

Caring for Children in Child Welfare (CCCW) Newsletter

Mental Health and Developmental Training Requirements in the CWS

The Caring for Children in Child Welfare (CCCW) study is examining the delivery of mental health and developmental services provided to children involved with the Child Welfare System (CWS). The need for this type of research has been supported through studies showing that children in the CWS have, or are at extremely high risk of, developmental, psychological, and physical health problems.

One area of interest is the training requirements for CWS caseworkers and foster caregivers. Little comprehensive information exists about the efforts of child welfare agencies to provide training for child welfare workers and foster caregivers regarding the identification of and appropriate response to mental health and developmental problems. Furthermore, it is not known whether child welfare agencies place a differing emphasis on training requirements for child welfare workers and foster caregivers. To obtain this information, CCCW conducted telephone interviews with CWS training departments or supervisors to determine the requirements and covered topics in a nationally representative sample of child welfare agencies.

Results showed that most counties require training on mental health and developmental needs for both caseworkers (MH: 74.6%, D: 70.7%) and foster caregivers (MH: 83.2%, D: 81.3%). Caseworkers are required to complete significantly more hours of training (average= MH: 15.4 hours, D: 9.9 hours) than caregivers (average= MH: 4.1 hours, D: 3.3 hours).

Agencies that required training were then asked whether specific topics were covered during the training. Children's mental health topics included mental health needs, medication use, substance use and abuse, and behavioral management strategies. Developmental topics included developmental milestones, common problems, and how to obtain help through the school system.

Over 90% of agencies reported that caseworkers were required to complete training on the mental health needs of children (Fig 1). However, less than half of the agencies required training on medication use, substance use and abuse, or behavioral management strategies. A different pattern was present in the required training for foster caregivers, with two-thirds requiring training on mental health needs and behavioral management strategies and about half requiring medication use and substance use/abuse training.

During the required developmental training for both caseworkers and caregivers, 98% of agencies covered de-

Figure 1: Child welfare agencies requiring mental health training, by topic.

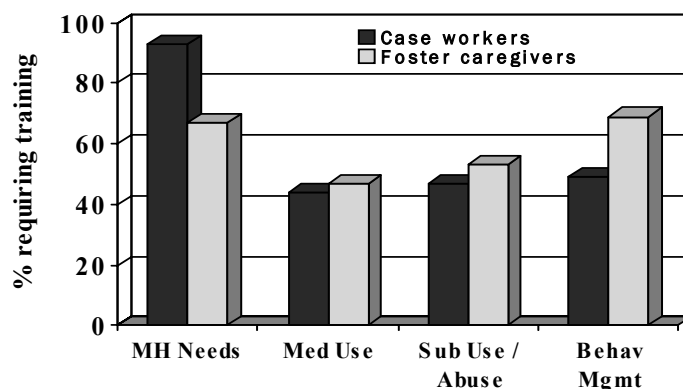
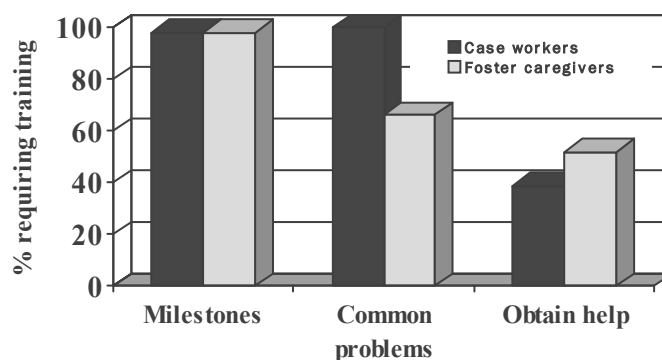


Figure 2: Child welfare agencies requiring developmental training, by topic.



velopmental milestones (Fig 2). All agencies reported that caseworkers received training on common developmental problems in children, but only two-thirds required this training for caregivers. Finally, about half of agencies require training on how to access services for developmental problems through the school system.

These results show that training on mental health and developmental needs is more common among agencies than training on how to address these problems, including medication and behavioral management strategies for mental health concerns and obtaining help for developmental problems through the school system. Given the large percentage of children in the CWS with mental health and/or developmental problems, training on appropriate responses to these problems should be considered for all caseworkers and caregivers, both of whom share legal responsibility for the care of these children.

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