity of the study measures, a significant relationship between the self-efficacy and human caring independent variables, and a significant relationship between certain domains of self-efficacy and the extent to which caseworkers support the agency case decisions which they must present in court. Analysis of measures completed by judges showed that they relied far more strongly on evidence provided by caseworkers than that presented by other participants in hearings. A total of 37 judges enrolled in the study, with an estimated 34 actually completing ratings of caseworkers. Judicial ratings showed strong reliability, indicating that they made consistent discriminations in their assessments of
caseworker performance. Implications of the findings for future research, for child welfare and legal practice, and for social work education are discussed.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Context of the Study

Public child welfare agencies in the United States are charged by law with the protection of children at risk of harm due to abuse or neglect by their parents or caregivers. All states now have reporting laws which require certain groups of professionals to report suspected child abuse and neglect to either law enforcement or child protection agencies. Currently, public agencies in this country, either directly or through arrangements with the private sector, investigate and assess about 2.8 million reports of child abuse, neglect, or dependency per year; about one-third are substantiated (U.S. Children's Bureau [USCB], 1999). In most instances of confirmed maltreatment, children remain in their homes with the child protection agency or another community resource providing services. However, in the most serious situations, when children must be removed from parental custody, the authority of the court is required. As a result of such court actions, about 500,000 children are in the protective custody of the nation's state or county child welfare agencies (Barth, 1996; USCB, 1999). These agencies must also provide follow-up services to insure the care and safety of these children while in custody, to work with their families to remedy the causes of maltreatment, and, in some instances, to effect subsequent adoptive or other permanent placement of children who are unable to be safely returned to their parents. When children must be taken into protective custody, it is essential that child welfare agencies and the courts work together to determine the child's fate (Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention [OJJDP], 2000).
The profession of social work, especially in the area of child welfare, has always been closely associated with the juvenile courts. Indeed, at its inception in Chicago in 1899, the first juvenile court employed several social workers to serve the needs of the families which came to its attention (Mason, 1997). Originally, the roles of juvenile court legal professionals and social workers were conceptualized to be collaborative, with both entities espousing a philosophy of guiding and protecting children and families. While the courts exercised authority in legal and civil rights issues, child welfare agencies offered assessment, planning, and intervention to address the physical and psychosocial needs of the children and families brought to their attention (OJJDP, 1999). In reality, however, their interface has always been problematic to some extent. Initially, problems between the two entities centered around the division of responsibilities. Juvenile courts were often vested with social services responsibility and some were reluctant to relinquish it as public child welfare agencies emerged in the 1920's and 1930's (Costin, Karger, & Stoessel, 1996; Leighninger & Ellett, 1998). More recently, friction between the courts and agencies has grown as the court’s role in child welfare cases has enlarged and as differences in legal and social services approaches to dealing with the complex problems of children and families have become more pronounced (Boyer, 1995; Hardin, 1993, 1996; Kamerman & Kahn 1990; Katz, Spoonemore, & Robinson, 1994).

This study addresses the need to further explore the complex interplay between the child welfare and legal systems which so significantly impacts the children and clients which each system serves. It specifically examines work-related personal characteristics and demographic variables of child welfare staff in relation to the way in which judges
perceive staff participation in hearings and the extent to which staff characteristics influence judges' decision making.

In focusing on the public child welfare agency and courts in Louisiana, this quantitative study builds on earlier research (Ellett & Steib, 2000) which used qualitative methods to examine agency-court interaction and the experience of casework staff in court hearings. That study, which included observations of 228 hearings in child dependency matters, raised concerns about the degree to which casework staff and their supervisors were able to present important information in court as well as other issues such as court scheduling, waiting time for caseworkers, and the time allotted to hearings.

Brief Literature Review

**Child Welfare Agencies and the Juvenile Courts**

The passage of the federal Child Welfare and Adoption Assistance Act of 1980 (Public Law 96-272) markedly expanded the judicial role in child welfare. Specifically, the law called for efforts to (1) maintain children in their own homes when that could be done with reasonable assurance of children's safety, (2) to make efforts to return children who were removed as soon as their homes could be made safe, and (3) to move as quickly as possible to place those children unable to be reunited with their families into permanent homes outside of the foster care system. This legislation, intended to reform a child welfare system in which too many children were remaining in foster care for too long, provided for ongoing judicial oversight as the chief means of achieving more timely permanent placement for children (Hardin, 1996; Knepper & Barton, 1997). Thus, the court is now involved not only when children enter and leave protective

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custody, as was formerly the case, but throughout their stay in foster care. As a result, while the fact is probably unknown to most of the public, child welfare practice has become closely intertwined with the legal system, and casework staff spend much of their time preparing for, waiting in, and appearing in court to provide information about agency activities and to support the agency’s recommendations in each case (Ellett & Steib, 2000; Hardin, 1993; Schwartz, Weiner, & Enosh, 1999).

More recently, even more prescriptive federal legislation, the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, has escalated the level of judicial involvement and control in child welfare cases. This law, which places even greater emphasis on child safety and the timely attainment for children of a permanent home outside of the foster care system, gives courts the authority to oversee the management of cases within specific time frames, and mandates agencies to file petitions for involuntary termination of parental rights for children who have been in the foster care system for at least 15 out of the past 22 months unless certain specified exceptions apply (P.L. 105-89, 1997).

Many child welfare staff find interaction with legal professionals and the court’s high degree of control and scrutiny to be among the most distasteful and stressful aspects of their jobs (Ellett, C., 1995; Johnson & Cahn, 1995). Studies have documented the tension which frequently exists between caseworkers and attorneys as well as the frustrations expressed by both judges and child welfare staff with each other’s values, priorities, and performance (Hardin, 1993, Johnson & Cahn, 1995; Russel, 1986).

While caseworkers complain of judges who are chronically disrespectful, issue unreasonable orders, and over-reach their authority, judges tend to justify these actions
as necessary in order to make progress and protect clients, because many judges perceive
that agencies give poor-quality services. Judges also express frustration at the variability
in the amount and quality of training given to child welfare staff as well as the frequency
with which staff appear in court poorly prepared (either without needed information or
failing to have carried out previous orders) and who give evidence poorly (Boyer 1995 ;

The Child Welfare Workforce

Judges’ claims that child welfare staff perform inferior quality work may often be
warranted, which is not surprising given the current picture of the workforce in public
child welfare. While both public and private sector child welfare practice in the United
States has historically been identified with the profession of social work, only about a
quarter of those working in the child welfare field at this time have any formal social
work education at either the baccalaureate or graduate level (Leighninger & Ellett,
1998; Liebermann, Hornby & Russell, 1988). Since, in most agencies, those with social
work degrees tend to occupy supervisory and administrative positions, the percentage of
caseworkers with such social work educational credentials is assumed to be even smaller.
Although the two phenomena have not been linked by empirical evidence, an historical
review shows that the court’s expanding role in child welfare, has occurred concurrently
with the decreasing qualifications for child welfare employment. Indeed, the variability in
the expertise and training of child welfare staff has been cited as a justification for the
court taking a more controlling role in child welfare cases (Boyer, 1995).
Child welfare agencies were the first public sector human services to recognize the value of professional education as graduate schools of social work developed during the first third of the twentieth century. During the late 1930's, the U.S. Children's Bureau, which administered federal funding for state and county child welfare programs, had established grants to provide educational leave for staff to obtain a master of social work (MSW) degree and had formally recognized the MSW as the educational standard for the profession (Leighninger & Ellett, 1998; Popple & Leighninger, 1996). However, federal legislation enacted during the 1960's and 1970's resulted in the erosion of educational standards. Amendments to the Social Security Act in 1962 required states to administratively combine child welfare with public assistance, which had a much smaller professionally educated work force. Then, in 1974, the passage of the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and the subsequent enactment of child abuse and neglect reporting laws in all states resulted in a five-fold increase in reports of child maltreatment between 1976 and 1993. This deluge of reports, as well as reductions in federal funding in subsequent years, led to an erosion of esteem and professionalism in child welfare. While graduate schools of social work were unable to produce graduates in sufficient numbers, the need for a greatly increased work force caused states to more strictly limit compensation; consequently, many agencies reduced the educational qualifications for employment. Typically, a bachelor's degree in any field constitutes acceptable qualification for an entry level job in child welfare today and, in some states, experience may be substituted for even this academic requirement (Ellett & Steib, 2000; Kadushin, 1987; Terpstra, 1996).
Tom Morton, Co-Director of the National Resource Center on Child Maltreatment (1999), refers to what he terms the “dumbing down” of the child welfare system and questions why agencies would have responded to the increasing difficulty of the problems which client families present by lowering the bar on staff competencies. He notes that agencies struggle to determine how individual and family assessments, crucial prerequisites to case decision making, should be conducted; further, there is a danger in replacing professional judgment with the rigid protocols many states have adopted in an attempt to enable less qualified staff to perform acceptably. Likewise, Howard Davidson, Director of the American Bar Association’s Center on Children and the Law, notes that most child protection staff are inadequately prepared and calls for social work education or related educational credentials and better training as the first of his ten-point agenda for reforming the child protection system in the new century (Davidson, 1999).

Perhaps as a result of the growing awareness of the problems related to preparing staff for work in child welfare, as well as the high rates of employee turnover in the field, a number of recent studies have focused on the type of education and training which is most associated with successful staff performance and retention. These have consistently shown that those staff with formal social work education perform more capably, feel more comfortable in their work, and remain in child welfare longer (Albers, Reilly, & Rittner, 1993; Booz-Allen, Hamilton, Inc., 1987; Dhooper, Royse, & Wolfe, 1990; Ellett, A., 2000; Liebermann, et al, 1988). None of this work, with the exception of that by Ellett, however, has moved beyond that to explore the way in which specific personal characteristics might contribute to caseworker performance or whether they are related
to educational attainment. Further, there is no research which attempts to link any characteristics of caseworkers with the way in which they are perceived by judges and in which this perception influences the decisions which judges make in child welfare hearings. A more detailed and focused inquiry into the factors which contribute to the performance of child welfare staff in the juvenile courts can provide a foundation which informs decisions about staff selection, development, and deployment, and leads to improved relationships between child welfare agencies and the courts.

Literature in the fields of psychology and management suggests a theoretical basis for such research. In psychology, self-efficacy is a construct of cognitive learning theory which researchers have studied extensively over the past two decades in relation to performance in many work contexts. It has only recently been explored in the field of child welfare, however. Self-efficacy refers to persons’ judgments about their capabilities to successfully perform certain tasks (Parker, 1998). A personnel needs study conducted in Louisiana’s child welfare agency in 1995 (Ellett, C.), identified self-efficacy as one of two personal characteristics which distinguished those professional staff who were termed “committed survivors” (i.e., those who liked child welfare, were respected by their colleagues, and expressed an intention to remain in the profession) from their colleagues. A subsequent study of child welfare staff in Louisiana and Arkansas found higher levels of reported self-efficacy to be significantly related to intent to remain employed in child welfare (Ellett, 2000). Neither of these studies attempted to link self-efficacy specifically to caseworkers’ performance in court or interaction with legal professionals, however.
Self-efficacy is concerned, not with the degree of skill which a person possesses, but rather with what one can do with the skill (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1990) posited that peoples' willingness to undertake certain endeavors, and to persist in working toward their goals, depends in large part on whether they feel that they will ultimately succeed. Self-efficacy includes the elements of motivation and persistence. Those with higher self-efficacy are expected to display a greater willingness to strive toward attaining objectives even in the face of significant barriers (Bandura, 1990, 1997).

Human caring, a concept from social psychology, is another factor which has recently been studied in the helping professions, specifically those of education and nursing. Although it was the second factor which distinguished the "committed survivors" in the Louisiana personnel needs study cited above (Ellett, C., 1995) and was subsequently studied in relation to retention of child welfare staff (Ellett, A., 2000), there is no known research which links this construct to specific areas of performance in the field of child welfare. This study will focus on the affective component of caring as distinguished by Moffett (1994) from the behavioral or cognitive dimensions associated with care giving or the possession of skills and knowledge necessary for effective care giving (i.e., caring about versus caring for).

Recent research in human caring in the field of education, has found caring on the part of teachers to be significantly related to greater engagement of students in academic learning activities (Freese, 1999). Agne (1992) discusses the importance of caring in teachers, noting that, unlike most other professionals who expect their clients to remain dependent upon them for their expertise, teachers are successful to the extent that they...
enable their students to do without them. She asserts that this focus on empowerment presupposes caring and commitment, especially in the context of a profession in which monetary rewards are not significant. The same argument may be made on behalf of child welfare staff, who also receive very limited compensation and whose services, if they are effective, enable their clients to function more adequately after the caseworker’s involvement has ceased.

An important aspect of the caseworker role is that of participating in decisions about the existence and severity of child maltreatment and the best possible alternative plans for children and families served by the child welfare system. Decision-making in the context of child welfare is often criticized as being subjective and thus more reflective of both the staff’s personal biases and the agency’s circumstances than of the real problems and needs of the child and family involved (Alter, 1985; Banach, 1998). In part because of the lack of universally accepted guidelines for decisions concerning child maltreatment, child welfare agencies tend to rely upon group decision-making. Recommendations which will be presented to the court are typically made not by the caseworker alone, but in meetings in which the case supervisor and perhaps others (both within and outside of the agency) offer consultation and input. Regardless of the factors considered in reaching the decision or recommendation in a particular case, however, it is typically the caseworker who must convey the decision to the court. In this study decision agreement is viewed as a mediating variable through which self-efficacy and human caring are expressed in court testimony. It is the degree of the caseworker’s belief in and support of the goals and courses of action recommended to the court which
are reflected in the information which he or she provides and the manner of its presentation.

Judicial response, which is a dependent variable in the study, is grounded in theories of power, authority, and leadership. The courts are vested by our society with the formal authority to interpret and enforce laws. As the chief office-holders in the court system, judges possess considerable power. However, judges in juvenile courts share decision-making with other court personnel more than do judges in other courts. In this regard, juvenile judges function in more of a leadership or managerial role than in one of absolute authority ((Knepper & Barton, 1997; NCJFCJ, 1995; USGAO, 1999). Thus, this study draws on the theoretical dimensions of both power and leadership to examine the role and behavior of judges in the context of child welfare judicial proceedings.

Because power is not unidirectional, its use has implications for the behavior of its targets (in this case, child welfare staff), and thus for the outcomes of their actions. Organizational theory delineates the construct of power and its relationship to authority. Judges’ use of the power with which they are vested is a key aspect of judicial decisions. Power is often thought of negatively in modern society, yet it remains a very real means of social influence. There is no question that judges, by virtue of their position, hold the power with which our laws invest the courts. In their role in child welfare cases, however, juvenile judges may also be thought of as the leaders in the process of making decisions about the welfare of endangered children.
As juvenile courts have become more involved in the ongoing review and oversight of child welfare cases, they have moved beyond the perfunctory periodic exercise of judicial authority to a system which accommodates and mirrors the time lines and decision making points in the casework process. The interface between the child welfare agency and the court, when the two entities work well together, is characterized by mutual respect and collaboration, with the court relying on the child welfare agency to plan and implement treatment and the agency looking to the court to protect the best interests of children and the due process rights of parents. (Hardin, Rubin, & Baker, 1995). To the extent that the child welfare agency is effective in providing services and formulating recommendations which are consistent with the mission of the court (i.e., the protection of the parties’ legal rights and the facilitation of a timely, safe, and permanent plan for the child), it seems reasonable to expect that judges’ need for the use of coercive power, especially as it is directed toward the agency, will be lessened. The judge who works with the child welfare agency in a relationship of mutual confidence and respect would logically need to rely more on professional expertise in applying the agency recommendations to the case within the context of the law and the legitimate authority of the court. The ability of the agency to gain such respect from the court is directly contingent upon the performance of the caseworker. It is thus logical to expect that the traits of the caseworker (as they are exhibited in the provision of information and testimony to the court), directly impact the judge’s use of power and authority. This view is further supported by statements of caseworkers and agency attorneys who view the heavy-handed behavior of judges in some situations as a response to poor casework,
lack of preparation, and courtroom behavior which detracts from workers’ credibility (Ellett & Steib, 2000; Hardin, 1996).

Conceptual Framework

This study posits a conceptual framework in which the personal variables of self-efficacy, human caring, and agreement with the agency recommendations and goals which are to be put forward in court interact in a dynamic system with the way in which judges perceive and respond to the evidence provided by caseworkers in child welfare hearings.

Figure 1 depicts the conceptualized relationship of the independent variables in which decision agreement is viewed as a consequence of self-efficacy and human caring. It is the degree of the caseworker’s belief in and commitment to the decision which is recommended to the court which is most directly reflected in the evidence which he or she provides and to which the judge responds. The caseworker’s post-hearing appraisal of the judge’s decision reflects the feedback which influences the personal factors of self-efficacy and human caring. Over time, this feedback is reflected in the worker’s overall assessment of the court experience and bears upon the personal characteristics of self-efficacy and human caring.

This framework is consistent with Bandura’s (1997) theory of triadic reciprocal causation which holds that humans function within an interdependent causal structure consisting of the personal internal factors of cognitive, affective, and biological events, behavior, and the external environment. Each of these factors influences the other bidirectionally. Thus, the caseworker’s experience in the judicial system both results
Fig. 1. Conceptual Model
from and contributes to the development of the personal characteristics of self-efficacy and human caring.

Statement of the Problem

There has been considerable attention in the literature to the problems which exist in the agency-court relationship, with a number of writers citing (1) the variability of caseworker knowledge and skills, (2) judges' lack of confidence in caseworkers' abilities, and (3) their perceptions of poor courtroom performance by child welfare staff as key factors (Boyer, 1995; General Accounting Office [GAO], 1999; Hardin, 1993, 1996; Kammerman & Kahn, 1990). The literature cites deficiencies on both sides, including the need for better understanding across professions, better role clarification between child welfare and legal professionals, and procedures which consider the needs of both systems (Hardin, 1993; Katz, et al., 1994; Knepper & Barton, 97/98). Although there seems to be agreement that the caseworker is a key actor in court, no studies have identified the personal characteristics displayed by caseworkers whom judges perceive as performing well in court or which tie caseworker performance to the value of the evidence which they provide in judicial decisions. Moreover, theory-based constructs in the psychology literature have not been applied to explain interactions in the juvenile courts.

This study also addresses concerns for inconsistency in various response formats used to date in the measurement of self-efficacy. The response stem used in this study was more closely aligned with the conceptual definition of self-efficacy as a theory of beliefs than formats in earlier studies have been. The measures used attempted to capture
the contextual aspect of the construct as well as its outcomes of task motivation and persistence.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was threefold. First it explored the theoretical personal variables of self-efficacy, human caring, and decision agreement as they relate to the way in which caseworkers experience work with the court, caseworkers’ performance in the courtroom, and the way in which judges evaluate caseworkers’ participation in judicial proceedings in child dependency matters. Secondly, it tested a measurement of self-efficacy which employs a response set most closely aligned with Bandura’s (1997) definition of efficacy. Lastly, the study examined the linkages among the independent variables as well as their relationship to demographic factors such as caseworker education and experience.

**Significance of the Study**

The role of the judicial system in child welfare has grown markedly over the past twenty years and is likely to increase (Hardin, 1996). As this change has occurred, problems have arisen in the relationship between agencies and courts, impeding the timely and effective resolution of the matters before them. Judges often cite problems with caseworker performance, both in service delivery and in their preparation for and presentation in court, as a source of frustration and a reason for the court’s exceeding what some view as its prescribed role. Caseworkers, on the other hand, view court appearance as one of the more stressful aspects of their jobs and cite problematic relations with the court as a factor negatively impacting job satisfaction. With greater
court involvement and oversight of child welfare cases, staff time is increasingly consumed with court-related activities as well as time lost waiting for cases to be heard (Ellett, 1995; Ellett & Steib, 2000; Kamerman & Kahn, 1990; Hardin, 1993).

Because the courts and child welfare agencies are the primary institutions constituting the child welfare system in our country, it is important that they work well together to achieve the best possible outcomes for the families and children they serve. Such cooperation is even more critical in view of the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, which requires states to move children into permanent placements outside of the foster care system within a shorter period of time and calls for more intense oversight by the court system to insure the achievement of this objective (P.L. 105-89, 1997). A more thorough understanding of the way in which characteristics of caseworkers influence their work with the courts, and thus affect the extent to which judges view them as credible, enables agencies to better select and prepare staff to work with the legal system in a mutually respectful, collaborative relationship. Such a relationship allows both the agency and the court to focus their efforts on the mutual goal of protection and well-being of children rather than on systemic problems. This research adds to what is already known about the characteristics of effective child welfare caseworkers and suggests new directions for inquiry to identify significant prerequisites and professional development needs for this important work.

This study is timely given the impending demands of more rigorous federal legislation and the focus through the national Court Improvement Project on enhanced
coordination and collaboration between juvenile courts and child welfare agencies (GAO, 1999; National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges, 1995; OJJDP, 2000).

Findings of this study also have applicability for social work education. As child welfare agencies over the past twenty-five years have employed fewer numbers of staff with social work degrees, many in the field have come to question the relevance of social work education. In recent years, however, funding has been made available through Title IV-E of the Social Security Act to encourage university schools of social work to develop curricula with content specifically relevant to child welfare practice (Zlotnick, 1998). This study provides data which can inform educators in the planning of such curricula, especially in the area of exploration and clarification of beliefs related to caring, a fundamental value in social work, in the development of critical thinking skills, and in course content and practicum experiences which better prepare new social workers for competent practice in child welfare.

**Conceptual and Operational Definitions of Variables**

**Independent Variables**

**Self-Efficacy**

**Conceptual definition.** Self-Efficacy has been most recently defined by Bandura (1997) as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). According to Bandura, a person’s willingness to embark on an endeavor is based largely on whether or not he or she expects to succeed. It is this expectation which influences motivation and the willingness to persist to achieve objectives even in the face of obstacles. Thus, in child welfare, self-
efficacy translates into the caseworker’s belief that he or she possesses the capability to successfully accomplish work-related tasks and goals and to thus improve outcomes for the children and families he or she serves. Self-efficacy is a contextual variable, changing based on resources and conditions. There is increasing evidence, however, that some carry-over exists from one domain to another (Bandura, 1997; Parker, 1998).

**Operational definition.** Self-efficacy was operationalized in this study through the use of an instrument adapted from earlier studies in child welfare (Ellett, C., 1995; Ellett, A., 2000). New items were added to assess efficacy in court-related work tasks. This measure, the Caseworker Self-efficacy Scale-Court (CSES-C), measures caseworkers’ beliefs in their capabilities to both provide services to their clients and to work collaboratively and effectively with the court and with the other professionals typically involved in child welfare hearings.

**Human Caring**

**Conceptual Definition.** Human caring is conceptualized as the degree to which the caseworker feels that what happens to the child and family who are the targets of services is important. This definition is drawn from the work of Moffett (1994) who explicated the affective component of caring as differentiated from the behavioral component (i.e., caring about versus caring for) of the construct. In social work, caring is also linked with justice, a basic value of the profession. Thus, caring about the individual recipient of services is also rooted in the belief in each person’s intrinsic worth and the conviction that social systems must function to serve the best interests of all (Lynn, 1999). Caring is viewed as a critical prerequisite in establishing a therapeutic
aliance with clients, in motivating the caseworker to work in clients' best interests, and in the caseworker's degree of investment in and commitment to work in child welfare.

**Operational Definition.** Human caring was operationalized in this research using the Human Caring Inventory-Child Welfare (HCI-CW). This instrument is a further adaptation of an instrument originally developed by Moffett (1994) for use in a study of nurses and later adapted to apply to child welfare (Ellett, C., 1995; Ellett, A., 2000).

**Decision Agreement**

**Conceptual Definition.** Decision agreement is the degree to which the caseworker supports and is committed to the recommendation which he or she presents to the court. It includes the element of contentment with the decision. Decision agreement was viewed in this study as a consequence of self-efficacy and human caring which embodies the elements of motivation and persistence characterizing those personal factors. Thus, the caseworker who was committed to a specific goal or action was expected to be more likely to persist in explaining and defending it even in the face of the opposition which may be encountered in the courtroom. Because the recommendations which caseworkers must put forward sometimes represent what has been determined to be the least detrimental of the available alternatives, decision agreement does not necessarily reflect wholehearted confidence in a positive outcome. It does, however, imply agreement on the part of the caseworker that the decision made is the best one which can be made given the unique circumstances of the case. Theory on decision making cites commitment, or one's level of approval of and attachment to a chosen alternative as an essential feature of effective decision making (Hoy & Miskel, 1991).
While the decision is officially that of the agency and may not have been made solely by
the caseworker, it is important that he or she agree with it in order to convincingly
convey the agency’s recommendation to the court.

**Operational Definition.** Decision agreement was operationalized by the
Decision Agreement Scale-Child Welfare (DAS-CW). Because there are no known
scales which have measured this variable in the context of social work, it was adapted for
this study from one developed by Bienvenu (2000) to measure decision certainty in
students selecting a college major. Items were added and reworded to pertain to the
child welfare and court context and to reflect the conceptual difference between certainty
about one’s own decision and agreement with one made by a group.

**Dependent Variables**

**Summary Appraisal of Court Experience**

**Conceptual Definition.** This variable represents the caseworker’s overall
assessment of his or her experiences in working with the legal system in the context of
child welfare practice. Conceptually, the post-hearing appraisal is based on the idea that,
over time, workers develop an overall sense of the quality of their experiences in court,
and in the courts of specific judges. This global impression of how things typically play
out in court is viewed in the conceptual framework of the study as being a consequence
of self-efficacy and human caring. Further, it influences those personal characteristics of
the caseworker through consistent feedback over time.

**Operational Definition.** The Summary Appraisal of Court Experience Scale
(SACE) was developed to operationalize that variable in this study. It is a self-
administered measure in which the caseworker evaluates his or her experience in court on six items, each having two Likert response scales. Both scales consist of the same six items with the worker selecting one of four response choices (1 = Strongly Disagree; 4 = Strongly Agree) in Scale A, and one of three response choices (1 = Little Variation; 3 = Great Variation) in Scale B. Scale A measures the quality of the caseworker’s overall court experience based on the six items and Scale B allows the caseworker to estimate the amount of variation he or she has encountered in the measured factors over the past three years in all courts in which he or she has appeared.

Judicial Response

Conceptual Definition. Judicial response is the extent to which the judge feels that the evidence provided by the caseworker is helpful to the court in fulfilling its responsibility to make the best decision on behalf of the child and family who are subjects of the hearing. This conceptual definition emerges from the unique role of the judge in juvenile court proceedings. It is a given that judges are vested with the formal authority to issue orders within the constraints of the law. In the context of the juvenile court, however, they may also be viewed as leaders of a team of diverse and interdependent individuals (such as child welfare staff, Court Appointed Special Advocates, and Assistant District Attorneys) whose job it is to serve the needs of children who have been placed in the protective custody of the state (Kotter, 1985; NCJFCJ, 1995).

Operational Definition. This variable was operationalized by the Judicial Response Index (JRI) which was originally developed for this study. This measure asked judges to evaluate the evidence the caseworker provided in a specific hearing based on 9
individual factors, to rate the caseworker’s overall credibility (i.e., in all court hearings before the judge), and to rate the relative weight which was given to evidence provided by various hearing participants in making the case decision.

**Post-Hearing Appraisal**

**Conceptual Definition.** The post-hearing appraisal represents the caseworker’s immediate evaluation of what took place in the specific court hearing in which he or she presented evidence before a judge who was enrolled in the study. Conceptually, in the context of this research, the worker’s assessment of the hearing is viewed as providing feedback, which is ultimately incorporated into the overall assessment of the court-related experience and thus influences the personal characteristic variables of self-efficacy and caring.

**Operational Definition.** The post-hearing appraisal was operationalized by the ten-item post-hearing appraisal scale (PHA). This measure, which was developed for the study, asks caseworkers to respond using a four-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 4= Strongly Agree) to assess the specific hearing with regard to both their own treatment in court and the decision which was made.

**Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses are derived from the previous discussion.

**Hypothesis 1.**

There is a positive, statistically significant (p< .05) relationship between level of caseworker self-efficacy and higher scores on the summary appraisal of court experience.
**Rationale.** Caseworkers who score higher on the measure of self-efficacy are expected to be those who have a stronger belief in their ability to effectively serve clients, to prepare thoroughly for court hearings, and to present evidence even in an adverse environment. Theory also suggests that an overall positive experience in court would contribute to the development of even greater professional self-efficacy in the domains measured in this study providing feedback which reinforces the worker’s belief in his or her capability to work effectively with the judicial system.

**Hypothesis 2.**

There is a positive, statistically significant relationship between level of caseworker self-efficacy and the level of decision agreement.

**Rationale.** According to efficacy theory, people who have a high level of efficacy in a particular area are more likely to put forth greater effort and persist even in the face of adversity (Bandura, 1997). Thus, caseworkers who have higher efficacy in relation to their work can be expected to have done a more thorough job of assessing problems, engaging clients, and delivering services and to have played a greater role in the decision-making process as it relates to case goals and recommendations. The feature of persistence which is a consequence of efficacy would logically be expected to cause caseworkers to strive more to have their views reflected in the agency’s recommendations. Other measures have supported motivation and persistence as outcomes of efficacy (Claiborne, 2001; Ellett, 1995; Loup, 1994).

**Hypothesis 3.**

There is a positive, statistically significant (p<.05) relationship between human caring and degree of caseworker decision agreement.
**Rationale.** Caseworkers with high levels of human caring are expected to be more motivated to meet their clients' needs and thus to go beyond the minimum (i.e., just that required by law or agency policy) in the services which they provide. Additionally, people who care about an issue are more likely to emotionally invest in decisions to a greater degree. Thus, a caseworker with a greater level of concern about a case outcome could be expected to have more thoroughly considered all of the possible consequences in the development of recommendations and to try harder to articulate them in the decision-making process as being in the best interest of the child and family. Alternatively, caseworkers not as high in caring would be expected to demonstrate less investment in the process of case decision-making and thus a lower level of commitment to the decision which is ultimately made.

**Hypothesis 4.**

There is a positive, statistically significant relationship ($p<.05$) between the level of caseworker decision agreement and judicial response.

**Rationale.** It is anticipated that caseworkers who have a high degree of commitment to the decision which forms the basis of the agency’s recommendations will be more motivated and persistent in articulating the recommendations to the judge in their testimony. As a result, the judge is expected to perceive their testimony as more credible.

**Hypothesis 5.**

There is a positive, statistically significant relationship ($p<.05$) between human caring and self-efficacy.
**Rationale.** Because child welfare is a helping profession, it is reasonable to expect that a high level of human caring will contribute to the strengthening of efficacy beliefs, decision agreement, and motivation and persistence to accomplish goals. Consequently, caseworkers who are more caring would also be those who are more motivated and have an increased probability of success. It is successful experience which is the most powerful influence on the development of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

**Hypothesis 6.**

The combination of self-efficacy, human caring, and decision agreement will account for significantly ($p<.05$) more variation in judicial response than will either of these characteristics considered alone.

**Rationale.** If each of the individual independent variables of self-efficacy, human caring, and decision certainty has a significant positive relationship with the independent variable, regression analysis should show an increasingly stronger relationship as each variable is entered into the equation. Further, based on the discussion above, it is reasonable to expect that there will be an additive value when the independent variables are combined.

**Research Questions**

The following supplemental research questions were addressed in the study:

**Question 1.**

How valid and reliable are the measures of the study variables?

**Rationale.** All of the instruments used were either developed or adapted specifically for this research. Thus, it is important to determine whether they are
reasonably valid and reliable measures of the constructs which form the variables in the study.

**Question 2.**

Is there a difference in scores on any of the three independent variables (i.e., self-efficacy, human caring, and decision agreement) among caseworkers based upon demographic factors such as level and type of education and years of experience?

**Rationale:** Other studies (Booz-Allen & Hamilton, 1987; Dhooper, et al., 1990; Leibermann, et al., 1988) have demonstrated a positive relationship between social work education, level of education, and both the performance and longevity of caseworkers in child welfare. In the case of human caring, it is reasonable to expect, given the value-based nature of social work education, that caseworkers with social work degrees would have had greater opportunity to identify and resolve their negative assumptions and biases regarding clients and thus be able to feel greater genuine concern for them. Likewise, the competencies developed through a social work academic program should provide workers with greater confidence in their possession of the knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to child welfare work. If, as would logically be expected, these characteristics are positively related to decision agreement, this variable also should be associated with social work education and longer experience in child welfare. Additionally, caseworkers who feel that they have a stronger knowledge base might logically be expected to feel more confident about their case decisions.

**Question 3.**

How much variation in decision agreement is accounted for by self-efficacy as opposed to human caring?
**Rationale.** In this study, decision agreement was viewed as a consequence of self-efficacy and human caring, each of which is expressed through elements which are components of decision agreement (i.e., commitment and persistence). In order to better understand the inter-relationship of the independent variables, it is useful to explore which of the two antecedent variables has the strongest relationship to decision agreement.

**Assumptions**

The study was based on the following assumptions:

1. That the responses of all participants will be honest.
2. That the information provided by caseworkers plays a major role in judges’ decisions.
3. That caseworkers’ and judges’ perceptions of the court environment are accurate indicators of actual characteristics and of experiences as they occur.
4. That the sample of child welfare staff used in the study is representative of caseworkers in the state child welfare agency.
5. That the sample of judges in the study is representative of judges hearing child dependency cases in the state.

**Limitations**

1. Both the caseworkers and judges who participated in this study were volunteers and may, therefore, constitute a non-representative sample. From the standpoint of caseworkers, voluntary participation in a study in which one knows that one’s testimony will be evaluated by a judge may be viewed as somewhat threatening in spite of the fact that workers were assured that they would not be
identified. Thus those who agreed to participate may be the most confident about their abilities and/or more committed to the agency mission and therefore more willing to engage in an activity which they see as having some positive application to the field of child welfare. Likewise, judges who participated may have a greater interest in juvenile matters and more investment in helping to provide information to better inform selection and preparation of child welfare staff.

2. Because it was limited to the public child welfare agency and courts in Louisiana, findings of this study cannot be generalized to other geographic areas.

3. It should be recognized that the measures used in this study were measures of perceptions of characteristics and experiences related to the legal process in dependency matters rather than more direct, and perhaps more objective measures (e.g., direct systematic observation).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter includes information which sets the context for the study and explains its purpose and significance. A brief overview of literature related to the study context and variables was provided as was a conceptual framework. A more detailed review of the literature is found in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature related to the interface between child welfare agencies and the courts and the relevant research pertaining to the theoretical framework and study variables.

Child Welfare Agencies and the Courts

The prevalence of problems in the relationship between child welfare agencies and juvenile courts is well documented. A 1999 study of the juvenile courts in five states conducted by the United States General Accounting Office (GAO) for a report to Congress cited the lack of a cooperative working relationship between the courts and other participants in the child welfare system, including public child welfare agencies, as one of two key problems adversely affecting the court’s ability to make sound and timely decisions in cases of child abuse and neglect. This GAO report, noting the unique nature of child abuse and neglect litigation, emphasizes the necessity that all of the participants work well together in order to achieve the best outcomes for children.

It is not surprising that child welfare and legal professionals should have some difficulty working together. Many marked differences characterize the two professions. Social workers and lawyers approach their work from a very different knowledge base and value orientation (Johnson & Cahn, 1995; Katz et al., 1994). Although most staff in public child welfare agencies have had no formal social work education, they are generally regarded as social workers by the larger community. The in-service training which they are provided, much of it developed by university social work departments, is grounded in the values and methods of that profession.
Social workers are typically taught, both in training and in their supervision on the job, to adopt a broad perspective which encourages them to use their knowledge of human behavior and social interaction as well as intuition in decision making. The social work approach tends to be more collaborative and to rely on teamwork and consensus building. Attorneys, on the other hand, tend to be interested in objective facts. They are schooled to use an adversarial approach to arrive at truth, so their style tends to be more confrontational and competitive. Child welfare professionals often question the value of this adversarial approach in dependency matters, believing that it fails to serve the best interest of children and families and that it often contributes to the deflection of responsibility from parents to the child welfare agency (Ellett & Steib, 2000; Katz et al., 1994; Weinstein, 1997).

An additional factor which undoubtedly impacts the relationship between child welfare and legal professionals is that of their disparate status in American society. Although lawyers often may be maligned, their profession continues to be one of relative power and prestige when compared to that of social work. The legal profession has historically been male-dominant, while most social workers are women, and attorneys tend to belong to a higher socioeconomic group than do most social workers (Katz et al., 1994). The status difference is even greater when compared with child welfare staff, many of whom have no actual professional credentials at all. It is noteworthy that attorney Mark Hardin, in the introduction to his book How to Work With Your Court (1993), states that it is written for those child welfare administrators "with special dedication and courage...who are not overly intimidated by lawyers and judges,...". Such intimidation is, unfortunately, all too common and poses yet another barrier to...
caseworkers and members of the legal profession working collaboratively on behalf of children and families.

Whatever the basis of the problems between child welfare agencies and the courts, the increased regulation of child welfare practice by external entities may have reached a point of diminishing returns. Monitoring and coercing cannot substitute for professional expertise and judgment on the part of those actually working with children and families. The degree of regulation which now exists in child welfare diminishes the autonomy which is essential to attract and maintain the highest quality practitioners in any profession (Morton, 1999; O'Donnell, 1992). Some recent research has suggested that there may be a direct link between the degree of empowerment which social workers feel and the degree of benefit which their clients derive from their services (Guterman & Bargal, 1996). On the other hand, it is understandable that judges who perceive that child welfare staff lack competence will be reluctant to relinquish more power to the child welfare agency. Thus it seems critical to explore those factors which might promote more mutual respect between the social work and legal entities in order to encourage and preserve a more balanced system of services for children and families.

**Judicial Behavior**

A number of theories from the disciplines of psychology and economics can guide us in understanding and predicting judicial behavior. Economic theory, most notably that of rational choice analysis, has been the most widely used to explain why judges make the choices they do (Baum, 1997). Rational choice analysis assumes that behavior is strategic, with individuals seeking to advance certain goals. It is less concerned with process than with outcomes and more concerned with individual
differences than with similarities in roles. People holding the same roles are assumed to have goals which are similar in nature, although not necessarily the same (Baum, 1997; Baum, 1994).

Psychological theories used to explain judges' actions include those pertaining to attitudes, cognition and decision making, and interpersonal influence. Although it is undoubtedly true that psychological factors, such as the attitudes of specific judges, affect their choice of goals, such theory has not yet been applied to attempt to predict judicial behavior. Most research in psychology has focused on ordinary people rather than on specific elite groups such as judges (Baum, 1997).

Some of the theoretical perspectives which have been used in the broader studies of judicial behavior and motivation may be applicable to the juvenile context as well, but they have not been applied to this context. For the most part, the study of judicial decision making has focused on judges' strategic use of their authority to influence public policy. Such a perspective is obviously more applicable to the U.S. Supreme Court and other higher courts. In the case of lower courts, the literature views judges as being motivated by the desire for higher office or the power to interpret laws (Baum, 1997; Schubert, 1964). There is little which addresses the specialized role of the judge in a juvenile jurisdiction.

Van Koppen and Kate (1984), in discussing decision making in civil proceedings, suggest that judicial decisions are likely a result of the interaction of both the case characteristics and the personal characteristics of the judge. They point out that judges must interpret, select, evaluate and integrate all relevant facts in a lawsuit. They conclude that, because individuals perform such tasks in different ways, at least some of the
variation in decisions is attributed to the personal characteristics of the judge. Although the juvenile context is somewhat different, this view of personal subjectivity on the part of judges is supported by Bortner’s (1982) much earlier study of delinquency proceedings in juvenile court which found great disparity in sentencing among judges and magistrates.

**Power and Leadership**

While the literature suggests that the desire for power may be a factor in some judges’ decision-making as well as in their aspirations for office, the study of power as a theoretical construct has not dealt with the judiciary. We must turn to the area of complex organizations and administration for an in-depth analysis of power and its use.

Power usually refers to an agent’s capacity to influence a target. French and Raven developed a taxonomy of power as it arises both from one’s position and from personal characteristics (Hoy & Miskel, 1991; Yukl, 1998):

- **Legitimate power** stems from formal authority and is associated with particular positions in an organization or social system. Holders of such positions are usually seen as having the right to exercise power and the targets of this power accept the responsibility of compliance.
- **Coercive power** entails the capacity to exact punishment and is also positional in nature. The targets of such power comply in order to avoid negative consequences.
- **Reward power** is exercised by one whose position includes the ability to control rewards and compliance is granted in order to obtain positive consequences.
Expert power is based on the possession of some special knowledge or ability and is not contingent upon one’s position.

Referent power is also based on personal characteristics and ensues when target individuals wish to comply because they admire and identify with the one who exercises power.

This typology categorizes legitimate, reward, and coercive power as positional and expert and referent power as personal. Considerable research has been conducted on the various forms of power and their interrelatedness. These studies suggest that effective leaders are those who emphasize expert and referent power. Such leaders are more likely to elicit commitment, rather than mere compliance, from their subordinates (Yukl, 1995). In the case of judges, legitimate power arising from their position is a constant. The use of reward or coercive (positional) or of expert or referent (personal) power, however, may vary based upon the situation.

The Juvenile Court

Juvenile courts are distinguished from other courts by unique characteristics which should logically impact the way in which juvenile judges behave. These distinctions are articulated in numerous writings on the history and current status of the juvenile court (Bortner, 1982; OJJDP, 1999; Rubin 1996, Schwartz, et al., 1999). Juvenile court judges are not simply neutral arbiters of fact. Since its founding in Chicago in 1899, the philosophical position of the juvenile court system has been, not punishment, but protection and guidance (Bortner, 1982; NCJFCJ, 1995). This more broadly defined role presupposes the involvement of numerous disciplines. Thus, from its beginning, the juvenile court was meant to be in partnership with the community and
with other professionals involved in serving children and families. Indeed, the success of the juvenile court has depended upon its collaboration with a myriad of other disciplines, including social workers, other mental health and substance abuse professionals, and officials in health and education (Fox, 1984; OJJDP, 1999; Rubin, 1985, 1996). This characterization of the juvenile court as a partner with other entities involved in serving children and their families suggests that the juvenile court judge, while also having to maintain some distance in order to be an impartial decision maker, is simultaneously viewed as a sort of team leader. In this role, he or she becomes the one who sets the tone for the working relationship of the other parties.

Two common features of complex organizations in modern society are diversity and interdependence. While an atmosphere that encourages greater interdependence and diversity can foster better decisions by bringing together the varied perspectives of those involved in a mutual endeavor, it can also lead to conflict. The essence of effective leadership is the managing of groups of very different individuals in a way that minimizes power struggles, promotes understanding, and optimizes the knowledge and talents of all members of the group (Kotter, 1985). Such is the task of the juvenile court judge.

The juvenile court with respect to its responsibility in child abuse and neglect cases is distinguished by the much greater degree of interdependence which exists among the participants in such matters. Whereas judges in most other forms of litigation are dealing with events which occurred at a point in the past, child welfare cases are ongoing and changing. Judges in such cases often must make decisions, not just regarding guilt or innocence, or the degree of one’s responsibility for an act, but on a number of issues, ranging from custody to specific child placement settings and services to be delivered.
This requires reliance on a variety of participants including attorneys, agency
caseworkers, guardians ad litem, Court Appointed Special Advocates, and in some
instances, law enforcement officials, mental health professionals, and representatives of
other private and public agencies (USGAO, 1999; NCJFCJ, 1995). It is the juvenile
court judge whose influence is most pivotal in determining whether the disparate actors
involved in child welfare legal proceedings work together cooperatively.

The findings of Knepper and his colleagues (1997) support the conceptualization
of the judge as leader. Their study of juvenile courts in Kentucky, revealed that,
although judges exercise considerable influence and leadership, they are not the sole
decision makers. Case outcomes are influenced heavily by the dynamics of the court
work group, which consists of all of those who are regularly involved in the activities of
the court. While the judge may be viewed as the leader, all of the court insiders have a
stake in how cases are decided and thus exercise some influence. Likewise, an earlier
study, which explored judicial decision making in the juvenile justice context, also
provides support for the importance of the role played by the many other professionals
associated with the court including caseworkers, mental health specialists, law
enforcement, school officials, and attorneys (Bortner, 1982).

Thus we find that, although most of the research in leadership has focused on the
behavior and characteristics of managers and administrators in corporations, it is
applicable as well to the role of the judge as the central figure in the intricate milieu of
child dependency matters. Increasingly, the complex problems which beset the children
and families who come to the attention of the courts and agencies, call for the services of
a wide array of individuals. The effective orchestration of these actors requires power,
but not just that power which is derived from the judge’s formal authority. Effective leaders must demonstrate power based on knowledge, interpersonal skills, and the use of resource networks (Kotter, 1985).

**Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy derives from social cognitive theory and has been explicated over the past three decades in the work of Albert Bandura and his colleagues. Bandura (1997) defines perceived self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). It “is concerned not with the skills one has, but with the judgments of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses” (Bandura, 1986). Efficacy beliefs have varied and far-reaching effects. They may influence the direction of one’s actions, the amount of effort one invests, the willingness to persist in the face of obstacles, the ability to cope with difficulty or failure, and the amount of stress one experiences in meeting challenges.

**Human agency**, the ability which people have to exercise control over their thoughts and actions, is conceptualized as interactive. In what he terms triadic reciprocal causation, Bandura (1989; 1997) describes a dynamic system in which one’s personal characteristics, actions, and the environment impact each other bidirectionally.

Important life decisions are influenced in part by one’s beliefs of efficacy in certain areas. This perception of one’s ability influences not only actions, but thought patterns and emotional arousal. Higher self-efficacy tends to be associated with a higher level of performance and decreased anxiety (Bandura, 1982). The development and level of an individual’s self-efficacy is influenced by four types of experiences: performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal.
(Bandura, 1982, 1990). Performance accomplishment is based on a person's own experiences in mastery of particular tasks. As might be expected, successful performance results in enhancement while failure lowers one's assessment of self-efficacy.

Both vicarious experience and verbal persuasion occur in an individual's interactions with others. Vicarious experience refers to a person's observing someone else perform a task (Bandura, 1982). Based on that observation, an individual then makes a judgment about his own ability to perform in a like situation. In the example of the child welfare caseworker, this might include the modeling experienced in the relationship with one's supervisor, through formal professional development exercises, or through observation of and association with one's peers. Verbal persuasion refers to the verbal information and encouragement a person receives from others about his or her ability to perform successfully in a particular undertaking (Bandura, 1982). In child welfare, direction and feedback from one's superiors and more experienced peers as well as from those in other professions would be expected to influence the development of caseworker self-efficacy.

Emotional arousal is viewed by Bandura (1982) and others as having a negative effect on performance and as leading to lowered self-efficacy. Thus, one's assessment of one's own ability in approaching an activity plays an important role in determining level of arousal. Believing that one lacks the skills and knowledge to succeed in an endeavor increases adverse arousal (i.e., anxiety) which, in turn, may result in lowered performance (Bandura, 1982; Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

Efficacy is more than just knowing what to do in a given situation. It also requires having the capability of organizing one's cognitive, social, and behavioral skills
into an action or, more often, a series of actions which result in the accomplishment of a task (Bandura, 1982).

It is important to distinguish between self-efficacy and other related but distinct constructs which are also studied in relation to organizational adjustment and performance. These include such concepts as self-esteem, self-concept or self-image, locus of control, proactive personality, and organizational citizenship behavior.

Self-efficacy is distinguished from self-esteem in several ways. First, the latter is a more global trait which reflects one's assessment of one's self-worth. It is viewed as a more stable characteristic while self-efficacy is dynamic, changing over time in response to the factors discussed above (Bandura, 1997; Parker, 1998).

Self-concept refers to a global view of oneself. It is not domain-specific and thus, unlike self-efficacy, does not predict behavior or explain the wide variations in behavior in different situations. Findings suggest that the two are linked in that self-concept is reflective of persons' beliefs in their efficacy. Bandura (1997) suggests that much of what is actually being measured in most measures of self-concept is, in fact, self-efficacy.

The construct of locus of control refers to one's beliefs about whether one's behavior and major life events are caused by internal or external factors. An individual with an internal locus of control tends to believe that his or her own behavior and ability are the dominant influence of life events and outcomes whereas one with an external locus of control is likely to view the course of life as being predominantly influenced by external factors. Like self-esteem and self-concept, locus of control is conceptualized as both a more stable and a more global construct than is self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Johnson, 1998).
Proactive personality describes a personal disposition to effect environmental change. Whereas self-efficacy changes in response to the environment, the concept of proactive personality is relatively stable (Parker, 1998).

The concept of organizational citizenship behavior is found in the management literature and refers to job-related behaviors such as attendance and punctuality and compliance with policies and procedures. Organizational citizenship behavior focuses on more passive activities than does self-efficacy and, as its name implies, is concerned with actual behavior, whereas self-efficacy focuses on people's beliefs in what they can do (Parker, 1998).

A number of studies have confirmed the relationship between self-efficacy and performance (Prussia, Anderson, & Manz, 1998; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). This has been borne out in research involving different settings including both individual and organizational endeavors. Empirical evidence links self-efficacy to several work-performance measures including coping with job-related events, adaptability to technological change, the acquisition of new skills, generation of ideas, and adjustment to organizational environments (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Self-efficacy has also been identified as a mediating factor linking both external and self-leadership to performance (Prussia, et al., 1998). In studies of teachers, efficacy, defined as the teacher's belief that he or she has the capability to affect student learning, has been found to be the single most powerful variable related to student performance (Agne, 1992, p.121).

Although originally conceptualized as a domain-specific construct, self-efficacy is now being viewed more broadly by Bandura (1997) and others. Parker (1998) discusses the concept of role breadth self-efficacy which refers to employees' perceptions of their

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capability to successfully carry out a broader set of work responsibilities which extend beyond those traditionally prescribed. This is an important factor given the new and changing demands with which organizations are continually faced in today's environment, and has applicability in child welfare where the work environment and scope of responsibility is subject to change based on external factors such as legislation, social conditions, and fluctuations in the fiscal and political environment.

The fact that self-efficacy is both positively related to performance and a malleable characteristic makes it an especially important construct for application in public sector organizations in which there is often a lack of control over staff selection.

**Human Caring**

**Theoretical Basis**

In spite of the long history of professions described as “helping” (e.g., teaching, nursing, social work), the study of caring in the professional context is of rather recent origin. The exploration of the meaning and content of caring dates primarily from the 1970's and has focused largely on the areas of teaching and nursing (Leira, 1994; Moffett, 1994).

Caring is explicated in the psychology literature related to prosocial behavior, specifically that which explores the constructs of empathy and altruism versus egoism. Conceptually, it is built on the study of morality and ethics. Prosocial behavior has been studied throughout history and various theories have emerged concerning its development and maintenance. Darwin, for example, viewed it as biologically based. In the twentieth century, most research in the area, specifically that dealing with the empathy and altruism, has focused on the role of cognitive development or social
learning in the acquisition of such behaviors (Eisenberg, 1986; Hoffman, 2000). Most of this work has dealt with the development of altruism during the course of childhood, finding that it increases consistently over the first ten years of life. Those who support a cognitive basis for prosocial behavior relate this development to the child’s increased cognitive ability to differentiate others and to make moral judgments. Proponents of the social learning perspective, on the other hand, insist that altruism, as well as other prosocial behavior, is learned and incorporated into the individual’s pattern of behavior through reinforcement, thus suggesting the possibility that it might be developed at a later point in life as well (Bar-Tal, 1976).

Although there is considerable controversy about the nature of altruism, there tends to be consensus that truly altruistic behavior must be characterized by three conditions: It must be voluntary, be intended to benefit another, and it must be performed without the expectation of a reward (Berkowitz, 1972; Krebs, 1970).

There are those who deny that actual altruistic behavior exists. They contend that, in helping, the helper’s real goal is either to obtain a reward or to relieve his own distress rather than that of the other person. This position has long been supported in social psychology and underlies many theories in that field such as those of self-awareness, self-handicapping, self-esteem and much of attribution theory (Batson, 1990; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Those who hold that all behavior is self-serving have formulated various rationales for this belief. Bar-Tal (1976) categorizes these theories into four different, but related, approaches: exchange, normative, developmental, and cultural.

Proponents of the exchange approach hold that persons give with an expectation of receiving and that what they hope to receive may be social approval or prestige as
well as material goods. Thus, altruistic behavior is seen as motivated by the desire for social rewards. Pure altruism is not impossible, but it occurs infrequently.

The normative approach focuses on altruism at the societal level and views altruistic acts as performed, not solely for the good of another, but in order to avoid sanctions associated with the violation of societal norms. Such norms also offer a sense of security for members of the social group by prescribing acceptable behavior in what might otherwise be an ambiguous situation. In accordance with this view, the norm of social responsibility, which carries an expectation that one acts to help those in need, may be followed because of the self-satisfaction one receives from doing so.

The developmental perspective arises from social learning theory and focuses on individual behavior. According to this theory, altruistic behavior is acquired over time through reinforcement and is maintained through the development of a self-reward mechanism.

Like normative theory, the cultural approach explains altruism on the societal level. It differs, though in its emphasis on the role of biological and cultural evolution and view of the development of altruistic behavior as an adaptive survival strategy which arose in response to threats posed by intergroup conflict.

Much work to address this concern about the underlying motivation for helping behavior has dealt with the role of empathy. Empathy as an emotional response has been variously defined. Some scholars describe it as the vicarious experience of another's emotional state, while others consider it to also include concern or compassion for another's welfare. Hoffman (2000) discusses empathic distress to describe the pain one experiences on seeing another in pain and suggests that it includes both cognitive and
emotional components. He differentiates sympathy from empathy as the response which is motivated by empathic feelings and attempts to relieve another's distress. Likewise, Batson (1990), Eisenberg (1986) and others distinguish between empathy and sympathy, pointing out that empathy can also be self-oriented, generating anxiety or pain in the observer which is not translated into helping behavior, but rather into attempts to alleviate one's own distress.

Batson and his colleagues (1990, 1996) have done considerable work to enlarge our understanding of the motivations underlying altruistic behavior. In numerous experiments, they have found that persons with greater feelings of empathy for another will try to help that individual even when they have nothing to gain personally.

Professional Caring

In her report of a 1993 study of 734 nurses in 14 hospitals, Moffett (1994) suggests that human caring in the professional context has cognitive, behavioral, and affective components. The cognitive dimension is related to knowledge and skills, and the behavioral to the act of care giving, while caring refers to the affective dimension. She finds that this affective component can be further subdivided into the characteristics of receptivity, responsivity, moral/ethical consciousness, and professional commitment.

Receptivity includes variations in sensitivity to others and a sense of connectedness. Sensitivity is also related to empathy. The responsivity element of caring includes the notion of nurturance. Some researchers have suggested that responsivity in the helping professions is dependent upon a moral view which includes acceptance and respect. Moral/ethical consciousness includes the notions of justice,
respect, equality, and goodness. Some literature suggests that an attitude of respect for
human dignity is a prerequisite for caring (Moffett, 1994). This is confirmed by the
ability to accept a person as he is, which is also a fundamental tenet of social work.

Agne (1992) discusses the significance of caring in education, suggesting that it is
the essential quality of the expert teacher. She points out that, in studies, only expert
teachers displayed genuine distress when they believed that they had failed to attain the
goals they had set for themselves in delivering a lesson to their students.

Samson (1985) recognizes the essential nature of caring in medicine while noting
that it may be sacrificed in medical education in favor of scientific and skills-oriented
content. Similarly, Gropper (1992) found that new doctors experience increased comfort
and effectiveness in their professional roles once they were taught to understand and
attend to their patients’ psychosocial needs.

Writers concerned with professional caring raise the issues of value and status,
noting that caring work, while acknowledged as important, even essential, tends to be
devalued from the standpoint of monetary compensation and prestige. Many caring skills
are considered to be acquired informally and thus are viewed as being within the
common domain. Writers have also observed that women predominate in the caring
professions and note their association with the traditional role of women as unpaid care
givers within the family. Indeed, much of the interest in professional caring has been
driven by feminist scholarship (Freedberg, 1993; Leira, 1994; Moffet, 1994).

Helping in the professional context carries with it ethical dilemmas associated
with respect for the individual’s worth and dignity and right to determine how much and
what kind of help is in his or her best interest. The best helpers are those who enable
people to help themselves. Agne (1992) makes this observation with regard to teachers. Skinner (1978), likewise, observes that therapists, like teachers, must plan and work toward withdrawing from their clients’ lives. Lenrow (1978) comments on the tension which exists between the helper’s obligation to act on his own judgments about what is in a client’s best interest and the need to respect the wishes of the client himself.

**Caring in Social Work & Child Welfare**

In the context of social work, caring has a strong link to the concept of social justice, a fundamental professional value, and thus is viewed as having both individual and societal dimensions. Lynn (1999) identifies personal caring and social justice as the two value bases central to the development of social work. Imre (1989) cites caring as the “primary underlying good” (p.18) in social work, and Tucker (1996) suggests that a “social ecology of caring” (p. 423) should serve as social work’s professional foundation and the feature which distinguishes from related fields. This bi-dimensional view of caring is shared by scholars in related professions as well, however. In psychology, for example, Lenrow (1978) observes that an underlying ethic of commitment both to the worth and dignity of the individual and to the public good is foundational to professional helping, and Hoffman (2000) also links caring to justice, suggesting that empathy is linked to both and that, since both are valued in our society, most adults who have internalized moral principles are sensitive to both caring and justice perspectives (p. 21).

From the social justice perspective, the proper goal of helping is not to enable the recipients of services to adapt to the way things are, but to help them change things for the better. Thus, social work educators must be concerned with teaching students
both to help individuals improve their personal circumstances and to understand and address the underlying causes of inequality and oppression (Lynn, 1999).

In child welfare, the forming of a helping relationship with children and families presupposes that child welfare caseworkers are able to convey empathy and a sense of caring. This does not always mean that the caseworker agrees with or condones the client’s feelings, but that he or she understands them and believes in the possibility of positive change (Mather & Lager, 2000). As in other kinds of helping, caseworkers in child welfare must be concerned not only with the kind of help which is needed, but with when helping is beneficial versus when it fosters dependence and dampens individual initiative. Unlike most other areas of social work, however, the child welfare worker may be guided not so much by his or her own judgment about the extent of helping which is appropriate as by the court’s. The legal mandate to be sure that all reasonable services have been provided to clients (P. L. 96-272, 1980; P. L. 105-89, 1997) is subject to discretion and, from the court’s perspective, the safest course is to interpret it broadly rather than narrowly. Thus, especially in the case of the parents of children in agency custody, caseworkers may find themselves doing more for clients than enabling them to do for themselves.

**Decision Making and Decision Agreement**

Classical decision theory posits a process which is rational and sequential. It involves the examination of all relevant information and consideration of all possible outcomes in planning and implementing a course of action (Hoy & Miskel, 1991). Janis & Mann (1977) suggest that there are seven major criteria which can be used to gauge the quality of decisions. Based on information drawn from other research in the area of
decision-making, they conclude that high quality decisions are ones in which the decision maker has (1) thoroughly considered a wide range of alternative courses of action; (2) surveyed the full range of objectives to be fulfilled and the values implications; (3) weighed the relative costs and risks; (4) searched for new information to further assess the alternatives; (5) assimilated and taken note of any new information even when it does not agree with the preferred course of action; (6) reexamined the potential positive and negative outcomes of all known alternatives; and (7) made detailed plans for implementing the chosen alternative and developed a contingency plan to be implemented if necessary (p. 21).

Real-world decisions do not, of course, meet this standard of quality assurance. Decision makers do not normally have all of the relevant information available to them when they must make decisions nor do they have an understanding of all possible outcomes. Such is certainly the case in child welfare where decision making typically focuses on the presenting problem (i.e., the specific child maltreatment), which is in all likelihood only a manifestation of an array of underlying factors affecting parenting ability and the safety and well being of the child.

Time is also a common consideration for decision makers. A conflict theory of decision-making is posited in which individuals seek to avoid the anxiety and other sources of stress associated with their choices. In so doing, they may make decisions too hurriedly or without thinking critically about the alternatives and their likely consequences (Hoy & Miskel, 1991). This is clearly an issue in child welfare where the stress associated with work load and time frames which are externally imposed by courts and legislation focus importance on the timeliness of decisions. Unfortunately, while
timeliness certainly speaks to the urgency of these decisions in the lives of children and their families, the quality of decisions may be negatively impacted by the imposition of such arbitrary deadlines.

The standard of the best interests of the child is presumed to be the guiding principle in decisions about goals and recommendations concerning long term plans for children who are the subjects of child protection investigations or who are already in the custody of the state. This standard, articulated in the classic work of Goldstein, Solnit, and Freud (1973,1979), emphasizes the importance of both physical safety and longer-term psychological and emotional well-being. Although the best interest standard is assumed to be tied to what is known about the physical, emotional, and developmental needs of children, it has never been clearly defined. Because of this, there is considerable suspicion on the part of those outside of child welfare agencies that decisions may be based more on personal biases and agency resource considerations than on a thorough and objective evaluation of what truly constitutes the best alternative for the child in question (Alter, 1985; Boyer, 1995).

There are relatively few studies which have attempted to define the way in which child welfare professionals go about making decisions. What research does exist relates more to decision making about situations of child abuse rather than neglect although the latter constitutes a far greater proportion of all documented child maltreatment (Alter, 1985; Barth, 1996). There are some findings, however, which suggest that decision-making is not as random and subjective as might be supposed, but rather that the perception persists because the standards by which the goals of best interest and child safety are measured have not been sufficiently explicated either in the literature or in
legislation (Alter, 1985). For example, a study of the way in which legal and social service professionals involved in child dependency and child custody proceedings go about making decisions found that considerations tended to group into three fairly distinct domains. These included precipitating events, guiding professional principles, and individual case variables (Banach, 1998).

In studying the decision making practices of child protection workers involved in the assessment of child neglect, Alter (1985) found a high level of agreement among workers with regard to the importance of three factors: (1) The degree of physical harm sustained by the child; (2) The age of the child; and (3) the frequency of the alleged parental behavior.

More recently, however, research in decision making in both child abuse and neglect cases failed to find sufficient consistency among decision makers to identify a standard for good practice. Even when nationally recognized experts in the field of child welfare were asked to rate the relative influence of case variables in their decisions, their opinions varied significantly and were only slightly more consistent that those of first line caseworkers. Although some case characteristics, such as a history of previous child maltreatment reports, were considered more important than others, there was wide variation in how those characteristics were weighted by different decision makers (Rossi, Schuerman, & Budde, 1999).

The majority of situations in which child welfare staff must make decisions regarding recommendations to the court involve not physical or sexual abuse, but neglect (Alter, 1985). Because standards for the determination of neglect tend to be poorly defined both in the law and in professional literature, these decisions are particularly
vulnerable to subjective factors such as personal ideology and interpretation of minimum
child care standards within the community (Banach, 1998; Fox, 1984).

The fact that there are no generally accepted standards to guide child welfare
professionals, renders decision making all the more difficult and subjects agencies and
individual staff to accusations of irresponsibility or incompetence when things do not go
well for the children they serve. Agencies typically use group decision making in an
attempt to bring a greater breadth of perspective to the process and to mitigate the
influence of individual biases. There is still the danger, however, that decisions are
limited by institutional tradition which narrows the range of service considerations to a
small array of those most easily accessible or reasonably priced, by differential influence
of the more powerful members of the decision making group, or by what decision
makers view as the expectations of their superiors or of the court (Lieberman, 1972;
Schwartz et al., 1999).

While group decision making has the advantage of offering different perspectives
and potentially providing an opportunity for input from persons with expertise in various
relevant fields, it also means that the caseworker’s input may be discounted by more
powerful members of the group. Although persons who work together frequently come
to adopt similar views and thus may be prone to reach consensus in most cases, when
this does not occur, the more powerful persons in the group tend to exert their will
(Lieberman, 1972). In such situations and others in which there is not consensus, the
caseworker may be charged with presenting to the court a recommendation with which
he or she does not agree.
Decisions confronting child welfare professionals tend to be value-laden and often present no completely satisfactory alternatives. In addition, there is question as to the extent to which case decisions, even when they reflect a consensus among a number of agency staff, are impacted by what the decision makers have come to expect will be acceptable to the court. Schwartz and his colleagues suggest that it may often be the case that the judgments of child welfare personnel reflect what they perceive to be the expectations of the court (Schwartz, et al., 1999). Observations of caseworkers in court and discussions with them regarding their perceptions of their role suggest that many feel powerless relative to the legal professionals involved in the case and that their recommendations may therefore be heavily influenced by what they perceive will lessen the resistance which they will encounter in court (Ellett & Steib, 2000).

Chapter Summary

There are surely many factors which influence the relationship between child welfare agencies and the courts and the way in which they interact to meet the needs of abused and neglected children and their families. Many observers have noted the prevalence of problems between the two entities and have cited a variety of contributing behaviors of both child welfare and legal professionals. There has been little attempt, however, to explain the way in which specific underlying characteristics of child welfare staff might influence these professional interactions. This study addresses that issue, using the theoretical variables of self-efficacy and human caring which have been found to have relevance to the performance of persons in other helping professions. The preceding literature review supports the applicability of these factors in child welfare.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This study used quantitative methodology to determine the association of personal factors with the way in which judges evaluate and respond to the evidence which caseworkers provide in child welfare hearings. It is important to note that, for the purposes of this research, evidence was defined as consisting of both the written and oral information which is provided by a caseworker in association with a hearing. The focus of the research was casework staff in the child welfare programs in the Louisiana Office of Community Services (OCS) and Louisiana state and city court judges who hear child welfare cases.

This chapter describes the methodology used in the study. It includes a description of the research design, the measures used, the data collection procedures, and the data analyses conducted both to establish the psychometric properties of the measures and to test the research hypotheses.

Sampling Design

Caseworkers

The OCS is a state-administered child welfare agency in which the professional work force consists of about fifteen hundred persons. Services are provided throughout the state by staff in fifty-four parish (county) offices and ten regional offices. Nine of the parish offices in rural areas also provide services in one or more neighboring parishes so that all sixty-four of Louisiana’s parishes are served.

This study involved a sample of caseworkers employed in the OCS during the late fall of 2000. A description of the study and copies of the instruments to be used was sent to the head of the agency in August, 2000. She approved the study and agreed to
sign a letter of support, which was included in the survey packets which were sent to caseworkers. A list showing the number of caseworkers assigned to each of the child welfare programs in each OCS parish and regional office was obtained from the OCS Division of Field Services. It showed that a total of 799 staff were assigned to the programs in which the duties of staff typically require their regular appearance in juvenile court. This number represents about 71% of the total number of caseworkers in the OCS. It includes the staff who conduct child protection investigations, those who serve children and families when children have been placed in the custody of the agency (i.e., foster care), and those responsible for working with children who are available for adoption. Staff who work with families in which the children remain at home following a finding of child maltreatment were also asked to participate if those cases were placed under the jurisdiction of the court in their area. Caseworker participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Two presentations were made at meetings of the OCS Regional Administrators. The first of these was in May, 2000 to inform them of plans for the study and of its purpose. The second was in September, 2000 just prior to the beginning of data collection to explain the study procedures and to ask for their support.

**Judges**

Louisiana has four designated juvenile courts with a total of eight judges who are currently hearing child abuse and neglect cases. These are located in the metropolitan areas of New Orleans, Jefferson Parish (i.e., suburban New Orleans), Baton Rouge, and Shreveport. Judges in district courts and designated city courts in mid-sized towns also exercise juvenile jurisdiction while hearing criminal and other civil cases as well.
However, whether a judge holding jurisdiction to hear dependency cases actually does so depends upon local arrangements with other judges in the district. In some judicial districts, judges routinely handle mixed dockets while in others they divide cases into areas of specialization, or have rotational schedules during which each judge only hears cases of a particular type.

It is estimated that about 4000 of the families served by the OCS at any given time are under the jurisdiction of the court (Tracking, Information, and Payments System [TIPS], 2000). Those cases in which the court is involved are typically those in which one or more of the children in the family have been taken into protective custody. In some jurisdictions, however, the courts may also exercise oversight of cases in which children have been allowed to remain in the home while the family works on a plan designed to remedy the cause of the identified child maltreatment.

A description of the study was sent to the President of the Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges in June, 2000 along with a suggested letter of support for his signature. He approved the study and sent a letter of support to all members of the organization advising them that they could expect to receive a request for their participation and urging them to take part.

A listing of all judges with their addresses and judicial districts as well as a map showing the geographic boundaries of judicial districts was obtained from the Office of the Judicial Administrator of the Louisiana Supreme Court. Regional Administrators in each of the ten regions of the OCS were then polled by electronic mail to determine which of these judges were currently hearing dependency cases in their regions. A total of 125 judges was listed in the composite responses from the ten regions. Letters were
then sent to all of these judges asking for their participation in the study and providing a copy of the Judicial Response Index which they would be asked to complete. Each letter included a stamped, self-addressed post card on which was printed a number identifying the judge and the sentence “Yes, I would like to participate in the OCS-Court Study.” Thus judges had only to drop the card in the mail to indicate their desire to take part in the study. Cards were returned by thirty-seven judges. Although this number constitutes barely 30% of the total number of judges hearing child in need of care cases in the state, it represents a much larger portion of the total judicial caseload of child dependency cases as it includes judges in four of the five designated juvenile courts as well as those in several other larger jurisdictions. Five of the eight judges in the state’s juvenile courts enrolled in the study. Together, the juvenile courts enrolled hear the cases of about 40% of the total number of families under the jurisdiction of the court who are served by the OCS. Each of the ten OCS regions had at least three judges enrolled in the study and one region had seven. Only one major city in the state was without court participation and two judges within its metropolitan area did take part.

Instrumentation

Employee Self-Report Measures

The Caseworker Self-Efficacy Scale-Court (CSES-C)

The Caseworker Self-Efficacy Scale (CSES) is an adaptation of the Self-Efficacy Assessment-Social Work (SEA-SW) measure developed by Ellett (2000) in a study of child welfare staff retention. Items from that scale which reflect efficacy beliefs concerning caseworker competencies were retained and new items were developed to capture efficacy beliefs regarding capabilities more directly related to work with the
courts and legal system. The scale consists of a total of twenty items measured on a four-point Likert scale (1= Weak, 4= Very Strong) resulting in a range of possible scores from 20 to 80.

The items on the CSES-C were designed to measure caseworker efficacy in two domains: (1) Workers’ beliefs about their capabilities to effectively provide casework services to clients, and (2) to successfully prepare and present information about their work and about the clients to legal professionals and the court in written and oral evidence. The self-efficacy components of belief, motivation, and persistence are embedded within the items.

**The Human Caring Inventory-Child Welfare (HCI-CW)**

The instrument used to measure human caring is an adaptation of one originally developed by Moffett (1994) for use with nurses in acute care hospitals and later adapted for child welfare (Ellett, 1995; Ellett, 2000). The HCI-CW consists of 25 items to which participants respond on a four-point Likert Scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 4= Strongly Agree). Six of the items are included to control for responses based on social desirability. Possible scores range from 25 to 100 with higher scores being indicative of a greater degree of caring.

**Summary Appraisal of Court Experience (SACE)**

The Summary Appraisal of Court Experience (SACE) is a six-item measure designed by the researcher to allow respondents to give a self-assessment of their overall experiences in court. Participants were asked to respond to two Likert scale measures (A and B) for each of the items. Scale A consists of a four-point scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 4= Strongly Agree) while Scale B offers three response choices (1= Great
Variation, 3= Little Variation). Possible scores on Scale A range from 6 to 24 with higher scores indicating more positive experiences in court. On Scale B, scores may range from 6 to 18 with lower scores indicating greater variation in experiences across judges over the past three year period.

**The Caseworker Decision Agreement Scale (CWDA)**

The Caseworker Decision Agreement Scale (CWDA) was adapted for this study from an instrument designed by Bienvenu (2000) in a study of decision making in students’ selection of a college major. Answers are provided related only to the specific case in which the caseworker provides testimony. The CWDA measure consists of ten items that solicit responses to a four-point scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 4= Strongly Agree). The range of possible scores is 10 to 40. The items are designed to measure caseworker decision agreement in two domains: (1) support and (2) commitment.

**The Post-Hearing Appraisal Scale (PHAS)**

This measure allows the caseworker to evaluate his or her experience in a specific hearing, the judge’s overall response to the evidence provided, and the quality of the decision which was rendered. It consists of ten items which are answered on a four-point scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 4= Strongly Agree). Possible scores range from 10 to 40.

A packet of all of the measures to be completed by caseworkers was first distributed to a group of ten professional staff in the central office of the OCS. All of those individuals had masters degrees in social work, experience as caseworkers, and at least seven years of experience with the agency. All but one had worked for the OCS for at least ten years. They were asked to review the items in the measure for clarity and to make a determination as to whether any items should be changed or added to better
measure caseworkers' beliefs and values concerning their work or their experiences with
the court system. The instructions of the CSES-C and two items were revised based on
the input of this expert panel.

Fifty copies of the instrument packet were then distributed to casework staff in a
large metropolitan office of the OCS. These staff were also asked to note completion
times as well as clarity of items and whether any other changes should be made. Thirty-
nine completed surveys were returned. Completion times ranged from 15 to 20 minutes
for the Phase 1 measures (CSES-C, HCI-CW, SACE, and demographic information) and
five minutes for those in Phase 2 (CWDA and PHA). Based on input from these
participants, minor revisions were made in the instructions for the DA measure to make
them more clearly applicable to the caseworker role in all agency program areas.

Judges' Rating Measure

The Judicial Response Index (JRI)

The Judicial Response Index (JRI) was developed for this study after a review of
the literature yielded no existing instruments designed to allow judges to evaluate the
evidence provided by caseworkers in child dependency hearings.

An initial draft of the JRI was first distributed to five staff with responsibility for
functional supervision of the child welfare programs in the OCS central office. Each of
these persons had at least twenty years of experience in child welfare with at least three
of those years in the supervision of caseworkers involved in regular court appearance.
They were asked to review the items to determine whether they adequately represented
the range of factors which they had found to be important in fulfilling the OCS worker's
role in child welfare hearings. Two items were added to the instrument as a result of their
review. In July, 2000 the revised draft was sent to a sample of twelve judges representing juvenile, district, and city courts. All eight of the judges hearing dependency cases in juvenile courts were included in this group as were four additional judges who were selected based on information gathered in a previous study about their interest or leadership in the area of child dependency issues (Ellett & Steib, 2000). These judges were asked to review the measure and to actually use it to rate the evidence provided by a caseworker in a child welfare hearing. They were requested to note the amount of time required for the measure's completion, whether there were any items which were unclear, and whether they had recommendations for any changes or additions to insure that it adequately covered the range of factors which judges consider important in decision-making in child dependency hearings. Eight of these judges responded. Two of those in rural courts advised that they were not able to actually apply the instrument in a hearing because they had no child welfare cases docketed in their courts during the five-week period allowed for the field test. In view of that, they were asked to simply review the measure and to offer any suggestions for revisions which they felt were indicated. One of those did offer some recommendations which were included in the final instrument. Four other respondents also offered suggestions for the addition of items or minor revisions. Based on those comments and suggestions, two items were added to part A of the measure and questions concerning the type of hearing and whether it was contested were also included. The instructions were reworded to clarify that all types of hearings on child dependency cases in which evidence was offered by a caseworker were to be included in the study.
The JRI includes three parts. Part A consists of nine questions each of which is answered on a four-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree, 4= Strongly Agree). A non-applicable choice is also provided. This section allows the judge to evaluate the caseworker’s testimony based on his or her perceptions of the worker’s preparation, thoroughness, and presentation of information. Part B includes only one question which offers the judge three response choices (1=yes, 2=no, 3= have not formed an opinion) to indicate whether the caseworker being rated usually (i.e., in other hearings) provides credible and helpful evidence. The second sub-scale asks the judge to select from a list of usual hearing participants the degree to which the evidence offered by each was weighted in making the decision in the case being heard.

Data Collection Procedures

Phase 1

In September of 2000, packets containing the Phase 1 survey forms were sent to each OCS parish and regional office. Each office was sent the number of forms which corresponded to the number of staff in the Child Protection, Foster Care, and Adoption programs. Offices were advised that additional forms would be sent if they also had other staff whose duties involved regular court appearance. Six offices called for additional forms and a larger office returned 15 surveys which were not needed due to vacant positions. A total of 786 forms was distributed to staff. Each survey form carried an identification number. In addition, each had attached a letter to the caseworker explaining the purpose and design of the study as well as a brightly colored sticker marked with a corresponding number and attached to a tab which asked the worker to
keep the number, explaining that he or she should receive a packet marked with the same identifier in Phase 2 of the study.

Because of concern that caseworkers would be intimidated by the idea of being rated by judges and due to the possibility, however remote, that judges’ ratings could influence agency evaluations of employee performance, great effort was made to insure that no worker could be connected with the rating which he or she was given by a judge. In order to insure that the researcher had no way of identifying participating caseworkers, office managers were asked to distribute the numbered survey forms randomly to staff who wished to participate and to make a master list with each worker’s name and corresponding survey packet number. They were informed that this list would be used to provide caseworker identifiers to participating judges in their area and that their copy should be destroyed after the end date of the data collection period.

The packet sent to each office included a letter to the office manager giving a detailed explanation of the study design and advising that it was to be voluntary and anonymous. Another very brief cover letter cautioned the office manager not to distribute the surveys without recording the identification number along with the name of the worker to whom it was given. A master list form was provided for this purpose. All cover letters are included in Appendix B.

Participants were asked to return phase 1 surveys by October 15, 2000, which was the begin date for data collection in Phase 2. However, surveys were, in fact, accepted through the end of data collection in mid-December, 2000. An electronic mail
message was sent to all offices ten days after distribution of the Phase 1 surveys and an additional reminder was included in the mailings of Phase 2 packets.

**Phase 2**

Data collection in this part of the study began on October 15 and extended through December 15, 2000 throughout the state with the exception of one parish. A judge in that parish had no juvenile cases docketed until December 21, 2000 and asked if data collection in his jurisdiction could be extended to allow his participation. Thus it was arranged, with the cooperation of the OCS office manager in that location, to extend data collection for an additional week. Only those OCS staff in offices serving the jurisdictions of participating courts were sent packets containing Phase 2 survey forms. Thus 12 local offices were not eligible to take part in this portion of the study. Phase 2 surveys were sent to a total of 692 caseworkers in 49 parish and regional OCS offices. These forms carried identification numbers in the same series as those sent to those offices in Phase 1. Caseworkers were advised that they should only take part in Phase 2 if they had also completed Phase 1 forms and that their participation in this part of the study was also voluntary.

Office managers in these offices were asked to send a master list of workers taking part in the study, along with their corresponding identification numbers to each participating judge for the judge’s use in marking the forms with the correct identifier. Each of these judges was then sent a packet containing the JRI forms and return envelopes. Because there was no way for the researcher to know how many caseworkers in each office would participate in this part of the study or how many of
them would actually have a hearing occurring during the data collection period, each judge was provided with the number of forms corresponding to the number of caseworkers in the local and regional offices serving his or her court. The packets sent to each judge included a cover letter providing instructions for the survey.

Post cards were sent to judges half-way through the two month data collection period as a reminder to continue completion of ratings and at its conclusion to remind them to submit any remaining surveys.

Data Analysis Procedures

A number of descriptive, bivariate and multivariate statistical procedures were used to explore the reliability and validity of the measures used in the study and to address the research hypotheses and research questions. The data analyses included the following:

1. Descriptive statistics of the various measures.
2. Factor analysis of all of the scaled measures used in the study to identify underlying constructs.
3. Cronbach Alpha coefficients to test the reliability of the measures.
4. Bivariate correlations of all independent and dependent variables.
5. Multiple regression analyses regressing the judicial ratings on the measures of the independent variables, regressing the decision agreement variable on those of self-efficacy and human caring, and regressing the OCS caseworker variable of Part C on the items of Part A of the Judicial Response Index.
6. Analyses to compare groups (ANOVAS) to answer questions about differences based on the demographic characteristics of degree level and type and years of child welfare experience.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides the methodology used in the study. It includes a description of the study sample, measurements used, data collection procedures, and data analyses. Also described are the procedures used in the development and testing of the survey instruments and in obtaining permission to conduct the study in the Office of Community Services. Chapter Four, which follows provides the results of the study.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

This research sought to identify the relationships between specific work-related personal characteristics of child welfare caseworkers and the way in which they work within and experience the judicial system with which they are so closely associated. Over the past twenty years, the courts have been accorded an increasingly important role in the ongoing oversight of child welfare agencies and the families they serve. Ideally, the relationship between these two institutional entities should be collaborative, with each fulfilling its assigned role to assure safety and stability for children whose well being is in jeopardy. In reality, however, the relationship between agencies and courts is often troubled, characterized by poor communication and lack of role clarity and cooperation (Ellett & Steib, 2000; Hardin, 93, 96; Kamerman & Kahn, 1990).

This research focused on the public child welfare agency and courts of juvenile jurisdiction in the state of Louisiana. It was quantitative, using an ex post facto design in which variables were assigned and not manipulated. Only a small amount of qualitative data was obtained in the form of written comments from both caseworkers and judges. This Chapter provides the results of the data analyses which were performed on surveys submitted by both child welfare caseworkers and juvenile court judges who took part in the study.

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Phase 1

Caseworkers

The first phase of this research involved the survey of caseworkers who regularly appear in juvenile court as part of their jobs. A total of 786 survey packets was...
distributed. Completed surveys were received from 377 caseworkers or 47%. Three of those forms were considered unusable because of the amount of missing data. Thus, the final data set for this phase included 374 usable instruments.

Table 1 contains summary information for the demographic characteristics of caseworkers who took part in Phase 1 of the study. Some percentages do not total 100% due to missing data. For example, some caseworkers failed to report their degree level, but instead only designated their major field of study. Percentages of baccalaureate and masters degrees reflect duplication and thus total more than 100%.

Of the total respondents, 75.1% were female while only 13.6% were male. By age, 10.2% of respondents were 30 or younger, 29.4% were between ages 30 and 40, and 48.3% were over 40 years old. African Americans comprised 44.1% of the respondents, Caucasians 45.7, and 1.9% were Hispanic/Latino, Native American, or other. Only two caseworkers, or .5%, had less that a baccalaureate degree, 80.2% had baccalaureate degrees, and 36.3% had masters degrees. Bachelors degrees in social work were held by 22.5%, 9.1% had degrees in sociology, and another 9.1% in psychology. Doctorates were held by .5% of the respondents. A masters in social work was held by 23.5% of the participants while an additional 12.8% reported other masters degrees. Neither of the two doctorates reported was in social work. An additional 14 respondents, or 3.7% indicated that they were working toward masters degrees in social work. Of the total respondents, 19.8% indicated that they had worked in child welfare for 3 years or less, 26.2% from 4 to 9 years, 25.5% 10 to 19 years, and 12.1% had worked for 20 or more years.
The reported demographic characteristics approximate those of the agency
casework staff as a whole, in most respects. The proportionate representation of African
Americans in the sample was slightly greater than in the total number of agency staff
where it is about 40%, and males, who comprise about 18% of the staff, were slightly
under-represented. Available data on educational level indicates that about 40% of all
OCS professional staff have masters degrees, but figures do not break down education
by job assignment. It is assumed that a larger percentage of those with masters degrees
are in supervisory or administrative positions rather than in direct casework. The largest
group of participants (48.7%) was assigned to the agency’s foster care program. Child
protection workers comprised 20.1% of the sample, family services workers 8.6%,
adoption staff 9.4%, and those assigned to multiple programs 2.4%.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Phase 1 Caseworker Sample (n= 374)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OCS Region</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orleans</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>18.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baton Rouge</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thibodaux</td>
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<td>7.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lafayette</td>
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<td>Lake Charles</td>
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<td>Alexandria</td>
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<td>12.3</td>
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<td>Shreveport</td>
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<td>7.8</td>
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<td>Monroe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Covington</td>
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<td>9.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 - 30</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>31 - 35</td>
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<td>15.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>36 - 40</td>
<td>53</td>
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<tr>
<td>41 - 45</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 - 50</td>
<td>63</td>
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<tr>
<td>51 - 55</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 - 60</td>
<td>12</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 +</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
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<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
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<td>.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Level</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.5</td>
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<td>9.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
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<td>9.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>39.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>48</td>
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Table 1 (Cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<td>Doctorate</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>.5</td>
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<td>Working Toward MSW</td>
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<td>3.7</td>
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Program Assignment

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Program Assignment</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Child Protection</td>
<td>75</td>
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<td>Foster Care</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
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<td>Family Services</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Programs</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Years Child Welfare Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Child Welfare Experience</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 3 years</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 9 years</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 19 years</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 + years</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means and standard deviations for the Caseworker Self-efficacy Scale- Court (CSES-C) and the Human Caring Inventory- Child Welfare (HCI-CW) completed in the Phase 1 portion of the survey (n= 374) are shown in Table 2. Responses for all items on the CSES-C consisted of a four-point forced-choice Likert scale (1=Weak to 4=Very Strong). The HCI-CW also employed a forced-choice four-point scale with responses ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 4= Strongly Agree. On the HCI-CW, items 3, 6, 10, 15, 21, and 24 were included to detect the tendency of respondents to rate items in a socially desirable direction. Items 2, 3, 7, 9, 10, 15, 19, 21, and 24 were negatively worded and thus were reverse coded in the data analysis.
On the CSES-C, the highest mean was 3.47 for item #20 (belief in capability to establish rapport with clients), while the lowest was 2.82 for item # 4 (work effectively with sexual abuse victims and non-offending parents) and # 11 (say what I think is best for clients even if it means respectfully disagreeing with the judge). Item # 7 (work collaboratively with most Court Appointed Special Advocates) and item # 8 (respond calmly and carefully under hostile cross-examination) each had relatively large standard deviations of .84 indicating greater differences among caseworkers. The lowest standard deviation was in responses to item # 9 (work collaboratively with other professionals involved in delivery of service to clients) indicating greater cohesiveness among caseworkers on that variable.

The lowest item mean on the HCI-CW was 1.96 for item # 19 (usually try to avoid becoming involved in clients’ problems), and the highest for # 5 (Parents should be informed of the consequences of their actions at the outset of agency intervention.). The highest standard deviation was .79 for item # 17 (I would work in child welfare even if I didn’t need the money.) and the lowest was .51 for items # 20 (It bothers me that some clients don’t receive the services they need) and # 25 (I speak up when practices seem contrary to the welfare of others.)

Table 3 provides item means and standard deviations for the Summary Appraisal of Court Experience (SACE), which formed the dependent variable for Phase 1 of the study. This measure consists of six items and asks for responses on two different scales. The response choices on scale A consist of a four-point forced-choice Likert scale ranging from 1= Strongly Disagree to 4= Strongly Agree, while B contains a three-point
scale on which respondents assess the amount of variation they have experienced across judges and over the past 3 years (1 = Great Variation, 3 = Little Variation).

Table 2
Summary of Item Means and Standard Deviations for the Self-Efficacy Scale and Human Caring Inventory (n= 374)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>3.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.74</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>3.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Caring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. **</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. *</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>.71</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>3.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. *</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.57</td>
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<td>7. **</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.64</td>
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<td>8.</td>
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<td>.55</td>
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<td>9. **</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>.73</td>
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<td>10.*</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.52</td>
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Table 2 (Cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Caring (Cont.)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.60</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.*</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
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<td>.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.**</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>21.*</td>
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<td>.74</td>
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<td>22.</td>
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<td>.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>23.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>3.13</td>
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</table>

Note. * Social Desirability items. ** Reverse coded.

Table 3
Summary of Item Means and Standard Deviations for the Summary Appraisal of Court Experience (n= 374)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tr>
<td>5.*</td>
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<td>.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
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<td>.66</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Reverse Coded.

Scale B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
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<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.26</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The highest item mean on scale A was 3.15 for item # 5 (treated much less respectfully than other participants in the hearing). Because it was negatively worded, this item was recoded in the data analysis so that higher scores indicate that the caseworker did not feel that he or she was treated less respectfully than others. The lowest item mean was for # 4 (I usually fare better than most of my colleagues).

On scale B, which indicated the amount of variation each respondent had experienced with regard to the item, the highest mean was 2.55 on item # 5 (treated less respectfully than other participants in the hearing), while the lowest was 2.27 on item # 6 (the decision made is usually the best for the child).

The highest item mean on scale A was 3.15 for item # 5 (treated much less respectfully than other participants in the hearing). Because it was negatively worded, this item was recoded in the data analysis so that higher scores indicate that the caseworker did not feel that he or she was treated less respectfully than others. The lowest item mean was 2.49 for # 4 (I usually fare better than most of my colleagues).

On scale B, which indicated the amount of variation each respondent had experienced with regard to the item, the highest mean was 2.55 on item # 5 (treated less respectfully than other participants in the hearing), while the lowest was 2.27 on item # 6 (the decision made is usually the best for the child).

**Phase 2**

**Judges**

Thirty-seven judges returned cards indicating a wish to enroll in the study. Two of those advised at the close of the study that they had been unable to participate. One
had not received a caseworker list from the OCS offices in his court’s jurisdiction and another reported that he had no contested dependency cases in his court during the data collection period. This judge apparently misunderstood the study instructions as cases included in the sample were not required to have been contested. Another judge wrote to advise that she had not been able to participate as fully as she had hoped as an exceptionally crowded docket had made it impossible to complete rating forms on all appropriate cases. She did, however, return six completed surveys. One other completed 12 surveys although a master list of participating caseworkers was never received from the office in her court’s jurisdiction. These surveys are included in the aggregate data analysis although there was no way to match them with caseworker responses.

Further difficulty was encountered in matching of judicial ratings with those completed by caseworkers due to the fact that some office managers did not make up the master list which they provided to participating judges from caseworkers who volunteered to take part in the study, but simply distributed a numbered packet to all workers and included each one on the list. As a result, judges rated many workers who did not themselves complete surveys during. A total of 82 judicial response ratings were matched with Phase 1 surveys, but only 26 with both Phase 1 and Phase 2.

It was not possible to discern exactly which other judges actually participated since each region of the state, and many judicial districts, had multiple judges enrolled and the forms which they completed carried no identifying information other than the caseworker’s study identification number. Caseworkers assigned to regional offices routinely appear in all courts in the region. However, because a recorded number series

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was issued to workers in each parish and regional office in the jurisdictions of enrolled judges, it was possible in some instances to identify gaps where no JRI surveys were returned for a particular geographic area. For example, it was clear that the only judge representing one parish in the northeast part of the state did not participate based on the fact that no rating forms carrying numbers assigned to caseworkers in any office in his jurisdiction were received. Based on an overall review of the JRI forms received and the numbers they carried, it is estimated that up to four-fifths of the enrolled judges actually returned one or more completed surveys.

Table 4 depicts the type of court (i.e., juvenile, district, or city) for each judge who took part in the study along with personal demographic information concerning each. All personal data (i.e., age, ethnicity, years on the bench) was obtained from the *Louisiana Judicial Digest* (Louisiana Governmental Studies, Inc., 2000). The table provides summary information for a total of 34 judges. The three who are known to have enrolled but not actually taken part in the study are excluded. All three of those were district court judges, one in a medium-sized city and two in rural parishes.

Six judges, or 17%, represented designated juvenile courts, which are located in the larger metropolitan areas of the state. These six judges represent 75% of the eight judges currently hearing child dependency cases in the state’s four juvenile courts. District courts had the greatest representation with 23 judges, or 78% of the sample, while 5 city courts (15%) took part.

Geographically, courts were distributed throughout the state, with their jurisdictions covering 41 of the state’s 64 parishes. Region D, which consists of eight
parishes containing both rural areas and small cities, had the heaviest participation with six judges, or 18% of the total number taking part in the study. The lowest participation was in region H, comprised of 12 parishes containing only one urban area, with two judges, or 6% of the participants. Overall, 21 of the state's 40 judicial districts, covering a geographic area consisting of 38 of the state's 64 parishes (counties), were represented by at least one judge.

Table 4
Summary of Characteristics of Participating Judges (n=34)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Court</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OCS Region</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

78
Table 4 (Cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yrs. on bench</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although judicial participants represented less than one third of all judges hearing child dependency cases, they accounted for a much larger percentage of the total caseload. For example, all five judges hearing such cases in the state’s largest metropolitan juvenile courts took part. These 2 courts together are responsible for about 30% of the child dependency cases in the state. One of the two judges in another major urban juvenile court, which handles about 10% of the state’s dependency caseload also participated. Only one designated juvenile court had no judge enrolled in the study. Collectively, all courts enrolled in the study cover about two thirds of such matters.

By gender and race, 71% of the sample was male and 29% female, while 94% were Caucasian. The only other racial group represented, was African American which comprised 6% of the group. The majority (59%) of judges were in the 51 to 60 age range. The second largest age group was 41-50 with 9 representatives, followed by 3 who were over age 60. Only 2 participants were between ages 30 and 40, with the youngest judge being age 36. In years on the bench, the group was evenly divided in the
4 to 9 and 10 to 20 year categories, with 11(32%) judges in each. Nine (27%) had
served three years or less and only three had held judgeships for 20 or more years.

The Judicial Response Index, which judges were asked to complete, consists of
three parts. Part A is a nine-item measure which asked the judge to rate the performance
of the caseworker on variables which reflect the quality of the services provided, the
timeliness and quality of any written work presented, and court room presentation.
Response sets in this part consist of a four-point forced-choice Likert scale (1= Strongly
Disagree, 4= Strongly Agree). Items # 5 and # 9 were worded in the negative and thus
were reverse coded in the data analysis.

Table 5
Summary Descriptive Statistics for Part A of the Judicial Response Index (n=202)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section/Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PartA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. *</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. *</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Recoded items.

Table 5 shows the item means and standard deviations of answers to part A of
the Judicial Response Index. The highest mean score is 3.55 for item #8 (testimony
presented was consistent with the written material submitted) and the lowest was 3.07
for item #3 (submitted written material which was concise, informative, and thorough). Item #6 (provided or arranged all court-ordered services within a reasonable time) had the highest standard deviation at 1.02 indicating rather large variation in response to this item among judges. The least variation (.71) was noted in item #4 (made a recommendation which was reasonable and supported by facts).

Table 6 depicts frequencies and percentages for parts B and C of the JRI. Part B asked judges to rate their overall experience with the caseworker before them with regard to credibility and helpfulness of the evidence which the caseworker usually provides. Response choices include 1= Yes, 2= No, and 3= Have Not Formed an Opinion. Part C includes a listing of all usual participants in dependency hearings and asks the judge to rate the relative weight which was given to the evidence they provided in the hearing. Response choices range from 1=Not at All to 4= Very Strongly.

In part B of the JRI, 70.8% of the 188 surveys in which judges responded to this item indicated that they usually found the caseworker in the hearing to be credible and helpful. An additional 13.4% had not formed an opinion, while 8.9% gave a negative response.

Part C responses show that judges indicated that they were very strongly or strongly influenced in their decision making by evidence offered by the OCS caseworker in 73.3% of the hearings (Very Strongly= 28.7%, Strongly=44.6%). This far exceeded scores for any other participant in the hearing. The hearing participant receiving the next highest percentage of the two highest responses (very strongly or strongly) was the
Table 6
Frequencies and Percentages for Parts B and C of the Judicial Response Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part B (n= 188)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Formed Opinion</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part C (n= 200)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at All</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney for Child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at All</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant District Attorney</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at All</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCS Caseworker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at All</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at All</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 6 (Cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child (Cont.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>67.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent's Attorney</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at All</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCS Attorney</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at All</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCS Attorney (Cont.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>80.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at All</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at All</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

attorney for the child with a total of 46.7% followed by the assistant district attorney at 43.1% The highest percentage of "not at all" responses (16.8%) was given with regard
to the influence of evidence offered by parents, possibly because evidence in their behalf in usually provided by their attorneys. Evidence offered by parents’ attorneys was considered strongly or very strongly 34.1% of the time.

Judges indicated that they are strongly or very strongly influenced by others in 6.4% of the hearings. When these participants were specified, they were most frequently Court Appointed Special Advocates (31%). Others mentioned included therapists and teachers.

**Caseworkers**

In the second phase of the study, caseworkers were asked to complete measures in association with a specific court hearing in which they appeared before a judge who was taking part in the study. A total of 182 usable surveys was received from 149 caseworkers in this phase. This number represents a participation rate of 22% of the 692 staff who were sent Phase 2 packets. It was anticipated that participation in this phase would be much lower than in Phase 1 since it involved the completion of surveys before and after specific hearings with the knowledge that the worker was also being rated by the judge.

Two measures were completed by caseworkers in Phase 2. The first was the Decision Agreement scale which was to be completed just prior to the hearing in which the caseworker provides evidence before a participating judge. This was a ten-item measure designed to assess the extent of caseworkers’ agreement with and support of the agency recommendation which must be put forward at the hearing. Responses were given on a four-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree to 4= Strongly Agree). Items
# 4 and #6 were reverse coded in the data analysis so that higher scores indicated a
greater degree of decision agreement.

The Post-Hearing Appraisal was the second measure completed by Phase 2
caseworker participants. It was designed to capture the worker’s assessment of a specific
hearing which was held before a participating judge and was to be completed following
the hearing. Like the Decision Agreement scale, it also consisted of ten items which were
rated on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Strongly Agree).

Table 7 provides summary descriptive statistics for the Decision Agreement and
Post-Hearing Appraisal measures. On the Decision Agreement scale, the highest mean
score was 3.42 for item #1 (I agree with the agency goal/recommendation), while the
lowest was 2.69 for item #4 (I expect the goal to change before case is resolved). This
probably reflects the fact that most cases in which children are in foster care begin with a
goal of family reunification which must later be changed if the parents are unable to
make the changes necessary to insure the child’s safe return.

On the Post-Hearing Appraisal scale, the highest item mean was 3.48 for #8 (I
did the best I could in providing services to the client and giving information to the
court.) The lowest mean was 2.85 for #4 (Some of the services ordered are
unreasonable.).

**Factor Analyses of Measures**

All measures used in this study were either designed by the researcher or
substantially adapted from measures used in only one or two previous studies. Therefore,
a series of exploratory factor analyses of all measures was completed in order to empirically examine and define the measurement constructs. Each measure was subjected to a series of analyses in order to determine the fewest number of factors responsible for the variance in the responses on each scale. An unconstrained solution using principal components procedures was first completed for each measure. This was followed by rotated solutions extracting from one to multiple factors as indicated by review of scree

Table 7
Summary of Item Means and Standard Deviations for the Decision Agreement and Post-Hearing Appraisal Scales (n=182)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision Agreement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. *</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. *</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Hearing Appraisal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. *</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
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<td>.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
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<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. *</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Reverse Coded

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plots and the initial unconstrained analysis (Green, Salkind, & Akey, 2000). The use of orthogonal or oblique rotation was determined by theoretical assumptions about the extent of interrelatedness among the components of the constructs. Orthogonal rotation was selected in the case of all measures except the Human Caring Inventory. Previous studies related to human caring suggest an intercorrelation between the components of the caring construct. For example, persons who are higher in the receptivity component of caring as defined by Moffett (1994), would also be expected to be higher in responsivity. Thus, oblique rotation was used in the analysis of the human caring measure. Self-efficacy, on the other hand, is considered to be a more domain-specific construct (Bandura, 1989, 1997). One might have high efficacy in the preparation of written material but low efficacy in the verbal presentation of the same information in court. Thus, orthogonal rotation was considered more appropriate for the analysis for self-efficacy as well as for the other measures used in the study.

All factor analyses reported in the tables in this section are the results of principal components analysis. It is recognized, however, that there is a lack of consensus among researchers with regard to the merits of this procedure in the identification of latent constructs as opposed to that of principal axis factor analysis. These two methods are very similar with the exception of the amount variance which each considers in the analysis. The principal components procedure analyzes all of the variance associated with the variables, while principal axis considers only that which the variables have in common. Some researchers take the view that principal axis factoring is best when considering measures which may contain large amounts of error. Others believe that
there is little real difference between the two procedures in terms of results and that principal components analysis offers an advantage in being easier to understand and yielding more easily interpretable results (Gardner, 2001; McDonald, 1985). Because of these differing views, principal axis factoring was also conducted on all measures to determine whether that alternative method would yield any substantial difference. Although factor loadings and amount of total variance accounted for in the analysis tended to be higher in principal components analysis, as was expected, there was little difference. The greatest difference was in the self-efficacy measure in which the third factor of the three factor solution had only two items (items # 1 and 2). The factor was logically sound, however, and had a reliability coefficient of .78. Factor 2 in the principal axis analysis included the same factors as factor 1 in the principal components analysis, and there was a discrepancy in three items of the remaining factor. The principal components analysis produced factors which were more balanced and were more logically sound based on review of the items. In the case of the human caring measure, both types of factor analysis produced a two-factor solution with only one item loading differently on each factor. A comparison of the reliability coefficients of the subscales produced by the two methods did not suggest an advantage of one method over the other.

Pearson product moment correlations were completed using the subscales of the self-efficacy and human caring measures identified through principal axis factor analysis. As in that done with the principal components factors, there was a statistically significant relationship between all subscales of the two measures. The only difference was a drop in
level of significance from $p < .01$ to $p < .05$ in the relationship between one factor of self-efficacy and one of human caring. Correlations of the self-efficacy and human caring subscales with the other measures produced no differences in significant relationships or in levels of significance.

It must also be pointed out that the application of factor analysis to the Judicial Response Index and the Caseworker Decision Agreement scale violates the assumption of independence of observations which underlies correlational analysis. As explained in Chapter 3, considerations related to anonymity of study participants precluded the use of study procedures which distinguished the individual judge or individual caseworker in those jurisdictions in which workers rated and were rated by more than one judge. The 202 judicial ratings were produced by only 34 judges, and the 182 caseworker surveys received in Phase 2 were completed by 149 different individuals. Additionally, the small sample size in the judicial ratings creates another concern related to application of this method. The decision was made to use factor analysis in order to probe the covariation among the items of these two originally-developed measures. It is important, however, for the reader to recognize that the findings of these analyses cannot be generalized beyond the specific conditions of data collection. Should additional studies be conducted using this measure, consideration may be given to the use of another form of factor analysis designed to accommodate the inclusion of multiple observations by the same individuals unless a substantially larger independent sample can be obtained (Gorsuch, 1983).
In evaluating the results of the factor analyses, three rules were used to determine whether items were retained on a given factor:

1. Items must meet a minimum loading of at least .33 to be retained on a factor.
2. Any item which loaded at .33 or above on more than one factor was retained on the factor with the highest loading if the difference between the squared loadings was greater than .10.
3. If the difference between two squared factor loadings for an item of at least .33 was less than .10, the item was not retained on either factor.

**Caseworker Self-efficacy Scale - Court (CSES-C)**

Exploratory principal components factor analyses were completed for the 20 items of the Caseworker Self-efficacy Scale - Court (CSES-C). All items given here can be cross-referenced by the item number of the measures contained in Appendix A. The initial unconstrained solution yielded four factors. All items loaded on factor 1 with loadings ranging from .53 for item #11 to .71 for item #5. These four factors accounted for 58% of the item variance. Subsequently, one, two, and three-factor extractions were performed using orthogonal rotations. Ultimately, the decision was made to accept the three-factor solution. Table 8 depicts communalities and factor loadings for these factors. Six items (5, 6, 7, 8, 11, and 16) loaded on the first factor. These related to work directly with the court and persons involved in court hearings; thus the factor was termed Court Group Efficacy (CGE). All items retained on this factor loaded at a level of at least .50. An additional five items (3, 10, 14, 15, and 18) loaded on factor two with loadings ranging from a minimum of .51 to a maximum of .72. These items pertained either to tasks involved directly in preparation for hearings or to the possession of casework skills essential for the provision of evidence in court (e.g. accurate assessment
of parenting capability). This subscale was labeled Hearing Preparation Efficacy (HPE). Items #1, 2, 12, 19, and 20 loaded on factor three. Factor loadings ranged from .52 to .73. These items all related to the caseworker's self-assessment of skill in the performance of casework duties and was termed Client Services Efficacy.

Table 8
Summary of Item Communalities and Factor Loadings for a Three-Factor Solution for the Measure of Caseworker Self-Efficacy (n=374)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Communality</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigen Values: 10.38
% Variance Explained: 53

Note. * Items can be cross-referenced with measures in Appendix A. Bolded numbers indicate factor locations.

Human Caring Inventory

Factor analysis of the Human Caring Inventory (HCI) was performed excluding the six items (#3, 6, 10, 15, 21, and 24) included to detect responses based on social
desirability. The initial unconstrained solution of the remaining 19 items yielded seven factors accounting for 59% of the total item variance. All items loaded clearly on one of the factors with the exception of #11, #20, and #23, which did not meet the requirement that there be at least a 10% difference between loadings to retain an item on a factor. Subsequently analysis was done extracting from 1 to 6 factors successively. As indicated above, oblique rotation was used based on the assumption of moderate correlation among the subconstructs. The two-factor solution yielded a loading of the maximum number of items on the fewest factors. A summary of these factor loadings and communalities is depicted in Table 9. A total of 12 of the 19 items loaded clearly on the two factors with five items (#2, 4, 7, 9, 13, and 17) being retained on the first factor, and six items (#11, 12, 14, 18, 20, and 25) on factor 2. These factors accounted for 29% of the total variance. An examination of the items found that these items were logically grouped. The factor 1 subscale included items suggestive of commitment to work in child welfare and was labeled Child Welfare Commitment (CWC), while factor 2 items related to advocacy for the interests of clients. This factor was termed Client Advocacy (CA).

Table 9
Summary of Item Communalities and Factor Loadings for a Two-Factor Solution for the Human Caring Inventory Measure (n= 374)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Communality</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

92

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Table 9 (Cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Communality</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigen Values: 6.49
% Variance Explained: 29

Note. * Items can be cross-referenced with measures in Appendix A. b Bolded numbers indicate factor locations.

**Summary Appraisal of Court Experience (SACE)**

Five of the six items of the Summary Appraisal of Court Experience Scale (SACE) loaded on a one-factor solution which accounted for 50% of the item variance. A summary of item communalities and factor loadings for this measure is shown in Table 10. Loadings for the five retained items ranged from a high of .83 for items #2 and 3 to a low of .52 for #5. Four of the five item loadings were at or exceeded .75. Item #4 (usually fare better than my colleagues) loaded at only .19 and thus was not retained.

**Judicial Response Index (JRI)**

Table 11 includes a summary of item communalities and factor loadings of a one-factor solution for the Judicial Response Index (JRI). Only Section A (i.e., the first
nine items) of this instrument was subjected to factor analysis as only these items constituted a total score for the caseworker. All of the nine items of Section A loaded on one factor. Item loadings were quite strong with the lowest being .66 for item #7 (caseworker had explored all reasonable options) and the highest .91 for item #2 (case plan addresses individual needs of the child/family).

Table 10.
Summary of Item Communalities and Factor Loadings for a One-Factor Solution of the Summary Appraisal of Court Experience (SACE) Measure (n=374)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Communalty</th>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigen Value 2.81
% of Variance Explained 50

Note. *Items can be cross-referenced with measures in Appendix A. bBolded numbers indicate factor locations.

Decision Agreement Scale

The unconstrained solution for the ten items of this scale yielded a three-factor solution with all items loading at .33 or greater on factor one. Subsequent analyses using orthogonal rotation and extracting one and two factors were completed. Although only two items loaded on the second factor, the decision was made to use the two-factor solution based upon the conceptual logic of the item groupings and the strength of the factor's reliability. Table 12 depicts item communalities and factor loadings for the Decision Agreement Scale. Items #1 through 7 all loaded on factor one. Item loadings
were quite strong, ranging from .57 to .86. This subscale was termed Decision Support (DS). Items #9 and 10, which loaded on factor two both pertained to the caseworker’s perceived consequences of the court’s failure to concur with the recommendation or goal of the agency and were thus termed Decision Consequence (DC). The highest loading for item #8 was .31 on factor 1; thus, it was not retained on either factor.

Table 11
Summary of Item Communalities and Factor Loadings for the Judicial Response Index Measure (n=202)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Communality</th>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigen Values 6.4
% Variance Explained 71

Note. * Items can be cross-referenced with measures included in Appendix A. b Bolded numbers indicate factor locations.

Post-Hearing Appraisal (PHA)

Table 13 depicts a summary of item communalities and factor loadings for a one-factor solution of the PHA measure. The unconstrained solution of this measure yielded a two-factor solution. Items #1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9 all loaded on the first factor, while items #5 and 7 loaded on factor two. Consideration was given to using a two-factor solution because items 5 and 7 seemed to be conceptually grouped in that both pertained
to the caseworker's assessment of the quality of his or her preparation for or presentation at the court hearing. However, the decision was made to use the one-factor solution after subsequent reliability analysis yielded a rather moderate (.70) reliability for the two-item factor. All items were retained on the single factor with loadings ranging from .51 for item #6 to .90 for item #3.

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients were computed for each dimension of the measures identified through the various factor analyses discussed above. Table 14 includes Alpha reliability coefficients for the subscales for each study measure. Reliability coefficients were surprisingly moderate on the two subscales of the Human Caring Inventory (.67 for CWC and .65 for CA). All of the items included in these two factors had been used in previous studies with OCS staff with stronger findings (Ellett, C., 1995; Ellett, A., 2000). Those studies, however, dealt with a larger sample, and administered the measure to supervisors and administrative staff as well as to caseworkers. Reliability coefficients on all other measures ranged from .71 on the two-item Decision Consequence subscale to .93 on Section A of the JRI.

Table 12
Summary of Item Communalities and Factor Loadings for a Two-Factor Solution for the Decision Agreement Measure (n=182)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Communality</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.57</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12 (Cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Communality</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigen Values 5.14
% Variance Explained 51

Note. * Items can be cross-referenced with measures included in Appendix A. b Bolded numbers indicate factor locations.

Table 13
Summary of Item Communalities and Factor Loadings for a One-Factor Solution of the Post-Hearing Appraisal Measure (n=182)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Communalities</th>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigen Values 5.72
% Variance Explained 46

Note. * Items can be cross-referenced with measures included in Appendix A. b Bolded numbers indicate factor locations.

Table 15 shows a summary of the means, with standard deviations, and means expressed as percentages of the maximum possible score for each of the factored subscales of the study measures. The highest mean score was evident for the Judicial Response measure followed by the Client Advocacy dimension of Human Caring. The
mean percent maximum statistic was computed for each subscale to make the subscale mean score more directly comparable since the number of items comprising each subscale differs from one to the next.

Table 14
Cronbach Alpha Internal Consistency Reliability Coefficients for the Factored Subscales of the Study Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
<th>Alpha Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>n=374</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court Group Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Preparation Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client Service Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Caring Inventory</td>
<td>n=374</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare Commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client Advocacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACE</td>
<td>n=374</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Agreement</td>
<td>n=182</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Consequence</td>
<td></td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Hearing Appraisal</td>
<td>n=182</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judicial Response</td>
<td>N=202</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bivariate Correlations Among Factored Dimensions of the Study Measures

Pearson product moment correlations were computed to empirically examine relationships among all factored subscales of the measures and to test the research hypotheses.

Table 16 shows intercorrelations between the factored dimensions of CSES-C (Caseworker Self-efficacy) and HCI (Human Caring) and the dependent variable.
Summary Appraisal of Court Experience (SACE) for the total sample of Phase 1 respondents (n=374). Considered collectively, the results in Table 16 show little relationship between the self-efficacy and human caring measures and respondents’ appraisals of their court experiences. The highest and most important correlation to note in the table is for the relationship between the human caring Child Welfare Commitment subscale and the court appraisal measure. This correlation was statistically significant and positive in direction, though rather moderate in magnitude (r= .12, p<.01). The relationships among variables indicated by the remaining coefficients shown in Table 16, though positive in direction and statistically significant are rather negligible in magnitude.

Table 15
Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Each Study Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>% Max*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy (n=374)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGE (6)</td>
<td>18.05</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPE (5)</td>
<td>16.21</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSE (5)</td>
<td>15.53</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Caring (n=374)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWC (5)</td>
<td>15.22</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA (6)</td>
<td>19.84</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Agreement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS (7)</td>
<td>20.55</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC (2)</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judicial Response (9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACE (5)</td>
<td>13.96</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Subscale mean/the maximum subscale score. bNumber of items on the subscale.
Table 16
Summary of Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Factored Subscales of the Self-Efficacy, Human Caring, and Summary Appraisal of Court Experience Measures for Phase 1 of the Study (n=374)

| Variable                      | SACE  
|-------------------------------|-------
| Self-Efficacy                 |       
| Court Group Efficacy          | .09   
| Hearing Preparation Efficacy  | .07   
| Client Services Efficacy      | .06   
| Human Caring                  |       
| Child Welfare Commitment      | .12*  
| Client Advocacy               | .02   

* p<.05, 2-tailed test

Table 17 shows intercorrelations between the factored dimensions of the Caseworker Self-Efficacy (CSES-C) and the Decision Agreement measure. Considered collectively, the results in Table 17 showed slight strength of relationship between self-efficacy and caseworkers' perspectives of court/case decisions. The strongest relationship in the table is between the self-efficacy Hearing Preparation subscales and the measure of Decision Support (r=.26, p<.01). The Court Group Efficacy and Decision Support correlation was also positive in direction and statistically significant, though rather moderate in magnitude (r=.19, p<.05). Only one of the three correlations between the self-efficacy and decision consequences measures was statistically significant (r=-.20, p<.05). This analysis shows mixed support for the hypothesis depending upon the kind of self-efficacy and Decision Agreement.

Correlations between the dimensions of Decision Agreement and the factored subscales of the Human Caring Inventory are included in Table 18. These findings show
Table 17
Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlations Between Decision Agreement and Independent Variable of Self-Efficacy (n=165)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Decision Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decision Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court Group Efficacy</td>
<td>.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Preparation Efficacy</td>
<td>.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client Services Efficacy</td>
<td>.041</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05, 2-tailed test  ** p<.01, 2-tailed test

that the relationships between Decision Support and the Human Caring dimensions of both Child Welfare Commitment and Client Advocacy were negligible in magnitude although in the predicted direction. The correlation between Decision Support and Child Welfare Commitment is statistically significant and positive while that between Decision Consequence and Child Welfare Commitment is significant and negative in direction. The relationship of the Client Advocacy subscale with Decision Consequence is also negative but negligible in magnitude.

Table 18
Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlations Between Decision Agreement and Independent Variable of Human Caring (n=165)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Caring</th>
<th>Decision Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decision Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare Commitment</td>
<td>.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client Advocacy</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05, 2-tailed test
Correlations between the Decision Agreement subscales and the dependent variable of Judicial Response are shown in Table 19. These results show no discernible relationship among the variables. The low return of matched surveys resulted in a very small sample size (n=26) for this analysis.

Pearson product moment correlations computed showed positive, statistically significant relationships between the factored domains of the CSES-C (Self-Efficacy) measure and those of the HCI (Human Caring). These results are shown in Table 19. Correlation coefficients ranged from .26 (Hearing Preparation Efficacy with Child Welfare Commitment) to .33 (Client Service Efficacy and Client Advocacy).

Pearson product moment correlations were also computed between scores on the Judicial Response Index and the factored subscales of both the Caseworker Self-Efficacy Scale and the Human Caring Inventory. No significant relationships were found in these analyses.

Regression Analysis Results

Standard multiple regression analysis was used to examine the amount of variance in the dependent variable of judicial response which was explained by the combination of independent variables. This analysis, which was conducted regressing the Judicial Response Index (JRI) as a dependent variable on the factored dimensions of the independent variable measures, showed no significant relationship between the JRI and any factored subscales of those independent variables. It should be noted that the sample in this analysis was quite small (n=26) due to the low return of caseworker surveys in the second phase of the study.
Table 19
Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlations Between Factored Dimensions
of Caseworker Self-Efficacy and Human Caring (n= 374)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Court Group Efficacy</th>
<th>Hearing Prep. Efficacy</th>
<th>Client Service Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Caring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare Commitment</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client Advocacy</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p<.01, 2-tailed test

Results Related to Research Hypotheses and Questions

Hypotheses

Six hypotheses were formulated stating the expected relationships between the
independent and dependent variables in the study. Each of these is listed below along
with the results of the relevant data analysis:

Hypothesis 1.

There is a statistically significant (p< .05), positive relationship between
caseworker self-efficacy and the summary appraisal of court experience.

Results did not provide support for this hypothesis. None of the bivariate
correlations between the factored subscales of the CSES-C and the SACE showed a
statistically significant relationship.

Hypothesis 2.

There is a positive, statistically significant (p< .05) relationship between self-
efficacy and caseworker decision agreement.
The collective results provided some support for this hypothesis. The data analysis support the relationship between Decision Support and Court Group Efficacy ($r = .19, p < .05$), and between Decision Support and Hearing Preparation Efficacy ($r = .26, p < .01$). The Decision Consequence variable was negatively correlated with Casework Self-Efficacy at a significant level ($r = -.20, p < .05$).

**Hypothesis 3.**

There is a positive, statistically significant ($p < .05$) relationship between human caring and degree of caseworker decision agreement.

The study results supported a significant but very modest relationship ($r = .17, p < .05$) between Decision Consequence and Child Welfare Commitment. No other correlations between the variables were significant.

**Hypothesis 4.**

There is a positive, statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between caseworker decision agreement and judicial response.

This hypothesis was not supported in the data analysis. Only a very small number of matched surveys ($n = 26$) was returned in the phase of the study in which these measures were completed.

**Hypothesis 5.**

There is a positive, statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between human caring and self-efficacy.

The relationship among the factored subscales of these variables was confirmed in the data analysis. All correlations were significant at the .001 level. The strongest relationship (.354) was between Client Service Efficacy and Child Welfare Commitment.
followed by Client Service Efficacy and Client Advocacy at .33. The correlation of Court Group Efficacy with Child Welfare Commitment (.25) was least strong.

**Hypothesis 6.**

The combination of self-efficacy, human caring, and decision agreement will account for significantly (p<.05) more variation in judicial response than will either of these characteristics considered alone.

This prediction was not supported in the data analysis. As with Hypothesis 4, above, only a small number of matched data sets was available for this analysis.

**Research Questions**

**Question 1.**

How valid and reliable are the measurements of the study variables?

Overall, the results of principle components factor analysis, internal consistency reliability analysis, and bivariate correlations support the reliability and validity of measurements in the study. The two-factors of the Human Caring Inventory showed lower reliability than expected (.67 for Child Welfare Commitment and .65 for Client Advocacy). The relationship between the self-efficacy and human caring subscales showed moderate, statistically significant (p<.01) relationships, demonstrating criterion-related validity as predicted by the theory pertaining to both of the variables.

Factor analysis of the Judicial Response Index designed for completion by judges showed that all items loaded on one factor at levels ranging from .67 to .91. Reliability analysis of this measure yielded a coefficient of .93, indicating a high level of consistency in response across judges.
Question 2.

Is there a difference in scores on any of the three independent variables (i.e., self-efficacy, human caring, and decision agreement) among caseworkers based on demographic factors such as education and experience?

Areas of interest in the demographic data included level and area of education as well as years of child welfare experience. Factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed using the entire sample of caseworker participants (n= 374) to examine the differences in measures of the independent variables among these groups.

Analysis of the sample according to level of degree (bachelors and masters) showed that those with masters degrees had higher mean scores across all dimensions of the self-efficacy variable. These differences were statistically significant with regard to the factor of Hearing Preparation Efficacy (F=11.65, p< .001).

Multivariate analysis using the two factors of the Human Caring Inventory as dependent variables with level of degree showed a significant difference (F=4.109, p<.043) with those having masters degrees measuring higher on the Client Advocacy factor. A significant difference (F= 10.37, p<.001) was also found for the Client Advocacy variable when a one-way ANOVA was completed using area of degree (social-work, non-social work) as an independent variable, with social workers rating higher.

Factorial ANOVA using four levels of years of child welfare experience (0-3, 4-9, 10-19, and 20+) showed small but statistically significant differences on the factors of self-efficacy. The magnitude was greatest for Hearing Preparation Efficacy (F= 3.99, p<.009), followed by Client Services Efficacy (F=3.967, p<.008) and Court Group
Efficacy (F=3.26, p<.022). Post hoc comparison (Tukey) showed that effects were accounted for by differences between the 0-3 year and 10-19 year groups. An interesting, though not statistically significant, trend also noted in this data analysis was a similar decline in mean scores on each factor of self-efficacy for staff with 20 or more years of experience.

**Question 3.**

How much variation in decision agreement is accounted for by self-efficacy as opposed to human caring?

Stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed using each of the two factors of the Decision Agreement scale as the dependent variable. Results of these analyses are displayed in Table 20. The 3 factors of self-efficacy accounted for 13.5% of the variance in the eight-item Decision Support scale. The first variable to enter the equation was HPE (Hearing Preparation Efficacy), followed by CSE (Client Services Efficacy). The final variable was CGE (Court Group Efficacy). The Human Caring variables did not account for any significant amount of the variance in Decision Support.

Using the two-item DC (Decision Consequence) subscale as a dependent variable, CSE (Client Skills Efficacy) was the only variable entering the regression equation, accounting for 3.8% of the variance.

**Supplemental Data Analysis**

Additional analysis of the Judicial Response Index was conducted to examine the extent to which the responses in Section A of the measure predicted the judge’s weighting of evidence presented by the OCS worker. Stepwise multiple regression was used in this analysis as that method is more useful for prediction than is standard multiple...
regression. Results of the analysis showed that the provision of a recommendation which was reasonable and supported by facts accounted for 48% of the variance in the weighting of caseworker evidence. These findings lend further support to those of a survey of OCS caseworkers conducted in 1996 (Louisiana Court Improvement Program [C.A.R.E.]) in which caseworkers rated their own recommendations as those most likely to influence the court following those of treatment specialists (e.g., psychologists, mental health therapists).

Table 20
Summary of Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of Decision Agreement on the Factored Dimensions of the Human Caring Inventory and Caseworker Self-Efficacy Measures (n= 165)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV= Decision Support</th>
<th>Variable Entered</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HPE</td>
<td>.259</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.74</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSE</td>
<td>.332</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.87</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGE</td>
<td>.368</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td></td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.033</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV= Decision Consequence</th>
<th>Variable Entered</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSE</td>
<td>.195</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.47</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The provision of services in accordance to the case plan and the provision of concise and informative written information accounted for an additional 11% of the variance in this item. These results are shown in Table 21.

Stepwise multiple regression was again used to regress this same item (i.e., the judge's weighting of the evidence provided by the OCS caseworker) on the three factors of the CWSE-C with significant results which are shown in Table 22 below. The first variable to enter the model was Client Services Efficacy, followed by Hearing.
Preparation Efficacy, with these two accounting for a total of 22% of the variance in judges’ ratings.

Table 21
Summary of Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of the OCS Caseworker Variable on Part A of the Judicial Response Index (n=202)
DV= OCS Caseworker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Entered</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.477</td>
<td></td>
<td>113.85</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable Services</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.517</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>81.20</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Material</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.585</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>57.89</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22
Summary of Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of the OCS Caseworker Variable on the Factored Subscales of the Self-Efficacy Measure (n=86)
DV= OCS Caseworker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Entered</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Client Services</td>
<td>.288</td>
<td>.083</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.57</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Prep.</td>
<td>.365</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of Comments

Both caseworkers and judges were given an opportunity to submit comments along with the survey forms which they completed. In the instance of caseworkers, comments were submitted on the Phase 1 survey forms which contained a section asking for "additional comments concerning your experiences in court". Judges were also given a space at the bottom of the Judicial Response Index which was simply labeled "comments" in order for them to add any explanatory remarks they wished to their ratings of individual hearings. Seventy-seven (21%) of the 374 caseworkers responding
in Phase I made comments. Thirty-four (17%) of the surveys completed by judges also carried comments, although many of these were simply to better explain the context of the hearing (e.g., a notation that the case involved agreement among the parties rather than an evidentiary hearing) rather than to make a statement about the performance of the caseworker.

Data analysis of comments consisted of review and categorization of those which carried a common and distinct theme (Patton, 1990). Categories were divided into those with positive, negative, and neutral themes.

**Comments of Caseworkers**

Seven major categories were identified in the comments provided by caseworkers. Positive comments were all grouped into a single category which indicated that the caseworker's overall experience in court had been positive or that the judges before whom he or she appeared were fair or did a good job. Sixteen caseworkers made comments which fell into this group.

Neutral comments included those which (1) affirmed the importance of preparation and (2) observations regarding the importance of maintaining contact and collaborating with attorneys and advocates involved in the court process. Three comments were categorized into the first of these groups and two in the second.

Seven groups of comments were designated as negative. The groups are given in rank order based on the numbers of comments pertaining to each:

1. Poor performance or preparation by attorneys.
   
   This was the most frequently occurring category with 22 comments mentioning that attorneys were often unprepared and did not seem
interested in dependency cases. These included references to children’s attorneys and court-appointed attorneys representing parents who arrived at court for the hearing without having met their clients or reviewing relevant information. Eight comments in this category referred specifically to lack of cooperation on the part of assistant district attorneys, seven made direct references to children’s attorneys, and two mentioned lack of support from the agency’s own staff attorneys.

(2) Rude treatment or lack of respect from judges and others at court.

Twenty-one caseworkers mentioned being treated rudely either by the judge or by others at court. Some who mentioned being treated rudely by others felt that such treatment was tacitly supported by the judge.

(3) Caseworker opinions and information discounted or disregarded.

Ten comments indicated that caseworkers felt that their input into case decisions was not valued. Comments mentioned such issues as decisions being made by attorneys and judges behind closed doors or the perception that judges valued the opinions of private therapists and consultants more than information offered by caseworkers.

(4) Court waiting time and scheduling problems.

Nine workers mentioned waiting time, poor scheduling, and delays or postponements as problems. Two of these commented that it was not unusual to spend a full day in court waiting to provide 5 minutes of testimony. Some remarks also indicated that caseworkers interpret this sort of treatment as a sign of the judge’s lack of respect for them.
(5) Reluctance to hold parents accountable.

Seven caseworkers said they felt that judges did not hold parents responsible for their action or inaction in relation to rehabilitation or changing the underlying causes related to the child maltreatment. Some of these also suggested that, in their view, judges focused more on the accountability of OCS staff than that of the parents.

(6) Anti-agency bias.

The comments of six caseworkers indicated that they believe the behavior of judges in their area indicates a bias against the agency. There was some overlap in this category with number 2 above; however, this category also included suggestions that the judge's orientation prior to taking office (e.g., frequent representation of parents) carried over into his or her attitude toward agency staff.

Comments of Judges

All comments submitted by judges except those which were simply explanatory, grouped logically into two categories (1) quality of casework and court preparation and (2) quality of testimony or court room presentation. Fifteen comments were interpreted as positive and eleven were negative. An additional ten were neutral or explanatory. Positive and negative comments were assigned as follows:

(1) Quality of casework and court preparation.

Twelve comments mentioned workers being well prepared, knowledgeable about the case, or having fully explored options for the child’s placement.
Nine of judges’ negative comments were in this category. Five referred either to deficiencies in provision of services, failure to explore all placement options for the child, or inadequate communication with parties or treatment providers about important issues, and the remaining four remarks mentioned caseworkers’ failure to submit written reports to the court on time.

(2) Court presentation.

Three comments specifically mentioned that the caseworker did a good job in providing testimony.

Two remarks in this category were considered negative. One mentioned the perception that the worker did not understand the objective of the hearing. The other noted that the worker appeared too intimidated to provide thorough testimony.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 contains the results of the data analyses performed in the study. Analyses consisted of: (a) descriptive statistics pertaining to the total sample of participants, (b) principle components factor analysis to define subconstructs in the study measures, (c) internal consistency reliability analysis of all scales defined in the factor analysis, (d) bivariate correlations to examine relationships among the variables and to test the research hypotheses, (e) multiple regression analysis to examine the influence of the combined independent variables on the dependent variable, and (f) analysis of variance and post hoc comparisons to determine differences among participants based on demographic variables. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of conclusions and implications.
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents the major findings of the study and discusses their significance and implications. It also includes a brief overview of the study, its context, design, and purpose.

Overview of the Study

This research focused on the relationship between child welfare agencies and the juvenile courts and was designed to identify and examine factors which are associated with the way in which child welfare staff relate to the legal system and are viewed by judges who hear the child dependency matters in which caseworkers play such a significant role.

The impetus for the study was the growing recognition of the importance of a cooperative and collaborative relationship between child welfare agencies and the courts in effecting positive outcomes for the children and families which they collectively serve. Over the past twenty years, the judicial system has come to play an increasingly greater role in the oversight of public child welfare agencies and the services they provide to abused, neglected, and dependent children and their families. Whereas courts formerly were involved only when agencies recommended a change in the custody of children, they now are charged with responsibility to provide ongoing oversight of situations in which children are placed in the custody of the state (Hardin, 1996).

This growth in the court’s involvement, which came about, at least in part, as a result of public concern about the quality of services which agencies offer, has led to increasing tensions between agencies and courts. The literature pertaining to the agency-judicial relationship documents judges’ claims of inadequate caseworker performance as

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a major area of concern (Hardin, 1993, 1996; Kamerman & Kahn, 1990; Katz, et al., 1994). Specific factors cited by judges and others in the legal system include the quality of service planning and delivery, lack of understanding of the judicial process, and inadequate preparation for court. Likewise, caseworkers complain of judges who are chronically disrespectful, lack understanding of important issues related to child development and attachment, and who regularly over-reach their authority.

No previous studies have attempted to link work-related personal characteristics of caseworkers to the performance of activities related to their role in working with the judicial system or to empirically explore the factors which judges consider most important in assessing the performance of caseworkers in court.

This research explored the applicability of theoretical variables found to have relevance in other helping professions to the performance of caseworkers in court-related tasks. Independent variables in the study included self-efficacy, human caring, and decision agreement. The conceptual framework for the study viewed self-efficacy and human caring as independent variables influencing the way in which judges in child dependency hearings evaluate and respond to the performance of caseworkers. Decision agreement was viewed as a mediating variable influenced by the caseworker's level of self-efficacy and human caring and impacting the way in which he or she presents the agency's recommendations to the court.

The construct of self-efficacy is drawn from social cognitive theory and explicated primarily in the work of Albert Bandura (1982, 1986, 1989, 1990, 1997). Human caring, is based on the literature in psychology related to empathy and altruism and that in social work pertaining to social justice and understanding. The decision
agreement variable is derived from the study of decision making in the fields of psychology and management.

Based on the conceptual framework, six hypotheses were developed to describe predicted relationships between the study variables. Three research questions related to the psychometric properties of the measures, differences in groups based on demographic characteristics, and the relative influence of the two independent variables upon the mediating variable of decision agreement, were also posed.

The study used self-administered survey instruments which were either adapted from measures used in earlier studies in child welfare and nursing (Bienvenu, 2000; Ellett, C. 1995; Ellett, A. 2000; Moffett, 1994) or originally designed. Data was collected during the fall of 2000. The research was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 involved the completion by caseworkers of measures of self-efficacy, human caring, and their overall (i.e., for the last 3 years) experience in court. A total of 374 completed, usable surveys was returned in Phase 1. Phase 2 involved both caseworkers and judges. Those caseworkers who had taken part in Phase 1 were asked to complete measures of decision agreement just prior to the court hearing on a specific case, followed by an assessment of the hearing at its conclusion. Thirty-seven judges enrolled in the study, and an estimated maximum of 34 actually participated. Each was asked to complete surveys which rated the performance of participating caseworkers in a single hearing. A total of 202 completed judicial ratings was received and 149 caseworkers returned a total of 182 survey forms pertaining to individual hearings.
Major Findings and Conclusions

Major Finding Number One

The six measures which were either developed or revised for this study all demonstrated reasonable reliability and validity. The measures of the independent variables of self-efficacy, human caring, and decision agreement were adapted from previous research to include items specifically related to work with the legal system. Measures used by judges to evaluate caseworker performance and by caseworkers to assess both their overall experience in court and in specific hearings, were originally developed.

Conclusion

It is possible to develop reasonably reliable measures which can be useful in the measurement of the theoretical variables of self-efficacy and human caring in the social work context. The network of relationships established among these measures is consistent with the theory concerning self-efficacy and add further support to the inclusion of human caring as a component of self-efficacy in the social work context. Additionally, this finding confirms that the quality of caseworkers' interaction with the courts and with legal professionals can be reliably measured.

Major Finding Number Two

This study tested a new response stem format in the measurement of self-efficacy which is more consistent with the definition of efficacy as a theory of beliefs (Bandura, 1997). The results demonstrate that this response format is capable of yielding reliable data and support its use in future research in self-efficacy. These findings replicate those of Ellett (2000) and Claiborne (2001).
Conclusion

The new response stem used in this measure (The strength of my belief in my capability to __________ is...) is more closely aligned with theory and thus provides a better operational definition of the self-efficacy construct than do those currently used in research (e.g., How confident are you that you can...?, I feel that I can..., etc.).

Major Finding Number Three

There is a significant relationship between the dimensions of caseworker efficacy related to work with the courts (Court Group Efficacy and Hearing Preparation Efficacy) and the mediating variable of Decision Support.

Conclusion

Although modest in magnitude, this finding suggests that efficacy is a significant factor in caseworkers' ability to influence decision making in a group context.

Major Finding Number Four

The views of judges can be measured with a great degree of reliability.

Conclusion

The extant literature which suggests that judges' actions are in large part subjective, differing greatly from one to another (Bortner, 1982; Van Koppen & Tate, 1984), was not verified in judges' ratings of 202 individual hearings. Findings showed that judges were able to make very consistent discriminations regarding the performance of caseworkers.

Major Finding Number Five

There is a statistically significant relationship between all factored dimensions of the human caring and self-efficacy measures.
Conclusion

Self-efficacy is described by Bandura as multifaceted and including affective as well as behavioral components. These results provide further empirical support of human caring as a component of self-efficacy in the child welfare context.

Major Finding Number Six

Judges weight the information provided by child welfare caseworkers far more strongly in their decision making than that of any other participants in the hearing.

Conclusion

Judges value the evidence provided by caseworkers. These findings, when examined with those of an earlier study in Louisiana courts (Ellett & Steib, 2000) which noted that caseworkers typically do not provide significant oral testimony, suggests that judges may be relying heavily on the written information which caseworkers provide.

Major Finding Number Seven

Judges value the recommendation of the caseworker in their decision making far more importantly than any other factor.

Conclusion

The opinions of child welfare professionals, when reasonable and based on fact, influence the decisions which judges make in child dependency hearings. Caseworkers must not only be familiar with the important facts of a case, but have the ability to use them to formulate reasonable recommendations.

Findings Pertinent to Research Questions

This section provides a summary of the findings related to the three research questions which were addressed in this study.
Research Question 1

How valid and reliable are the measurements of the study variables?

Findings pertinent to this question are discussed above under Major Finding Number One. The subconstructs identified through factor analysis of the self-efficacy and human caring measures were consistent with the theoretical definitions of these variables. The reliability of the self-efficacy measures was strong, while that of the human caring measure was adequate. The statistically significant correlation between the subscales of the self-efficacy and human caring measures supports the existence of an affective dimension of self-efficacy as predicted by theory.

Factor analysis clearly identified the conceptual dimensions of the other measures developed for the study. All of these demonstrated good reliability, with that of the Judicial Response Index (.93) and of the Summary Appraisal of Court Experience scale (.91) being exceptionally high.

Question 2

Is there a difference in scores on any of the three independent variables (i.e., self-efficacy, human caring, and decision agreement) among caseworkers based on demographic factors such as education and experience?

Statistical analysis by level of education (baccalaureate, masters) and type (social work, non-social work) in relation to the independent variables showed differences in two areas. Analysis of the sample according to level of degree (bachelors and masters) showed that those with masters degrees had higher mean scores across all dimensions of the self-efficacy variable. These differences were statistically significant with regard to the factor of Hearing Preparation Efficacy ($F=11.65, p<.001$).
Multivariate analysis using the two factors of the Human Caring Inventory as dependent variables with level of degree showed a significant difference ($F=4.109$, $p<.043$) for the Client Advocacy factor with those with masters degrees. Those with social work degrees also had significantly higher scores ($F= 10.37$, $p<.001$) on the Client Advocacy variable.

There were significant differences between new staff (those with 0-3 years experience) and those at mid-career (10-19 years) on all three self-efficacy factors. Mean scores on this variable also tended to be higher for the 4-9 year group, but the difference was not statistically significant. An interesting, though not significant, trend also noted in this data analysis was a similar decline in mean scores on each factor for caseworkers with 20 or more years experience.

**Question 3**

How much variation in decision agreement is accounted for by self-efficacy as opposed to human caring?

Only the self-efficacy constructs contributed significantly to variation in decision agreement. The 3 subscales of self-efficacy (Hearing Preparation Efficacy, Client Services Efficacy, and Court Group Efficacy) contributed a total of 13.5% of the variation in Decision Support. The only variable to show a significant relationship to the two-item Decision Consequence component of Decision Agreement was Client Services Efficacy which contributed a statistically significant ($p<.05$), but negligible 3.8% of the variance.

**Discussion and Implications of Findings**

This is the only known study conducted to empirically examine the relationship between work-related personal characteristics of child welfare agency staff and the way
in which they interact with the juvenile courts in the performance of their job duties.

Although findings did not confirm the predicted linkages between theoretical variables and the way in which caseworkers are evaluated by judges or assess their own experience in court, there were several findings which are of significance for theory development and future research as well as for social work practice.

**Implications for Theory**

The measure of self-efficacy developed for the study provides further support for the generalizability of this theoretical construct to the field of social work and specifically to child welfare. The finding of significant correlations between this measure and that of the human caring variable is consistent with the conceptual definition of this construct as consisting of affective as well as cognitive and behavioral components. These findings suggest that caring is an important dimension of the efficacy construct in the context of child welfare practice.

Confirmed linkages between latent constructs of the self-efficacy measure and the decision agreement variable lend further credence to the theoretical conception of resilience and persistence as reflections of higher self-efficacy. The finding of a significant relationship between self-efficacy and decision agreement suggests that caseworkers with stronger efficacy beliefs related to tasks involved in working with legal professionals and child advocates and the preparation of cases for court may also play a more integral role in the development of the agency's goals and recommendations in specific cases. It is reasonable to expect that individuals possessing greater resilience and persistence would be better able, even as the low ranking members of decision-making groups, to put their views forward and influence others to endorse their point of view.
than would those with lower self-efficacy. Moreover, this ability to prevail in the formulation of critical decisions in a group environment, would be expected to further strengthen caseworker efficacy beliefs.

**Implications for Research**

Findings of this study with regard to the consistency with which judges discriminate in their assessment of the value of evidence provided by child welfare staff point to the benefits of further research in judicial decision making. The involvement of judges themselves in the development of measurements, as was done in this study, has the potential to yield instruments which are valid and reliable in the measurement of their views. It should also be noted that the participation of judges was better than expected given the conventional wisdom that this is an extremely difficult population to engage in research efforts. The jurisdictions of the 37 judges who enrolled in this study covered over half of the state and accounted for approximately two-thirds of the child dependency judicial caseload. The experience of this study indicates that research with this population is possible and capable of yielding reliable results.

The verification of human caring as a component of self-efficacy in child welfare lends further credence to the value of the study of self-efficacy in this context as well as in other areas of social work. Caring is a fundamental social work value (Imre, 1989; Lynn, 1999); thus it is logical that it would be an essential part of efficacy beliefs in this profession. The development of a better understanding of the way in which these two theoretical variables interact and are expressed in actual practice has important implications for social work education as well as for agency staff selection and development.
A continuing controversy in self-efficacy theory is the extent to which self-efficacy is a situationally specific construct as opposed to one which can be generalized across domains. The delineation, through factor analysis, of the self-efficacy measure used in this study into conceptual domains and the relationship of two of the self-efficacy subconstructs with the decision support variable, suggests that further inquiry into the nature of efficacy domains in child welfare might yield important information on which to base education and staff development.

This study indicated that judges greatly value both the evidence and the recommendations provided by caseworkers. While this finding is considered important, it should be interpreted with caution; the study did not consider other factors which might influence the degree of credibility which the judge is willing to ascribe to the caseworker. Such factors may include prior experience with the caseworker, the way in which the recommendations are presented, and the amount of additional information presented to or read by the judge. It might also be noted that written reports from the child welfare agency tend to be formatted differently from one jurisdiction to another, a fact that might affect the way in which judges weigh the contents of the report, particularly in a fast-paced court schedule. Although consideration of these issues was beyond the scope of this research they present worthwhile areas of exploration for future exploration.

Additional research using the measures developed or adapted for this study will be needed to determine whether the reliability and construct validity which they exhibited will be sustained. This may be especially important with the human caring measure, which did not show the strength in reliability in this study which it has in previous research with child welfare staff (Ellett, C.,1995; Ellett, A., 2000). Because of the
conceptual importance of caring in social work and its demonstrated relationship with self-efficacy, it is important to develop valid and reliable measures of this construct. Future research with the decision agreement measure, which showed reasonable validity and reliability in this study, should include the development of additional items related to the potential consequences of judicial decisions. Only two such items were included on the measure used in this study, yet factor analysis delineated them on a separate factor which had reasonable (.78) reliability.

Substantial difficulty was encountered in data collection during the second phase of this study. Comparison of caseworker participation with that in previous agency-sponsored research suggests that stronger organizational support will be needed if future studies are to yield data which informs the precise nature of the variables underlying successful agency-court relationships. Although there was adequate (48%) participation in the first phase, which involved only caseworker completion of surveys, this dropped significantly (to 22%) during that portion of the study which included the rating of caseworkers by judges. Several calls and electronic messages were received by the researcher from local OCS office managers stating that caseworkers were concerned about their names being included on the master list of participants that was to be sent to judges in order for them to record identification numbers on their surveys. This suggests that a more open, trusting relationship may be a prerequisite for future research of this type. Some other child welfare agencies have institutionalized judicial participation in caseworker evaluation (Hardin et al., 1995), but this has not been done in Louisiana. Research such as this might be facilitated if it were agency-sponsored and if both agency staff and judges understood the role which it played in overall caseworker evaluation and
skills development. Such agency support and coordination would also allow for a more balanced process in which supervisory ratings of specific competencies could be incorporated into the research design. In addition, many of the complexities in design which were necessary to assure caseworker anonymity in this study might be eliminated if there were clear policies within the agency about the use and disclosure of such information.

Limitations of time and resources necessitated this study's relying solely on quantitative methods. However, research which also includes a qualitative component may be more appropriate for the examination of court-agency interaction in child welfare. In addition, research which truly ties caseworker performance and judicial decisions to outcomes for children and families would require the use of a longitudinal design which incorporates, at a minimum, the review of case records and agency management data.

If further research of this type were to be attempted under similar conditions, more definitive results might be obtained through the use of a procedure which assigns numerical identifiers to judges as well as to caseworkers and which asks judges to rate the performance of the caseworker in every dependency hearing during the period of data collection rather than to rate each participating caseworker only once as was done in this study. In such a design, different data collection periods could be assigned to courts based on the volume of dependency cases heard. This would eliminate the problem encountered in this study of large juvenile courts being asked to do a disproportionate share of data collection in order to allow a sufficient time period for judges hearing dependency cases more infrequently to have an opportunity to participate.
Such a process would likely be less confusing to judges and allow for more meaningful data analysis by providing an exact match of judicial ratings with those of caseworkers.

Additionally, better cooperation of caseworkers may be obtained through personal contact in local offices to orient staff to the purpose and procedures of the study. The complex procedures necessary to insure caseworker anonymity in this research required a detailed and lengthy written explanation of the study procedures (see Appendix B) which may have discouraged participation and confused those who did take part.

Although this study found some support for a preference of graduate education and social work educational content, this area should be explored further. A study which also incorporates supervisory assessment and evaluation of case outcomes as other measures of caseworker performance would allow for triangulation of judges' ratings and caseworker self-reports. The best support for the employment of social workers in child welfare will be based on their demonstrated ability to attain better outcomes for children and families. Thus far, few studies have attempted to determine this.

The interface between child welfare agencies and the courts continues to be an important area for research and one which has implications for related fields as well. The ability to work effectively within the legal system may be most important for staff in child welfare, but it is also a key competency for social workers in other fields of practice. Increasingly, social workers are serving as witnesses in proceedings related to child custody, juvenile justice, and mental illness or mental capacity (Mason, 1997). Thus, a better understanding of the factors which contribute to competent performance in the legal arena may provide important information on which to base professional
development for social workers as well as those in related professions who are required to provide evidence in court.

**Implications for Practice in Child Welfare**

The significant relationship between the self-efficacy and decision support variables which was found in this study suggests applicability of the self-efficacy construct in the development of decision-making and group interaction skills through both organized staff development and the mentoring of caseworkers by their supervisors and other superiors. The ability to participate effectively in the formulation of critical decisions which must be made regarding the lives of children is extremely important in child welfare. An array of persons with differing professional perspectives (and perhaps with divergent opinions about the best course of action) is typically involved in the decision-making process, especially in the most complex cases. The caseworker is the person best positioned to integrate all of the available information and to distill the differing views into a core plan or recommendation. It is critical that he or she be equipped to do so.

The findings of this study regarding the degree to which judges value and rely upon the evidence provided by caseworkers should be empowering for agency staff. More importantly, this finding underscores the very great responsibility which agencies have to assure that the information which caseworkers present in court is factually based and rests on thorough and skilled assessment and decision making. Caseworkers are not just functionaries in the court as was suggested by one agency attorney (personal communication, Sept., 1998); they play a very significant role in the judicial decisions which affect the lives of children and families. This finding, coupled with that in a
previous study which found, based on observations in many of these same courts, that the rapid pace of hearings allows for little oral testimony by caseworkers, suggests that judges rely heavily on the 
*written* information with which they are provided. Data analysis in this study also showed that the provision of concise and informative written reports was one of three variables most strongly associated with judges’ reliance on the evidence offered by caseworkers. Such findings underscore the importance of caseworkers’ proficiency in the clear and concise organization and expression of information and ideas in writing. Agencies would do well to assess this skill when hiring and to further develop it in staff through mentoring and supervision. The consideration of writing samples in the employee selection process and an emphasis by supervisors on the quality of written work are both supported by the findings of this research.

Although slight and not significant, the uniform decline in self-efficacy across all subconstructs for those with 20 or more years of experience suggests that agency supervisors and administrators might pay special attention to the provision of professional development opportunities for older staff. This trend may also have implications for institutional change. One might expect that more competent staff would advance beyond casework positions before reaching 20 or more years of service.

However, previous research in the OCS noted that, especially in rural offices, promotional opportunities are severely limited in number (Ellett, A., 2000). Moreover, the current job structure provides little in the way of advancement opportunities for those who prefer direct work with clients to supervision or administration. Thus, the most experienced staff remaining in casework positions may have few opportunities for career advancement or other avenues for professional growth. Whatever, the underlying
reason for this finding, theory predicts that lowered self-efficacy would be associated with less motivation, task persistence, and resilience on the part of these employees. Thus, further exploration may be warranted to determine the need for a specific focus on this group of older workers in the provision of staff development and opportunities for leadership and advancement.

Additional findings with implications for practice are those pertaining to differential performance on the part of staff with masters degrees and with degrees in social work. Although differences apparent in this study were not as robust as those in some other research which has explored differing educational levels among child welfare staff, they add to the body of research which has shown that staff with graduate education, especially in social work, perform more competently in child welfare than do those with only baccalaureate degrees or degrees in content areas other than social work (Albers, et al., 1993; Booz-Allen & Hamilton, 1987; Dhooper et al, 1990, Liebermann, et al.,1988).

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, agencies might use self-efficacy theory as a foundation in the planning of programs for staff development and credentialing. Because self-efficacy can be developed and sustained through specific activities and experiences (Bandura, 1997), the theory can provide a guide for the formulation of structured learning, for overall supervision, and for assessment of staff competencies. Based on what has been demonstrated in this research and in other studies concerning the relationship of self-efficacy to work performance (Bandura, 1997), those developing credentialing standards and examinations might consider the inclusion of efficacy-
enhancing prerequisites for licensure as well as measurement of this construct as a part of licensing examinations.

**Implications for Legal Practice**

The responses of judges regarding the relative degree to which they weigh the information provided by the parties in hearings also has implications for legal practice in child dependency matters. As the hearing participants on whom judges rely most strongly in addition to agency caseworkers, children’s attorneys have an especially great responsibility to prepare their cases thoroughly and, in doing so, to use the information which can be provided by agency staff. This finding supports the validity of concerns addressed in the literature about the serious need for children’s attorneys to be well prepared and to carefully consider the nature of their advocacy role in these unique matters (Weinstein, 1997). It is notable that, in the 1996 survey of Louisiana judges conducted in association with the Court Improvement Program (C. A. R. E.), judges estimated that children’s attorneys were adequately prepared for hearings just over half (57%) of the time, and 37% indicated that there were no experience, training, or quality control requirements for such attorneys.

All attorneys involved in dependency hearings might do well to pay special attention to the information which can be provided by caseworkers. Although caseworkers themselves may recognize the value of the information which they provide, 86.5% of those participating in the 1996 C.A.R.E. survey indicated that parents’ attorneys rarely met with them prior to the day of the hearing. That was also true for 76.6% of the attorneys representing children. Although the argument might be made that
these attorneys receive copies of reports prepared by OCS caseworkers, it would appear that the quality of their case preparation might be improved by more direct contact.

**Implications for Social Work Education**

Findings of this study have several implications for social work education. First the degree to which judges rely upon the evidence which caseworkers provide in their making of important decisions in the lives of families and children has obvious implications for the importance of educational content in the areas of human behavior, and mental health. Just as importantly, though, these findings point to the need for social work practitioners to have the capacity to think critically and to evaluate and consider a range of ideas and issues in the formulation of their treatment plans and recommendations. Social work scholars are best equipped to take the lead in working to identify the core competencies which practitioners need to attain good outcomes for families in the child welfare client population and develop meaningful ways to teach them in courses and student practicums (Gambrill, 1997).

Additionally, although it would seem to be of obvious importance, these findings underscore the responsibility which social work educators have to assure that their graduates can express themselves well, not just in oral communication, but in writing. The ability of social workers in child welfare to influence the critical decisions which judges make appears to be strongly related to the extent to which they can express facts and opinions clearly and succinctly in writing.

Efficacy theory also has important implications for the design of internship experiences for social work students. By structuring internship content which insures the inclusion of efficacy-building experiences such as competent modeling, verbal feedback,
and opportunities for mastering specific skills, social work educators can more reliably promote efficacy outcomes such as motivation and persistence in students.

Discussion of Study Limitations

As noted in Chapter 1, several limitations should be considered in the interpretation of the findings of this research. First, the measures of caseworker-related variables consisted only of self-reports and thus may not be as reliable as measures which also include other sources of data such as supervisory or peer ratings or review of materials prepared by caseworkers. Additionally, this study used only volunteers. As in any research, the use of a sample comprised of volunteers raises questions regarding representativeness of the larger population from which it is drawn. Finally, the study was conducted only in the child welfare agency and courts in Louisiana. Thus, caution should be used in generalizing the findings beyond this geographic area. Such limits on generalizability may be somewhat mitigated, however, by the greater uniformity in child welfare systems in the United States which has resulted from implementation of the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (P.L. 105-89, 1997). Because of standardized requirements imposed by this legislation, state child welfare agencies and dependency courts now operate in accordance with a uniform set of time frames and outcome measures as well as more similar (although not identical) laws pertaining to such actions as the removal of children from their parents or the termination of parental rights.

Chapter Summary

This chapter included the major findings and conclusions of the study. Findings related to hypotheses and research questions are summarized. The implications which the findings have for theory, research, practice, and education are also discussed.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

STUDY MEASURES
This survey is intended for those Office of Community Services staff providing direct casework services to clients in the child welfare programs and who routinely provide information to the court in the course of their work.

**PART I (Caseworker Self-Efficacy Scale - Court)**

The items below ask you to make a series of self-assessments regarding the strength of your work-related capabilities. Please darken the one answer which you believe is most accurate based on the following key.

1 = Weak  
2 = Somewhat Strong  
3 = Strong  
4 = Very Strong

The strength of my belief in my capability to (item statement) is...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. develop specific, meaningful, and individualized case plans for children and families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. provide effective interventions for parents whose children are in foster care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. accurately assess parenting capability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. work effectively with child sexual abuse victims and non-offending parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. prepare adequately for difficult court hearings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. work collaboratively with attorneys and other legal personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. work collaboratively with most Court Appointed Special Advocates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. respond calmly and carefully under hostile cross-examination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. work collaboratively with other professionals involved in delivery of services to clients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. organize and analyze information which will be important in court hearings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. say what I think is best for clients even if it means respectfully disagreeing with the judge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. continue to make sincere efforts to work with clients even when they are resistant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Part I (Cont.)

The strength of my belief in my capability to (item statement) is...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Somewhat Weak</th>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Strong Strong</th>
<th>Very Strong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. consistently put my best effort into my work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. prepare organized, succinct, and well-written documents for judges and attorneys</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. conduct an accurate and thorough assessment of family/child strengths and needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. work effectively with assistant district attorneys and agency attorneys to prepare cases for court</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. advocate successfully on behalf of children’s interests with other participants in the legal process</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. set and follow work priorities which enable me to provide the most important services for my clients</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. persist in efforts to meet client needs even when there are no formal resources available</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. establish rapport with clients</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PART II (Human Caring Inventory-Child Welfare)

The items below ask you to make a series of self-assessments regarding your work-related values and attitudes. Please darken the one answer which you believe is most accurate based on the following key.

1 = Strongly Disagree  
2 = Disagree  
3 = Agree  
4 = Strongly Agree

1. I feel badly for parents when I have to provide negative information about them in court  
   1 2 3 4

2. I have trouble relating to clients who abuse or neglect their children  
   1 2 3 4

3. I have sometimes taken unfair advantage of another person  
   1 2 3 4

4. I genuinely enjoy my profession  
   1 2 3 4

5. Parents should be informed of the consequences of their actions  
   1 2 3 4

6. I would never think of letting someone be  
   1 2 3 4
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1= Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2= Disagree</th>
<th>3= Agree</th>
<th>4= Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I would delay personal plans in order to help a client who needed assistance</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I don't particularly enjoy finding out about other people</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I have patience with clients when they become emotionally upset</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>I try to identify and examine my personal biases when I relate to clients</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>My work is worthwhile</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>I advocate for clients who can't or don't speak for themselves</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>I sometimes feel resentful when I don’t get my way</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>I try to communicate to judges and others that I genuinely care about clients even when I am recommending actions with which clients do not agree</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I would work in child welfare even if I didn’t need to money</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>It upsets me when the system doesn't work for the best interest of clients</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>I usually try to avoid becoming personally involved in clients problems</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>It bothers me that some clients don’t receive the services they need.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>At times, I have wished that something bad would happen to someone I dislike.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>I find it easy to read clients’ feelings</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>I'm usually the first to offer help when someone needs something</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>I am sometimes irritated with people who ask favors of me.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part II (Cont.)

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Agree 4 = Strongly Agree

25. I speak up when practices seem contrary to the welfare of others 1 2 3 4

PART III (Summary Appraisal of Court Experience)

This portion of the survey asks you to make a series of judgments about your experiences in court based on two different scales. In answering on Scale A, please select the number which most accurately completes the sentence below based on your OVERALL experience in child welfare hearings over the past 3 years. Scale B asks that you consider the degree of VARIATION which you have experienced regarding the item among ALL judges before whom you have appeared over the past 3 years.

Scale A:
1 = Strong Disagree (SD) 2 = Disagree (D) 3 = Agree (A) 4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

Scale B:
1 = Great Variation (GV) 2 = Some Variation (SV) 3 = Little Variation (LV)

My experience in court hearings is that...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My experience</th>
<th>Scale A</th>
<th>Scale B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I am usually treated with respect.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The OCS recommendation is usually</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supported in the court's decision.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The information (written/oral) which I</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide is valued and duly considered.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I usually fare better than most of my</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>colleagues.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I am treated much less respectfully</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>that the other participants in the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>hearing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. The decision which is made is</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>usually the best for the child(ren) involved.</td>
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PART III (Cont.)

Additional comments concerning your experiences in court:

PART IV

**Directions:** Please complete the following items by marking in the appropriate space or by writing in the requested information. Your answers will not be used to identify you. All analysis and reporting will use aggregate data.

1. **OCS Region:**
   - Orleans
   - Thibodaux
   - Lafayette
   - L. C.
   - Alex.
   - B. R.
   - Shreve.
   - Monroe
   - Covington
   - Jeff.

2. **Gender:** _Male_ __Female

3. **Age:**
   - 20-25
   - 26-30
   - 31-35
   - 36-40
   - 41-45
   - 46-50
   - 51-55
   - 56-60
   - Over 60

4. **Ethnicity:**
   - African American, non-Hispanic
   - Asian/Pacific Islander
   - Caucasian, non-Hispanic
   - Native American
   - Other

5. **Highest Educational Level & Major:**
   - Less than a baccalaureate degree
   - Baccalaureate degree in:
     - social work
     - sociology
     - psychology
     - education
     - business
     - math
     - English/Foreign languages
     - physical/biological sciences
     - history/political science
     - arts & humanities
     - general studies
     - other

6. **Are you currently working toward an MSW degree?**
   - Yes
   - No

7. **Number of years employed in child welfare:** __

8. **Current Program Assignment:**
   - Child Protection Investigations
   - Foster Care
   - Family Services
   - Adoption
   - Multiple programs

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Judicial Response Index (JRI)

Using the following key, assess the OCS worker in this case by darkening the best response. Please consider both oral testimony and any written material submitted by the caseworker. If an item is not applicable in this hearing, darken the circle N/A. Record the caseworker’s numerical identifier in the space in the top left corner. Please do not give the name of the caseworker.

1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Agree  4 = Strongly Agree  5 = N/A

The OCS worker in this case...

1. was knowledgeable of the facts.  1  2  3  4  5
2. well prepared for testimony.  1  2  3  4  5
3. presented written material which was informative and thorough.  1  2  3  4  5
4. presented a recommendation which was reasonable and supported by facts.  1  2  3  4  5
5. did not provide services according to the case plan.  1  2  3  4  5
6. provided or arranged all court-ordered services within a reasonable time  1  2  3  4  5
7. had explored all reasonable options for placement or other resources needed.  1  2  3  4  5
8. presented testimony which was consistent with written material submitted  1  2  3  4  5
9. did not appear to understand the objective of the court hearing  1  2  3  4  5

B. Please answer the following with respect to your overall experience with the caseworker in this case (i.e., not just this hearing):

I usually find the evidence provided by this caseworker to be credible and helpful

____ yes  ______ no  ______ have not formed an opinion

C. Using the following key, please darken the oval which best indicates the degree to which evidence provided by the following individuals influenced you decision making in this case. Your answers should reflect both oral testimony and written information considered by the court. If a listed person was not present or did not provide evidence, darken the N/A.

1 = Not at All  2 = Somewhat  3 = Strongly  4 = Very Strongly  5 = N/A

Not at all Somewhat Strongly Very Strongly

1. Parent(s)........................................ 1  2  3  4
2. Child’s Attorney................................. 1  2  3  4
3. District Attorney.............................. 1  2  3  4

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>OCS Worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Parents’ Attorney</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>OCS Attorney</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Foster Parent(s)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Other (specify)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Was this a contested hearing?**

_**yes** _  _**no**_

**Comments:**
PHASE 2
Part I (Decision Agreement Scale)

The following items reflect the strength of your commitment to and support of the goals and/or recommendations which the agency is putting forward in the specific case which will be included in the study. (Note: Child Protection Investigation Workers will normally answer based on case recommendations, e.g. “Continue in state custody”, rather than goals.) Please select the most accurate response based on the following scale.

1= Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Agree 4=Strongly Agree

1. I agree with the agency goal and/or recommendation in this case.

2. I am satisfied that this goal/recommendation reflects the best available alternative for each child in the family for whom I have case responsibility.

3. The case goal/recommendation reflects my personal views about what is best in this case.

4. The case goal/recommendation put forward by OCS at this time will have to be changed before the case is finally resolved.

5. If this goal or this recommendation is attained, I will feel that I have done the best I can do in this case.

6. When I think about whether our recommendations or goals for this case can be accomplished, I feel a lot of uncertainty.

7. I had a lot of input into the development of the case goals/recommendations.

8. I believe that the court will be accepting of the rationale for the goals/recommendations in this case even if the decision does not reflect complete concurrence with them.

9. I would be upset if the court did not concur with the goal/recommendation is this case.

10. If the court does not allow implementation of our recommendations in this case, the child will suffer.
PHASE 2
PART II (Post Hearing Appraisal)

Using the following key, select the answer which best describes your assessment of the court hearing and the decision which was made.

1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Agree  4 = Strongly Agree

1. I was given a fair opportunity to provide the information which I believe was important for the court to consider in making a decision.
   1  2  3  4

2. The decision which was made was the best for the child(ren) involved.
   1  2  3  4

3. The judge seemed to give the evidence I provided due consideration in making a decision.
   1  2  3  4

4. Some of the services which the judge ordered are unreasonable.
   1  2  3  4

5. I was treated with respect by the judge.
   1  2  3  4

6. I was well prepared for the hearing.
   1  2  3  4

7. The decision which was made was consistent with the agency’s recommendation.
   1  2  3  4

8. I did the best I could in providing services to the client(s) and in giving information to the court either orally or in writing.
   1  2  3  4

9. The information and/or recommendations which I presented were valued less than those of most other participants in the hearing.
   1  2  3  4

10. Given the evidence which was presented, the court’s overall decision was reasonable.
    1  2  3  4
APPENDIX B

LETTERS TO STUDY PARTICIPANTS
SAMPLE LETTER TO JUDGES
REQUESTING PARTICIPATION

September 22, 2000

Dear Judge________:

I am the Program Director for the Office of Community Services and a Ph.D. student in social work and educational research at Louisiana State University. For completion of my studies, I am conducting research which explores the interaction between OCS staff and courts of juvenile jurisdiction throughout the state. Specifically, this research seeks to establish the relationship between certain work-related characteristics of OCS staff who present evidence in child in need of care cases and the way in which judges evaluate and use this information in making decisions. It is being done under the direction of a panel of six LSU professors representing the fields of social work, psychology, law, and educational research. You should have received a letter from Judge__________ earlier this summer confirming that this research is supported by the Louisiana Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges. A letter from OCS Assistant Secretary ______________ acknowledging the agency’s endorsement is enclosed.

As the courts have taken on a greater role in child dependency cases, the ability of child welfare staff to work effectively and collaboratively with the legal system has become an increasingly important factor affecting outcomes for the children and families we are both responsible to serve. There is a growing body of literature in the fields of both social work and law which documents the problems which often characterize the relationship between the courts and child welfare agencies. Many of these are attributed to a discrepancy between agency performance and judicial expectations. We know that there are some caseworkers who are more effective than others in working with the legal system. A better understanding of the underlying characteristics which are associated with good performance can be used to inform the development of training, caseworker “mentoring” programs, and guidelines for supervision targeted to enable OCS staff to be better participants in the legal process.

Taking part in the study would require your completing the Judicial Response Index (JRI) following any hearings in which participating caseworkers provide evidence in the form of either written information or oral testimony. The JRI was developed based on input from a group of eight judges representing both juvenile and district courts. Field tests in which members of that group applied the instrument in actual hearings indicate that it can be completed within five minutes. A copy is enclosed for your review.
Neither you nor OCS caseworkers will be identified in this study. Participating caseworkers will be assigned numbers which will be used to match the JRI with the measures which they complete. You will be sent a copy of the JRI for each participating caseworker in offices serving your jurisdiction. Posted envelopes will be provided for you to return them directly to LSU. Only one instrument should be completed on a caseworker regardless of how many of their cases are heard by your court during the period of the study. Data collection is scheduled to begin October 16 and will extend through December 15, 2000. A summary report of the study, its findings and implications will be provided to all participating judges.

The enclosed card carries a numerical identifier. You need only drop it in the mail to indicate your interest in taking part in this research. To allow time for distribution of survey forms prior to the beginning date of data collection, your response must be received no later than October 7th. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, you may contact me at the above address, by telephone at __________, or by electronic mail at ______________.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Sue D. Steib
SAMPLE LETTER TO ENROLLED JUDGES

October 8, 2000

Re: OCS-Court Study

Dear Judge ________:

Thank you for your willingness to take part in the above-referenced study. I am enclosing a copy of the Judicial Response Index for each caseworker in the Office of Community Services offices serving the parishes of (jurisdiction). Some of these caseworkers may not have a hearing in your court during the period of data collection which begins October 16 and extends through December 15, 2000. There also may be some staff who have chosen not to participate in this research and thus, although they appear in your court, will not be on the list of caseworkers which you will receive from the above-referenced offices. There is no need to complete a survey form if the worker is not shown on the list.

As explained in earlier correspondence, only one hearing per caseworker is to be rated. This should be the first one occurring on or after October 16 in which the worker provides written and/or oral evidence. If a scheduled hearing is continued without any testimony or formal consideration of the written evidence submitted to the court, no JRI should be completed. In that event, the hearing to be rated would be the next one occurring during the data collection period in which the same caseworker provides evidence, whether it involves the same or a different case. Any type of hearing, whether evidentiary or review, involving a child in need of care case may be included in this research.

By copy of this letter I am requesting that the offices named above send you a master list of participants and their assigned numbers for your use in numbering the JRI’s which you complete. Simply enter the caseworker’s number in the space on the upper left hand corner of the form. Rating forms should be completed at the conclusion of each hearing or as soon afterward as possible and returned in the postage-paid envelopes provided. Once an instrument is completed on a single hearing involving a worker, his or her name may be crossed off of the list. The list should be destroyed after December 15, 2000 regardless of whether all of those named have appeared in your court. Any unused copies of the JRI may also be discarded at that time.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions concerning the above instructions. I may be reached at (phone) or by electronic mail at ________.

Sincerely,

Sue D. Steib
PHASE I COVER LETTER TO OFFICE MANAGERS

TO: Regional Administrator or Parish Manager

FROM: Sue D. Steib

RE: OCS - Court Study

Enclosed are packets of survey instruments which are being used to collect data in a statewide study of the interaction between the Office of Community Services and courts exercising juvenile jurisdiction. This is the first time in which workers across the state have been invited to give structured feedback concerning their experiences in the courts, and represents the first systematic attempt to obtain information from both caseworkers and judges about those factors which are most significant in their interaction.

As you know, work with the legal system has become an increasingly important aspect of child welfare practice. It is generally acknowledged by both child welfare and legal professionals that there is a need for a better understanding of the factors which impact the way in which they work together. This study seeks to gain information about variables which are most strongly associated with the way in which both caseworkers and judges evaluate their interaction in court. That information will be valuable in our work with the Louisiana Supreme Court, Court Improvement Project to form a more collaborative relationship with the courts across the state and to develop staff training, mentoring programs, and guidelines for supervision.

Packets are to be distributed to caseworkers in your office whose duties require that they regularly appear in court. Because it is expected that these will be primarily staff in the Child Protection Investigation, Foster Care, and Adoption programs, the number of packets corresponds to the number of those caseworker allocations in your office. However, if Family Services staff in your parish also appear in court frequently, their participation is welcomed. If you are in a parish where it is known that Family Services cases are heard in court, copies of survey forms have already been included for those staff. If not, it is possible that you may have some extra copies of survey forms due to vacancies in other units. If you need additional forms, please call me at ____ or through electronic mail at

The research will be conducted in two phases. All first line workers who regularly provide evidence (either in writing or oral testimony) to the court are asked to participate in Phase 1. This phase asks that they complete two scales which provide information concerning their beliefs and attitudes about their work and a third scale which measures their overall experiences in court. These measures have already been tested with OCS staff and require about 20 minutes to complete.

Phase 2 provides an opportunity for both judges and caseworkers to provide anonymous feedback concerning a single court hearing. All courts which hear child in need of care
cases are being asked to participate. If a judge in your area takes part in Phase 2, you will be sent additional packets which contain two brief survey forms requiring about five additional minutes to complete.

**Study Procedures:**

Participation in this research is to be voluntary and anonymous. Its goal is only to obtain aggregate data, not information about a particular worker or judge. Phase 1 involves only caseworker self-reports. Phase 2, however, requires that caseworker assessments of individual court hearings be correlated with Phase 1 data and with assessment scales completed by judges. It is anticipated that workers may be anxious about having their identities connected either with their own evaluation of a judge's performance or with the judge's evaluation of their participation in a court hearing. Therefore, numerical identifiers are being used to insure anonymity. In order to accomplish cross-matching of caseworker surveys with those completed by judges in Phase 2, you are asked to use the enclosed form to record the name with the corresponding packet number of each worker who participates. In large offices, it is suggested that packets be distributed to supervisors who will compile the list of participants.

Participating caseworkers are to seal their responses in the individual postage-paid envelopes provided and mail them directly to Louisiana State University where they will be computer-read. If offices choose to establish central collection boxes, workers should seal the survey forms before they are deposited. The list which you make will be used to distribute Phase 2 instruments to workers who took part in Phase 1 and to provide judges who participate with a means of entering the caseworker's number on the instrument which he or she completes following the court hearing in which the worker provides evidence. All judges' forms carry instructions that no names are to be given. Any instruments which carry names will be destroyed and the data excluded from the study.

The deadline for judges to indicate their participation is October 7. You will be notified early the following week of the courts in your parish which are participating. Phase 2 instruments will be sent to your office and must be distributed so that each worker who takes part receives the packet with the same identification number as he or she had in Phase 1. A copy of the list which you compile should be sent to each judge so that the correct numerical identifier can be entered on the form which he or she completes following the hearing. Please note that each list instructs the holder to destroy it following completion of the study. Any original which you maintain should also be destroyed.
Please do not hesitate to contact me at ___________________________ if you have any questions concerning this project.

Thank you very much for your help and cooperation.
SAMPLE LETTER TO CASEWORKERS

September 22, 2000

TO: OCS Social Service Specialists

FROM: Sue D. Steib

RE: OCS - Court Study

You are being asked to participate in a statewide study which explores the interaction between Office of Community Services staff and the courts. As you well know, our work with the courts has become increasingly important in determining outcomes for the children and families we serve. In addition, it has been cited as a critical factor affecting working conditions within our agency. Many child welfare professionals, not only in Louisiana, but nationally, cite the interface with the legal system as one of the most stressful aspects of their jobs.

This study will provide you with an opportunity to give an evaluation of your experiences in the courts, both generally and, if you are in the jurisdiction of a participating judge, in the context of a specific hearing. Specifically it will explore the relationship between caseworkers' self-reported values and capabilities, their assessment of their overall court experiences, and the way in which both they and judges evaluate the agency-court interaction in a specific hearing. It is being conducted as part of doctoral studies at Louisiana State University and is supported by the OCS and the Louisiana Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges. Please read the following description to understand what is involved in this research. All participation by OCS staff is voluntary and anonymous.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Phase 1: Average worker time required - 20 minutes. The instruments which are attached comprise Phase 1. They have already been field tested with a sample of OCS caseworkers and revised based on input from those workers. They are to be completed, sealed and returned to Louisiana State University in the individual postage-paid envelopes provided. If there is no participating court in the area served by the OCS office, this concludes your part in the study. You are asked to return Phase 1 surveys by October 16th.

Phase 2: Average worker time required - 5 minutes per participating court. Phase 2 participation occurs only in those areas where there is a participating court. All Louisiana courts which hear child in need of care cases have been asked to take part in this research and must indicate by October 7th whether they will do so. Your office will then be notified of participating courts in your area and provided with a second set of packets which each worker who took part in Phase 1 may complete on a single hearing in each of
those courts in which he or she appears. The Phase 2 packet will consist of two brief instruments, one to be completed prior to and the other immediately following the next hearing in which he or she provides evidence (either written information or oral testimony) in the participating court. Only one hearing per court, per caseworker will be measured. Those forms are also mailed directly to LSU.

In this phase, judges also will complete measures in which they rate the services and information which OCS has provided and the weight it is given in decision making relative to that provided by other participants in the case (e.g., parents, parents’ attorney, district attorney, therapists, etc.). Judges’ ratings are submitted on forms which bear no identifying information but carry a number which corresponds to that on the surveys submitted by workers. Data collection in this phase will cover the period of October 16 through December 15, 2000.

NOTE: Taking part in Phase 1 does not obligate you to take part in Phase 2 even if a court in your area participates. You are urged to do so, however, as the mutual rating of hearings by judges and OCS staff is the most powerful part of this research.

WHAT’S IN IT FOR WORKERS?

This is the first time OCS workers across the state have been given an opportunity to report on their experiences with the court system. Further, the research represents the first systematic attempt to define those factors which are most significant in interactions between the courts and the agency as they are assessed by both judges and child welfare staff. It will yield information which will inform our efforts at both the state and regional/parish levels in working through the Court Improvement Project to build a more collaborative relationship with the legal system. Its findings will also aid in the development of staff training, caseworker “mentoring” programs, and guidelines for supervision targeted to enable OCS staff to be better participants in the legal process.

WHAT GUARANTRY DO I HAVE THAT I WILL NOT BE IDENTIFIED WITH THE INFORMATION I PROVIDE ABOUT A COURT OR THAT A JUDGE PROVIDES IN A HEARING IN WHICH I TAKE PART?

This research seeks only to obtain aggregate data. It has been carefully designed to insure anonymity through the use of numerical identifiers which are assigned locally and are unknown to the researcher. No results will be obtained which pertain to either specific judges or caseworkers. Here’s how it works: A batch of survey packets is sent to each parish or regional office based on the allocated number of first-line staff. Each carries a number in the upper left-hand corner. Packets are distributed randomly by the parish manager or a designee. That individual records the names of participants with the corresponding packet number. This list is used only in
Phase 2 of the study to enable cross-matching of caseworker surveys with those they submitted in Phase 1 and those completed by judges on the same hearings. Caseworkers send their completed surveys for Phase 1 directly to LSU in sealed individual envelopes which the parish manager or other person maintaining the list of names and numbers never sees. If no judges in the parish or region take part in the study, the parish manager is so advised and instructed to destroy the list. If a jurisdiction which is served by the office does participate, the list which cross-references names with numbers is used only to insure that workers receive a second set of instruments bearing the same number as those they completed in Phase 1 and to enable judges to correctly number the scale which they complete. No names are given and each list bears instructions that it is to be destroyed after the period of data collection. Judges are specifically instructed not to note any worker names on the forms which they complete. Should they do so, the form will be destroyed and the information excluded from the study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at _____________ if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you very much for your consideration of this request.
PHASE 2 COVER LETTER TO CASEWORKERS

October 2, 2000

TO: Social Services Specialists
FROM: Sue D. Steib
RE: OCS-Court Study

Enclosed are forms for Phase 2 of the above-referenced study. You are being provided one numbered survey instrument for each judge who is participating in the study in your area.

The Phase 2 scales are to be completed on the first case which is heard before a participating judge during the data collection period, October 16 - December 15, 2000. Part I is to be completed after the agency’s goal and/or recommendation on the case has been decided, but prior to going court. Part II is to be completed just following the hearing.

The following judges in your region are taking part in this study:

All survey forms are to be returned in the attached postage-paid envelope by December 15, 2000.

Thank you very much for your participation in this research. Please contact me at _____ if you have any questions.
September 21, 2000

TO: OCS Regional & Parish Staff

FROM: Carmen D. Weisner
Assistant Secretary

RE: OCS-Court Study

I am writing to confirm the Agency’s support for the above-referenced research which is being conducted by Sue Steib as part of her doctoral studies in social work and educational research.

I am very much aware that we are all undergoing a difficult time as we face reductions in staff and resources. However, those challenges make it even more important that we search for new ways to work closely and cooperatively with the other entities which share our mission of service to the children and families of Louisiana. As you know, our ability to work effectively with the courts is critical and will become even more so as we seek to comply with the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act. Recognizing this, OCS staff at the state level have begun to work with representatives of the Louisiana Supreme Court, Court Improvement Project to develop strategies for improving collaboration between the child welfare and legal systems. This effort will become more visible at the regional and local levels as we jointly initiate systems of interagency planning and cross-training. The research in which you are being asked to participate is expected to yield information which will be valuable to us in this undertaking.

Please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Steib if you have questions about this project. Thank you for your hard work and dedication.

CDW/js
September 21, 2000

TO: Judges Hearing Child in Need of Care Cases

FROM: Carmen D. Weisner
Assistant Secretary

RE: Proposed Study of OCS in the Courts

I am writing to confirm that the Office of Community Services is in support of the above-referenced study which is to be conducted by Sue Steib for completion of her doctoral studies in social work and educational research at Louisiana State University.

A number of researchers have cited problems in the relationship between the juvenile courts and child welfare agencies as a major barrier to the timely attainment of resolution in dependency matters. The ability of caseworkers to provide credible evidence is a critical factor often mentioned as an issue of concern for judges.

This study represents the first systematic attempt to define the factors which influence the quality of the interaction between OCS and the courts. It affords judges an opportunity to provide feedback concerning the utility of both the verbal testimony and the written information which child welfare staff provide. The information gained from this research will inform our efforts to build a more collaborative relationship with the legal system and aid in the development of staff training and supervision.

Please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Steib or me if you require further information to consider participating in this research.

CDW:SDS

"AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER"
APPENDIX C

CASEWORKERS' AND JUDGES' COMMENTS
I make every attempt to prepare myself adequately. My experiences in court have been positive. I have encountered common problem areas in both courts.

Court brings apprehensiveness as to the uncertainty of the direction the case may go. The judge may agree with the agency's recommendation or he may disagree. The clients may present problems that may be disruptive if they disagree with the agency's recommendations.

In our area the ADA is not involved and rarely in his office. This makes us go into court without support. The ADA usually turns the entire hearing over to us. He just introduces the case.

Our court is presently a great difficulty to OCS. The new judge has a strong defense attorney bias. He strongly disagrees with where the agency places children (i.e., facilities). He often changes case plans and has sent children home to very unsafe environments. Caseworkers in his court never know what he will say and order. This judge knows the law and constantly interprets it against the agency. This is causing workers to never know how their cases will be perceived. While this is the case, I have always been treated well, but he lambasts the agency at the same time. The other judge is very fair and it is very comfortable in his court.

The problem is not in the overall decisions, but in the disagreement in the steps to get there. We are also having problems with our court scheduling hearings every one to three months which is limiting the time for services we can do for our clients.

The parents' attorneys, the child's attorneys, and CASA workers are allowed to treat the OCS workers in a rude, unprofessional manner. This occurs during the court hearings with no intervention or support from the judge or DA.

I left parish because I felt the judge had no respect, did not listen, and was not always right as was implied.

Some judges are more concerned with the worker's knowledge of policy than they are making the best decision for children and families. Judges sometimes treat cases as though they are in direct opposition to the agency. Sometimes no matter how well a worker knows a case, judges will try to intimidate them regarding how well they know policy and the client. Above all, judges never want workers to quote policy.

Extremely important to respect court process, understand the roles that everyone plays; never take it personally, and be prepared! All for the best interest of the children.
Caseworkers (Cont.)

The responsibility for making sure all parents involved have an attorney to represent them appears to fall between OCS and the court system. This delays many hearings as they have to be continued. Court docket days need to be increased for TPR cases. People wait too long to be heard on the matter. Caseworkers have sent o f all the necessary and wait longer than six months in many cases for a court date.

Preparation is key.

In my parish the judges are very supportive of OCS. Where I see a need for improvement is with the DA’s office regarding prosecution of sexual offenders. The tapes from the Child Advocacy Center are never used. Many times the arresting officer and OCS investigator are not subpoenaed to grand jury; consequently “no true bill” is most often ruled in these cases. The DA does not possess any training that OCS and law enforcement possess regarding the dynamics of sexual abuse (e.g., why children disclose and are to be considered credible when they give detailed information about the sexual act). The DA’s office appears to support the accused sexual offender more than the child victim.

Very frequently in court proceedings CASA has more input and is listened to more than OCS who is the guardian of the child. Decisions are made with CASA and attorneys without involving the OCS case manager.

(1) Child’s best interest neglected due to lack of advocacy by the child’s attorney. (2) Judges and attorneys meet in chambers to work out deals without OCS representation. (3) No OCS representation other than workers during court. (4) Disregard professional opinions and recommendations to satisfy attorneys.

I generally have no difficulties with the court or other agencies. Surely there are some pompous judges and other professionals we deal with daily, but we have to learn these shortcomings and practice good public relations at all times. I’m sure this may offend many OCS workers, but there is much incompetence of workers in the _______ and _______ OCS regions which results in a general lack of respect for the agency by the courts and DA’s office.

Local court system excellent in handling child welfare cases.

Judges are sometimes ignorant about OCS policy and the Children’s Code.

(1) A major concern is that in difficult, contested cases the judges meet with the judge in chambers and work out a legal compromise that may disregard all OCS testimony and therapists’ reports. These decisions can harm our foster children. (2) Parents’ attorneys may not know or understand the Children’s Code. Some ADA’s have not studied the Children’s Code. (3) Most children’s attorneys are passive observers and do not provide
Caseworkers (Cont.)

adequate representation for our children. Of course, they don’t have to agree with OCS. (4) Another major concern is that some courts do not forward signed orders to OCS in a timely manner. We need these orders to be sure we are complying with the judge’s ruling. Also, workers fail QA (quality assurance) reviews if signed orders are not in the record.

Court has gotten more stressful since the newly elected judge took office. He was very biased against the agency when he was an attorney. The agency is having to go to court much more often than before. The attorneys don’t read the court report and the workers have to testify about information that is in the court report. Before the new judge took office, the workers seldom had to testify because the court report stood on its own. Now the workers have to testify at every court hearing. The law clerk at juvenile court is sometimes very disrespectful to the agency’s attorney.

Overall, my experience in court has been positive. There have been some bad experiences in the past. One judge in particular cussed me out in the court room. I remained calm and professional. Before this judge left office, this judge had to apologize to me for a poor decision he made regarding one of my cases. Overall, I feel I have been able to work well with court and court personnel.

Juvenile cases appear to be considered less of an immediate need. We usually have to wait several hours to be heard. We are not provided the preparation time with the ADA handling the case.

The survey does not address problems in court as it is hard to answer and doesn’t relate to problems we see. One major problem is a newer judge (with years of experience as an assistant DA) who has no clue how to conduct our hearings. The best interest of the child is not usually met in his court. The other problems in that court are that the ADA and child’s attorney also don’t know what is going on and don’t care either. This is all in reference to _______ court. There our workers are not treated with respect. Our other court does a great job most of the time.

The judges appear to be overly “demanding” and lack some important knowledge regarding OCS policy. (Particularly cases acceptance, time frames, and referral procedures.) Proper guidelines need to be developed with the judges regarding OCS procedures as the judges appear to put orders into place that OCS may not be able to comply with in a timely manner.

I feel that the court makes us (the workers) responsible for the failures or inactions of the parents. I also feel that OCS workers are teamed up against by the other participants in
the court hearings (OCS attorney, IDB, or private attorneys, court social workers, bailiff, clerks in the court room, and the judge).

I feel that the court system has little respect for OCS employees even though we are the ones doing the work and reporting information to them. The courts sometimes make OCS employees feel as though they have abused/neglected the child. OCS workers are blamed for everything that goes wrong.

Some judges' actions in court are strongly affected by their personal and public dealings with OCS prior to becoming judges.

Legal representation the clients have is generally a deciding factor in the court system. Those who pay for their own attorney are fought for. Those who receive court appointed attorneys may be represented in court or may not.

OCS workers spend an entire day in court, including overtime, usually for about 5 minutes of testimony. In addition, most courts make no exceptions for workers, foster children, or parents that may reside in distant areas of the state, several hours away from the court house.

OCS workers spend the entire day in court usually for five minutes of testimony. Inadequate service provision to clients is directly related to carrying double caseloads which is not acceptable to myself or the courts.

Lawyers appointed for families and children do not know their clients and rarely meet with them before or after hearings. They have little idea on what is in the best interest of clients, only how to win their position.

_________ judges respect opinions of OCS workers, however, in__________ Parish it appears less so.

We deal with 9 judges and each judge responds differently, so it is difficult to answer with regard to the questions as it varies.

Usually my best cases were not contested when I worked in CPI. The cases that I never expected resistance, those were long and hard fought adjudication hearings. Some were contested, but all of my weak cases were fought. Years ago, a judge became furious and lectured me when I was placed in the middle of a civil court battle when my investigation had not been fully completed. My other two cases went well. That one did not because I did not make an inference for the judge. I had not formed a conclusion yet on that case.
Caseworkers (Cont.)

The judges in our district, overall, are excellent. The major problem has been attorneys who display open hostility to agency personnel and attorneys who have no client contact. Some/most attorneys in this area never ask to meet the children they represent, nor do they ask to review agency records/information regarding the children or their feelings about what has happened to them. How can they represent someone without this information? The attorneys for the parents rarely speak to their clients, either.

I have been before approximately 10 different judges in my 12 years. The consistency gained in having a single judge is lost by the familiarity the judge has with OCS. Also with one judge, they seem to begin to feel OCS is their domain. The problem with more than one judge is their lack of preparation when cases are transferred back and forth.

I have gone before a few judges who seem to view OCS workers as lazy and dishonest. However, most judges seem to appreciate our attempts to be caring and professional.

The court system in this area is different to work with - attorneys are allowed to badger and degrade OCS workers in front of the clients. The judge stands by and allows such behavior by attorneys and is very harsh to OCS also. Both the court and CASA have no respect for the agency.

In a word - reciprocity.

One judge (now retired) was very intimidating to OCS workers and could make workers who were not well informed about the case very uncomfortable in his court room. I preferred his court to a judge who doesn’t really want to hear our comments.

It should be noted that during court hearings a worker’s testimony and recommendation are based on the recommendations of OCS and not the worker’s personal opinion. Very often, the judge or attorneys ask a worker their personal opinion concerning a case. The workers have been told by OCS administration that their personal opinion does not count. Recommendations are made prior to court, usually during staffings with administration staff.

At times the lawyers and supervisor will be asked to meet in chambers to discuss agency concerns and recommendations, but the court judge does not emphasize the concerns to the parents during court if they decide to stipulate. At times, attorneys for the children seem to think they are representing the parent and don’t address safety concerns. When the DA asks for updates 5 minutes before court, he may not be able to instruct the court adequately. If a parent has an attorney, the judge appears to treat the parent as though they are cooperating rather than fighting (resisting) with the agency.

Two of the three judges are fair and respectful and have the best interest of the children. One judge just enjoys being hateful.
It frustrates me when I take the time to write a specific, detailed, and thorough court report and the judge doesn’t read it! That’s when I feel disrespected and worthless, as if my opinion and hard work doesn’t mean anything.

Usually productive and constructive. Have not experienced any negative incidents with the judges. There have been problems with clients telling the truth and accepting responsibility for their actions.

Some of the judges do not allow agency input when we are the ones with the most knowledge of the child’s and parents’ situation. Some of the judges have preconceived ideas about OCS that do not follow the best interest of the child. We have had children returned to the home with fractured skulls and spiral fractures only to have the children harmed again. And many times the attorneys have convinced the judges that “failure to thrive” does not exist, when we have medical proof.

In general: Scheduling is inefficient, attorneys are unprepared and hurried, too many postponements. Some clerks offices don’t file properly- literally lose documents.

Court has become one of the most stressful situations I encounter in the job. There is a variation each time a court hearing is held so you don’t know what to expect.

I have participated in court hearings for many years. I have been employed by OCS for 22 years. I have worked very hard which has earned me the level of professionalism which OCS would require of me and I have received the respect of judges, attorneys, and other court officials. My verbal and written presentations to the court systems have been deemed very professional by both judges, attorneys, and my supervisors. I enjoy representing OCS in court. I try to be fair and unbiased on the part of my clients.

On some occasions, a great deal of time is spent at court unnecessarily. The docket should be more concise (e.g., detention hearing at 10; OCS case at 11; etc.)

Often following a court hearing, I feel like we are the bad guys and the parents are the good guys. The court will note what the department fails to do, but overlooks the failures of the parents. The IDB attorneys get away with a lot - and at times even coached by the judge - yet the department attorneys are stopped at every line of questions to get to the truth. He has often gone against information in the Ch. Code stating that “he makes the rules”

As an MSW social worker, I am not allowed to do social work. My professional opinion is not valued. It must be supported by an outside provider. The OCS agency provides little support to workers in court. The outside provider is more supportive to me. They say what we tell them to say and then it is respected.
Caseworkers (Cont.)

It seems that the attorneys and court are more concerned with perceived fairness to parents rather than protection for the children.

The social work profession is never really respected in the court system. We are always the least respected individual in the court hearings. We are often disrespected in the presence of our clients making it very difficult for us to gain respect from our clients afterward. Court hearings are almost always very bad experiences.

Recently, the children’s attorneys have provided more problems to the agency. Certain attorneys will only look at what the child wants as opposed to what is in the best interest of the child, regardless of what the agency recommends. Education of the attorneys would appear to be in order.

Workers need more training in testifying, court language, and legal court proceedings. Court preparation should be part of 710 (i.e., legally required) training.

I have only been with the agency 15 months.

Maintaining contact and working collaboratively with the attorneys and other advocates promotes accuracy and effectiveness in court proceedings.

The social work profession has never been treated like a profession in the court system. A. Often times social workers are humiliated in the presence of their clients. B. Judges are very degrading.

The overall court experience is generally professional except when it appears either judge is particularly in a bad mood. This is then used as a license to belittle and dehumanize those who are allegedly professional social workers, without any recourse for these actions.

Most judges consider the OCS agency’s recommendations. There have been a couple who made deals with the attorneys and sent young children home to parents who had not made any improvements only to be abused again.

Some judges tend to expect more respect than they give to workers who are child welfare professionals.

My experiences in court have been with some variations. I leave the court room not taking any comments made by the judge or attorney personally. Most workers are frightened in court because the judges expect so much from them; ask personal questions like “You are not providing for the needs of this child because he is not your own.” No praises for jobs well done. In court the case manager is in the middle taking questions from attorneys and the judge. Most of the attorneys do not do their job. They only call
Caseworkers (Cont.)

the worker a few days before hearings and obtain needed information. It is time for the court to assign specific related duties to the attorneys. The caseworkers are burned out.

My experience in court has been good for the most part, but very intimidating. I try my best to work hard on my cases so that when I am in court I feel confident that I have done my best. Sometimes in court, issues come up on a case and if that issue was not resolved in a timely manner it can become a very uncomfortable, especially when you were unaware of the issue or problem.

I have had the opportunity to work as a case manager with an MSW in foster care. I have interfaced with several judges and numerous attorneys. I strongly believe that the key is collaboration and preparation prior to the court hearing. I am very confident during testimony because I honestly believe no one knows the case as well as I do. Secondly, I am currently working as a court liaison. The legal process as I see it now is different. I really have developed a different more positive attitude about the judges, but we still have work to do!

It is essential that the court demonstrate respect for the OCS caseworkers during the hearing. The parents and children are often in court and observe disrespectful treatment of OCS by judges. Their interpretation: Why should they follow our recommendations? The only power OCS possesses is the removal of children from the home and the hope of reunification is the motivation to get parents to follow their case plans. If the judge is overtly disrespectful to OCS, the message is not lost on our clients and it becomes difficult to work with them. Judges should make parents more responsible for their actions and inactions, not OCS. The primary source of stressful court hearings are above comments.

I've only been with the agency for 21 months.

Need better representation from DA. Need better rapport with judges. Need to be included in "roundtable" discussions between DA's, judges, and attorneys for the clients. Especially since the agency is the reason court is being held on a particular client. Agency not always included in decision of courts.

We are not allowed to express individual feeling, etc. Only what agency - supervisors and district supervisors, etc. tell us to express.

Some courts in larger cities treat OCS as the enemy and are against anything that is recommended by OCS. They agency is constantly ridiculed and made to feel below the clients that they are trying to serve. This factor kills morale and causes agency workers to leave OCS. The job is too stressful to begin with to be constantly badgered in court.
Caseworkers (Cont.)

Court is ___________ parish can well send many professionals to seek employment elsewhere. A kind of “I gotcha” game that often occurs, i.e., contemptible glares at caseworker for something such as not getting step great-grandfather’s proper zip code in Singapore, or more directly, a child’s attorney asking for contempt of court charges against the agency for not having a report card for a child who has yet to receive one - say two weeks into the school term. (No regard for the endless hours of effort submitted in front of them........ they seem to have no cognition of the many phases of effort in assisting this family). I watch as our teens in care and younger seem to say “So what that I have to be in court”. Their antennae are up and they watch professionals bash and bully each other all in the name of helping (them?). But of course, one can find a spot at the court to discuss with willing doomsday profits: “I just don’t know what’s become of kids today. They don’t show any respect for anyone.”

At some of the court hearings, one judge has yelled at me and made inappropriate remarks. I was not able to explain why a service was not in place. I know the judge wants the best for each child. I, too, am concerned about the child’s welfare. The social worker must work with all of the family members. The caseloads are low, but all are complicated. Some of the services are contracted through other social service agencies. Sometimes their report is delayed and may be faxed on the day of the court hearing. The judge may not accept the report.

The judge makes you very nervous and talks to you like you are the reason the parents are not doing what they need to do to get their children back. The judge handicaps the parents.

Having to go to court every 30 days!

The judge talks down to social workers in the presence of the clients. As a result, it is extremely difficult to regain respect and rapport with the clients.

Overall, judges desire to make the best decisions for families and to be informed of what action will be in the best interest of the child.

Judges

This child was hospitalized at the time of hearing- had been at a group home. Worker did not communicate sufficient information to treating physicians at hospital for them to adequately make recommendations to court for placement. Court has been dissatisfied with group home placement- child not progressing after very long stay. Has had runaways and hospitalizations.
Judges (Cont.)

Child remained with parent so no report issued. This worker always provides thorough investigation material which makes decisions on instanters and adjudications easier for the court.

OCS worker explored and presented all available options.

Case was well prepared and presented.

Written materials not mailed timely for review prior to court. Written November 3rd, mailed Nov. 14th, received after court, Nov. 17th.

Children returned to parent at this hearing and custody vacated.

She felt too intimidated by people in court room to give all information. She is wonderful worker- needs to be more vocal.

Case plan and court report not timely.

Court report and case plan were not filed with court timely.

Case manager was very strongly opinionated regarding consequences she believed should be imposed on one of the children for his disruptive behavior. This is the first time I have seen this case manager so focused on holding the child accountable.

Worker did not adequately follow up on medical information being provided regarding the child.

This was a stipulation in which all parties were in agreement, however, there were still some educational issues that were unresolved.

Stipulations.

Stipulation between the parties.

Worker had not done a good job at speaking to parents.

Mother abandoned children. This was basis for OCS involvement. Both fathers appeared at hearing. Both wanted custody of their respective children. Court ordered home studies and continued custody with the state pending investigation.

Caseworker is always well prepared and helpful to the court in making a decision which is in the best interest of the child.
Child remained with parents so there was no written material presented. In the past, material and testimony presented by this worker have always been helpful to the court.

Children were returned to mother, so no additional report was necessary.

Child was left with parent so no report was provided beforehand.

Worker had several matters before the court today and was well prepared on all matters.

Caseworker was in good command of case and background of family, providing court with good insight.

This caseworker is the OCS liaison with the court. She testifies in lieu of the assigned caseworker except in the most contested hearings. For example in the 18 hearings conducted on 11/3/00, she testified in 16.

Worker answered questions from the court, but did not testify under oath.

Worker was extremely precise with her testimony.

OCS worker did not submit court report.

Ms.__________, special education teacher, testified at today’s hearing. Her testimony was strongly taken into consideration.

This worker is one of the most effective in the district office.

This worker does not fully understand the goals and objectives of the legal process.

Exceptionally conscientious and cooperative with the court.

This worker is extremely hard working and is always well prepared.

This worker always provides outstanding services to her clients and cooperation to the court.

This case (a 17 year old parent in group home out of parish; infant child in foster home in parish), out of parish foster care worker not present, nor was group home representative, possibly due to lack of timely service. ____________ Parish caseworker was extremely knowledgeable about plan and goals and offered documents on psychological. Due to lack of current information from caretakers, evidence did not explain components of plan had never been carried out. Matter was reset.
Judges (Cont.)

I think this was an unusual case in which OCS became too invested in its original placement decision (with the father) and did not explore maternal placement sufficiently. I essentially created a joint plan.
VITA

Sue Duvall Steib is a native of Wichita Falls, Texas. She moved with her family to Louisiana in 1959 and graduated from Bolton High School in Alexandria. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology from Louisiana State University in 1970 and a Master of Social Work, in 1983. Ms. Steib began work in public child welfare in Louisiana in 1971. She was a caseworker for 10 years, a case supervisor for seven, and has worked in the administration of the agency since 1987, currently serving as the Program Director.

Ms. Steib is the daughter of Naomi B. Duvall of Metairie, Louisiana and the late Vinson L. Duvall. She has been married to John C. Steib since 1971.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Sue Duvall Steib

Major Field: Social Work

Title of Dissertation:
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Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

April 5, 2001

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