

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI[®]

HOW DO ETHNICITY, AGE, AND GENDER AFFECT FAMILY
REUNIFICATION OF CHILDREN IN SOUTH CAROLINA'S FOSTER CARE
SYSTEM?

by

Denatra Green-Stroman

Bachelor of Arts
University of South Carolina, 1984

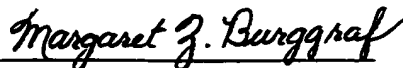
Master of Arts
South Carolina State University, 1986

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Education in the
Department of Educational Psychology
University of South Carolina

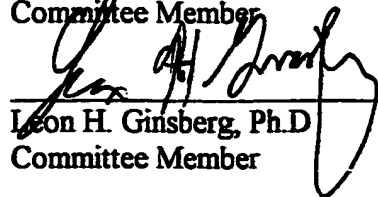
2001



Major Professor
John McFadden, Ph.D
Chairman, Examining Committee



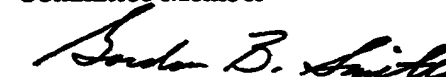
Margaret Z. Burggraf, Ph.D
Committee Member



Leon H. Ginsberg, Ph.D
Committee Member



Lorin W. Anderson, Ph.D
Committee Member



Gordon B. Smith, Ph.D
Dean of the Graduate School

UMI Number: 3013424

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3013424

Copyright 2001 by Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Dedication

I give the glory to God, for He believed and consoled me when there was no one to comfort me.

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Dedication.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Tables.....	iv
Chapter One – Introduction.....	1
Research Question/Hypothesis.....	8
Definition of Terms.....	9
Delimitation of Study.....	9
Limitations of Study.....	10
Chapter Two – Review of Literature.....	11
Research	
Foster Care Placement.....	16
Permanency Planning.....	23
Family Reunification.....	24
South Carolina Foster Care Statistics	
South Carolina Department of Social Services.....	28
Office of the Governor, Division of Foster Care.....	29
Family Reunification Programs.....	30
Chapter Three – Methodology.....	35
Definition of Terms.....	36
Sample.....	36
Procedure.....	38
Data Analysis.....	40
Chapter Four – Findings.....	41
Descriptive Findings.....	41
Comparative Findings.....	42
Chapter Five – Discussion.....	47
Summary of Findings.....	47
Implications.....	50
Conclusion/Recommendations.....	51
References.....	54
Appendix.....	64

List of Tables

1. Table 1 Descriptive Profile of the Independent and Dependent Variables.....	38
2. Table 2 Descriptive Profile of Discharge Status among Subjects Sampled.....	42
3. Table 3 Comparative Profile of Ethnicity upon Family Reunification.....	43
4. Table 4 Comparative Profile of Age upon Family Reunification.....	44
5. Table 5 Comparative Profile of Gender upon Family Reunification.....	44

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Children's protective services agencies in 1997 investigated an estimated two million reports that involved the alleged maltreatment of approximately three million children (Child Welfare League of America). Tragically, of those estimated three million children, just under one million were victims of substantiated or indicated child abuse and neglect (Child Welfare League of America, 1997). Being in foster care can be a lonely, frightening and traumatic experience for a child who has been removed from his/her family and placed in an alien family within 24 hours. Although family foster care was designed to provide temporary protection and nurturing for children experiencing maltreatment, this has been a critical service for millions of children in the United States. The increased attention given to this service in the last two decades has focused more on its limited ability to achieve its intended outcomes than on its successes (Magura, 1979).

Children come into foster care for a multitude of reasons and through processes that vary from county to county and state to state (Peocra, Whittaker, Maluccio, Bart & Plotnick, 1992). Placement can occur on a voluntary basis by the parent/guardian or by removal by means of court order (Everett, 1995). Consequently, in theory and practice, foster care is a temporary service to be terminated when the parent's condition or behavior has improved or alternative plans for permanence, including adoption, long-term foster care, independent living, and guardianship can be implemented. Although even in 1959, the notion of foster care as a temporary status turned out to be somewhat

misleading. Maas and Engler's (1959) nationwide study indicated that over half of the foster children in their sample were likely to stay in foster care until reaching the age of maturity. Only a few were expected to be adopted, and less than 25% were expected to return to their parents.

The reality that a large percentage of foster children grew up in an indeterminate state of placement without permanent, legal ties to a family were confirmed by later studies as reviewed by Costin, Bell and Downs (1991); Kadushin and Martin, (1988); and Wiltse (1985). Historically, agencies have conducted research and developed interventions to address recognized deficits in services by identifying and removing barriers to adoption, offering intensive services to prevent placement, and developing case plans that involved biological parents (Jenkins, 1967; Jenkins & Sauber, 1966; Lawder, 1966; Madison & Shapiro, 1970; Pecora et al., 1992; Wiltse, 1985). In 1980, in response to the drifting of children in care, Congress passed the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1986 (PL. 96-272), a key factor in shaping the current status of family foster care (Barbell & Wright, 1999). The original goal of the act was to reduce reliance on out-of-home placement and to encourage the use of preventive and reunification services; it also mandated that agencies engage in permanency planning efforts (Children's Defense Fund, 2000). "Permanency planning is the process of taking prompt, decisive action to maintain children in their own homes or place them permanently with other families (Maluccio & Fein, 1983, p. 195)."

Currently, the out-of-home placement system has found itself facing new challenges: the overrepresentation of minority children, the influx of infants/preschoolers, and children with increasingly severe emotional and behavioral problems to name a few

(Barbell & Wright, 1999). Sixty percent of children in foster care are children of color that are grouped into 43% African American, 15% Hispanic, and the remainder representing American Indian/Alaska Native and Asian Pacific Islander (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System Report, 2000). Traditionally, the treatment of minority children in the United States child welfare system has been marked by discrimination manifested in insufficient and inadequate services (Billingsley & Govannoni, 1972). The race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexual orientation of providers and clients/consumers of child welfare services are an integral part of relationships and service planning and delivery (Anderson, Ryan, & Leashhore, 1997). The foster care system often has failed to reunite children with their parents by providing the services that would facilitate such reunion or by making plans for permanent substitute care. Research utilizing national data has shown that service delivery for minority children in foster care is slower, more limited, and less comprehensive than that for non-minority children (Close, 1983). Young Hispanic and older African American children have been found to lack formal services plans at particularly high rates (Close, 1983). Moreover, when services plans are in effect, the recommendations more often tend to be of a clinical nature, such as mental health counseling, rather than targeted toward improving the family's social and financial conditions (Olsen, 1982). In particular, African American children remain in care longer and are reunified with their biological families at lower rates (Fein, Maluccio, & Kluger, 1990; Jenkins & Diamond, 1985; Jenkins et al., 1983; McMurtry & Lie, 1992; Seaberg & Trolley, 1986). Studies have explored the effects of race and age as factors associated with family reunification (Courtney et al., 1996; Jenkins & Diamond, 1985; Courtney, 1994; Benedict & White,

1991). Ethnicity interacts with both age and placement such as African American children generally being returned home at about half the rate of Euro American children regardless of age (Jenkins & Diamond, 1985). The study also revealed that Hispanic children corresponded to slower reunification rates with their biological parents than that of Euro American children. Barth et al. (1986) considered contributors to reunification or permanent out-of-home placement for physically abused children in California and found that African American children were more likely than other children to experience permanent out-of-home placement as opposed to family reunification.

Another challenge outlined in the United States Department of Health and Human Services Report (1994) maintained that infants and young children are entering foster care in greater numbers than any other group and are remaining in care longer than older children entering foster care. The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System Report (2000) indicated that as of March 31, 1998, four percent of children in foster care were under the age of one; 27 % were age one through five; 28 % were age six through 10; 27 % were age 11 through 15; and 13 % were age 16 through 18. The United States Department of Health and Human Services Report (1994) indicated the mean and median age of children in foster care placement is six and five, respectively. In addition, younger children entering the child welfare system are more likely to be in foster care placement than older children with approximately 23 % under age one. The report further states that, overall, African American children are more likely to enter the child welfare system at younger ages than Hispanic or Euro American children are. The median age of entry for African American children is four years compared to six years for Hispanic children and eight for Euro American children. Twenty-eight percent of African

American children enter foster care under age one compared to 19 % of Hispanic children and 10 percent of Euro American children (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1994).

The average length of stay for a child in foster care is 33 months (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System Report, 2000). In that report it was revealed that of the children entering foster care as of March 31, 1998, 47 % were given the treatment plan goal of reunification with their parents; three percent were given the treatment plan goal of kinship care; 24 % were given the treatment plan goal of adoption; four percent were given the treatment plan goal of guardianship; seven percent were given the treatment plan goal of emancipation; and seven percent were given the treatment plan goal of long-term foster care. Various research studies suggested the longer the child remains in care the less likely he or she is to return to his/her biological family or to go into an adoptive home. Moreover, data indicated that the likelihood of the child returning home or going into some permanent plan is drastically reduced once he or she has been in foster care beyond one and one-half years (Fanshel & Shinn, 1978; Mass & Engler, 1959). Older children were more difficult to place; therefore, it was crucial to make permanent plans as soon as possible (Everett, 1995). Early permanency planning is also urgent in the case of younger children, particularly infants, because a few months of unplanned time in foster care can soon make placement difficult (Shireman, 1983). Research has also shown that minority children tend to remain in foster care longer than other children, have multiple placements, and are placed less often into adoption (Chestang, 1978; Olsen, 1982; Stehno, 1982). Wells and Guo (1999) found that children who were African American infants, children in poor health, children from mother only

homes, and children who first enter foster care because of substance abuse or neglect had a slower rate of reunification than comparative groups.

When exploring the effects of metropolitan cities on the foster care system, it was concluded that there is more of a difference in terms of family reunification rate for Euro American than African American children. Nationally, African American children in metropolitan areas stay in foster care two months less than Euro American children in metropolitan areas who stay in foster care (Jenkins & Diamond, 1985). When families lived in non-metropolitan areas, 32 % of African American children were placed in foster care compared to 36 % of Hispanic children and 20 % of Euro American children (US Department of Health and Human Services, 1994).

In contrast, some research findings suggest that minority children may progress through foster care faster than non-minority children. For example, Olsen (1982) reported on a study of 1,900 foster children in four Ohio counties. She found that minority children were more likely than non-minority children to experience termination of parental rights and to spend lengthy periods in temporary care following that termination. However, in specific comparisons between overall lengths of stay by African American and Euro American children, it was found that African American children averaged approximately nine months less time in foster care than Euro American children.

Other researchers have not focused on the duration of foster care but on the living arrangements into which children are placed after leaving temporary care. Finch, Fanshel and Grundy (1986) used cross-sectional and cohort data to examine the likelihood of adoption versus discharge to parent or relatives across groups of children with different

case plans. One model using cross-sectional data showed that minority children for whom adoption was planned had a lower probability of being adopted than Euro American children, but most models showed no effect for ethnicity in predicting placement outcomes. In a study of 85 foster children analyzed five years after initial placement, Lawder, Poulin, and Andres (1986) also found that ethnicity did not predict final disposition.

There is a shift in the population of children being placed and staying in foster care who are younger and minority; therefore, these variables must be addressed when examining child welfare services and permanency planning. Such variables are particularly important when concentrating on efforts to keep abused and neglected children in homes of their natural parents in non-metropolitan states. The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System Report (2000) suggested that of the children who exited foster care during the period of October 1, 1997, through March 31, 1998, 60% were reunited with their parents, 13% were living with other relatives, and 12% were adopted. With the passage and implementation of the Adoption and Safe Families Act and subsequent shortening of the time that a child can spend in foster care, it becomes imperative that we know which children were not being reunited with their families. This current research study was conducted in a rural state where minimal research has been completed regarding reunification especially when examining issues such as ethnicity, gender, and age. This study presented a realistic picture of which cohort of children were actually being returned to their families for this rural state. And the research findings provided social service agencies with a direction to determine which groups of foster care children in terms of ethnicity, age, and gender need more services

and interventions that will encourage reunification in the state of South Carolina. It is understood that not all children should or will be reunited with their families when every effort has been afforded to preserve that family structure. It is not the position of a social service agency to resolve major societal conditions such as racism, sexism and poverty; however, these findings will provide information with which to advocate for solutions on a societal rather than individual basis. Courtney et al. (1996) reported that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners should also give more attention to the nexus of race, gender and social class as factors in the functioning of child welfare service. Therefore, due to the availability of information, this study is limited to examining the effects of ethnicity, age, gender, on family reunification.

Research Question/Hypothesis

This research study addressed the following research questions: 1) How do Euro American, African American, Native American, Hispanic, and Asian American ethnic groups differ regarding family reunification of children in South Carolina's foster care system? 2) How do females and males differ regarding family reunification of children in South Carolina's foster care system? 3) How do children of age one to 18 differ regarding family reunification in South Carolina's foster care system? 4) How do the differences of ethnicity, age, and gender interact upon family reunification of children in South Carolina's foster care system?

Hypothesis One: There is a difference in the family reunification rate between African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian American children and Euro American children.

Hypothesis Two: There is a difference in the family reunification rate between older children and younger children.

Hypothesis Three: There is a difference in the family reunification rate between female children and male children.

Hypothesis Four: There is interaction among ethnicity, gender, and age upon family reunification.

Definition of Terms

Family reunification- the placement of foster care children with their biological parents upon case closure.

Ethnicity – quality of group identity that comes from a sense of history tied to time and place. It is a form of shared historical experience often tied to place of natural origin (Anderson, Ryan & Leashore, 1997, p.22). The ethnic groups that were examined in this study were African American, Euro American, Hispanic and Other (Native American and Asian American).

Age – the child must have been less than eighteen years of age at the time of the maltreatment in question (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1994). The age groups were 1-3, 4-7, 8-11, 12-15, and 16-23.

Gender – the sexual category of male or female as an individual or as a group.

Delimitations of Study

This study was restricted to family reunification due to the overwhelming data that would be obtained if all discharged placements were examined. Archival administrative data were selected because a longer period of time could be examined and the data were manageable and available. The South Carolina Foster Care Review Board

was selected as the agency with which to collaborate on this study because it has statewide and county information on all foster care children who have remained in the foster care system longer than four consecutive months. The researcher chose to limit the study to five years (1995-2000) to evaluate better possible patterns.

Limitations of Study

Due to the size and limited economy of South Carolina, there were inadequate human resources in different counties that have an effect on their ability to facilitate family reunification. South Carolina is a small, rural, southeastern state and, as such, the results are limited to comparable states. Therefore, the results of this study may not have reflected an accurate count of foster care children that were reunified with their families. The results may have been influenced by the administrative data due to human error in the recording of the research variables – ethnicity, age and gender. The researcher evaluated frequencies only in the data analysis of this study and cannot make any decisions regarding causality.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

In order to clarify the concept and dynamics of family reunification, a brief literary review of the foster care system will be presented. Foster care is a publicly funded child welfare system of organized services for full time residential caregiving of children whose parents' condition or behavior prevents them from discharging their parental responsibilities (Family Impact Seminar, 1990). The concept of foster care developed in 1853 as a way to assist children whose parents were inadequate, or had received charity or had abandoned their dependent offspring from the unwholesome influences found in cities (Pecora et al., 1992). Children were relocated from large cities to rural areas in southern states where the children were placed on farms where they were expected to work in exchange for room and board provided to them. Charity workers attacked the methods of selecting free foster homes for children and the lack of supervision following placement (Kadushin, 1974). Poor families objected to the practice of taking their children away. Initially, foster care was seen as long-term substitute care.

The foster care system moved toward the ideology of a temporary service under the directorship of Charles Birtwell at the Boston Children's Aid Society. He viewed placement in the foster care system as an opportunity to reunify the children with their family guided by the needs of the children. The Boston Children's Aid Society under

Birtwell's leadership developed systematic procedures for 1) studying the individualized needs of children, 2) studying the prospective foster family, and 3) providing supervision of the home once the child was placed (Kadushin, 1974). Foster care programs, established in each state by children's aid societies, as well as the public sector, subsequently offered a range of foster care options, including receiving homes for emergency placement, boarding homes, and group homes (Pecora et al., 1992). The incongruity between statements of foster care policy and the actual practice of foster care placement began to unfold in the latter part of the 1950s with the publication of *Children in Need of Parents* by Mass and Engler (1959). Furthermore, this study revealed that many foster care children were destined to grow up in foster care and that only a few would return home or be adopted.

Subsequently, research activities in the 1960s focused on descriptive studies that substantiated the image of foster care as a "holding tank" and proposed tentative alternatives for practice (Jenkins, 1967; Jenkins & Sauber, 1966; Lawder, 1966; Madison & Shapiro, 1970). In the 1970s, research and demonstration projects identified some of the deficiencies in the ways children were being served, and they developed and tested specific intervention methods for addressing these flaws (Pecora et al., 1992; Wiltse, 1985). Demonstration projects sought to reorient child welfare practice toward ensuring permanency for foster care children. By identifying and removing barriers to adoption, offering intensive services to prevent placement, and developing case plans that included the involvement of biological parents, these projects were found to be insufficient in proving that continuity and permanency could be achieved for children in foster care through careful, goal-directed case planning (Wiltse, 1985). In the mid 1970s, half a

million children were in foster care, some without any plan for a permanent home. In an attempt to prevent foster care drift and to give children a stable living arrangement, The 1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (PL 96-272) authorized and prioritized four types of permanent plans. The first plan is return to the parent. If this cannot be achieved successfully, then adoption must be considered. If adoption is not feasible, then guardianship or long-term foster care is evaluated. In subsequent years, family foster care issues were addressed within the context of permanency planning. The concept of permanency planning was developed in response to children literally growing up in foster care.

Permanency planning is the guiding principle of the child welfare system which seeks to avoid unnecessary entry into placement and to limit the time children must be in out-of-home care (Sudia, 1986; Seaberg, 1988). As a process, permanency planning helps a child to live in a home that offers the hope of establishing lifetime family relationships (Terpstra, 1986). As a philosophy, permanency planning seeks to preserve and support the child's biological family as the most natural environment and when it is not possible to reunify the biological family then to secure an adoptive family for placement (Cole, 1985). As a strategy, permanency planning is designed to help children live in families that offer continuity of relationships with nurturing parents or caretakers (Fein, Maluccio, Hamilton & Ward, 1983).

The 1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (PL 96-272) has the following key principles: preventing out-of-home placement, promoting family restoration, implementing placement guidelines, utilizing other placement outcomes and selecting other provisions. The permanency planning curriculum and projects of the late

1970s and early 1980s provided a valuable legal and decision-making framework. For effective permanency planning practice in the 1990s and into the year 2000, however, a revitalization of permanency planning based on a contemporary assessment of the family, social environment, and obstacles to permanency is required (Anderson, Ryan, & Leashore, 1997). This revisiting of permanency planning includes the recognition that child welfare services and permanency planning efforts are defined and delivered in a cultural context. The race, ethnicity, gender, religion and sexual orientation of providers and consumers of child welfare services are an integral part of relationship and service planning and delivery. Working with families to prevent unnecessary out-of-home placement or to promote family restoration when placement has been indicated requires workers to build a relationship with families, to assess their strengths and problems, to collaborate on constructing with families, and to work together to achieve a safer and healthier environment for children and their families (Anderson, Ryan & Leashore, 1997). Consequently, more policies, legal statutes, and programs have begun focusing efforts on preserving families by reunification. "Family reunification is the planned process of reconnecting children in out-of-home care with their families by means of a variety of services and supports to the children, their families, and their foster parents or other service providers" (Maluccio, Warsh, & Pine, 1993, p.6). Maluccio, Warsh, and Pine (1996) outlined several values and principles that help guide policy formulation program development and practice theory in child welfare.

First, family reunification is an integral part of the philosophy of preserving families and of permanency planning. Child welfare systems and communities must begin viewing the biological families as viable placement options instead of punishing

the families by separating them. Individual practitioners must negotiate, advocate, and broker in a continual effort to get resources in place so that families can be supported. This is unfortunate for families in crisis because their case resolution depends greatly upon the effectiveness of their caseworker. The burden of creating resources is left to the individual worker. If resources were available for families, and if permanency planning were really in place, family reconnection and family reunification would no longer be necessary (Hartman, 1993). Agencies must be aggressive in changing the ingrained philosophy of removal and punishment and begin systemically to consider early intervention and services that will enable less out-of-home care. To meet these challenges, the administrators will have to respond favorably to all aspects of the multilevel service delivery system, including the court system, funding sources, provider agencies, internal support systems such as work environment and training, agency policies and procedures, and foster parent recruitment, retention, and training (Maluccio et al., 1996). Policymakers, administrators, supervisors, and direct service staff in public and private agencies need to be well informed about the confluence of factors that affect family reunification service delivery and must be encouraged to think creatively about shaping new structures and approaches to help children and their families reunite (Maluccio et al., 1996).

A second principle is that family reunification should be viewed as a continuum with ranges from full reentry into the family system to occasional contact. This principle recognizes that not all children should be reunited with their families but with limited contact children can still maintain familial bonds with the birth family. Another important principle is that family reunification services should be ongoing. Regrettably,

the majority of family preservation and reunification services are inadequate in that they last for a determinate number of weeks and can be exhausted. Most services are utilized sequentially instead of concurrently which provides optimal effect.

Along with systemic ordeals, there are challenges to all levels of the child welfare systems. This is particularly true of the large and diverse foster care populations in metropolitan cities. Although race, age, and gender should not affect reunification, growing concern has arisen that they do indeed. Ethnic minority children tend to be over-represented in the child protection system (Abney, 1996), to remain in out-of-home placement substantially longer than non-minority children (Barth et al., 1986; Gurak, Smith & Goldson, 1982; McMurtry & Lie, 1992), to receive differential treatment (Harris, 1990). The remainder of this chapter provides a review of research that examines the effects of ethnicity, age, and gender upon family reunification.

Research

Foster Care Placement

Magua's (1979) study analyzed trends in entries to family foster care and length of time in care for children in New Jersey from 1973 through 1978. The basic method of the study involved comparing six consecutive annual cross-sectional populations of children in family foster care to determine trends in the number of initial placements and in the average length of stay in placement. The researcher examined Magua's results in terms of age.

Adolescents placed in the New Jersey's foster care system increased from 831 in 1973 to 1,250 in 1975 and then declined to 887 in 1978, as indicated by Magua's review of foster care cases. On the other hand, the number of children placed under age six and

between age six and 12 conformed to no particular pattern over the six-year period. Changes in the number of children entering family foster care could be attributed mainly to fluctuations in the number of adolescents placed. No trends overtime were observed for younger children.

Lindsey (1991) conducted another study that examined foster care placement. His research was a discriminate analysis that identified differences between those children who received placement in a foster care system and those who received supportive services. Children in different age groups were analyzed separately, thus requiring four different discriminate analyses. The stratified sample included 9,597 children broadly representative of the approximately 1,800,000 children nationwide who come annually the to attention of public child welfare agencies. The intent was to determine which variable best differentiates between those children who were either 1) removed from their parent(s) and subsequently placed in foster care or 2) kept in the home and provided supportive services.

Findings for preschool children in terms of income indicated that parents without adequate income were unable to prevent their children from being removed and placed in foster care. Parents with either self-support or government assistance are better able to retain their children and receive supportive services. Those preschool (0-5) children who were emergency cases were more likely to receive foster care placement. Children referred because of neglect are the most likely to receive foster care placement, while those referred because of behavior problems are most likely to receive supportive services.

As with preschool children, elementary (6-12) school children's parents without adequate income sources were most likely to have their children removed from their homes and placed in foster care. The major reasons for referral to foster care among elementary school children were neglect and problems related to the economic condition of the parents. There is a higher rate of placement in foster care for the elementary school children than for the preschool children.

With early adolescence (13-15), children's parental income was also an influential variable in predicting removal and foster care placement. It was also compounded by litigation. Many of these young people were status offenders referred to the foster care system by the court or juvenile justice system. With this population, as previously discussed, those referred for reasons of neglect or parental conditions were most likely to receive placement and those with behavioral problems were mostly likely to receive supportive services.

Stehno (1982) used data collected from national studies by Shyne and Schroeder, (1980); Children's Defense Fund, (1981); United States Bureau of the Census, (1970); the National Institute of Mental Health, (1980); National Center for Juvenile Justice, (1981); and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (1980) to compare patterns of placement of minority and non-minority children. The data, unfortunately, were not complete because Law Enforcement Assistance Administration provided no race information, and no data on race was found in 54 % of youth in the welfare system and 59 % of children in the juvenile justice system. National Institute of Mental Health did not differentiate among minorities, and the 1970 Census made the distinction that Hispanic heritage was related to ethnicity rather than race; hence, Hispanic children were

classified as Euro American. There was also little distinction within minorities. Given the above limitations, five patterns emerged and the researcher focused on placement and ethnicity, which were related to the current study.

Stehno (1982) found a higher rate of placement among minority children than among Euro American children. African American children were approximately 15 % of the total population of children under age eighteen in 1970. They were 22 % of those in institutions counted by the 1970 Census, 28 % of those in foster home and residential group care in the Shyne and Schroeder (1980) study, 32 % of those in foster homes and residential group care in the Children's Defense Fund study and 28 % of those in correctional facilities surveyed by Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

About seven percent of the total population of children under age 18 was Hispanic. The Children's Defense Fund (1980) found that 13 % of child welfare placements were Hispanic. In the Shyne and Schroeder sample, five percent of the children in foster care, group homes and institutions were Hispanic.

Stehno (1982) also found a disproportionate number of African American children in less desirable placements. Both the Shyne and Schroeder and Children's Defense Fund found African American children to be over-represented in foster care and underrepresented in group homes and residential treatment facilities.

Jenkins, Diamond, Flanzraich, Gibson, Hendricks, and Marshood (1983) analyzed the results of a national survey. The population surveyed comprised all public welfare and social service agencies in the county responsible for the referral or placement of children in out-of-home care. All reports refer to the 301,943 children who were in care during the survey; of that number, 53 % were Euro American and 42 % were minority

children. They examined differences based on ethnicity among the following variables: legal status, type of placement, location of placement, and length of time in care. The researcher reviewed the findings regarding ethnicity and length of time in care as they relate to the current study. The percentages of Euro American children in care dropped as their time in care increased, and the percentages of minority children in care rose as their time in care increased. The estimated median time in care for all minority children was 24 months, but for African American children it was 32 months and for Euro American children it was 20 months.

Albers, Reilly, and Rittner (1993) explored the characteristics of children under the age of ten in foster care to determine which characteristics were associated with longer length of stay in that system. They particularly examined the family's economic status, ethnicity, and the relationship between the educational background of the caseworker and the duration of services of the child. Albers et al. compared two groups of children. One group had less than three years of continuous foster care and the other group consisted of children with more than three years of continuous foster care. A total sample of 404 children's records was identified in Clark County Nevada's foster care system. For the purpose of his study, data on child and family demographics, the date of entry into the system, the duration of service, the reasons for placement in foster care, the current location of the child, the number of previous placements, the permanent placement plan for the child, and worker educational levels were collected. The researcher focused on the variables related to the current study: age, gender, ethnicity, and family reunification.

Of the total sample, 161 children had three or more years of consecutive years of service in foster care placement and 243 had less than three years. Among the children with more than three years of service, 99 were male and 62 were female. Of those with less than three years, 132 were male and 111 were female. Albers et al. found that gender did not affect duration of placements.

Of the 404 cases examined, 194 were African American, 164 were Euro American and 28 were Hispanic. The study examined the differences in length of stay between African Americans and Euro Americans. Fewer Euro American children (n=57) were still in foster care more than three years than African American (n=94). Among the children with less than three years of service, Euro American children (n=107) were more highly represented than African American children (n=100). African American children under the age of ten were significantly more likely to remain in foster care three years longer than Euro American children. The findings reflect the increased number of older children in foster care for more than three years.

With regard to the goal of family reunification, Albers et al. found only 22 of 161 were expected to be reunified with their parents, 78 were targeted for adoption with non-relative family, and 51 were designated for foster parent adoption.

A study was completed by Olsen (1982) that examined the characteristics of foster care children and their families with particular focus on the differences among children in various minority groups. A concurrent concern of Olsen's research was with the ways in which age interacts with minority children in the child welfare system. The national study surveyed 319 public social service agencies in 38 states for the purpose of assessing what services were being offered and the characteristics of children and their

families being served. Two different analyses were conducted to establish the findings. One, being a bivariate analysis, was performed for the purpose of screening for instances in which the child's racial background was significantly related to the dependent variability under consideration. Analysis of covariance was performed in order to control for the influence of other background variables and to determine whether there was significant interaction between the race and age variable.

The mean age of children in out-of-home care was 11 years. African American children tended to be younger, with a mean age of 10 years, than Hispanic, Asian American or Native American children who had an average age of 12. When age was analyzed, children 12 to 18, 48 % were in foster care. Of the remaining children, 30% were six to 11 years old; 21 % were under six years of age. African American children under six years of age averaged four months longer in out-of-home care than the group. As a whole, those between six and 11 years averaged over one year longer and African American adolescence averaged nearly three years longer in placement.

Goerge, Wulczyn, and Harden (1996) compiled statistics on the entire foster care population of California, Illinois, Michigan, New York, and Texas to compare foster care statistics among the states and examined each state and subsequently comparative trends from 1983 through 1993. For purposes of this study, the researcher examined incidence rates of age and ethnicity.

Incidence rates classified by age indicated that children under the age of five are twice as likely as older children to have entered foster care and this disproportionate rate increased in the placement of very young children who had much to do with the increased rates of entry. In four of the five states, entry rates for children under age five were more

volatile and registered greater increases than those of older children. The most notable feature of the age distributions was the very large and increased number of infant placements. Over the entire period from 1983 through 1993, one out of every four first admissions to foster care was an infant less than one year old.

Data relating to race and ethnicity underscore the diversity of state phenomena; state populations varied strikingly not only in their racial composition but also in the directions in which these populations were shifting. Among all five states, approximately 33 % of first admissions were Euro American, 40 % were African American, and less than 20 % were Hispanic.

Permanency Planning

Fein, Davies, and Knight (1979) completed a study on the effectiveness of permanency planning on a sample of 35 children who had been served and discharged to natural or adoptive parents or institutions. The staff limited the study to the question of permanence, how permanent the discharge placement proved to be, and which kind of discharge had a better record for the 35 children. Information was obtained by mailed questionnaires or through contact with the social worker for 29 children.

Of the 29 children, 12 were discharged to natural parents, 13 were discharged to adoptive parents, and four were discharged to an institution. Between the period of 19 and 24 months, 19 children were still at their original placement. Hence, the success rate for adoptive placement and family reunification was similar. This study had limitations in several areas; the small sample utilized in this study does not afford accurate prediction as to how long after discharge a placement can be considered to have stability. It did not examine different variables that affect placement.

In 1984, Edith Fein and Anthony Maluccio published a longitudinal study on the outcomes of permanency planning. Their study consisted of an investigation of a sample of 187 children under the age of 14 who were discharged to a permanent home from temporary foster care after a stay of at least 30 days. They gathered information by interviewing parents or guardians in the permanent home at three time intervals 1) when a child moved into the home, 2) six to 10 months later, 3) and six months after the second designated time frame. Concerning family reunification, 53 % of the children were returned to their biological parents; 24 % were adopted; eight percent went to relatives; and seven percent went to permanent foster homes and foster parent adoptions. Most of the children in biological, permanent foster and relatives' homes were six years of age or older. While most of those children in adoptive and foster parents adoptions were under six years, they also found that 48 % of Euro American children went to biological homes and 29 % to adoptive homes. Among the African American children, 66 % went to their biological homes and nine percent to adoptions. Hispanic children (68 %) were most often returned to their biological homes.

In this study, the biological families were the most common resource for permanency planning for children in the study. Unfortunately, these families were found to have multiple needs, particularly in basic areas such as housing, employment, and income.

Family Reunification

Murtry and Lie (1992) examined data on 775 foster children and event history analysis to estimate the effects of predictor variables on the rate of children leaving foster care for four different types of placement – adoption, returned home, other successful

outcome, and failure. In exponential models such as the one used, an antilog can be understood as a multiplier that expresses the contribution of each predictor variables toward increasing or decreasing a child's hazard rate for that particular placement. Males were returned home at a faster rate than females. African American children were returned home at half the rate of Euro American children. The study's findings also indicated that ethnicity was one of a number of variables associated with foster care outcomes, and as with ethnicity, this variable had specific predictive effects across different placements.

Courtney (1994) completed a study on the family reunification process from a random sample of 8,748 children placed in foster care in California for the first time between January 1988 and May 1991. He used a proportional hazard model for the family reunification process. This model tested the proportionality assumption for each of the covariates. In addition, variables were created to model directly the effects of three two-way interactions within the strata such as ethnicity by age, ethnicity by region, and removal reason by age. The parameter estimates showed the effects of child, family and placement characteristics on the hazard rate for reunification, relative to the comparison category for each variable. Comparison categories were chosen to minimize the standard errors of estimated parameters and to enhance the interpretation of findings.

Of his sample, 55 % were African American or Hispanic and 45 % of their children were under the age of four. Of those children that left foster care, (44 % of the sample) 79 were reunited with their birth parents. In general, children from four to 12 years of age at entry into the foster care system returned home much faster than infants, whereas the rates for the one to three group and the 13 and older group were between

these extremes. Age and ethnicity also interacted with respect to family reunification rates. The model indicated that African American children returned home at a slower rate than Euro American children (comparison group) and Hispanics. The interaction term in the research design suggested that this was primarily the case for infants and older youth. Unfortunately, Courtney (1994) did not provide percentages for the different ages and races that were actually reunited with their birth families. When ethnicity interacts with both age and placement to affect the hazard rate for return to the home, African American children generally went home at about half the rate of Euro American children regardless of age group. However, much of the effect of Hispanic children on reunification rates seems to come from those Hispanic children who entered foster care under one year of age, even though they returned home at a slower rate than Euro American Children do.

Barth, Snowden, Broeck, Clancy, Jordan, and Barusch (1985) also examined contributors to reunification or permanent out-of-home placement for physically abused children. Their initial sample included 107 closed cases that were designated in the agency court log as physical abuse cases under California's Welfare and Institutions. Separate discriminate analyses were conducted to determine the contributions of background factors and service characteristics to reunification or permanent out-of-home-placement. Following those analyses, a stepwise discriminate analysis was computed in which the service variables were entered after the background variables to determine the ability to improve the between-group discrimination. From this full model Barth et al. (1985) was able to identify the best discriminators.

Among those 107 cases, 74 cases resulted in children's reunification with their families. Barth et al. (1985) also found that African American children were more likely to be placed outside of their birth families.

In 1999, Luna conducted research on the differences of foster care for Euro American and minority children with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services. After cases were gathered from the Suspense Unit of the Department of Children Services, Los Angeles County, 60 cases were randomly selected. The researcher selected every second case of Euro American, African American and Hispanic children until 20 cases of each were reached. The sample was eventually decreased to 54 cases due to six biracial children who were not used in this study. She utilized a five-part questionnaire to collect data. Part I was comprised of demographic questions, and Part III consisted of questions pertaining to the foster parent. Part IV was comprised of questions pertaining to the biological parents, and Part V contained questions pertaining to the county social worker. The data were analyzed utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Chi-square and cross tabulations were used to evaluate the association of demographic and descriptive characteristics, reasons for detention, outcome services used and received, and comparisons between foster parents, biological parents, and social workers. For purposes of this study, the researcher focused on the findings regarding family reunification.

In comparing ethnicity to reunification, African Americans were reunified the least amount of time (29 %). While Hispanics and Euro Americans both were reunited with their children 35 % of the time, African Americans were more likely to be placed with relatives 50 % of the time and Hispanics, 33 % of the time.

South Carolina's Foster Care Statistics

South Carolina Department of Social Services

Child protective and preventive services are offered to families by the South Carolina Department of Social Services which is mandated by law to protect children from abuse and neglect within the families. One primary element of the mission of Child Protective and Preventive Services is "recognizing that Child Protective and Preventive Services are child-centered and family focused"(Department of Social Services, online). "Services are designed to ensure that reasonable efforts are made to maintain children safely in their own homes, to reunite the family as soon as possible if removal of child or parent is necessary, and to assure permanency in an adoptive home or other permanent situation if parental rights are terminated" (Department of Social Services, online). The objectives of Child Protective and Preventive Services are 1) to protect the child's safety and welfare and 2) to maintain the child within the family unless the safety of the child requires placement outside the home.

The 20,257 reports of suspected child abuse and neglect cases received in 1996 through 1997 concerned 45,168 children. Fifty-one percent of the victims involved in reported cases of child abuse and neglect were Euro American while 47 % were African American.

In June 1997, 55 % of the children in foster care were 10 years of age or younger. Approximately 30 % of the foster care population was composed of children 14 years of age or older. Approximately 43 % of the children had the permanency planning goal of temporary placement and return home to either parent or relative; approximately 11 %

had the goal of permanent foster care, and 29 % had the goal of adoption. No information was provided in terms of gender.

Office of the Governor, Division of Foster Care Review Board

The Foster Care Review Board provides an external system of accountability and advocacy for children and families involved with the foster care system. The Review Board evaluates the entire system affecting children and their families, identifies deficiencies, and advocates for due process and quality service delivery. There are 36 local review boards across the State of South Carolina that conduct semi-annual case reviews of all children who have resided in foster care more than four consecutive months.

In 1998, 891 children entered the Review Board's data system and were reviewed for the first time by local boards. Twenty-six percent of the children were zero through one year old; 20 % were two through five years old; 20 % were six through nine years old; 30 % were 10 through 15 years old; and four percent were age 16 through 21 years old. Data for 1998 indicated that 60 % of the children active in the foster care population are African American, 35 % are Euro American, and four percent are other races or biracial. Fifty-two percent of the children's cases reviewed and remaining active in the system were male and 48 % were female. The number of children in the Review Board system who left care in 1998 was 1,433. Thirty-five percent of these children were returned to their parents, 32 % were legally adopted and 13% had legal custody transferred to a relative or other individual.

Family Reunification Programs

The growing emphasis in the field of child welfare on preserving families has led to renewed attention to reunification of children in out-of-home care with their families. This attention is a crucial development since each year many children in family foster care, group homes, or residential treatment centers are reunited with their families. Unfortunately, a substantial proportion of children who are returned to their families reenter some form of out-of-home placement (Fein et al., 1983; Goerge, 1990; Rzepnicki, 1987). Delivery of services to these children and their families must be examined and refined.

In order for reunification of children and their families to be more successful, an agency must articulate and carry out its mission through a comprehensive framework of policies, strategies, and resources (Maluccio, Pine, & Warsh, 1993). They reviewed various family reunification projects and suggested several components.

The first and foremost component of a reunification program is a family-centered orientation to service delivery; that is, the family should be the central unit or focus of attention and decisions should be made in the best interest of the family. Underlying this component is the assumption that human beings can be best understood and helped within their significant environments and that the family is the most intimate environment of all (Hartman & Laird, 1983; Maluccio & Whittaker, 1998). As in all efforts to preserve families, intervention is directed as much as possible toward strengthening the family.

A second component is an ongoing partnership among practitioners, foster parents and other caregivers, and parents as well as other family members. Effective family reunification programs are those that involve family members, especially parents, as

much as possible as partners in the helping process. In family reunification, as in intensive family preservation, parents may be viewed as colleagues in the change process (Kinney et al., 1990). A third component is that social workers must be trained, supervised and given authority to make decisions in family reunification practice. Specifically, agencies empower their staff members by creating a climate and structure that promote professional skill attainment and permit the exercise of decision-making authority; agencies must recognize that the ability of staff members to empower families is linked to the degree to which staff members themselves feel empowered (Maluccio, Pine, & Warsh, 1993).

Given the multiple and complex needs of families with respect to their basic life conditions, providing a variety of supports and services is another major component. Successfully reuniting children and families calls for a combination of services such as counseling, parent training, income assistance, housing and day care. Parents need both expanded knowledge and the strengthening of tangible resources to be able to provide developmentally sound parenting for their children (Maluccio, Pine, & Warsh, 1993). The range of societal or systemic problems that lead to out-of-home care, primarily, problems such as racism, poverty, and homelessness, calls for advocacy and social action in addition to direct practice with families (Pelton, 1989).

Successful programs recognize that family reunification practice requires services of several systems, such as law, health, mental health, and education; these programs regularly convene among interdisciplinary teams for training, service planning, and service implementation (Maluccio, Pine, & Warsh, 1993). Providing services that are required is no simple task, even when services are adequate and accessible. As in the

human service field in general, and permanency planning in particular (Maluccio et al., 1986), one person must orchestrate the whole plan and its implementation with and in behalf of the family.

The final component of reunification is the therapeutic use of out-of-home placement. With few exceptions, care away from home can no longer be viewed as an end in itself, as a full substitute for the biological family, or as custodial care (Maluccio, Warsh, & Pine, 1993). Out-of-home placement is a means to an end, the rehabilitation of the family or child and the reconnection of the child with the family to the extent possible (Maluccio, Pine, & Warsh, 1993). Even in cases in which the family cannot fully care for a child, efforts should be made to teach the parents how to relate at least in part to their children.

Attention to family reunification is one expression of the renewed emphasis in child welfare on preserving families and part of the contemporary revolution in child welfare services. Effective family reunification practice requires extensive resources and commitment on the part of administrators, policymakers, practitioners, foster parents and other service providers (Maluccio, Pine, & Warsh, 1993). Additionally, family reunification should be considered as soon as it is determined that a child should be placed in out-of-home care, given intensive and persistent attention throughout the placement, and reinforced through follow-up services that maintain the reconnection (Maluccio et al., 1986).

The changing conditions of the foster care system in this country require reexamination. Most children come into foster care because of family problems, and factors in the child welfare system can affect their time in care. Attention to family

reunification is one expression in child welfare on preserving families and part of the contemporary revolution in child welfare services. Of primary importance is the recognition of the plight of minority children and the broad range of reasons that may be necessary to alleviate this problem. At the same time, states struggling to meet the needs of their children do this without knowing what the foster care experience is of their children and their families. Given applicable data and resources, it is possible to compile timely statistics on the entire foster care population of a given state and examine the state and its comparative trends over long periods. States should also periodically evaluate and examine the variables that are attributable to worsening social conditions, changes in popular culture, changes in child welfare practice and policy, especially patterns of entry and exit for foster care children as they relate to age, gender, and race. Family reunification should not remain the province of a few exemplary or demonstration projects here and there; rather, it should become a regular component of the services provided in each community for all young people in care and their families (Pine, Warsh, & Maluccio, 1993). This component will provide social service agencies with an opportunity to develop and design appropriate services that are beneficial for children to exist foster care at a higher and faster rate.

The relationship between age, race, and gender at entry to foster care and the subsequent probability of reunification is generally reason for concern as indicated in the aforementioned research. Corrective efforts are needed if this is the case, but results from empirical studies of children in foster care differ considerably relative to the relationship between ethnicity, gender, and age and foster care outcomes. Younger and minority children are being trapped in the foster care system without being given the opportunity

to be reunified with their parents. Above all, the unique challenge of preserving families that have been separated through placement requires new thinking, revised practice strategies, and an attitude of hope and compassion for even the most vulnerable families (Pine, Warsh, & Maluccio, 1993). The researcher undertook this study and examined the broader picture of family reunification and its characteristics. Many of the researchers whose studies have been described above have noted repeatedly that the problems that are being faced by the children in the child welfare system are societal problems and their resolution is far beyond the scope of the child welfare system to remedy.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This research study addressed the following research questions: 1) How do Euro American, African American, Native American, Hispanic, and Asian American ethnic groups differ regarding family reunification of children in South Carolina's foster care system? 2) How do females and males differ regarding family reunification of children in South Carolina's foster care system? 3) How do children of age one to 18 differ regarding family reunification in South Carolina's foster care system? 4) How do the differences of ethnicity, age, and gender interact upon family reunification of children in South Carolina's foster care system?

Hypothesis One: There is a difference in the family reunification rate between African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian American children and Euro American children.

Hypothesis Two: There is a difference in the family reunification rate between older children and younger children.

Hypothesis Three: There is a difference in the family reunification rate between female children and male children.

Hypothesis Four: There is interaction among ethnicity, gender, and age upon family reunification.

Definition of Terms

Family reunification – the placement of foster care children with their biological parents upon case closure.

Ethnicity – quality of group identity that comes from a sense of history tied to time and place. It is a form of shared historical experience often tied to place of natural origin (Anderson, Ryan & Leashore, 1997, p.22). The ethnic groups that were examined in this study were African American, Euro American, Hispanic and Other (Native American and Asian American).

Age – the child must have been less than eighteen years of age at the time of the maltreatment in question (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1994). The age groups were 1-3, 4-7, 8-11, 12-15, and 16-23.

Gender – the sexual category of male or female as an individual or as a group.

Sample

Data were collected from archival foster care records at the Office of the Governor, Division of the Foster Care Review Board in South Carolina. Currently, the Foster Care Review Board provides an external system of accountability and advocacy for children and families involved with the foster care system. The Review Board evaluates the entire system affecting the children and their families, identifies deficiencies, advocates for due process, and evaluates the quality of service delivery. There are 36 local review boards across the state that conduct semi-annual case reviews of all children who have resided in foster care more than four consecutive months.

Table 1 illustrates a descriptive profile of the foster care children in terms of ethnicity, age, and gender. This study's population consisted of 8,814 children who have

resided in foster care for more than four consecutive months from 1995 through 2000. Of the total sample 4,252 were male, 4,562 were female. In terms of ethnicity, 3,424 were Euro American, 5,089 were African American and 198, Hispanic/Other. The Hispanic/Other ethnic group consisted of Hispanic, Asian American, Biracial, Native American and Other due to the small number of cases for each of the categories. The majority, 58.4% of the foster care children, were African American. This is particularly striking given that African American children encompassed 37% of the total population in South Carolina and Euro American children comprised 59% of the total population in 2000 (Department of Social Services, online).

Age was partitioned into five categories that represent developmentally similar children. Foster care children placed and discharged from foster within their first year of birth were given an age of one; otherwise they would have been computed as missing data if assigned the value of zero. The age categories were as follows: 1 – 3 (1,417); 4 – 7 (1,844); 8 – 11 (1,517); 12 – 15 (1,378); and 16 – 23 (2,601). Initially, the age category 16 – 23 was 16 – 19, but due to the small number of children who were 20 years of age and older, the categories were combined. This age group, 16 – 23, had the highest (29.5%) percentage of children.

In terms of family reunification, 3,576 children were reunified with their biological parents and 5,238 were adopted, deceased, emancipated, nonparental legal custody and other.

Table 1
Descriptive Profile of the Independent and Dependent Variables

Independent Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	4,252	48.2%
Female	4,562	51.8%
Ethnicity		
Euro American	3,424	39.3%
African American	5,089	58.4%
Hispanic and Other	198	2.3%
Age		
1-3	1,471	16.7%
4-7	1,844	20.9%
8-11	1,517	17.2%
12-15	1,378	15.6%
16-23	2,601	29.5%
<u>Dependent Variable</u>		
Family Reunification		
Successful	3,576	40.6%
Unsuccessful	5,238	59.4%

Procedure

This researcher contacted, via telephone, the Director of the Office of the Governor, Division of Foster Care Review Board, and discussed collaborating with her office on this study. An initial meeting was subsequently scheduled with the director, and possible areas of consideration that could be investigated by the director and researcher were generated. The director provided the researcher with the departmental annual report and research other states had conducted for review. The researcher selected the topic family reunification and subsequently investigated the current research and literature to determine the research that had been previously conducted. After meeting with the

research committee member, several research questions were developed based upon the review of literature. A list was generated and reviewed by the director and researcher, and it was concluded that the present research questions would benefit the agency. Then the researcher conferred with the dissertation committee chair seeking approval. Subsequently, approval from the committee members was obtained. A letter was mailed to the director outlining the research proposal and requesting permission to proceed with the study (see Appendix A).

The Division of Foster Care Review Board has utilized the Foster Care Data System version 2.0 since March 1995, as reported by the data research administrator. This system has been in existence since the beginning of the data researcher administrator's employment with the agency one year ago. Therefore, the data research administrator could not discuss any advantages of this system to previously used software. The data research administrator reported some limitations of this system, such as not being able to add new information to a child's record once it has been entered into the system. The software can only track children in care over four months and it does not reflect the true number of children who have been in the system for less than four months. The data research administrator cannot track children who repeatedly reenter the foster care system when each stay is less than four months. All the data are provided by the Department of Social Services caseworker at a review meeting with the review board coordinators. The review board coordinators complete the case notes form and enter the data into the computer. The data research administrator verifies case information by generating monthly reports of each review board coordinator's caseload for their review. The foster care records are not purged from the database but are placed in a separate

archival file once the case is closed or the child turns 18 years of age. Therefore, the data research administrator provided the researcher with demographic information on a computerized disc in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, and discharge status on foster care children from 1995 through 2000. The researcher then wrote a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) syntax statement that accessed the data from the computerized disc and perform the required analysis.

Data Analysis

Appropriate descriptive statistics were computed on the nominal (categorical) data representing the independent and dependent variable. A Chi-square analysis was employed to test the main and interactive effects of the three independent variables (gender, ethnicity, and age) upon the dependent variable (reunification). The PC SPSS logit subroutine was used to facilitate computer analysis of the data. The Logit Analysis procedure provided computation of parameter estimates needed to derive expected frequencies, which facilitated the establishment of odds associated with successful reunification based on various combinations of the independent variables. The .05 significance criterion was observed in all inferential analyses.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This study was designed to examine the effects of ethnicity, age, and gender upon family reunification. In studying these effects, the researcher observed the frequency of successful family reunification by ethnicity, age, and gender of the children involved in the process. This chapter presents the descriptive and comparative findings relative to this research problem.

Descriptive Findings

The Division of Foster Care Review Board reviewed cases of children who have been in foster care for four consecutive months from 1995 through 2000. As part of the review process, the agency recorded and stored demographic information on each child as well as discharge status. The following are possible discharge options: adoption, deceased, emancipation, nonparental legal custody, other and parental legal custody. For purposes of this study, successful family reunification was defined as foster care children with a discharge status of parental legal custody. Unsuccessful family reunification was defined as foster care children with a discharge state of adoption, deceased, emancipation, nonparental legal custody, and other. Table 2 illustrates the frequency and percentage of each discharge status. Parental legal custody had the highest (40.6%) percentage of the discharge classifications and the discharge classification with the lowest (.2%) percentage was other.

Table 2
Descriptive Profile of Discharge Status among Subjects Sampled

Discharge Status	Frequency	Percentage
Adoption	2,020	22.9%
Deceased	30	.3%
Emancipation	1,686	19.1%
Nonparental Legal Custody	1,481	16.8%
Other	21	.2%
Parent Legal Custody	3,576	40.6%

Comparative Findings

Ethnicity

The variable ethnicity was partitioned into three categories of Euro American, African American, Hispanic and Other, which included Asian American, Biracial, and Native American. Chi-square analysis was performed to determine the level of disparity among ethnic subgroups on family reunification. It was determined that ethnicity was significant in terms of family reunification (see Table 3); therefore, Hypothesis One was supported. Overall, 44.9% of Euro American children were reunified with their biological parents; 37.5%% of African American children and 39.4% of Hispanic and Other were reunited with their biological parents. Thus, reunification was more likely with Euro American children than with either of the other two ethnic groups.

Table 3
Comparative Profile of Ethnicity upon Family Reunification

Ethnicity	Successful	Unsuccessful
Euro American		
Frequency	1,538	1,886
Percentage within ethnicity	44.9%	55.1%
African American		
Frequency	1,910	3,179
Percentage within ethnicity	37.5%	62.5%
Hispanic and Other		
Frequency	78	120
Percentage within ethnicity	39.4%	60.6%

Note. Pearson Chi-square is 46.448

Age

Chi-square analysis was performed to determine the level of disparity among age subgroups on family reunification. It was determined age was significant in terms of family reunification (see Table 4); therefore, Hypothesis Two was supported. Specifically, reunification was least successful with children in the age group 16 -23. There were very small differences in the success rates of the other four age groups.

Table 4
Comparative Profile of Age upon Family Reunification

Age	Successful	Unsuccessful
1-3		
Frequency	660	811
Percentage within age groups	44.9%	56.1%
4-7		
Frequency	778	1,066
Percentage within age groups	42.2%	57.8%
8-11		
Frequency	732	785
Percentage within age groups	48.3%	51.7%
12-15		
Frequency	794	584
Percentage within age groups	58.3%	42.4%
16-23		
Frequency	611	1,990
Percentage within variable	23.5%	76.5%

Note. Pearson Chi-square is 531.210

Gender

As illustrated in Table 5, gender was not significant in terms of disparity on family reunification, and, therefore, does not support Hypothesis Three. Approximately 41% of male children were reunified with their families and 39.9% of female children.

Table 5
Comparative Profile of Gender upon Family Reunification

Gender	Successful	Unsuccessful
Male		
Frequency	1,756	2,496
Percentage within sex	41.3%	58.7%
Female		
Frequency	1,820	2,742
Percentage within sex	39.9%	60.1%

Note. Pearson Chi-square is 1.798

Interaction

Since gender was not significant in terms of family reunification, that variable was not computed in the log linear statistical analysis; only ethnicity and age were utilized to determine significance of their interaction on family reunification. Log linear analysis determined ethnicity and age were not significantly related to family reunification; therefore, Hypothesis Four was not supported. The same previously noted patterns of success in the rate of family reunification for the independent variables ethnicity and age were observed. The cohort of children most likely reunified with their biological parents was age 12 through 15. The following was the sequence in which the age groups were returned home: 1) 12 – 15, 2) 8 – 11, 3) 1 – 3, 4) 4 – 7, and 5) 16 – 23. Regarding ethnicity, Euro American children returned home at higher percentage than African American, Hispanic and Other children did.

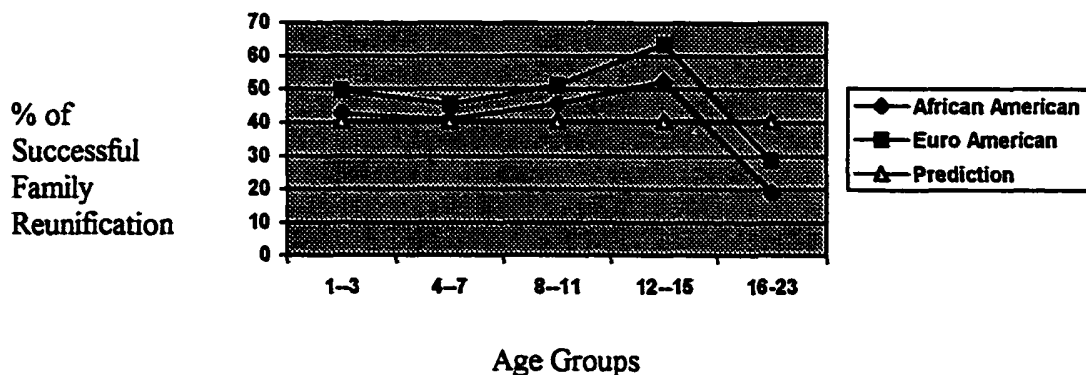


Figure 1. Comparative profile of ethnicity and age upon family reunification.

When the researcher examined interaction among ethnicity, age and successful family reunification, the same pattern emerged. Euro American children (63.59%) age 12

– 15 had a higher successful family reunification rate than African American children (52.42%) in the same age group (See Figure 1). In addition, the pattern of Euro American children being returned home at a higher percentage than African American children was illustrated in each age group. The ethnic group Hispanic and Other was computed in the log linear analysis but the results could have biased due to the very small cell size; therefore, it was eliminated from the comparative findings.

The log linear analysis was also utilized to predict which independent variable (ethnicity and age) best-identified successful family reunification placement. Overall, the precision of predictions for ethnicity and age was low due to the under prediction of successful family reunification. However, the best prediction rate was for African American children age 4 – 7 (40.87%) and the lowest predication rate was for Euro American children ages 12 – 15 (63.59%).

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This research study addressed the effect of ethnicity, age, and gender on family reunification. Initially, this chapter discussed the findings in relation to the hypotheses. Secondly, the researcher discussed both the implications of the findings and finally possible future research efforts.

Summary of Findings

Currently, the out-of-home placement system has found itself facing new challenges: the overrepresentation of minority children, the influx of infants/preschoolers, and children with increasingly severe emotional and behavioral problems (Barbell & Wright, 1999). There is a shift in the population of children being placed and staying in foster care who are younger and minority. The race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexual orientation of providers and consumers of child welfare services are an integral part of service planning and delivery. Therefore, these variables must be addressed when examining child welfare services and permanency planning. The purpose of the current study was to present a valid picture of which cohort of foster care children were reunified with their biological parents for the State of South Carolina from 1995 through 2000. The research findings provided social service agencies with a direction to determine which groups of foster care children in terms of ethnicity, age, and gender needed more services and interventions that would encourage reunification. Data were collect from 8,814

archival foster care records at the South Carolina Office of the Governor, Division of the Foster Care Review Board in terms of ethnicity, age, and gender.

Descriptive statistics were completed on the dependent variable for this study (family reunification). Specifically, a frequency distribution showing the frequency and percentage of successful and unsuccessful family reunification were displayed by ethnic, age, and gender classification. Comparatively, the log linear procedure was employed to discern the specific factors among the independent variables (ethnicity, age, and gender) that best identified successful family reunification placement from unsuccessful family reunification. The .05 criterion was regarded in these analyses.

The following were the study's major findings:

- 1) There was a significant difference between minority and non-minority children in the rate of family reunification. Euro American children were reunified with the biological parents at a higher percentage than African American children, Hispanic and Other children. The current study supported Stehno's (1982) findings that Euro American children were reunified with their biological parents at a higher rate than African American and Hispanic children. It was suggested this pattern occurred due to minority children having a higher discharge rate to alternative placements such as residential home and kinship care. Those findings were also supported by the current study, that the majority of minority children were not successfully reunited with their biological family and were more likely to be adopted, deceased, emancipated or nonparental custody. Fein and Maluccio (1984) also found Euro American children were reunified with their biological parents at a higher rate than African American and Hispanic children. Patricia

Luna (1999) also found that Euro American children were reunited with their biological parents more than African American children. When dealing with physically abused children, African American children were also more likely to be placed outside of their birth families (Barth et al., 1985). In contrast to the current findings, several studies did not find that ethnicity predicted placement (Jenkins et al., 1983; Lawder, Poulin, & Andrew, 1986; Finch, Fanshel & Grundy, 1986).

- 2) There was a significant difference in the family reunification rate between older children and younger children. Younger children (1-15) were reunited with their biological parents at a higher percentage than older children (16-23). The findings in Mark Courtney's (1992) study were similar to the present study. In general, children ages 4 – 12 were returned home at a higher rate.
- 3) There was not significant difference in the family reunification rate between female children and male children. Male and female children were reunited with the biological parent at approximately the same rate. Albers, et al. found that gender did not effect placement which supported the current study's findings. However, Murtry and Lie (1992) found that males were returned home at a faster rate than females.
- 4) There was not significant interaction among ethnicity, age, and gender upon family reunification. Ethnicity and age were the variables computed to determine interaction upon family reunification because gender was not significant. The ethnic group Other's results were eliminated due to the small cell size. There was no interaction between ethnicity and age upon family reunification. The same

previous pattern of reunification emerged that Euro American children were reunited at a higher rate in each age group than African American children in the same age groups. Log linear analysis was conducted to derive the independent variables (ethnicity and age) that were the best predictor of successful family reunification. Overall, it was determined that accuracy of prediction was low due to under prediction. However, African American children age 4 – 7 had the best prediction rate of successful family reunification and Euro American children age 12 – 15 the lowest. In contrast, Albers, Reilly, and Rittner (1993) found a significant interaction among ethnicity, age, and placement. They found African American children under the age of six were most likely to remain out of the home. As whole, African American children between ages six and 11, averaged out-of-home placement one year longer than Euro Americans in the same age group. African American adolescents averaged nearly three years longer in out-of-home placement than their Euro American counterparts.

Implications

Regrettably, the numbers of children entering foster care continues to grow, causing strain on the system. The fact that “diligent efforts” are mandated for the purpose of attempting to reunify the family means that the child welfare services must spend money and time on research, programs, training, resources, and personnel. This study reviewed a large number of foster care cases where abuse was indicated or confirmed; however, the data do not accurately reflect children that were in foster care less than four months. Therefore, the actual number of foster care cases from 1995 through 2000 was much larger. Less than half of the foster care children in this study returned home and the

majority of the children were adopted, deceased, emancipated, nonparental custody and other. Hence, it is not enough to identify children that have been successfully reunified with their biological families as in this study. Efforts are needed to ensure training for caseworkers and smaller caseloads to make certain children are provided an opportunity to be reunified with their families. If all foster care children were serviced by a specialized caseworker whose caseload was capped, there would be more opportunity to move cases toward reunification in a timelier manner. Making family reunification programs an integral part of permanency planning would ensure the focus on the family. Sadly, funding from Federal government has emphasized foster care by making unlimited funds available for service like adoption while capping funds for family reunification. This study indicated only one discharge option was clearly for family resolution—parental legal custody while the others succeeded in separating the family.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The current study supported recurrent concerns about the presence of cultural biases in the reunification of minority children of different age groups. Minority children were less likely to be reunified with the parent when compared to Euro American children. The varied efforts to examine family reunification have left many gaps in our understanding of this entity. Further research is required to fill these gaps, most particularly, in child and family development, child welfare service delivery, and training for child welfare services. Reunified families must cope with the multiple challenges of single parent households, the needs of children who exhibit multiple behavioral problems, and the difficulties leading to, and resulting from, previous out-of-home placements. Poverty, homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, and the effects of

child abuse and neglect are also obstacles that must be countered when reunification is considered.

In what ways do children successfully reunify with their families, differ from those requiring re-referral to child protective agencies following reunification or from those reentering foster care? What distinguishes children who are reunified from those for whom permanency planning involves adoption, guardianship or long-term family foster care? Further research addressing these issues will advance the current state of knowledge by describing specific weaknesses in agency guidelines regulating worker behaviors, in programs, and in the quality of services provided, and by describing decisions leading to disruption in family reunification efforts as well as program and service strengths resulting in successful long-term case outcome. The relative contribution of personal, environmental, and service factors leading to differential case outcome after children are reunited with their biological parents should be identified. Based on these data, recommendation could be made to improve service programs before and after children are returned home. Ultimately, however, strategies implemented by caseworkers will be most effective only when the contributions of this factor in individual cases are determined.

Research in practice setting can discover the factors associated with successful service provision and consumer outcomes. The goal of the reunification programs is to reunify children in foster care with their biological families or to assure the children permanency with an adoptive or long-term foster care if reunification was not possible or in the children's best interests (Fein & Staff, 1993). The purpose of research efforts should seek to clarify the needs of identified groups of children and their families and to

discover the factors associated with effective service provision and successful outcomes. Formative evaluations examine ongoing programs and produce results that can be used to improve the programs (Fein & Staff, 1993). Summative evaluations should examine completed programs to determine program effects, usually for funding or other planning decisions (Fein & Staff, 1993).

In conclusion, the research needs discussed in this study are testimony to the intricacy and complexity of the interactions that characterize the child welfare system (Davis et al., 1993; Fein et al., 1990). The research agenda should be tailored to that complexity with recognition that both quantitative and qualitative studies are essential in the efforts to develop a sound knowledge base for family reunification practice.

References

- Abney, V. (1996). Cultural competency in the field of child maltreatment. In J. Briere, L. Berliner, J. Bulkley, C. Jenny & T. Reid. (Eds.). The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment (pp. 409- 419). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Albers, E., Reilly, T., & Rittner, B. (1993). Children in foster care possible factors affecting permanency planning. Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 10,(4) 329-341.
- Anderson, G., Ryan, A., & Leashore, B. (Eds.). (1997). The challenge of permanency planning in a multicultural society. Binghamton, NJ: The Haworth Press.
- Barbell, K., & Wright, L. (1999). Family foster care in the next century. Child Welfare, 78(1), 216-235.
- Barth, R., & Berry, M. (1987). Outcomes of child welfare services under permanency planning. Social Service Review, 61(1), 71-90.
- Barth, R., Snowden, L., Broeck, E., Clancy, T., Jordan, C., & Barusch, A. (1985). Contributors to reunification or permanent out of home care for physically abused children. Journal of Social Service Research, 9, 31-45.
- Benedict, M., & White, R. (1990). Factors associated with foster care length of stay. Child Welfare, 70(1), 45-58.
- Benedict, M., White, R., & Stallings, R. (1987). Race and length of stay in foster care. Social Work Research and Abstracts, 23(4), 23-26.
- Billingsley, A., & Govannoni, J. (1972). Children of the storm: Black children and American child welfare. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Blanchard, C. (1999). Relationship of services and family reunification in New Jersey. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yeshiva University, New York.

Boyd, P. (1979). They can go home again. Child Welfare, 58, 609-615.

Brown, A., & Bailey-Etta, B. (1997). An out-of-home care system in crisis: Implication for African American children in the child welfare system. Child Welfare, 76, 65-83.

Chestang, L. (1978). The delivery of child welfare services to minority group children and their families. In A. Kadushin (Ed.). Child welfare strategy in the coming years: An overview (pp. 169 – 194). Washington, DC: United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Child Welfare League of America. (1997). Foster family care fact sheet. Washington, DC: Author.

Children's Defense Fund. (2000). Adoption and safe families act (ASFA) basics. [online], available: <http://www.childrensdefense.org>.

Close, M. (1988). Child welfare and people of color: Denial of equal access. Social Work Research and Abstracts, 19, 13-20.

Cole, B. (1984). An analysis of variables affecting length of stay in foster care. Children and Youth Services Review, 6(2), 135-145.

Costin, L., Bell, C., & Downs, S. (1991). Child welfare: Policies and practice. (4th ed.). New York: Longman.

Courtney, M. (1994). Factors associated with the reunification of foster children with their families. Social Service Review, 68, 81-108.

Courtney, M. (1992). Reunification of foster children with their families: The case of California's children. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, California.

Courtney, M., Barth, R., Berrick, J., Brooks, D., Needell, B., & Park, P. (1996). Race and child welfare services: Past research and future directions. Child Welfare, 75, 99-137.

Davis, I., English, D., & Landsverk, J. (1993). Going home – and returning to care: A study of foster care reunification. San Diego, CA: San Diego State University, College of Health and Human Services, School of Social Work and the Child and Family Research Group.

Everett, J. (1995). Child foster care. In R. Stern (Ed.) Encyclopedia of social work. (14th ed., pp. 375 – 389). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

Everett, J., Chipunga, S., & Leashore, B. (Eds.). (1991). Child welfare: An Africentric perspective. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Family Impact Seminar. (1990). Crisis in foster care: New directions for the 1990s. Washington, DC: American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, Research and Education Foundation.

Fanshel, D. (1971). The exit of children from foster care: An interim research. Child Welfare, 50,(2), 65-81.

Fanshel, D., & Mass, H. (1962). Factorial dimensions of the characteristics of children in placement and their families. Child Development, 33, 123-144.

Fanshel, D., & Shinn, (1978). Children in foster care: A longitudinal investigation. New York: Columbia University.

Fein, E., Davies, L., & Knight G. (1979). Placement stability in foster care. Social Work, 24(2), 156-157.

Fein, E., & Maluccio, A. (1984). Children leaving foster care: Outcomes of permanency planning. Child Abuse and Neglect, 8(4), 425-431.

Fein, E., & Maluccio, A. (1992). Permanency planning: Another remedy in jeopardy. Social Service Review, 66, 335-348.

Fein, E., Maluccio, A., Hamilton, V., & Ward, P. (1983). After foster care: Outcomes of permanency planning for children. Child Welfare, 62(6), 485-558.

Fein, E., Maluccio, A., & Kruger, (1990). No more partings: An examination of long-term foster family care. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of American.

Fein, E., & Staff, I. (1991). Implementing reunification services. Families in Society, 72(6), 335-343.

Fein, E., & Staff, I. (1993). The interaction of research and practice in family reunification. In B.A. Pine, R. Warsh, & A. N. Maluccio (Eds.), Together again: Family reunification in foster care (pp. 199-212). Washington, Dc: Child Welfare League of American.

Finch, S., Fanshel, D., & Grundy, J. (1986). Factors associated with the discharge of children from foster care. Social Work Research and Abstracts, 22, 10-18.

Garbaino, J., & Ebata, A. (1983). The significance of ethnic and cultural differences in child maltreatment. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 45, 773-783.

Goerge, R. (1990). The reunification process in foster care. Social Service Review, 64(3), 422-457.

Goerge, R., Wulczyn, F., & Harden, A. (1996). New comparative insights into states and their foster children. Public Welfare, 54, 12-25.

Gurak, D. Smith, D., & Goldson, M. (1982). The minority foster child: A comparative study of Hispanic, Black and White children [monograph number 9] pp. 35-48.

Harris, B. (1990). Factors affecting the foster care placement decision. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 61(2), 272-280.

Hartman, (1993). Application and adaptation of intensive family preservation services to use for the reunification of foster children with their biological parents. Children and Youth Services Review, 16(5-6), 339-361.

Hartman, A., & Laird, J. (1983). Family-centered social work practice. New York: The Free Press.

Hess, P. M., & Folaron, G. (1991). Ambivalences: A challenge to permanency for children. Children Welfare, 70(4), 403-424.

Jenkins, S. (1970). Duration of foster care: Some relevant antecedent variables. Child Welfare, 450-45.

Jenkins, S. & Diamond, B. (1985). Ethnicity and foster care: Census data as predictors of placement variables. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 55(2) 267-276.

Jenkins, S., Diamond, B., Flanzraich, M., Gibson, J., Hendricks, J., & Marshood, N. (1983). Ethnic differential in foster care placement. Social Work Research and Abstracts, 19(4), 41-45.

Jimenez, M. (1990). Permanency planning and the child abuse prevention and treatment: The paradox of child welfare policy. Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 17, 55-72.

Jones, L. (1998). The social and family correlates of successful reunification of children in foster care. Children and Youth Services Review, 21(4), 305-323.

Kadushin, A. (1974). Child welfare services. (2nd ed.). New York: Macmillan.

Kadushin, A., & Martin, J. (1988). Child welfare services. (4th ed.). New York: Macmillan.

Kinney, J., Haapala, D., Booth, C., & Leavitt, S. (1990). The homebuilders model. In J. Whittaker, J. Kinney, E. Tracy, and C. Booth. (Eds.) Reaching high risk families: Intensive family preservation in human services (pp.31-64). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Lawder, E. (1966). Quasi-adoption. Children, 13, 11-12.

Lawder, E., Poulin, J., & Andrews, R. (1986). A study of 185 foster children 5 years after placement. Child Welfare, 65(3), 241-251.

Lindsey, D. (1991). Factoring affecting the foster care placement decision: An analysis of national survey data. American Orthopsychiatric Association, 6(2), 272-281.

Luna, P. (1999). Family reunification and foster care children in California. New York: Macmillan.

Maas, H., & Engler, R. (1959). Children in need of parents. New York: Columbia University.

Madison, B., & Shapiro, M. (1970). Permanent and long term foster care as a placement service. Child Welfare, 49, 131-136.

Magura, S. (1979). Trends analysis in foster care. Social Work Research and Abstracts, 15, 29-36.

Maluccio, A., & Fein, E. (1983.) Permanency planning: A redefinition. Child Welfare, 62, 195-201.

Maluccio, A., Fein, E., & Davis, I. (1994). Family reunification: Research findings, issues, and direction. Child Welfare, 73 (5), 489-503.

Maluccio, A., Pine, B., & Warsh, R. (1996). Incorporating contact on family reunification into the social work curriculum. Journal of Social Work Education, 32(3), pp. 363 – 373.

Marsh, P., & Triseliotis, J. (1993). Prevention and reunification: In childcare. London: B. T. Hartford LTD.

McMurtry, S., & Lie, G. (1992). Differential exit rates of minority children in foster care. Social Work Research and Abstracts, 28, 42-48.

Murphy, H. (1980). Predicting duration of foster care. Child Welfare, 47, 76-84.

Office of the Governor, Division of the Foster Care Review. (1999). 1998-1999 annual report.

Olsen, L. (1982). Services for minority children in out-of home care. Social Service Review, 56, 572-585.

Pecora, P., Whittaker, J., Maluccio, A., Barth, R., & Plotnick, R. (1992). Child welfare and challenge: Policy, practice, and research. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.

Pelton, L. (1989). For reasons of poverty: A cultural analysis of the public child welfare system in the United States. New York: Praeger Publications.

Pinderhughes, E. (1989). Understanding race, ethnicity and power: The key to efficacy in clinical practice. New York: The Free Press.

Pine, B., Warsh, R., & Maluccio, A. (1993). Together again: Family reunification in foster care. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

Rzepnicki, T. (1987). Recidivism of foster children returned to their own homes: A review of new directions of research. Social Service Review, 61(1), 56-69.

Saunders, A., & Broadhurst, P. (1993). Racial inequality and child neglect: Findings in a metropolitan area. Journal of the Child Welfare League of America, 72(4),

Seaberg, J. (1988). Placement in permanency planning: Own home versus foster care. Social Work Research and Abstracts, 24, 4-7.

Seaberg, J., & Tolley, E. (1986). Predictors of the length of stay in foster care. Social Work Research and Abstracts, 22, 11-15.

Seltzer, M., & Bloksberg, L. (1980). Permanency planning and its effect on foster children. Social Work, 46(1), 65-68.

Stehno, S. (1982). Differential treatment of minority children in service systems. Social Work, 39-45.

South Carolina Department of Social Services. (2000). Child protective/prevention services [on-line] available: <http://www.state.sc.us/dss>.

South Carolina Department of Social Services. (2000). Direct services/foster care [on-line] available: <http://www.state.sc.us/dss>.

Sudia, C. (1986). Preventing out-of-home placement of children: The first step to permanency planning. Children Today, 15, 4-5.

Tann, T., & Ho, M. (1996). Factors influencing the prospect of children returning to their parents from out of home care. Child Welfare, 75(3), 253-268.

Terpsta, J. (1986). Partnership of child care institutions and child placing agencies. Portland, ME: National Child Welfare Resource Center for Management and Administration.

Turner, J. (1984). Reuniting children in foster care with their biological parents. Social Work, 29(6), 501-505.

United States Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. (1994). National study of protective, preventive, and reunification services delivered to children and their families. (ACF Contract Number 105-91-1802). Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.

United States Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. (1999). The adoption and foster care analysis and reporting system (AFCARS) report.

United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families. (2000). Child maltreatment 1998: Reports from the states to the national child abuse and neglect data system. (ACF Contract Number 105-99-9801). Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.

Usher, C., Randolph, K., & Gogan, H. (1999). Placement patterns in foster care. Social Service Review, 22-35.

Wells, K., & Guo, S. (1999). Reunification and reentry of foster children. Children and Youth Services Review, 21(4), 273-294.

Wiltse, K. (1985). Foster care: An overview. In J. Laird, & A. Hartman (Eds.). A handbook of child welfare: Context, knowledge and practice. (pp. 565 – 584). New York: Free Press.

Wulczyn, F. (1991). Caseload dynamics and foster care reentry. Social Service Review, 65(1), 133-156.

Appendix A

August 24, 2000

Denise T. Barker
Division Director
Office of the Governor's
Division of Foster Care Review
1205 Pendleton Street, Room 436
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Mrs. Barker:

As you are aware, I am a doctoral student at the University of South Carolina in the College of Education. I am writing to request written approval from your Division to carry out my study since the research involves the review of Division's records. Permission from study agencies is expected. No human subjects will be used in this study. Your computerized database will be access so that consumer's confidentiality will not be violated.

The proposed study will focus on the following research statements. They are as follows: 1) the effects of ethnicity, age and gender upon reunification with the family of origin in the South Carolina's foster care system; 2) The interaction of the effects of ethnicity, age and gender upon family reunification of children in South Carolina's foster care system; 3) Difference in length of stay in foster care based on ethnicity, age and gender. The sample will consist of administrative data collected by the Office of the Governor, Division of Foster Care Review Board that is drawn from children who entered foster care during the period of 1998-1999 and have resided in foster care more than four consecutive months.

The current crisis within many foster care jurisdictions in terms of adequacy of prevention and intervention services, number and quality of available foster homes, and the training and education of available foster homes, and the training and education of foster parents has increased the importance of understanding issues related to the length of children's foster care stay. Courtney et al., (1996) reported that researcher, policymakers and practitioners should also give ore attention to the nexus of race, gender and social class as factors in the functioning of child welfare service. Part of the mission of the South Carolina Department of Social Services is to ensure the health and safety of children who cannot protect themselves and to help parents provide a nurturing home. In particular, efforts to keep abused and neglected children in the homes of their natural parents have not resulted in long-term stability, let alone a decrease in the foster care population. The vein of research I have selected is to explore the characteristics of children who have successfully reunified with their natural parents in South Carolina. A minimal number of studies have measured family reunification based on ethnicity, age, and gender in South Carolina and this proposal would offer valuable information to the foster care system.

My study will be and conducted and completed by May 2001. No other staff or agency resources will be needed to conduct this study. When the study is completed, I will share my findings with the Division. From our earlier conversation, I understand that you will be my contact person and will address all future communication directly to you.

I am very grateful for you and your Division's assistance in the completion of my dissertation and this research will be beneficial to all parties by exploring how the characteristics of the children and their family effect reunification. If there is any additional information, which you need, please contact me at (803) 534-9872.

Sincerely,

Denatra Green-Stroman

Enclosure