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DISSERTATION

Adolescent Mothers Involved in the Child Welfare System in Los Angeles

Who are They and How Can We Help Them?

Jane McClure Burstain

This document was submitted as a dissertation in September 2008 in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the doctoral degree in public policy analysis at the Pardee RAND Graduate School. The faculty committee that supervised and approved the dissertation consisted of Amy Cox (Chair), John Romley, and Lionel Galway.

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

The child welfare system is the primary mechanism for addressing child maltreatment once it has occurred, with a process designed to reintegrate maltreated children back into their family or, if not possible, to find a suitable alternative. This dissertation addresses the reintegration, or reunification, portion of the process in connection with maltreating adolescent mothers. Currently, little is known about this population, their outcomes or what happens to them during the reunification process. This dissertation takes the first step in filling that void. It provides foundational analysis using the population of maltreating adolescent mothers involved in the Los Angeles County child welfare system in 2003 and 2004. The analysis shows that this population is unique. They are different from both the general adolescent mother population and adult maltreating parents. They are also a vulnerable population facing difficult circumstances. With respect to their outcomes, placing a child with an adolescent mother's relative decreases the likelihood that she will regain custody. Extending the time period in which an adolescent mother has to resolve her underlying problems, however, significantly increases the chance that she will regain custody. With respect to subsequent maltreatment once the child is returned to the adolescent mother's care, the time in which a child remained out of an adolescent mother's custody does not change the likelihood of another incident. The policy and research implications of these findings are discussed.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Child maltreatment is a widespread problem in the United States with 899,000 victims of child maltreatment in 2005.[1] It has significant negative consequences for the children including poorer cognitive abilities, language deficits, behavioral problems and difficulties in personal and social relationships (Dukewich, Borkowski, and Whitman, 1999). Child maltreatment and the concomitant removal from parental custody not only have a developmental and emotional cost to the children, they have a financial cost as well. Costs associated with child maltreatment are more than $100 billion a year including both direct costs as well as indirect costs related to poor outcomes for maltreated children (Wang and Holton, 2007). These costs are further compounded in situations where families are not reunified and a permanent out-of-home plan, usually adoption, is found for the child. The average cost to complete an adoption from the child welfare system in California is $19,000 per child, which does not even include the ongoing assistance payments adoptive parents receive once the adoption is finalized (Allphin, Simmons, and Barth, 2001).

One component of the child maltreatment problem is maltreatment by adolescent mothers. Almost all of the literature on this topic has been on child abuse prevention, primarily through identifying characteristics of adolescent mothers that are associated with an increased risk of maltreatment (Haskett, Johnson, and Miller, 1994; Dukewich, Borkowski, and Whitman, 1999; and Lounds, Borkowski, and Whitman, 2006) But it is difficult to assess risk for child maltreatment among adolescent mothers. Adult tools such as the Child Abuse Potential Index do not easily translate to adolescents (Blinn Pike and Mingus, 2000) and general parenting assessments such as the Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory do not always accurately assess risk (Connors et al., 2005). Even if one could identify exactly which adolescent mothers are most at risk, it can be difficult to formulate an effective prevention program (Olds and Kitzman, 2000).

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[1] US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families 2005 Child Maltreatment Report, Available at: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm05/chapterthree.htm#child (Accessed on May 6, 2008).

It can be hard to preemptively pinpoint the exact nature of the adolescent mother's problem and her circumstances are often changing. As a result, it is important to pursue successful treatment of maltreatment in adolescent mothers in addition to effective prevention. The primary way to address maltreatment once it has occurred is through the child welfare system. The underlying premise of the system is that, if possible, the maltreated child should be reintegrated, or reunified, with the parents. But if that is not possible, a suitable alternative such as adoption or legal guardianship must be found. This dissertation focuses on the reunification portion of the process addressing the following policy question: How can the child welfare system help adolescent mothers effectively parent their children without maltreatment?

The reunification process is generally comprised of two components. The first focuses on the individual, including the underlying reasons that cause an adolescent mother to maltreat her children and effective treatment programs to address and alleviate the problems. The second component focuses on the reunification structure or policies applicable to all adolescent mothers. Both are important. For example, if policies do not provide an adolescent mother with sufficient time in which to resolve her underlying issues, even the best treatment program will be ineffective. Similarly, an adolescent mother can be given an extensive period of time, but if the program she attends is ineffective, her problems will persist. This dissertation addresses the reunification structure and policy component. As a result, it will focus on how to improve the procedural, rather than clinical, aspects of the reunification process.

The first step in the analysis is defining the time at which the mother is an adolescent. Some studies define the population as those that were adolescents at the time their first child was born, regardless of their age at the time of the maltreatment (Earp and Ory, 1980; Boyer and Fine, 1992; Speiker et al., 1996). Other studies define the population as those that were adolescents at the time of the maltreatment (Bolton, Laner, and Kane, 1980; Miller 1984). The studies using the former definition are primarily interested in adolescent pregnancy and whether it is associated with negative outcomes. This study, however, is not focused on adolescent pregnancy but on understanding the experiences of adolescent mothers within the child welfare

system. As a result, adolescent mothers for the purposes of this study are defined as those who were under the age of 20 at the time of their first substantiated maltreatment allegation.

As described in the second section of Chapter 2, however, there has been little research on the topic of adolescent mothers involved in the child welfare system and no studies on their process of reunification. And studies regarding reunification in the general child welfare population, which is primary comprised of adults (Bolton, Laner, and Kane, 1980, Massat 1995), may not be directly applicable. Adolescent mothers have less resources than adult mothers (Schimeoller and Baranowski, 1985) They tend to have more psychological problems (Wurtz-Passion et al., 1993) and they are less mentally prepared for the rigors of parenthood (Borkowski et al., 1992). Given their age, their children are also different. They tend to be younger and there are fewer of them. Adolescent mothers are also socially in a different position from adult mothers. They cannot necessarily live on their own. They may not have had an opportunity to graduate from high school. They may not be able to drive. Or they may be under child welfare supervision themselves due to problems with their own parents. Adolescent mothers also commit different types of maltreatment. They are more likely to engage in neglect rather than abuse (Bolton 1981). Moreover, they are psychologically different from adults. Their frontal lobe, which is responsible for planning, reasoning and impulse control, does not fully develop until the mid 20's (Reyna and Farley, 2006).

As a result, any analysis seeking to improve the reunification structure for adolescent mothers must first lay a foundation for understanding who they are and what happens to them in the system. The child welfare system, however, is complex and unique. It is not strictly criminal or civil in nature but, instead, incorporates parts of both as well as its own unique rules, policies and procedures. It is governed by different legal standards including federal and state legislation, regulations and case law. California adds another layer of complexity as the child welfare system is largely administered at the county level through the local child welfare agencies. Consequently, the local county child welfare agencies and Juvenile Courts adopt their own polices and procedures for administering cases. This variation, combined with demographic differences in different geographic areas makes a global analysis of child welfare system policies

difficult, if not impossible. Accordingly, any detailed analysis must be done at the level where the system is administered.

In this dissertation I focus on adolescent mothers with a first time substantiated maltreatment allegation in Los Angeles County in 2003 and 2004. With respect to the population, analysis on child welfare outcomes works best using a longitudinal approach based on entry cohorts (Wulczyn, Kogan, and Dilts, 2001). With respect to the geographic location, Los Angeles County accounts for more than 33% of California's child welfare population. It also has significant ethnic and geographic variation, increasing the potential usefulness of any results. Moreover, most of the Juvenile Court child welfare records are located at Edelman's Children's Court in Monterey Park, which administers almost all child welfare court cases. This makes data extraction logistically easier. With respect to the time period, it is broad enough to provide a sufficiently sized sample. But it is limited enough to reduce potential policy changes that may occur over time, making the aggregation of 2003 and 2004 into one sample more reasonable. It is also recent enough to be relevant but still provides a sufficient period to follow individual cases over time. Finally, I worked as an attorney representing children in the child welfare system from 1999 to 2004 and so understand how the system works and its various nuances.[2]

As a first step in laying the necessary groundwork, in Chapter 2, I describe the entire child welfare process as it is implemented in Los Angeles County and the small body of literature that relates to maltreating adolescent mothers. Next, in Chapter 3, I develop a conceptual framework for understanding successful reunification with adolescent mothers. In Chapter 4, I describe an extensive data collection from Los Angeles County child welfare agency and Juvenile Court records which I use to measure the variables identified in the conceptual framework. Using the data described in Chapter 4, in Chapters 5 and 6, I depict the maltreating adolescent mothers

[2] As an attorney, I advocated for children's interests in court and coordinated with social workers and other professionals to obtain appropriate services for children. During my tenure, I did represent adolescent mothers. Although I have tried to be as objective as possible in my analysis, my perspective may be biased based on preconceived ideas about adolescent mothers and the system. To eliminate the potential for such bias, I have been explicit as possible about any assumptions I have made.

in Los Angeles County in terms of two broad categories of characteristics. In Chapter 5, I describe their individual level characteristics including characteristics of the adolescent mothers, child characteristics, family dynamics and the nature of the maltreatment. In Chapter 6, I describe how the adolescent mothers' cases progress through the reunification process and discuss their outcomes and the various procedural factors. In Chapter 7, I use the characteristics described in Chapters 5 and 6 to explore the relationship between successful reunification and factors over which the system has control such as the child's placement and the length of services. Finally, in Chapter 8, I make policy recommendations based on all the foregoing analysis as well as identify areas for future research.

2. THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM AND ADOLESCENT MOTHERS

2.1 THE CHLID WELFARE SYSTEM AS IMPLEMENTED IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY[3]

The primary federal statute governing the child welfare system is Title IV of the Social Security Act (the Act). In 1997, the Act was amended through the Adoption and Safe Families Act (AFSA). Under AFSA's provisions, if the states want federal monies to support their child welfare system, they must comply with certain requirements (Adler, 2001). AFSA was enacted to address the perception that parents were being given too long to regain custody of their children and, as a result, children were unnecessarily languishing in foster care (Adler, 2001) To address this issue, AFSA limits both the time and circumstances under which a parent is given an opportunity to regain custody of a child. 42 U.S.C. §§671(a)(15) and 675(5)(C); 63 Fed. Reg. 50,058; 50,072. Additionally, for those children who cannot be returned to their parents' custody, AFSA mandates adoption as the preferred option. 42 U.S.C. §675(5).

In California, the Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) governs the substance and procedure for child welfare cases. Although parts of it predate AFSA, it generally conforms to AFSA's requirements. WIC §§300 *et seq*. To flesh out the WIC policies and procedures, the California Supreme Court has enacted Rules of Court to govern child welfare proceedings.[4] The Los Angeles County Juvenile Court also has its own policies and procedures governing child welfare proceedings which are codified in its Local Rules of Court.[5] And the local child welfare agency, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), has its own policies and procedures to govern how it proceeds in child welfare cases which are codified in its Child

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[3] To the extent there is not a specific citation to support the policy or procedure identified, the information comes from my own experience working in the system.

[4] Available at: http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/rules/documents/pdfFiles/title_5.pdf (Accessed on May 2, 2008).

[5] Available at: http://www.lasuperiorcourt.org/courtrules/ (Accessed on May 2, 2008).

Welfare Services Handbook (Handbook).[6] Finally, there are published case law opinions from the California Appellate Courts and Supreme Court interpreting and ruling on the various provisions governing the child welfare system.

Within these various structures, there is a basic process that all child welfare cases generally follow in Los Angeles County. When DCFS receives information regarding child maltreatment, the information is referred to the DCFS Child Protection Hotline (CPH) for an initial assessment. Handbook §0050-502.10. In its assessment, CPH determines in which category the referral falls: Sexual abuse, General Neglect, Severe Neglect, Physical Abuse, Severe Physical Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Caretaker Absence/Incapacity, Exploitation or At Risk Because Sibling Abused. Handbook §0050-503.20. General Neglect does not involve actual harm to a child but instead consists of a risk of harm through the failure to provide the necessities of life or the failure to provide appropriate supervision. Handbook §0050-503.20. It also includes parental drug use to the extent it impairs a parent's ability to adequately supervise a child. Handbook §0050-503.20. Severe neglect is defined as "the negligent failure to protect a child from severe malnutrition or medically diagnosed non-organic failure to thrive and/or to permit the child or the child's health to be endangered by intentional failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter or medical care." Handbook §0050-503.20. But it also can include physical harm to a child through lack of supervision or pre-natal substance abuse. Handbook §0070-502.10. Emotional Abuse is nonphysical maltreatment (ridiculing or humiliation for the parent's pleasure) and includes exposure to domestic violence among household members. Handbook §0050-503.20.

After determining into which category the referral belongs, CPH determines whether an in-person response is necessary. Handbook §0050-504.05. If so, it assigns the case to the DCFS office that covers the primary custodial parent's address. Handbook §0050-504.05. If the assessment needs to be made after normal business hours or on the weekend, it is assigned to

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[6] Available at: http://dcfs.co.la.ca.us/Policy/Hndbook%20CWS/default.htm (Accessed on May 2, 2008).

the Emergency Response Command Post (Emergency). Handbook §0050-504.05. In investigating a referral, the assigned case manager, which DCFS refers to as a social worker, determines whether there is sufficient evidence to substantiate the maltreatment allegation. Handbook §0070-548.10. If so, the referral is promoted to a case. Handbook §0070-548.10. To the extent that the social worker does not believe there is sufficient evidence to substantiate the allegation, she can nonetheless promote the referral to a case under a substantial risk allegation for the sole purpose of providing voluntary services to the family. Handbook §0050-503.20. During the investigation, the social worker also completes a safety assessment and if the child's safety is compromised, the child is immediately removed from the parent's custody. Handbook §0070-548.20. For any child that is removed from a parent's custody, a hearing must be held in Juvenile Court within 3 business days to determine whether the child should remain detained from the parent's custody. WIC §§313(a) and 315.

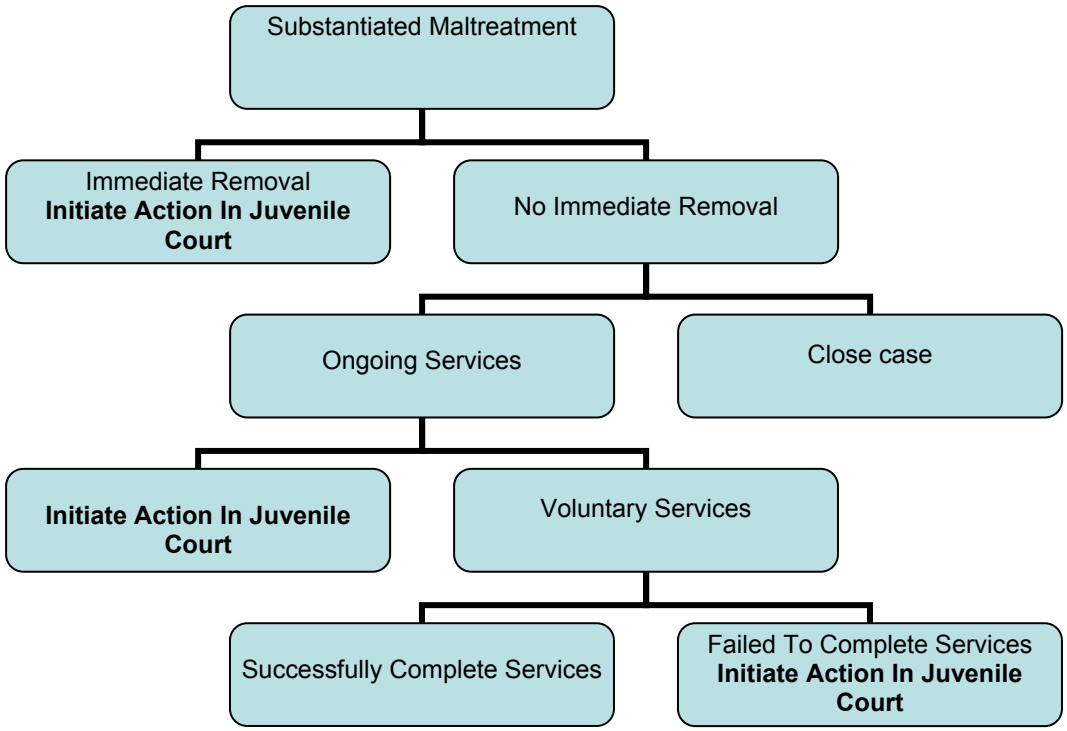
For those cases in which the child is not immediately removed from the parents' custody, a determination is made whether the case can be closed or whether it needs continuing services. Handbook §0070-548.10. If a case is not closed a case plan, which must be completed within 30 days, is developed for the family. Handbook §0070-548.10. For those cases initially assigned to the Emergency office, once the initial determination regarding removal has been made, the case is transferred to the appropriate DCFS office. The assigned social worker in this office then decides on whether to close the case and, if not, completes the case plan for the family.[7] Included in the case plan is a determination of whether the social worker will work with the family on a voluntary basis or whether the case should proceed directly to Juvenile Court for formal supervision. Handbook §0070-548.10. Voluntary services can include programs for the parents to attend (i.e., parenting class) as well as an out-of-home placement for the child. Handbook §0100-510.21. The primary consideration in determining whether to voluntarily work with the family is the parents' willingness to cooperate with supervision and participate in any programs or

[7] The DCFS Policy Manual was unclear about exactly how Emergency office cases are assigned after the initial removal determination. As a result, I contacted the assigned DCFS policy contact who confirmed that the Emergency office does not complete the initial case plan.

services the social worker feels are necessary. Handbook §0090-503.10. A parent generally should only receive voluntary services for up to 6 months, although services can be extended for up to 1 year under limited circumstances. WIC §16507.3.

For those cases that do not receive voluntary services or in cases where the parents fail to cooperate or comply with the services, the case proceeds to Juvenile Court. Figure 2.1 shows the general path of cases up to the point of involvement in the Juvenile Court.

Figure 2.1 – Path Of A Child Welfare Case Up To The Point Of Juvenile Court Involvement



To initiate an action in Juvenile Court for any case, the social worker files a document, called a petition. WIC §325. WIC Section 300 defines what type of maltreatment justifies Juvenile Court intervention.[8] The petition details the specific allegations that are made against the parents with facts to support the allegations and the specific provisions of WIC Section 300

[8] Federal law leaves it to the states to define what constitutes maltreatment. In Los Angeles, the categories of maltreatment in WIC Section 300 do not directly correspond to the categories DCFS uses in classifying its allegations. WIC §300 and Handbook §0500-503.20.

under which each allegation falls. WIC §325. The same facts can be used to support different provisions under WIC Section 300. In Los Angeles County, when DCFS files a petition to initiate court proceedings on a case, a court file is opened under the name of the mother and assigned a court case number. The same court case number is used for any of the mother's children who are the subject of a child welfare petition. Except for cases in the Lancaster area, all petitions are assigned to one of the 19 courtroom in the Edelman Children's Courthouse (Children's Court) in Monterey Park. Lancaster area cases are assigned to the satellite courtroom in Lancaster. Those petitions filed in Children's Court are generally randomly assigned to one of the courtrooms, except in cases where the parent is under supervision herself or has another child currently under court supervision. In those circumstances, the case is assigned to the courtroom that is currently supervising the parent or the other children. Each courtroom has a judicial officer – either a judge (elected or appointed by the governor), a commissioner (appointed by judges) or a referee (appointed by the Juvenile Court) – who conducts all the hearings and makes all the determinations on all cases assigned to his or her courtroom. The findings and determinations of commissioners and referees, however, can be subject to review by a Juvenile Court judge if a party feels that the ruling was in error. WIC §252.

At the initial, or "detention," hearing, if DCFS has removed the child from the parent's custody, the court determines whether that removal was appropriate. WIC §319. In addition to the issue of removal, at this hearing there is also an inquiry about the father's status. WIC §316.2 (a). A father qualifies as "presumed" if there has been a previous judgment of paternity, if the parents were married at the time of conception, if he has signed a declaration of paternity or if he has lived with the child in his home and openly acknowledges the child as his own. WIC §316.2 (a) and Cal.Fam.Code §7611. If a father is not "presumed" but there has been a genetic test proving paternity, he is considered a "biological" father and, otherwise, he is an "alleged" father. *In re Zacharia D.*, 6 Cal. 4th 435, 449 fn15 (1993).

At the detention hearing, the child is appointed an attorney to represent him or her. WIC §317(c). Parents who cannot afford their own attorney must also be appointed counsel if their child is to be removed from their custody. WIC §317(b). In practice in Los Angeles County, at

least in 2003 and 2004, mothers almost always were appointed counsel, even if they did not appear at the hearing. Fathers, however, were generally only appointed counsel if they appeared at a hearing, were incarcerated and therefore unable to attend, or were found to be the presumed father of the child.

In Los Angeles County, most children are represented by Children's Law Center Los Angeles (CLCLA), a non-profit organization that is divided into three separate firms (CLCLA 1, CLCLA 2, CLCLA 3). CLCLA has an overall staff of 185 attorneys, paralegals and social workers.[9] In 2003 and 2004 any indigent parent was generally represented by an attorney appointed from a panel of independent attorneys.[10] But if the adolescent mother was or had been under Juvenile Court supervision herself, her CLCLA lawyer usually also acted as her attorney in her case as a mother.

After the detention hearing, the court must conduct a trial, or adjudication, regarding whether the allegations in the petition are true. WIC §334. If the allegations in the petition are found not to be true, the case is dismissed. WIC §361.1. If the allegations are found to be true, then the case should proceed directly to the disposition of the case.

At the disposition hearing, the bench officer decides where the child shall live. The child must be returned to the original custodial parent unless there is clear and convincing evidence that the child is still at risk. WIC §361(c). For those cases where a child is not returned to the original custodial parent, custody is given to a parent who previously did not have primary physical custody unless doing so would place the child at risk of harm. WIC §361.2(a). When a child is placed with a former non-custodial parent, the Juvenile Court can either continue to supervise the family or can close the case with a family law custody order in place. WIC §361.2(b). If the child cannot be placed with any parent, preferential consideration is given to any relative requesting custody of the child. WIC §361.3. To be eligible for custody, the relative must

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[9] See CLCLA's website at: http://www.clcla.org/about.htm (Accessed on May 1, 2008).

[10] In 2007, however, the panel attorneys were reorganized into the Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers (LADL) organization which operates much like CLCLA except that its primary focus is representing parents.

meet the same requirements as a foster parent. WIC §309(d)(2). For those cases in which supervision continues, the bench officer orders services for the parents, usually in the form of programs designed to alleviate the problems that led to the maltreatment (i.e., attend a drug program, domestic violence program, a parenting class, etc). WIC §361.5(a).

To the extent a child is not returned to the original custodial parent and the case remains under Juvenile Court supervision, the parent gets an opportunity to regain custody of, or "reunify" with, the child, absent certain aggravating circumstances. WIC §361.5.[11] Although all mothers are eligible for reunification, only presumed fathers and biological fathers that have submitted a declaration of paternity are eligible. WIC §361.5(a). Parents who are given an opportunity to reunify are in "family reunification" mode. If at least one child was under the age of 3 at the initial detention, the parent is given 6 months of reunification services, although the time frame can be extended up to 18 months under limited circumstances. WIC §§361.5(a) and 366.21. If no child was under the age of 3 at the initial detention hearing, the parent is given 12 months of reunification services, although the time frame can again be extended up to 18 months under limited circumstances. WIC §§361.5(a) and 366.21.

For all family reunification cases, there is a hearing 6 months after the disposition. WIC §§366.21(e). At this hearing the bench officer must make a specific finding regarding the parents' compliance (no, partial or full) with the court ordered services. WIC §§366.21(e). The bench officer also must make a specific finding as to whether the social worker has provided a reasonable level of services to help the parents resolve their problems. WIC §§366.21(e). Generally, if the parent has successfully completed the court ordered services and has maintained visitation with the child, the child is returned to the parent. WIC §§366.21(e). To the extent the parent has only partially complied with the services and there is at least one child under the age of 3, the bench officer decides whether the parent is likely to complete the programs in the next 6 months. WIC §§366.21(e). If so, reunification services are continued and,

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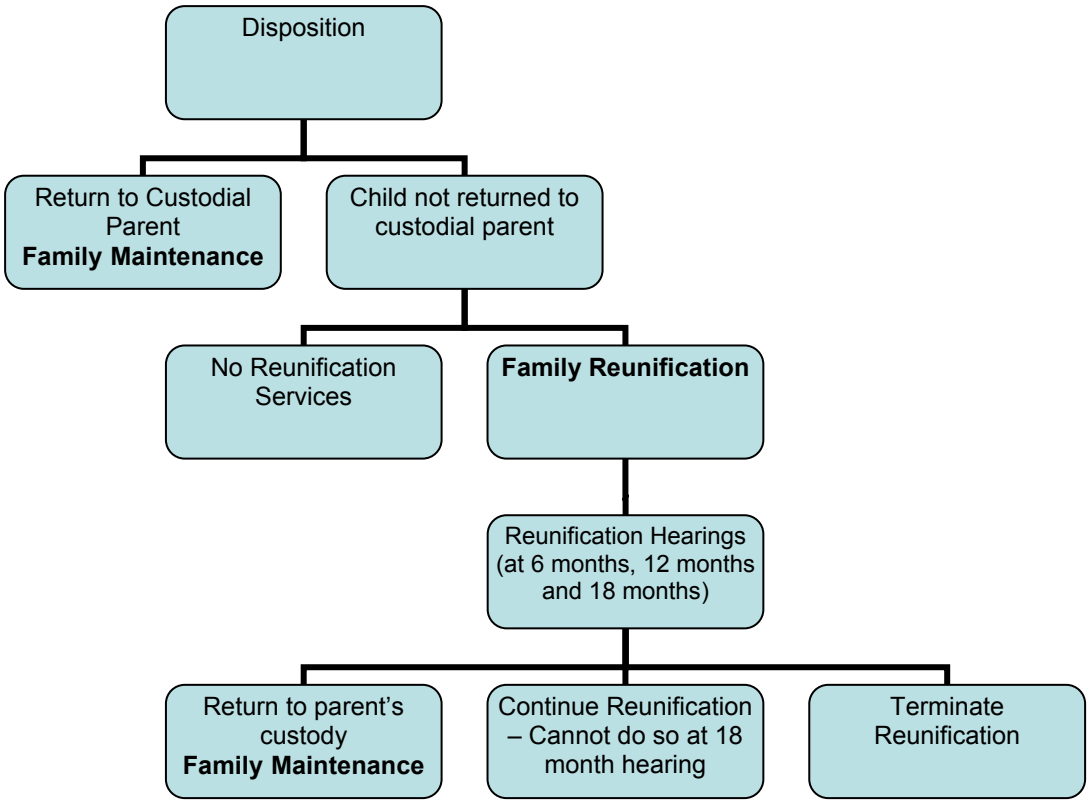
[11] In this aspect, California is more restrictive than AFSA as it has more exceptions to reunification. 42 USC §671(5)(D).

if not, reunification services are terminated. WIC §§366.21(e). In cases where reunification is continued, another hearing is held 6 months later and the case goes through the same process – return home, continue reunification or terminate reunification. WIC §§366.21(f). If reunification is continued, the next hearing must be held no later than 18 months from the date the child was initially removed from the parent's custody. WIC §§361.5(a). At this hearing the case goes through the same process as with the 6 and 12 month hearings except that if the child is not returned to the parent, reunification must be terminated. WIC §366.22.

Any case in which a child is returned to the custody of a parent (either at disposition or during the reunification period) generally remains under Juvenile Court supervision for some period of time. The supervision helps ensure that the parent completes all of the court ordered services and that there are no further problems. These cases are in a "family maintenance" mode and a hearing must be held to review the case every 6 months at which time the Juvenile Court can either close the case or continue supervision. WIC §364. Figure 2.2 shows the possible paths for a case after the disposition hearing and through the reunification period.

Figure 2.2 – Possible Paths For A Case After Disposition



If at any point reunification is terminated, the case is set for a hearing to determine the appropriate alternative permanent plan for the child, such as adoption or legal guardianship. WIC §§361.5(f) 366.21(e), 366.21(f), 366.22.

At every major hearing at which a parent does not have custody of a child, the court must make visitation orders for the child and the parent. The visitation is to occur as frequently as possible consistent with the child's well being. WIC §362.1(a). Generally, the Juvenile Court orders monitored visits, meaning that the parent must always be supervised with the child, or unmonitored visits, meaning the parent can visit the child unsupervised. In Los Angeles, a general order for monitored visits usually resulted in 1 hour visit per week. If the bench officer wanted something different (i.e., a specific monitor, place or timeframe for the visit), she had to order it specifically.

For each major hearing the social worker is required to submit a report that documents the child's placement, the parents' current address and birthdate, any previous child welfare history for the children, any criminal background on the parents, services the parent or child have

received, information on the child's physical and mental health and school progress, any changes in the child's placement since the last hearing and DCFS' recommendations regarding what findings and orders should be made. Handbook § 0300 et seq. For each type of hearing there are additional requirements regarding the information to be provided. The detention report must identify whether there are any relatives who have expressed an interest in having custody of the child and the party who reported the allegation, if known. Handbook §0300-303.15. The adjudication and disposition report must also identify relatives who are interested in custody in addition to providing background information on the parents including education, marital and employment history and status and any mental and physical handicaps. Handbook §0300-503.10.

If any party disagrees with the social worker's recommendations for a particular hearing, their attorney can have a contested hearing at which time they can present evidence regarding why the bench officer should not implement the recommendation.

If a child is returned home to a parent and another incident of maltreatment occurs, the social worker generally must file another petition regarding the subsequent maltreatment. WIC §342. In such circumstances, the petition goes through the same adjudication and disposition process as with the original maltreatment. WIC §342. But for those cases where the subsequent maltreatment occurred while the Juvenile Court was still monitoring the family (versus maltreatment occurring after the original case had closed), the applicable reunification period is not tolled during the time that the parent had custody of the child. WIC §361.5(a)(3). As a result, if more than 18 months has elapsed, the parent is not eligible for further reunification services even if she had custody of the child during some of that time. WIC §361.5(a)(3). If the minimum amount of reunification time to which a parent is entitled (i.e., 6 months for a child under 3) has already elapsed, the Juvenile Court has the option of not offering any further reunification for the second incident. WIC §361.5(a)(3).

2.2 EVIDENCE ON ADOLESCENT MOTHERS INVOLVED IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE[12]

There are few studies looking at adolescent mothers in the child welfare system and the studies that do exist are outdated or limited. The most recent study that looks at the prevalence of adolescent mothers in the child welfare population uses data from 1990 (Massat, 1995), while the one other study on the topic relies on data from the late 1970's (Kinard and Klerman, 1980). There are 6 studies that look at the characteristics of maltreating adolescent mothers but they actually involve only 3 different data sets, the most recent of which was from 1984 (Bolton, Laner, and Kane, 1980; Bolton and Laner, 1981; Bolton and Laner, 1986, Miller, 1984, Zuravin and DiBlasio, 1992' Zuravin and DiBlasio 1996). There are 2 studies looking at actual abuse rates in at-risk adolescent mothers, but they involve relatively small samples, the latest of which was from the 1990's (Flannagan et al., 1995; Stevens-Simon, Nelligan, and Kelly, 2001). With respect to the studies addressing treatment for maltreating adolescent mothers, one is more than 2 decades old and simply discusses ways to treat depression in this population (Barth, 1985). The other is at least from this decade but focuses only on treatments for drug abusing adolescent mothers who neglect their children and concludes from a literature review that there are no published controlled treatment outcome studies available (Donahue, 2004). I could identify no study which examined adolescent mothers' outcomes or experiences within the child welfare system.

In sum, there is no relevant body of recent literature on adolescent mothers involved in the child welfare system. There is only limited, historical information about their proportion within the child welfare population, their background characteristics and how they compare to their non-maltreating peers and maltreating adults.

Their proportion within the child welfare system seems to be diminishing over time, at least in some areas. In the 1960's they represented over 9% of the entire child welfare population from 30 selected cities and counties (Kinard and Klerman, 1980). In the late 1970's they represented

[12] For a more detailed discussion of the literature review methods, see Appendix A.

about 8% of the entire child welfare population in Georgia (Kinard and Klerman, 1980) and in the late 1980's they represented 5.8% of the child welfare population in Illinois (Massat 1995).

With respect to their characteristics, a study looking at 50% of all the child maltreatment cases in the area around Phoenix, Arizona in the late 1970's found that the population was dominated by Whites (Bolton, Laner, and Kane, 1980). That same study found that 3.8% of the adolescent mothers in the sample had been abused as a child, 1.9% had a police records, 3.5% had an identified drug or alcohol problem, 5.5% had a mental health problem, 33% were married, 79.9% had only 1 child and the average age at maltreatment was 17.8 years (Bolton, Laner, and Kane. 1980). Using the same data set, a later study found that 95% of adolescent mother were over 16 at the time of the maltreatment and that neglect was the predominant form of maltreatment (Bolton and Laner, 1986). Neglect as the predominant form of maltreatment was also found in a two later studies. But they only involved small sample sizes (N=15 and N=24, respectively) (Flanagan et al., 1995; Stevens-Simon, Nelligan and Kelly, 2001). One of these studies also found that maltreatment did not occur for the majority of adolescent mothers until after the child was more than 6 months old (Stevens-Simon, Nelligan and Kelly, 2001).

There have also been studies comparing maltreating adolescent mothers to their non-maltreating peers. One study found that neglecting adolescent mothers, as compared to non-maltreating adolescent mothers receiving public assistance in Baltimore in 1984, were more likely to have had a problematic childhood. During their formative years they were more likely to have been sexually abused, more likely to have runaway from home, to have gotten involved in the criminal justice system and to have resided with multiple caretakers (Zuaravin and DiBlasio, 1992). That same study found that the neglecting mothers also faced more difficulties and barriers than their non-maltreating counterparts. They completed fewer years of school, had their first child at a younger age, were more likely to have a premature and/or low birth-weight first child and to have had more than one child as an adolescent (Zuravin and DiBlasio, 1992). Another study using the same data found that physically abusive adolescent mothers as compared to the control group were more likely to have had problems with their mother and were more likely to have received public assistance as a child (Zuravin and DiBlasio, 1996).

In comparison to their maltreating adult counterparts, a third study using the Phoenix, Arizona data found that maltreating adolescent mothers were more likely to have neglected their children, were less likely to be White and were less likely to be married (Bolton and Laner, 1981). Another study looked at families reported for maltreatment from 1977 to 1980 in 26 counties around the United States. It found that maltreating adolescent mothers were more likely to have a substantiated neglect (vs. physical abuse) allegation but were also more likely to have a fatal or life threatening situation involving their children (Miller, 1984). There is a conflict between these two studies regarding whether adolescent mothers are more likely to have a referral for maltreatment substantiated. The Arizona study found that there was no difference in substantiation rates between adolescent and adult mothers whereas the national study found that adolescent mothers were more likely to be reported for maltreatment but less likely to have the report substantiated (Bolton and Laner, 1981; Miller, 1984).

This small body of literature provides a historical context and provides some insight into characteristics that might be associated with maltreatment within this population.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING SUCCESSFUL REUNIFICATION WITH ADOLESCENT MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN

3.1 VARIABLES TO INCLUDE IN THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Unfortunately, there is no comprehensive framework or model for understanding the reunification process, even for the general child welfare (Wulczyn and Zimmerman, 2004). As a result, one must be created using models and studies regarding related adolescent populations, along with the small body of literature and system description discussed in Chapter 2.

With respect to the reunification process, success for any parent is comprised of two parts: regaining custody of the child and parenting without maltreatment. A parent usually regains custody of a child in one of two ways. First, a parent can retain custody upfront despite the initial maltreatment usually in the form of voluntary services or, for Juvenile Court cases, family maintenance. Pursuant to law and policy, the primary factor that should influence whether a parent retains custody is the risk of harm to the child. This is assessed both by the parent's circumstances and the nature of the maltreatment. For cases in which the risk is too great for a parent to retain custody, the child is placed in an alternate living arrangement, either with a relative or in foster care. But in such circumstances, the parent is generally given an opportunity to regain custody through family reunification.

Under voluntary services, family maintenance or family reunification, the parent is provided services intended to alleviate the problem that led to the maltreatment. This is usually in the form of specific programs such as a parenting class to address appropriate forms of discipline or a drug program to address a parent's substance abuse problem. For those receiving family reunification, if a parent complies with the required programs within a specified time frame, the law generally provides that they should regain custody of the child. Once a parent regains custody, it becomes a family maintenance case. For those receiving voluntary or family maintenance services, if a parent successfully completes the required programs and does not engage in any subsequent maltreatment, the case is then closed.

In sum, successful reunification is primarily affected by compliance with programs and effective parenting. Unfortunately, I have no way of directly establishing how compliance or effective parenting with respect to adolescent mothers in the child welfare system works as there are no studies on the topic. But there are studies in related contexts that can at least provide some insight into factors that may be related.

There are studies looking at adolescents' compliance with medical, drug or substance abuse treatments. Looking at these studies, compliance is related a multitude of different factors. An adolescent with internal resources such as motivation (Lloyd et al., 1998; Kyngas and Rissanen, 2001), will power (Kyngas and Rissanen, 2001), self esteem (Greco et al., 1997), ability to perceive a problem (White-Kongig et al., 2007) and desire to change (Wong, Hser, and Grella, 2002) is more likely to comply. Internal resources seem to allow an adolescent to better understand what needs to be done and to actually do it. In addition to an adolescent's internal resources, the existence of a supportive environment such as a structured living arrangement (Smith, Weinman and Mumford, 1994; Wong, Hser, and Grella, 2002) and support from professionals, parents, family and peers (Kahn et al., 1999; Kyngas and Rissanen, 2001; Wilson and Ampey-Thornhill, 2001) make compliance more likely. The exact mechanism for increasing compliance is unclear. But one can hypothesize that a supportive environment may affect compliance by either increasing an adolescent's internal resources or providing greater access to the external resources that are necessary. Threats to the adolescent's social well-being (Kyngas and Rissanen, 2001), multi-faceted problems (Michaud, Frappier, and Pless, 1991), mental health issues or family problems (Bernstein et al., 2000) make compliance less likely. Presumably, these problems undermine the adolescent's internal resources or supportive environment. Age of the adolescent mother has also been found to be related to compliance. But there is a conflict in the literature with respect to whether younger or older adolescents are more likely to comply (West, Durant and Pendergrast, 1993; Greco et al., 1997). This conflict may reflect the fact that age may be a proxy for different variables which affect compliance differently. For example, younger adolescents are less psychologically developed (Reyna and Farley, 2006) and so may

have less internal resources. Or younger adolescent may be more likely to live in a supportive environment because their age necessitates that they live with a responsible adult.

To fully understand factors related to an adolescent mother's compliance, one must also take into account circumstances related to her children and her partner. Studies involving parents with young children in the general child welfare population, who are at least somewhat similar to adolescent mothers, can be informative. Parents of children with problematic behavior or health issues are less likely to regain custody (Frame, 2002), possibly due to a lack of internal resources. For example, the child's problems may reduce a parent's motivation to comply or the child's problems may reflect the parent's own lack of internal resources. Parents with young children are also less likely to regain custody (Frame, 2002). With respect to the child's age, caretakers may want to adopt babies (i.e., younger than 6 months) more than older children and if the caretaker wants to adopt the child, she may sabotage the parent's reunification efforts (i.e., prevent visitation), making it more difficult to regain custody.

With respect to an adolescent mother's partner, studies looking at the fathers of adolescent mother's children have found that younger adolescents and adolescents with more problematic behavior are more likely to get involved with older men (Lindberg et al., 1997). Adolescents involved with older men are also less likely to live with their parents (Lindberg et al.,1997). As a result, the age difference between the adolescent mother and the father may be related to compliance. It may reflect an adolescent mother's lack of internal resources or a difficult home environment. Or it may be that involvement with older men changes an adolescent mother's circumstances.

With respect to effective parenting after maltreatment has already occurred, general studies regarding adolescent parenting can provide some insight. For all parents, internal psychological resources seem exert the strongest influence over parenting behaviors (Belsky, 1984). But there are a myriad of other factors that are also related to parenting behavior. Schellenbach (1992) takes these factors and adapts them to adolescent parents. In this model, adolescent parenting behavior is the result of a complicated relationship and interplay between various factors. The factors include an adolescent mother's internal psychological resources, her

age, cognitive abilities, readiness to parent, health, social support system, socio-economic status, characteristics of the child (age and physical, developmental or behavioral problems) and the adolescent mother's relationship with the child (Schellenbach, Whitman, and Borokowski, 1992). In addition to parenting studies, the studies regarding maltreating adolescent mothers discussed in Chapter 2 can also provide some insight. In these studies, as compared to non-maltreating adolescent mothers, maltreating adolescent mothers were more likely to have been sexually abused, were younger at the time their first child was born, completed fewer years of school and had more than one child (Zuravin and DiBlasio, 1992). They also were more likely to have emotional problems, had received public assistance as a child and were less positively attached to a maternal figure (Zuravin and DiBlasio, 1996). Finally, just as with compliance, studies looking at subsequent maltreatment within the child welfare system with parents of young children can also be informative. In these studies, the nature and depth of the maltreatment seems to contribute to the likelihood of re-abuse. Those families with previous referrals and difficult to treat problems such as substance abuse are more likely to re-abuse (Frame, 2002). As with the previous studies, the exact mechanism through which any of the foregoing variables affect parenting is unclear. They may reflect a lack of internal resources or simply make parenting more difficult.

To fully account for the factors that may affect both compliance and effective parenting, one must also take into account the child welfare system players and policies discussed in Chapter 2. The first and perhaps most important player is the social worker. The social worker directly affects the reunification process, making the important upfront decision regarding in what context the services will be provided: voluntarily through informal supervision or through the more adversarial process of Juvenile Court supervision. For those cases in Juvenile Court, for each major hearing the social worker also writes a detailed report regarding the parents' progress and makes recommendations regarding what the bench officer should do. Social workers are also a parent's primary contact within the child welfare system and so can directly affect the mother's motivation by providing encouragement and support. Additionally, they are supposed to make sure that the parent has sufficient access to resources so they can successfully address

their underlying problems. They are required to provide parents with referrals to appropriate programs (parenting, drug counseling, etc) and bus tokens to the extent the parent relies on public transportation. For those parents who are receiving services while their child is living with them, the social worker is also supposed to obtain any necessary support services. For example, the social worker can obtain the services of an outside agency that provides in-home support and guidance to the parent.

But social workers' authority is not unfettered. Once an action is initiated in Juvenile Court, each parent and the children are appointed their own individual attorney to represent their interests and advocate on their behalf. At each hearing the attorneys can challenge the social worker's recommendations and present evidence. Through this role they can help increase an adolescent mother's motivation through direct encouragement and effective representation. The attorney can also directly affect outcomes by advocating for the mother to regain custody or asking the bench officer to order the social worker to provide specific services. The bench officer is another check on the social worker's discretion. She is required to independently review all the evidence and make her own determination about what should happen in any individual case. For family reunification cases, the bench officer must also make a specific finding as to whether the social worker has provided a reasonable level of support and services. She also has a direct impact on reunification as she ultimately decides the case outcomes. But as with attorneys, the bench officer can also help motivate the adolescent mothers by making the process seem fair. If so, the adolescent mother may be more likely to believe that her efforts to comply and effectively parent her child will be rewarded.

In addition to the individuals involved in administering the system, the context in which the case is administered is another important factor. For example, as opposed to the adversarial Juvenile Court process, the cooperative environment of voluntary services may improve the mother's motivation. It may also improve her relationship with the social worker which may in turn increase her access to the resources necessary to comply and effectively parent. Alternatively, working in the voluntary setting the adolescent mother has no attorney and there is no bench officer overseeing the social worker's case administration. So if the social worker does not

provide adequate services and support, the adolescent mother may actually be less motivated or have fewer resources than if she were in the Juvenile Court process.

In addition to the context in which the case is administered, another important policy is where the child should live to the extent placement with the parent is inappropriate. For example, if a child is placed with a relative, the parent may have greater access to and ease in visiting the child. This can strengthen the relationship between the parent and child making the mother more motivated to regain custody. But if there is a conflict between the relative and the mother, the relative may thwart the adolescent mother's reunification efforts which may strain the mother-child relationship. This may make it more difficult for the adolescent mother to regain custody and/or impair her ability to effectively parent if the child is returned to her care.

The nature of services provided to the adolescent mother may also have an effect on successful reunification. To the extent the services are tailored to and effective at addressing the adolescent mother's particular needs and circumstances, she may be more motivated to attend which, in turn, may make her more likely to regain custody. In addition to improving attendance, effective programs and services make it more likely that the adolescent mother will resolve her underlying issues which will improve her chances of effectively parenting once she regains custody.

The length of time a parent is provided services may also affect successful reunification. With respect to the time frame for services before the child is returned home, if the adolescent mother is not given a sufficient period of time to resolve her underlying problems, she may be more likely to have another maltreatment incident. Alternatively, if there is too long of a delay before the child is returned home, the mother-child relationship may be attenuated such that effective parenting is more difficult. With respect to the time frame for those in family reunification, as most adolescent mothers have a child under the age of 3, they are usually guaranteed only 6 months of services. At that point, the child must be returned home or an alternative permanent plan such as adoption must be found. As discussed in the Introduction, adolescent mothers tend to have fewer resources than adult mothers. As a result, they may not be able to comply with the required programs in such a short period of time, reducing the

likelihood of regaining custody. Alternatively, adolescents are notorious for procrastinating and for highly discounting events in the future (Reyna and Farley, 2006). So keeping the time frame short may force them to start complying right away which may actually increase the likelihood of regaining custody. With respect to the time frame for those in voluntary services or family maintenance, if supervision is too short, the family may not get the services they actually need. Alternatively, if the supervision is too long, it may be more difficult for the adolescent mother to transition to parenting without the structure and support of the system.

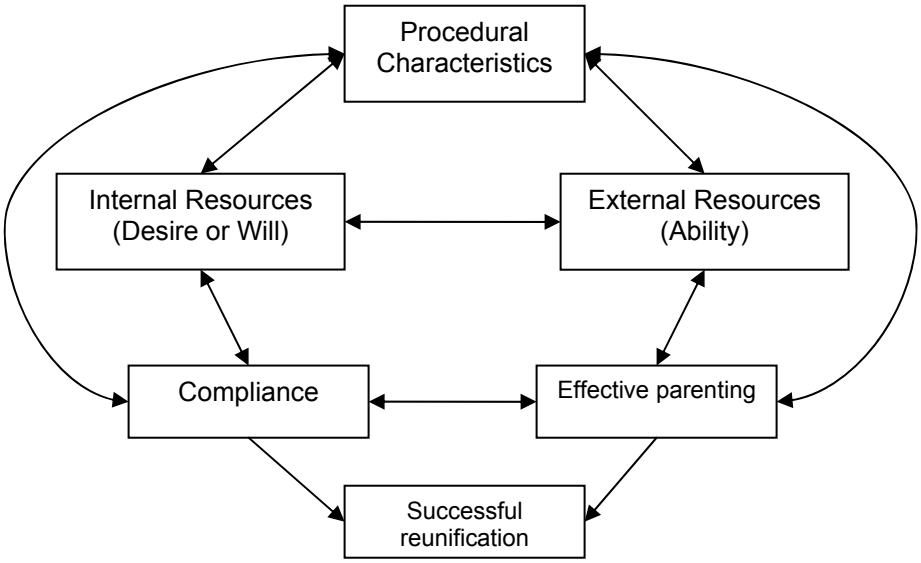
For cases in family reunification, parents are allowed to visit with their children in order to maintain a relationship. For those adolescent mothers in family reunification, having a liberal visitation order may increase the adolescent mother's access to the child. This may strengthen their relationship making her more motivated to regain custody and less likely to engage in subsequent maltreatment. Alternatively, if the adolescent mother has easy and frequent access to the child, her motivation to regain custody may be less and she may be less likely to comply with the required programs and services.

In sum, the nascent stage of research into adolescent mothers involved in the child welfare system allows only for a limited model. It can identify factors that may be related to successful reunification but cannot specify the manner in which the relationship exists. As with models of adolescent parenting (Schellenbach, Whitman, and Borokowski, 1992) and general models regarding the etiology of maltreatment (Belsky, 1993), the relationships between the various factors and the outcome is complicated. For example, the effect may be direct: a motivated adolescent mother may be more likely to attend the required classes or effectively parent, regardless of any other factor. Or the effect may be indirect: a motivated adolescent mother may be more likely to marshal the outside resources (i.e., arranging for transportation or child care) necessary for compliance and effective parenting. Or it may not reflect an effect at all but simply be a proxy for another factor: adolescent mothers who live with supportive parents are more motivated and have access to more outside resources. In addition to the different ways in which the various factors can affect outcomes, they also can affect each other (Schellenbach, Whitman, and Borokowski, 1992; Belsky, 1992). For example, the age of an adolescent mother may affect

with whom she lives. An adolescent mother who is under the age of 18 is not legally allowed to live on her own. As a result, she may be more likely to live with a parent or other responsible adult. Or the effectiveness of an adolescent mother's attorney may affect what type of visitation she receives.

Synthesizing all of the foregoing analysis, a conceptual model emerges. An adolescent mother's behavior (compliance and effective parenting) affects the outcomes of regaining custody with no subsequent maltreatment. An adolescent mother's behavior is influenced by her desire or will to engage in the behavior (internal resources) and her actual ability to do so (external resources). The behavior is also influenced by the procedural characteristics discussed above. But the exact mechanisms through which these characteristics influence the behavior are multi-faceted. Figure 3.1 illustrates this conceptual model.

Figure 3.1 - Conceptual Model For Understanding Successful Reunification For Adolescent Mothers



3.2 HOW TO MEASURE FACTORS IDENTIFIED IN CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Having identified the characteristics which should be included in the model, the next step is determining ways to measure them.

3.2.1 Successful Reunification

- Regaining Custody: The focus of this dissertation is on the reunification process and how it can be improved. Consequently, only those cases that regained custody through voluntary services, family maintenance or family reunification will be counted.

- Subsequent Maltreatment: For those cases that regained custody through voluntary services, subsequent maltreatment will be defined as a subsequent petition filed in the Los Angeles Juvenile Court. For Juvenile Court cases, subsequent maltreatment will be measured in terms of whether a subsequent petition was filed in the Los Angeles Juvenile Court. Due to data limitations, I cannot measure subsequent maltreatment that is never reported or maltreatment that is reported but not substantiated. As a result, it is likely that this proxy underestimates the actual rate of subsequent maltreatment.

3.2.2 Compliance

- For family reunification cases, the bench officer must make a finding at each hearing on whether the parent has complied with the court ordered services. The finding is either no compliance, partial compliance or full compliance. This finding will be used as a proxy for the parent's actual compliance.

- For voluntary service and family maintenance cases, compliance will be defined as the initial case being closed with no subsequent maltreatment petition filed while the initial case is under supervision

3.2.3 Effective Parenting

This variable cannot be accurately measured with this data and the only available proxy is subsequent maltreatment which is one of the ultimate outcomes.

3.2.4 Internal And External Resources

These variables are difficult to measure. With the data I have, I can only use outward signs that seem to indicate the existence, or lack thereof, of such resources. These outward signs, however, have limitations. First, it is not clear exactly what they are capturing. They may reflect internal resources, external resources or both. Or they may be measuring something that affects or changes the level of resources. Or it could be measuring something else entirely. Second, they do not capture all variability. For example, there may be adolescent mothers with no outward signs of a problem who still lack resources. But this dissertation is not attempting to establish a relationship between an adolescent mother's resources and outcomes. Instead, these variables will be included in the analysis in an attempt to account for heterogeneity that may be

confounded with the procedural variables of interest. As a result, even if the proxies discussed below are limited, they are still useful if they collectively capture some of the individual differences in the data. Using the studies on compliance and effective parenting discussed above, the following variables will be used:

- Age at the time adolescent mother's first child was born: Child's birthdate-mother's birthdate

- Age at the time adolescent mother is provided services: Date services started-mother's birthdate

- Adolescent mother's physical and mental health: DCFS is required to identify any physical or mental health problems regarding the adolescent mother in the disposition report. As a result, I will use information in the report as a proxy and assume that there are no physical or mental health problems absent an identified problem in the report. This proxy, however, likely underestimates the number with such problems as the social worker may not be aware of the adolescent mother's actual circumstances.

- Own maltreatment history: As discussed in the Introduction, maltreatment can affect or reflect individual resources. Moreover, to the extent that an adolescent mother has a strained relationship with her family, she may have less access to external resources. As I have no way of determining whether the adolescent mother has actually been maltreated, I will use a reported incident of maltreatment between the adolescent mother and her parents as a proxy for actual maltreatment. As I am leaving out unreported incidents, however, this proxy is likely an underestimation.

- Appearance at disposition hearing: The disposition hearing is arguably the most important hearing in the reunification process. An appearance at this hearing requires some effort and indicates some interest in and willingness to participate in the process. So it may reflect a level of internal resources. Moreover, since getting to the hearing requires outside resources (i.e., transportation), it may also be reflective of that variable.

- Child's age at time of maltreatment: Date of initial maltreatment-child's birthdate

- Number of children: Number of children

- Difference in age between the mother and the father: Father's birthdate-mother's birthdate

- Child's disabilities: In all of the reports DCFS files in Juvenile Court, it is required to identify any physical, behavioral, emotional or developmental problem with respect to the children. As a result, I will use information in the report as a proxy and assume that there are no disabilities absent an identified problem in a report. This proxy may, however, underestimate the number with such problems as such problems may not have been properly identified.

- Relationship between adolescent mother and child: Studies have found that children with disabilities are more difficult to parent (Schellenbach, Whitman, and Borokowski, 1992). As a result, the existence of a disability may indicate a difficult relationship between the mother and child. Additionally, to the extent that the maltreatment involved direct harm to the child (i.e., physical abuse), it may also indicate a difficult relationship. A child having an identified disability or maltreatment involving intentional direct harm to the child will be

used as a proxy for a difficult relationship between the child and the adolescent mother. This is a limited proxy, however, capturing only the most extreme problems.

- Involvement of the child's father: If involved, the child's father may be a part of the adolescent mother's network of social support. Here, involvement will be defined to exist if the father makes an overt act to be involved with the child and includes any of the following circumstances: (1) a child lives with the father; (2) a father appears at the disposition hearing; (3) a father receives some form of reunification services. But even assuming that the proxy adequately captures the existence of the involvement, it does not capture its nature.

- Adolescent mother living with a family member: To the extent the adolescent mother lives with family, it seems reasonable to assume that the individual is supportive in some way which may affect or reflect her internal and external resources. This proxy is likely an underestimation as it does not account for support from peers, which may be especially important for adolescent mothers. Unfortunately, however, that information is not available in my data.

- Adolescent mother's neighborhood: The environment in which a mother lives can affect or reflect her level of resources. Studies have found that the circumstances such as high poverty and crime and limited employment opportunities can contribute to problems with adolescent parenting (Schellenbach, Whitman, and Borokowski 1992). Moreover, studies on the general population have found that where the residents do not feel good about their community, there is also a higher rate of maltreatment, even accounting for socio-economic characteristics (Belsky, 1993). With respect to the general environment, in November of 1993, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors divided Los Angeles County into 8 different geographic or service planning areas (SPAs). As compared to the other SPAs, SPA 6 (South LA) has the highest teen pregnancy rate, the highest percentage of households with incomes less than 100% of the Federal Poverty Level, one of the highest unemployment rates, the lowest percentage of adults who think their neighborhood is safe, the highest homicide rate, one of the lowest parental support rates[13], one of the highest rates of households without a car, and the highest rate of child maltreatment referrals.[14] As a result, living in SPA 6 will be used as a proxy for a difficult neighborhood.

- Type of maltreatment: As discussed above, in substantiating the maltreatment, DCFS classifies the maltreatment into one of seven different categories (i.e., general neglect). For Juvenile Court cases, the petition not only states the category of maltreatment but the

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[13] Percentage of parents with children 0-5 years who say it is "very" or "somewhat" easy to find someone to talk to with about child rearing issues.

[14] Social characteristics of the SPAs are based on a 2002/2003 report by the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services on key indicators of health available at: http://www.lapublichealth.org/wwwfiles/ph/hae/ha/keyhealth.pdf (Accessed on April 18, 2008) and the 2005 SPA population profiles available at: http://www.childrensplanningcouncil.org/data/ddata.asp (Accessed on June 5, 2008).. Referral rates are based on information for 2004 contained in the 2005 Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN) annual data sharing report. Available at: http://ican.co.la.ca.us/dataD_loads.htm (Accessed on April 15, 2008).

details of the maltreatment (i.e., pre-natal drug exposure). These categories and details will be used as a proxy for the type of maltreatment that occurred.

- Complexity of the adolescent mother's underlying problems: Cases involving 2 or more substantively different maltreatment allegations (i.e., dirty home and domestic violence) and cases involving substance abuse, which is a difficult problem to treat, will be designated as complex.

- Socio-economic status: This is a complicated variable encompassing things such as race, income, English as a second language, education and other factors. Unfortunately, with this data, I do not have a comprehensive measure. But studies have found that both adolescent mothers and maltreating mothers in general are already more likely to come from a family and community with a low socio-economic status (Berglas, Brindis, and Cohen, 2003). As a result, it may be that there is no significant variation with respect to this factor. Consequently, it may not have much of an effect on case outcomes. But to capture any variation that may exist to the extent possible with this data, I will include the following:

    - An adolescent mother's school progress.

    - Race is often associated with socio-economic status so it will be included as well.

    - An inability to proficiently speak English can also be reflective of a low socio-economic status. Although I do not have information about an adolescent mother's actual language skills, the minute order reflects whether the adolescent mother used an interpreter at the court hearings. As a result, I will use that as a proxy for an inability to proficiently speak English.

3.2.5 Procedural Characteristics

- Social worker: I do not have access to data on individual social workers. Instead, I will use the following variables to capture some of the more systematic differences:

    - Case history: How a case evolved and progressed through the child welfare system can have an affect on the social worker's relationship with the parent. For cases not involving immediate removal, the primary consideration in providing voluntary services is whether the parent is willing to cooperate with the social worker. For cases which initially received voluntary services and did not close but, instead, ended up in Juvenile Court, a lack of cooperation with either the social worker or the assigned services is usually the reason. Once a social worker is assigned to a case, she generally stays on the case, even if the status changes. As a result, if an adolescent mother does not have her child immediately removed but still does not receive voluntary services or if she receives voluntary services but ends up in Juvenile Court while the initial case is still pending, it may be that the social worker would perceive a lack of cooperation. If so, a social worker on such a case may interact with a parent differently as compared to a social worker who does not have a similar history with the parent. Moreover, to the extent that a bench officer makes disposition orders against the social worker's recommendations (i.e., family maintenance vs. family reunification), the social worker may interact with a parent differently as opposed to a case where the bench officer actually implemented the social worker's recommendations. To capture the possible effect of different case histories I will include an indicator variable which will be a 1 if any of the following situations exists: (1) No immediate removal but no voluntary services; or (2) voluntary services but a subsequent petition is filed while the initial case is still

open; or (3) the social worker disagrees with the bench officer's orders regarding reunification services. Otherwise, the variable will be given a value of 0. In creating this variable, however, I acknowledge that it cannot fully capture or accurately measure the actual relationship between and a social worker and a parent. But with the data I have, it is the best measure available to capture at least some of the individual variation with respect to case history.

- Social worker's office: Each of the 24 social worker's office may operate and treat cases in a different manner. But there are too many to include a dummy variable for each. Each office, however, is assigned to a SPA and one may expect that offices within a geographic area (i.e., South Los Angeles) may operate in relatively the same manner. As there are only 8 SPAs, I will use the SPA to which the office is assigned to capture some of the systematic differences.

- Attorney: There is no way to measure the individual effectiveness of attorneys with this data. But some of the differences can be captured by identifying which type of attorney represented the adolescent mother. As discussed in Chapter 2, CLC lawyers have more resources available to them than the individual panel attorneys. As a result, a CLC lawyer will be used as a proxy for differences in representation.

- Bench officer: Each bench officer is permanently assigned to one of the 20 courtrooms. Once a case is assigned to a particular courtroom, that bench officer makes all the orders and findings on that case. But there are too many courtrooms to include a dummy for each. As a result, I will use the following proxies to capture some of the variability:

  - Lancaster vs. Monterey Park: I will include an indicator for a case assigned to the Lancaster courtroom. It is a satellite location so it may operate in a different manner from the courtrooms in Monterey Park.

  - Judge vs. referee or commissioner: As described in Chapter 2, the findings of referees and commissioners can be reviewed by a Juvenile Court judge. As a result, they may treat cases in a different manner from judges who can only be challenged at the Court of Appeal. I will include an indicator for having a judge to capture this variability.

- Nature of services: There is no way to determine the effectiveness of the services that are actually provided with this data and an evaluation of the effectiveness of individual programs is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, I will look at whether the services that are ordered seem to address the specific allegations (i.e., a domestic violence class for a domestic violence allegation) and whether the bench officer makes the legal finding that reasonable services were provided.

- Visitation: There is no way to determine the exact nature of the visitation that actually occurs between the adolescent mother and her child with this data. As a proxy, I will use the visitation that is ordered at disposition, recognizing that visitation that occurs does not always reflect what is ordered.

- Context of services:
  - Voluntary vs. Juvenile Court supervision: The decision to offer voluntary services must be made within 30 days. Accordingly, I will assume that any case that was initiated in Juvenile Court more than 30 days after the initial maltreatment received voluntary services.

  - Family Maintenance vs. Family Reunification vs. No services: Order made at disposition

- Child's placement: Who the child lives with

- Length of services:
  - How long before a child is returned – date child is returned – disposition date
  - Are family reunification services provided beyond first reunification hearing – indicator variable
  - How long are family maintenance cases supervised – date case is closed –date child is returned

3.3 CONCLUSIONS

Successful reunification for adolescent mothers is likely to be affected by a myriad of factors relating to the adolescent mother, her circumstances and the child welfare system itself. Some of these factors can be measured directly, some can be measured by proxy and some cannot be measured at all. With the conceptual framework in place, the next chapter details the actual data collection.

4. DATA COLLECTION IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

One of the reasons for the limited research in this area is the dearth of available detailed data regarding families and their circumstances. To that end, the data collection methodology described below serves not only to describe the process used in this analysis but also serves as a model other researchers can use in collecting data from child welfare administrative and court records in Los Angeles County.

4.1 OBTAINING ACCESS TO CHILD WELFARE RECORDS

Information regarding children involved in the child welfare system is confidential and not available to the public. WIC § 827. There is a process, however, to obtain access although it is often confusing and time consuming. Any person can petition the Juvenile Court for disclosure of information regarding a dependent child as long as a copy of the petition is given to "interested parties" and they are given an opportunity to object. WIC § 827(a)(1)(P). The actual process for obtaining access is detailed in California Rule of Court 5.552. Each local jurisdiction also may have additional guidelines and procedures.

Access to child welfare records for research purposes in Los Angeles County is governed by Local Rule 17.2(d). Under this Rule, the petition must describe the proposed research and the nature of the information sought using the "Petition and Order for Research" form adopted by the Juvenile Court, and include a copy of any materials or questions to be utilized in the research. A copy of the petition must be provided to DCFS, County Counsel, CLCLA and the Juvenile Courts Bar Association. Five days after the petition is provided to the appropriate parties, it must be filed at the Children's Court in Monterey Park. The various organizations are then given 20 days to object to the petition. After looking at any objections, the Presiding Judge rules on the petition and, if granted, issues an order allowing access to the requested records, along with any requirements or restrictions he feels are necessary.

Although the process seems relatively straightforward, in practice it can be more complicated. The notice requirement under Local Rule 17.2(d) that a copy of the petition only

needs to be provided to DCFS, County Counsel, CLCLA and the Juvenile Courts Bar Association appears to conflict with California Rule of Court 5.552. Rule 5.552 requires a copy of the petition also be mailed to the each child, their parents and all of the attorneys of record. Cal.R.Ct. 5.552(d). Normally, the Rule of Court, which is adopted by the California Supreme Court, would supersede any conflicting rule a local jurisdiction adopts. But WIC Section 827 vests the local Juvenile Courts with direct authority to give a third party access to juvenile records. WIC §827(a)(1)(P). California courts have consistently interpreted this provision to vest the juvenile court "with exclusive authority to determine when a release of juvenile court records to a third party is appropriate." *In re Elijah S.*, 125 Cal.App.4th 1532, 1541 (2005) (citations omitted). As a result, when a provision in Rule of Court 5.552 has been deemed to restrict a Juvenile Court's authority to permit disclosure, California appellate courts have found that provision invalid. *See In re Elijah S.*, 125 Cal. App.4th at 1553 (expressly rejecting that Rule 5.552 could "restrict the scope of the juvenile court's authority to permit disclosure of juvenile records"); *accord In re Keisha*, 38 Cal.App.4th220, 235 (1995) (rejecting the argument that rule of court 5.552 restricted the juvenile court's authority to provide access to the press: "The Judicial Council has no authority to so reduce the court's discretion. A rule that purports to do so is inconsistent with statute and, to that extent, invalid.").

Arguably, the notice provision in Rule of Court 5.552 restricts a Juvenile Court's ability to grant access to researcher as she will not actually know to whom to give notice until she is given access to the records. Moreover, even if a researcher could somehow divine upfront the names and addresses of the children, parents and attorneys who would be affected, research usually involves a large number of cases making individual notification a virtual impossibility. Presumably, that is why the Los Angeles Juvenile Court adopted Rule 17.2(d).

In my case, I addressed the potential conflict by contacting County Counsel and CLCLA prior to submitting my petition and described my project and the information I would be seeking. As no one raised the issue of notice, or any other objections, I followed the procedure set forth in Local Rule 17.2(d). There were no formal objections to my petition and the Presiding Judge of the Los Angeles Juvenile Court issued an order (Order) granting me access to the records

essentially as I requested. I started this process in September 2006 and received the Order in February 2007.

One of the reasons I believe that there were no objections is that I made it clear that I was not seeking any names or addresses. The only identifying information I requested was court case numbers so I could access the actual court file and I had a procedure to keep the court case numbers separate from the information I collected from the child welfare records, assigning each case a separate study identification number. As a result, there was virtually no way any party could be identified from the information I collected for the study.

4.2 IDENTIFYING RELEVANT CASES

Obtaining authorization to access juvenile court records is only the first hurdle in actually accessing the records. The next issue is identifying the cases that meet the study criteria. As discussed in the Introduction, the criteria is children with a substantiated allegation in 2003 or 2004 involving a mother who was under the age of 20 at the time the maltreatment was substantiated. To identify the relevant cases, both the mother's birthdate and the maltreatment date are needed. The Juvenile Court does not keep information about the mother's birthdate in its electronic court files. But I contacted DCFS' research division and discovered that this information is contained in DCFS' administrative electronic database. Once I received the Order[15], DCFS agreed to identify the relevant cases. To identify the relevant cases, DCFS used the mother's birthdate and the "case open" date, which is the date a referral is substantiated and promoted to an actual case. Using this criteria, DCFS identified 433 children and provided the following information:

- Alphanumeric child identifier – unique to each child – allowed identification of duplicate records
- Alphanumeric mother identifier – allowed identification of siblings related through the mother

[15] Authorization to access child welfare case records encompasses information contained both in official court records as well as DCFS records. Cal.R.Ct 5.552.

- Case start date – date on which maltreatment substantiated
- Case end date – date on which DCFS closed its case
- Mother's birthdate and race
- Child's birthdate, race and sex
- The DCFS allegation that was substantiated
- The original DCFS office to which the case was assigned
- Whether the case ultimately went to court and, if so, the court case number

I provided the Order to DCFS' research division in February 2007 and they identified the relevant cases and provided the foregoing information in May 2007.

From the children DCFS identified, I initially eliminated 28 that were duplicates using the unique client identifier. The remaining 405 children left a total of 369 potential cases. From the 369 potential cases, I eliminated 3 which had incorrect information such that none of the Juvenile Court records could be accessed. I also eliminated 3 cases in which the mother had no chance at the outset of reunifying with her children because she did not have legal custody, was deceased or voluntarily relinquished her parental rights.

As a check on the data DCFS provided, for those cases that went to Juvenile Court, I cross referenced DCFS' data about the mother's birthdate and the date of the substantiated maltreatment with the information contained in DCFS court reports. Based on information in the court reports, 21 cases DCFS identified did not actually involve a first time substantiation of maltreatment for the mother in 2003 or 2004. Instead those cases generally involved an older child with a substantiated maltreatment allegation prior to 2003 and a subsequent child with a substantiated allegation in 2003 or 2004. Families where there has been more than one substantiated maltreatment allegation may be considered at higher risk and so treated differently by social workers. Such families can also be subject to different legal standards. WIC §361.5(c). As a result, I excluded these cases from the sample so that all of the families in the sample would legally start from the same place (i.e., a first substantiated allegation). I also found in 11 cases that the mother was not actually under 20 at the time of the substantiated allegation and so

eliminated these cases from the sample. In most of these cases the birthdate of the oldest child had been entered in the DCFS database instead of the mother's birthdate.

Of the 130 cases that never went to court (i.e., only received voluntary services), I eliminated 6 cases in which the mother was under the age of 12 at the time her first child was born, assuming that the DCFS birthdate was incorrect.

Based on the foregoing, I identified a total of 325 usable cases.

4.3 DATA OBTAINED FROM COURT RECORDS

4.3.1 How Information In Court Records Is Organized

The juvenile court has two types of records for each case: paper files and electronic data.

With respect to the paper files, on the left side are any petitions DCFS has filed regarding any of the mother's children. Also on the left side of the file are the minute orders documenting the court's official findings and orders at each court hearing in the case. The minute orders also document the children who are the subject of the hearing, their birthdates, the parties that are present, the attorneys who represent the parties and whether any party uses an interpreter. On the right side of the file are DCFS reports and any other documents that are admitted into evidence at a hearing. The court file is organized in reverse chronological order with the most recent minute order and court reports on top.

In addition to the physical court files, there are electronic court records that can be accessed via a child's name or court case number. All the minute orders are contained in the court's electronic files along with basic information such as hearing dates.

4.3.2 Creating The Spreadsheet To Collect Information

Knowing what information was obtainable from the court records and what data I needed based on the conceptual model, I created a spreadsheet to organize the information extracted from the Juvenile Court files. The only identifying information in the spreadsheet is the study identification number. There are no names, addresses or case numbers and the file is password

protected. The key linking the study identification number and the court case number is in a separate file that is also password protected.

One of the difficulties in organizing information collected from court files is that after the disposition hearing, not every case goes through the same process or type of hearings. For example, if the child is returned home at disposition, the next hearing would be a family maintenance hearing. If the child is not returned home at disposition, however, the next hearing will be a reunification hearing unless the parent was not granted reunification in which case the next hearing would be a permanent plan hearing. To address this difficulty, I created a sheet for each major hearing that could potentially occur in a case. On each sheet, every study identification number is listed in the same numeric order. To the extent a particular hearing did not actually occur for a given case, an ”x” was recorded.

Another difficulty is that not every case has the same number of children. For those cases with multiple children, each child can potentially follow a different path as the case progresses. Since I was dealing with adolescent mothers, it seemed unlikely that many cases would involve more than 2 children. As a result, I created space on each hearing sheet to potentially record different information on at least 2 children. For those cases that involved more than 2 children, if their progress in the court system was different from one or both of the children on whom I recorded information, I noted the differences in a written log. In the end, there were only 6 of the 201 Juvenile Court cases that involved more than 2 children and in all those cases the children followed the same reunification path.

A final difficulty in organizing information from court records is that after the case is initiated on a child, the mother may subsequently give birth to additional children. Recording specific information on these additional children is logistically difficult given that their hearings progress separately and on a different track from the original children. As a result, the information in the spreadsheet relates only to the children under supervision at the outset of the case. But in the worksheet summarizing information on the last hearing in the case, I did note whether the mother had any additional children after the case was initiated and their status in the child welfare system.

After creating the general format for the spreadsheet, I created columns for the data I would collect for each hearing based on the variables described in Chapter 3. A detailed discussion of the specific elements in the spreadsheet is contained in Appendix B.

4.3.3 Collecting Information From Court Files

Once I created the master spreadsheet, I tested it using 10 cases, made some adjustments to the spreadsheet and then used it to collect information on the remaining cases.

To access the Juvenile Court files, I went to the Children's Court in Monterey Park, where almost all of the records on open child welfare cases in Los Angeles County are stored. I gave the clerk's office a list of court case numbers and they identified which files were housed at Children's Court, which files had been closed and moved to records storage in the Archives in downtown Los Angeles and which cases were handled in the Lancaster courtroom. For the files located at the Archives, the Children's Court court clerk provided the box location and box number where the file was stored. In all three locations I followed the same procedure to review the cases. The clerks in each location retrieved the case files via the court case number or box location and I reviewed the files in the clerk's office and recorded the information for each case in the password protected spreadsheet I created. For each case I reviewed, I completed a disclosure of information form to which I attached a copy of the Order. Initially it took me an average of 45 minutes per case to extract the necessary information from a court file but after a while, I was able to extract the information in an average of 20-30 minutes per case. Despite the relative speed with which I was able to extract the information, I only averaged about 4 cases a day at Children's Court and about 8 cases a day at the Archives as I spent a considerable amount of time waiting for the clerks to actually provide me with the files I requested. This was especially true at Children's Court where the clerks have obligations other than file retrieval.

4.3.4 Mother's Own Child Welfare History In Los Angeles County

Using the court's electronic records, Juvenile Court personnel used the mother's name and birthdate to identify on which cases the adolescent mothers had been under formal

supervision of the Los Angeles Juvenile Court as children themselves, their detention dates and the dates on which their cases closed.

4.4 TREATMENT OF THE DATA

After collecting the data, I did a data cleaning process as described in detail in Appendix B. In total, I made changes to less than 1% of the data elements in the various spreadsheets.

There were also data elements on which I was missing information for certain cases. My treatment of missing data is detailed in Appendix B.

As set forth in Table 4.1 below, comparing the population of cases started in 2003 to those started in 2004, there was variation. But none of the differences was significant, either in the background of the mothers, the decisions made regarding their cases or their outcomes.[16] As a result, the cases are treated as one population in the analyses.

Table 4.1 – Comparison of Cases From 2003 With Cases From 2004

	2003	2004
Number of cases	144	181
Age at first child	16.68 years	16.92 years
Age at case start	17.81 years	17.95 years
Mom involved in child welfare system as a child	26.57%	32.97%
Age of child at case start	1.31 years	1.03 years
Racial Distribution		
African American	22.38%	26.52%
White	18.18%	11.60%
Hispanic	54.55%	59.12%
Other	4.90%	2.72%
Serious Maltreatment	18.44%	13.33%
Immediate Removal	25.87%	28.02%
Informal Supervision	83.02%	77.10%
Go to court	61.54%	62.09%

[16] Using t-tests and chi-square tests and a p-value of .05.

	2003	2004
Reunification rates	65.04%	70.88%
Reabuse rates	30.56%	27.55%

4.5 CONCLUSIONS

Any researcher interested in obtaining information from child welfare records should identify exactly what specific information is needed. Then the researcher should contact DCFS, County Counsel, CLCLA and now, LADL, before filing any petition for disclosure and attempt to preemptively resolve any objections they may have to the request. There is less likely to be an objection to the extent the petition does not seek any identifying information (i.e., names and addresses) and there is a specific procedure to keep any information collected confidential and protected. Prior to filing the petition the researcher should also negotiate with DCFS regarding any information it will be providing from its electronic databases, including the identification of relevant cases. Expect the approval process to obtain access to take at least 6 months and possibly longer if seeking identifying information such as names or addresses.

After obtaining approval, the process for DCFS to identify relevant cases and provide information from its database may take at least 3-4 months. DCFS' research division has to attend to internal requests before processing requests from outside researchers. Once the relevant cases are identified, a researcher who intends to extract information from the Juvenile Court files should plan on at least 2 hours per file, exclusive of travel time to the file locations. In addition to the time it takes to extract the data, the court clerks at Children's Court only have time to retrieve a few files at a time because they are attending to other duties associated with the ongoing business of the Juvenile Court. As a result, a substantial portion of time is spent waiting for a file to review. For files located at the Archives, the retrieval process is a little faster as they do not have ongoing court business to attend to like the Children's Court clerks.

In extracting information from the court files, a spreadsheet should be created for each major court hearing: detention, adjudication/disposition, 1stst reunification hearing, 2ndnd reunification hearing, 3rdrd reunification hearing, 1stst family review hearing, 2ndnd family review hearing, 3rdrd family review hearing, permanent plan hearing, subsequent detention hearing,

subsequent adjudication/disposition hearing and final hearing. In designing the spreadsheet, the researcher should keep in mind that children may follow different paths through the court process and that subsequent children may come under court supervision after the initial case is started and those children may also follow a different path. If the research involves older mothers who are likely to have multiple children, it may be best to record information by child (vs. by mother) with a code to tie related children's records together.

As discussed in Appendix B, information from both DCFS and the Juvenile Court records is subject to inaccuracies. One should be especially careful in using DCFS records to determine the number of children involved on a particular case as its records are maintained by child rather than by family. With respect to a parent's own child welfare history, the most accurate and complete source of information appears to be a search of the Juvenile Court's electronic database using the parent's name and birthdate. Although in doing the search, different spelling variations of the name should be tried if a particular name is not found in the database. Additionally, there is often more than one person in the database with the same name the so a parent's birthdate should also be used to confirm that the individual identified is correct. As such a search can be time consuming and requires the cooperation of Juvenile Court personnel to actually conduct the search, an alternative method to obtain the information is through the adjudication/disposition court report. But it should be noted that using this method will likely result in an underestimation of the number of parents who have their own child welfare history as this information may be inadvertently left out of the court report.

5. ADOLECENT MOTHERS: INDIVIDUAL LEVEL CHARACTERISTICS

In this chapter I describe the individual level characteristics of the adolescent mothers including parental characteristics, child characteristics, family context and the nature of maltreatment. In addition to describing the maltreating population, I also explore whether the individual level characteristics of these adolescent mothers are significantly different from historical maltreating adolescent mother populations, the contemporary non-maltreating adolescent mother population in Los Angeles County and contemporary maltreating adult mothers in the child welfare system in Los Angeles County.

As discussed in detail below, maltreating adolescent mothers are a unique and vulnerable group.

5.1 CREATION OF COMPARISON POPULATIONS

To put the individual level characteristics into context, I created two comparison populations. The first is the non-maltreating adolescent mother population in Los Angeles in 2003 and 2004 using information about adolescent mothers who gave birth in Los Angeles County from 1998 to 2004.[17] To create the general population of adolescent mothers, I included all mothers who were under 15 and who gave birth from 1998 to 2004, mothers who were 15 who gave birth from 1999 to 2004, mothers who were 16 who gave birth from 2000 to 2004, mothers who were 17 who gave birth from 2001 to 2004, mothers who were 18 who gave birth from 2002 to 2004 and mothers who were 19 who gave birth in 2003 or 2004. Then to create the non-maltreating population I subtracted the adolescent mothers involved in the child welfare system from the general population. But there was no way to determine how many other children the

[17] Available at: http://www.cdph.ca.gov/data/statistics/Pages/NatalityDataTables.aspx (Accessed on February 22, 2008).

non-maltreating adolescent mothers had at the time they were included in the comparison population. As a result, there are likely adolescent mothers included in the comparison population who are not first time mothers (i.e., an 18 year old who gave birth in 1998 and had previously given birth at age 16 in 1996). There also may be those who have been counted twice (i.e., gave birth as a 16 year old in 1998 and subsequently gave birth as an 18 year old in 2000). So it is likely that the comparison population overestimates to some degree the number of older adolescent mothers.

The second comparison population is adult mothers with children 5 or under who had a substantiated maltreatment allegation in Los Angeles County in 2003 or 2004. The University of California at Berkley compiles data on the child welfare population in California both at a state and a county level using information contained in the child welfare agency database from each county.[18] This information is tracked according to child, not family. As a result, the comparison group is actually based on children rather than on mothers. To create the general population, I took all children 5 and under with a substantiated maltreatment allegation in 2003 or 2004 in Los Angeles County. Then, to create the population of adult mothers' children, I subtracted the adolescent mothers' children from the general population. As detailed in Appendix B, due to data limitations there are some cases on which it is likely that I have identified only one child on a case when, in fact, there is more than one child. But the children of adolescent mothers represent less than 2% of the overall child welfare population for children 5 and under with a substantiated allegation in 2003 and 2004 in Los Angeles County. As a result, this possible underestimation of the number of adolescent mothers' children is unlikely to significantly skew the comparisons of adolescents to adults.

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[18] Available at: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/default.aspx, (Accessed on February 27, 2008).

5.2 ANALYTIC METHODS

In the comparison analysis with other populations, the null hypothesis is that the mean for the maltreating adolescent mother population is the same as the mean for the other populations. As a result, unless otherwise noted, I use a one sample, two-sided t-test and a significant difference is determined by using a p-value of .05.

5.3 PARENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

5.3.1 Race

As illustrated in Table 5.1, racially, the majority of the adolescent mothers involved in the child welfare system are Hispanic, followed by African Americans, Whites, Asians and Native Americans. As compared to the racial distribution of a population of maltreating adolescent mothers in Arizona in 1976-1978 (Bolton 1980), minorities have now become dominant.

Table 5.1 - Racial Distribution Of Maltreating Adolescent Mothers In Los Angeles County In 2003 and 2004

	LA County Maltreating Adolescent Mothers – 2003-2004
Hispanic	57.10%
African American	24.69%
White	14.51%
Asian	3.70%
Native American	<1%

As illustrated in Table 5.2, compared to the non-maltreating adolescent mother population in Los Angeles County, adolescent mothers involved in the child welfare system are more likely to be African American and White and less likely to be Hispanic.

Table 5.2 – Racial Distribution Of Maltreating Adolescent Mothers – Comparison With Los Angeles County Non-Maltreating Adolescent Mother Population

	Maltreating Adolescent Mothers	Non-Maltreating Adolescent Mothers
Hispanic*	**57.10%**	**82.58%**
African American*	**24.69%**	**10.49%**
White*	**14.51%**	**5.10%**
Asian	3.70%	1.82%

But it may be that the percentage of African Americans and Whites in the child welfare population are being inflated by the significant under-representation of Hispanics. In fact, when you look at just the population of African Americans and Whites, maltreating adolescent mothers are not more likely than their non-maltreating counterparts to be African American as compared to Whites. But when you look at just the population of Hispanics and Whites, maltreating adolescent mothers are much less likely than their peers to be Hispanic. As a result, it appears that there is really only a racial disparity regarding maltreating adolescent mothers with respect to Hispanics.

It may be that Hispanics possess certain individual level characteristics that make them less likely to maltreat their children or that they live in an environment or within a support structure that has a protective effect. Or it may be that certain procedural characteristics (i.e., Hispanics are less likely to be referred for maltreatment or are less likely to have a referral substantiated) are causing the difference. Unfortunately, I do not have any specific information about the characteristics of the general adolescent mother population other than their age and racial distribution. As a result, there is no way to determine which characteristics, if any, are actually causing the effect.

5.3.2 Age

The average age of the maltreating adolescent mothers at the time their first child was born was 16.8 years, with 12% under the age of 15 and 74% under the age of 18. As illustrated in Table 5.3, comparing the maltreating adolescent mothers to the non-maltreating adolescent

mother population, the maltreating adolescent mothers are significantly younger at the time their first child was born. As discussed above, it is likely that the comparison population actually underestimates the percentage of younger non-maltreating adolescent mothers. But the finding that maltreating adolescent mothers are significantly younger is relatively robust. If the percentage of non-maltreating adolescent mothers under 15 doubled (i.e., to 8%), the difference would still be significant. Similarly, the percentage of non-maltreating adolescent mothers under 18 could increase by almost a third (i.e., to 68%) and the difference would still be significant.

Table 5.3 – Average Age of Adolescent Mothers At Time Of First Child's Birth – Comparison Of Maltreating and Non-Maltreating Adolescent Mothers

	Maltreating Adolescent Mothers	Non-Maltreating Adolescent Mothers
Under 15*	**11.69%**	**3.87%**
Under 18*	**74.15%**	**53.20%**

At the time of the substantiated maltreatment, the average adolescent mother was 17.9 years old, which is consistent with the one other comparable, historical study (Bolton, Laner, and Kane, 1980). But the mothers in that study were less likely to be very young. 11% of the maltreating adolescent mothers in Los Angeles were under 16 at the time of maltreatment while in that study, only 5% of the substantiated cases had a mother who was under the age of 16 (Bolton and Laner, 1986).

5.3.3 Adolescent Mothers' Own Maltreatment History

By the time of the maltreatment to their own child, 24% (79 of 325) had been maltreated themselves such that they had been under formal supervision of the child welfare system in Los Angeles County. As this does not include those who received voluntary services in Los Angeles County, those under supervision in another jurisdiction or those whose maltreatment was never reported, it is likely that this underestimates the actual number of adolescent mothers who had a maltreatment history. For those adolescent mothers who had a history of formal child welfare supervision themselves, they spent an average of 6.33 years in the system with more than 80% spending more than 2 years in the system.

5.3.4 Other Background Information

In addition to age, race and maltreatment history, for the 201 cases that eventually proceeded to Juvenile Court, I was able to collect other background information from the court records about the adolescent mothers. For adolescent mothers at the time of the disposition hearing, 38% (68 of 178) had a criminal history and 11% (9 of 80) of those who were 19 graduated from high school. None (0 of 185) had an identified physical disability and 17% (31 of 187) had an identified mental illness or disability. 57% (107 of 188) had a problematic background as measured by having a previous maltreatment referral or a criminal history. Only 3% (6 of 186) were married which is significantly less than other historical study which found that 33% were married (Bolton, Laner and Kane, 1980). 5% (9 of 179) of those 16 or older were employed at the time of disposition and 12% (22 of 191) used an interpreter. 66% (123 of 187) of the adolescent mothers attended the disposition hearing.

5.4 CHILD CHARACTERISTICS

With respect to the children of the adolescent mothers, there were an equal number of females and males - 51% of the children were female and 49% were male. This is generally in line with the children of adult maltreating mothers as 49% were female and 51% were male. As illustrated in Table 5.4, the racial distribution of the children of maltreating adolescent and adult mothers is similar. But despite the similar distribution, it seems that their racial issues are different. As discussed above, with respect to maltreating adolescent mothers, there seems to be a Hispanic racial disparity. But with respect to the children of maltreating adult mothers, the racial disparity appears to be with African Americans.

Table 5.4 – Racial Distribution Of Children Of Maltreating Adolescent Mothers – Comparison To Children Under 5 in Los Angeles County

	Children of Maltreating Adolescent Mothers	Children Of Maltreating Adult Mothers	All Children 5 and Under in Los Angeles County[19]
African American	24.73%	20.81%	7.82%
Asian	3.26%	3.89%	8.09%
Hispanic	61.14%	61.23%	65.94
White	10.87%	14.06%	18.15%

On average, the oldest child was 1.07 years old at the time of maltreatment with more than 55% not having any substantiated maltreatment until the child was more than 6 months old. The average age is generally consistent with the one other study that looked at the issue, although the sample in that study was very small (N=24) (Stevens-Simon, Nelligan, and Kelly, 2001). Studies have found that adolescent mothers of toddlers are more likely to suffer from depression as compared to adolescent mothers of infants (Gelles, 1986). As a result, it may be that adolescent mothers are able to deal with the relatively straightforward needs of an infant but as the child gets older they are not equipped to deal with the additional physical and emotional demands of the child.

For the cases that eventually proceeded to Juvenile Court, 5% (9 of 229) of the children had a physical disability while 8% (19 of 229) had a mental or developmental disability.

5.5 FAMILY CONTEXT

5.5.1 Number Of Children

14% (41 of 293) of the adolescent mothers had 2 or more children at the time of maltreatment. With respect to Juvenile Court cases, 22% (45 of 201) of the adolescent mothers had 2 or more children at start of Juvenile Court proceedings. This is consistent with a previous

[19] Berkley's data includes information on the child population in the various California counties using data from the California Department of Finance's annual population projections. Available at: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/RefRates.aspx (Accessed on May 28, 2008). I averaged the racial distributions for children under 5 in Los Angeles County for 2003 and 2004.

study which found 20% of maltreating adolescent mothers had 2 or more children (Bolton, Laner, and Kane 1980).

5.5.2 Age Difference Between Adolescent Mothers And Child's Father

For the cases that went to Juvenile Court, on average, the fathers of the adolescent mothers' children were 5 years older than the adolescent mothers, with more than 25% more than 6 years older.

5.5.3 Involvement Of Fathers

Using the proxy discussed in Chapter 3, for Juvenile Court cases, at least 1 father of the children was involved in 61% (123 of 201) of the cases.

5.5.4 With Whom The Adolescent Mother Lives

For Juvenile Court cases, Table 5.5 sets forth the living arrangements of the maltreating adolescent mothers at the time of the disposition hearing. Notably, almost 50% of the adolescent mothers live somewhere other than with their parents, family or another structured environment. DCFS did not know the living circumstances of another 16%.

Table 5.5 - Distribution Of Adolescent Mother's Living Arrangement At The Time Of Disposition For Juvenile Court Cases

	(N=186)
At home	16.31%
With extended family	6.99%
In DCFS Placement	14.52%
On their own or with friends	46.78%
Unknown	15.59%

5.5.5 Where The Adolescent Mothers Live

For cases not assigned to the Emergency office, the initial DCFS office assignment should generally reflect the area where the adolescent mother lives. In November of 1993, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors divided Los Angeles County into 8 different geographic areas, or service planning areas (SPAs). A map of the different areas is provided below.

As illustrated in Table 5.6, the adolescent mothers are not highly concentrated in any one particular area in Los Angeles County.[20] The lowest concentration is in the West Los Angeles

[20] As discussed in Chapter 4, 9.85% (32 of 325) of the cases in which the SPA is missing. Although there is no difference in those cases with and without a SPA code with respect to the age of the mother or the child, African Americans are significantly more likely to have no SPA code (16.25% vs. 7.33%). As 63% of maltreating African American adolescent mothers come from either SPA 1, SPA 6 or SPA 8, it may be that the cases without a SPA code are more likely to come from one of these SPAs and, if so, may change any analysis using SPA codes.

area (SPA 5) which is not surprising given that it has an extremely low teenage birth rate compared to the other areas.[21]

Table 5.6 – Distribution Of Maltreating Adolescent Mothers By SPA In Los Angeles County

SPA 1 (Lancaster)	14.04%
SPA 2 (The Valley)	10.27%
SPA 3 (Pasadena)	17.47%
SPA 4 (Mid LA)	7.88%
SPA 5 (West LA)	5.82%
SPA 6 (South LA)	14.04%
SPA 7 (East LA)	11.99%
SPA 8 (South Bay)	16.44%
Out of county	2.05%

With respect to the social and environmental characteristics of each area, as discussed in Chapter 3, South Los Angeles has the most difficult circumstances. Studies have found that the circumstances that exist in South Los Angeles (i.e., high poverty and crime, limited employment opportunities) can contribute to problems with adolescent parenting (Schellenbach, Whitman, and Borokowski, 1992). Moreover, studies on the general population have found that where, as in South Los Angeles, the residents do not feel good about their community; there is also a higher rate of maltreatment, even accounting for socio-economic characteristics (Belsky, 1993). Consequently, one might expect that within the general population of adolescent mothers, those from South Los Angeles (as compared to those from all other areas in Los Angeles County) may be more likely to become involved with the child welfare system. But, in fact, adolescent mothers from South Los Angeles are significantly underrepresented. [22] 23% of the general adolescent

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[21] Based on a 2002/2003 report by the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services on key indicators of health available at: http://www.lapublichealth.org/wwwfiles/ph/hae/ha/keyhealth.pdf (Accessed on April 18, 2008).

[22] The distribution of the general adolescent mother population among the SPAs was calculated by averaging the racial distribution of live births to girls age 15-19 in each SPA from 2000-2004. The information about the live births to adolescent mothers is contained in the annual Los Angeles County Perinatal Indicators report available at: http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/mch/rep/rep.htm (Accessed on May 1, 2008). There is no

mother population lives in South Los Angeles but only 14% of the maltreating adolescent mothers live there. Instead, the overrepresentation occurs with Lancaster (represents 4% of general adolescent mother population but 14% of maltreating population) and West Los Angeles (represents 1% of general adolescent mother population but 5% of maltreating population).

Area characteristics do not seem to explain these apparent discrepancies. South Los Angeles has the most difficult circumstances while West Los Angeles is the most affluent and Lancaster is somewhere in the middle. It may be that the general adolescent mother population in certain areas have individual characteristics that make them more or less likely to become involved in the child welfare system. Or it may be that procedural factors play a role. For example, certain areas may have a higher referral rate for adolescent mothers or DCFS offices in certain areas may be more likely to substantiate the adolescent mother maltreatment referrals they receive. Unfortunately, I do not have sufficient data on the general adolescent mother population to explore these possible relationships.

5.6 NATURE OF MALTREATMENT[23]

Table 5.7 details the type of maltreatment DCFS substantiated for the adolescent mothers.[24] Less than 20% of the cases involve physical harm to the child (physical abuse or severe neglect). Instead, general neglect is the predominant form of maltreatment representing more than 43% of the substantiated cases. Additionally, almost 20% of the cases involve only a risk of maltreatment.

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information in the report about mothers under the age of 15 that is available according to SPA. But as those mothers represent less than 2% of the births to adolescent mothers in Los Angeles, their exclusion from the overall distribution should not significantly affect the results.

[23] The comparisons in this section are based on a chi-square test as the variables are categorical. A p-value of .05 was used to determine significance.

[24] As discussed in Chapter 4, in 14.15% (46 of 325) of the cases, DCFS could not identify the allegation substantiated. If these cases all represent a certain type of allegation, the analysis in this section may not be accurate. But there is no difference in DCFS decisions (i.e., immediate removal rates, voluntary service rate or going to Juvenile Court rate) regarding those cases with an allegation and those cases without. As a result, it does not appear that these cases are grouped around any particular allegation.

Table 5.7 – Types of Maltreatment Among Children Of Adolescent Mothers

	# of children	Percent of Total
At risk, sibling	14	4.38%
Caretaker Absence	28	8.75%
Emotional Abuse	34	10.63%
Exploitation	1	.31%
General Neglect	138	43.13%
Physical Abuse	24	7.50%
Severe Neglect	23	7.19%
Substantial Risk	58	18.13%
Sex Abuse	0	0%

Comparing the children of adolescent and adult mothers, not surprisingly children of adolescent mothers are significantly less likely to have sibling at risk allegation (4.38% vs. 12.42%). Given their age, adolescent mothers are simply less likely to have more than one child so there is less of an opportunity for a sibling at risk allegation. Eliminating this allegation to make the populations more similar, as illustrated in Table 5.8, the maltreatment involved with adolescent mothers is significantly different from that involved with adult mothers. Maltreatment with the children of adolescent mothers is significantly less likely to involve emotional abuse, and sex abuse to the children of adolescent mothers is non-existent. But maltreatment with the children of adolescent mothers is more likely to involve severe neglect and substantial risk.

Table 5.8 – Types Of Maltreatment – Comparison Of Adolescent And Adult Mothers

	Children of Maltreating Adolescent Mothers	Children under 5 of Maltreating Adult Mothers
Caretaker Absence	9.15%	9.62%
Emotional Abuse*	**11.11%**	**18.62%**
Exploitation	.33%	.06%
General Neglect	45.10%	41.59%
Physical Abuse	7.84%	8.89%
Severe Neglect*	**7.52%**	**3.99%**
Substantial Risk*	**18.95%**	**13.29%**
Sex Abuse	**0%**	**3.94%**

With respect to the lower rate of emotional abuse and sex abuse, it may be that adolescent mothers are more likely than adult mothers to live with their parents. Thus, they may be less likely to live with an unrelated male. As a result, there may be less opportunity for

emotional abuse in the form of domestic violence with a live-in boyfriend, and less opportunity for sexual abuse, which usually involves an unrelated male perpetrator[25].

As discussed in Chapter 2, severe neglect can include a failure to thrive as well as physical harm to a child through lack of supervision or pre-natal substance abuse. Unfortunately, the DCFS database does not differentiate between cases involving the different forms of severe neglect. As a result, it is impossible to determine whether it is substance abuse or simply a lack of appropriate supervision which is driving the differences between adolescent and adult mothers. Although there is no significant difference between adolescent and adult mothers with respect to general neglect, adolescent mothers are more likely to have an allegation involving overall neglect (general and severe), which is consistent with historical studies on this population (Bolton 1981, Miller 1984).

As discussed in Chapter 2, substantial risk does not involve actual maltreatment. As a result, it may be that the increased rate of substantial risk indicates that adolescent mothers are more likely to be reported for maltreatment in marginal but not actually abusive situations. There is some support for this notion in the small body of literature on maltreating adolescent mothers. One study found that adolescent mothers (as compared to adult mothers) were more likely to be reported for maltreatment but less likely to have the maltreatment substantiated (Miller, 1984).

With respect to Juvenile Court cases, all except two involved at least one sustained allegation against the adolescent mother. The distribution of allegations against the adolescent mothers are detailed in Table 5.9. The percentages in Table 5.9 do not add to 100% as there was often more than 1 sustained allegation on a case. Although there are a number of different types of maltreatment, four types account for 80%: bad judgment, substance abuse, domestic violence and a bad home environment.

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[25] National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder's Child Sex Abuse Fact Sheet. Available at: http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/ncdocs/fact_shts/fs_child_sexual_abuse.html (Accessed on May 20, 2008).

Table 5.9 - Distribution of Sustained Petition Allegations Against Adolescent Mothers In Juvenile Court Cases

	Percentage of Total
Physical Abuse	2.89%
Pre-natal drug exposure	4.69%
Substance abuse impairs parenting	21.30%
Domestic violence (between mother and male significant other)	18.77%
Inappropriate Physical Discipline	2.53%
Bad judgment (left with inappropriate caretaker, left child alone, ran away with child, left child without a plan, child hurt from mother's inattention, mother fighting, failure to protect from another's harmful actions, failure to seek appropriate medical attention)	24.55%
Dirty or dangerous (guns, drugs) home environment	10.47%
Intentional serious harm to child under 5	3.25%
Death of a child	<1%
Mother has criminal history	<1%
Mother has mental health problems	6.80%
Mother is incarcerated	<1%
Mother is a minor herself	1.44%
Child has special needs	1.44%

With respect to the cases with sustained allegations against the mothers, 54% (95 of 176) involved only 1 allegation against the mother, while the remaining 46% (81 of 176) involved 2 or more substantively different allegations. On cases with 2 or more substantive allegations, substance abuse (both pre-natal exposure and impairment) was the predominant problem representing 58% (47 of 81) of such cases. The predominant combination was substance abuse and domestic violence. Domestic violence was involved on 43% (20 of 47) of the multiple allegation substance abuse cases.

5.7 CONCLUSIONS

Maltreating adolescent mothers are different from their non-maltreating adolescent mother peers. They are significantly younger at the birth of their first child and are less likely to be Hispanic. They are also less likely to live in South Los Angeles and more likely to live in Lancaster and West Los Angeles. Although the younger age is not unexpected, the reasons for the racial and geographic differences are unclear. Unfortunately, I do not have any data on the general adolescent mother population beyond age and race to determine whether any individual or procedural characteristics may be causing this effect.

Maltreating adolescent mothers are also different from their adult counterparts in the child welfare system. With respect to maltreating adult mothers, racial disparities appear with respect to African Americans, not Hispanics. Moreover, adolescent and adult mothers are involved with different types of maltreatment.

With respect to the maltreating adolescent mother population itself, over time they appear to have become more vulnerable. Compared to maltreating adolescent mothers in the past (at least in and around Phoenix, Arizona in the late 1970's), now they are younger, more likely to be a minority (African American or Hispanic) and are more likely to have been maltreated themselves as a child (Bolton 1980). Indeed, at least 25% of the current adolescent mother population had been maltreated as a child themselves by the time of the maltreatment to their own child. Based on Juvenile Court cases, almost 40% had a criminal background, 17% had an identified mental health problem and only 14% of those eligible graduated from high school. The majority maltreating adolescent mothers live on their own or in an unknown circumstance and they tend to become involved with men who are significantly older. Virtually none are married or employed. The primary form of maltreatment for adolescent mothers, however, does not seem to have changed over time as neglect continues to predominate. (Bolton 1981).

The majority of adolescent mothers have at least one of the children's father involved, although it is unclear whether this is a positive or negative factor. To the extent the father provides resources or support to the adolescent mother and her children his involvement would seem beneficial. But to the extent that his relationship with the adolescent mother is violent or involves her with illicit activities, it would be detrimental. Finally, only a small portion of the maltreating adolescent mothers live in the difficult area of South Los Angeles.

With this understanding of the individual level characteristics of the maltreating adolescent mothers, in the next chapter I look at what happens to them in the child welfare system.

6. ADOLESCENT MOTHERS: PROCEDURAL CHARACTERISTICS

In this Chapter I detail the flow of cases through the child welfare system and the outcomes for the adolescent mothers. I also discuss the various procedural characteristics that may be related to these outcomes as identified in Chapter 3.

Overall, the majority of adolescent mothers regain custody of their children through the reunification process. Of those who regain custody, only a minority have a subsequent maltreatment incident. But there are pockets within the process where the adolescent mothers seem to have more difficulty.

6.1 HOW THE CASES MOVE THROUGH THE REUNIFICATION PROCESS[26]

6.1.1 DCFS Decisions

As described in Chapter 2, when maltreatment is substantiated, a social worker must also decide whether to immediately remove the children. Of the 325 initial cases, 26% (85 of 325) involved removal within 5 days of the substantiated maltreatment which, as discussed in Chapter 4, is the proxy for immediate removal. Given the nature of immediate removal, one would expect that those cases involving direct harm to the child (physical abuse or severe neglect) and cases involving an absent parent (collectively referred to as “serious” cases) would be more likely to involve immediate removal. Moreover, one would expect that cases assigned to the Emergency office would be more likely to involve immediate removal. Given the circumstances of their investigations (at night and on the weekends), they may be more likely to err on the side of caution and remove the child even with non-serious cases. In fact, as compared to all other types of cases, serious cases are significantly more likely to have immediate removal (48.48% vs.

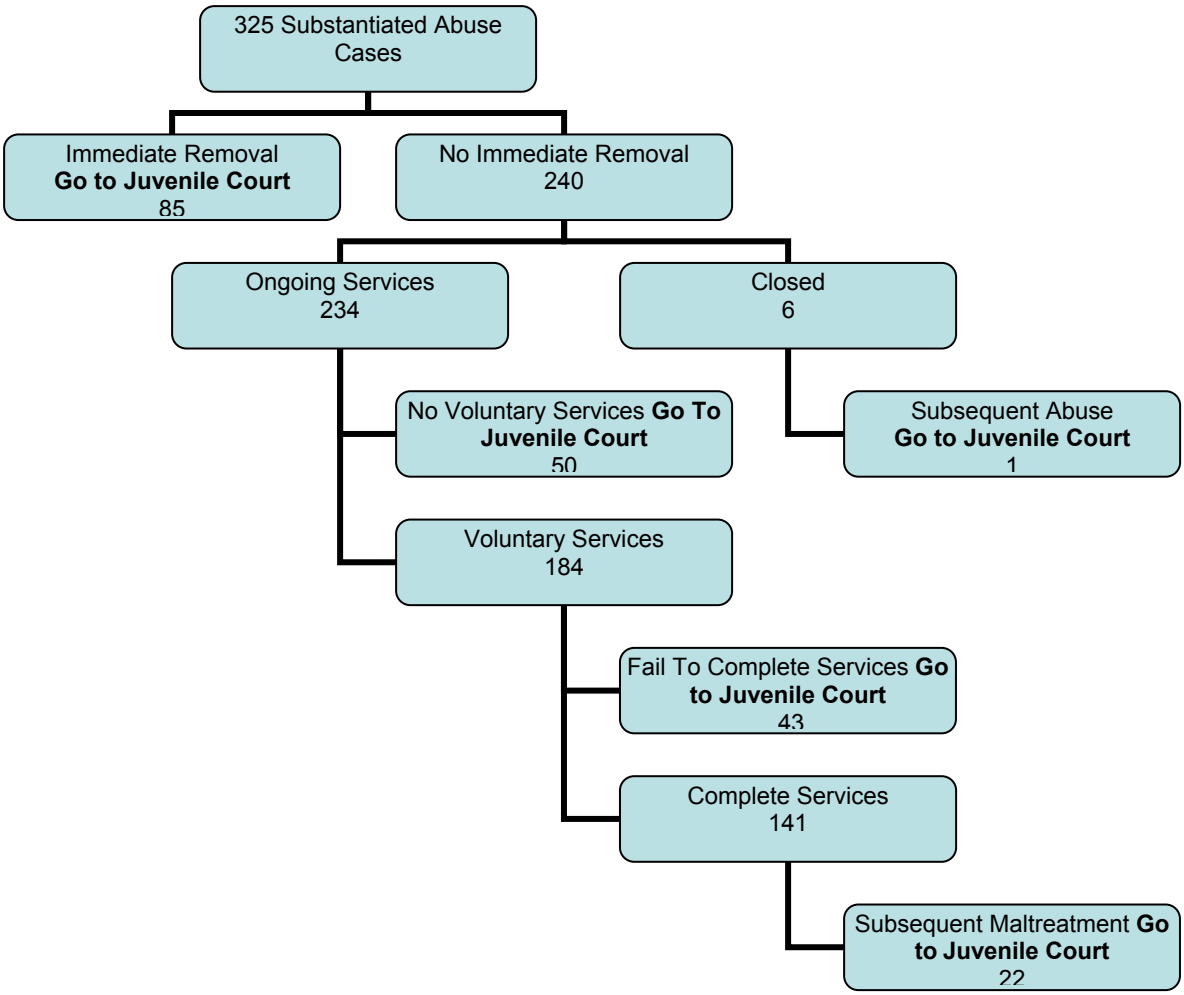
[26] The comparisons in this section are based on a chi-square test as the variables are categorical. A p-value of .05 was used to determine significance.

19.72%). Similarly, Emergency office cases are significantly more likely to involve immediate removal as compared to all other DCFS offices (81.82% vs. 18.60%).

If a child is not immediately removed from the parent's custody, the social worker must decide whether the family needs ongoing services. Here, only 2.5% (6 of 240) of the cases were closed without ongoing services. For the remaining cases, 79% (184 of 234) received voluntary services and 21% (50 of 234) proceeded to Juvenile Court.

Of those cases that were closed without services, 1 ended up in Juvenile Court 2 days after it was closed. Of those cases that received voluntary services, 74% (141 of 184) completed their voluntary services and DCFS closed their case without any need to resort to formal Juvenile Court supervision. For the remaining 26% (43 of 184) of cases, the social worker terminated voluntary services and resorted to Juvenile Court supervision. Additionally, 16% (22 of 141) of the cases that successfully completed voluntary services eventually ended up in Juvenile Court. In these cases, subsequent maltreatment occurred after the initial case had been closed. As a result, a total of 35% (65 of 184) of the cases that initially received voluntary services eventually ended up in Juvenile Court. Figure 6.1 shows the progression of cases up to the point of court supervision.

Figure 6.1 – Flow Of Adolescent Mother Cases Up To The Point Of Juvenile Court Supervision



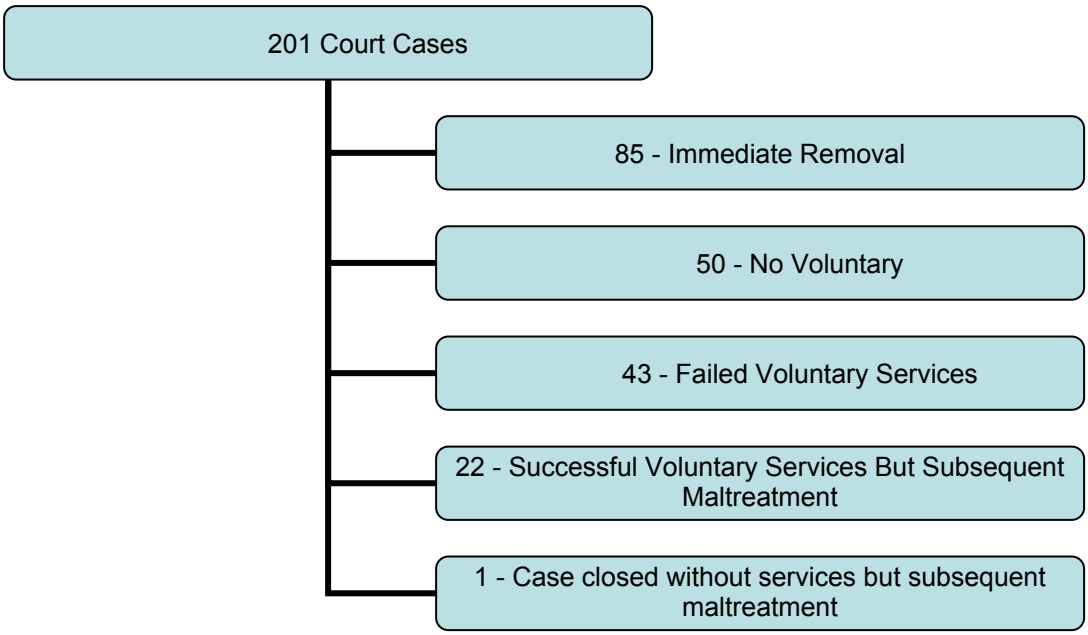
For the 141 cases that completed voluntary services, the average length of services[27] was 8.6 months. As discussed in Chapter 2, a family generally should not receive voluntary services for more than 6 months and, in any event, should never receive services for more than 1 year. But 60% of the adolescent mother cases receiving voluntary services remained open for more than 6 months and more than 20% of the cases remained open for more than 1 year.

[27] Calculated by subtracting the DCFS case open date from the DCFS case close date.

6.1.2 Juvenile Court Cases

Although almost 66% of the adolescent mother cases eventually ended up in Juvenile Court, Figure 6.2 demonstrates that they followed varied paths to get there.

Figure 6.2 - Path To Juvenile Court

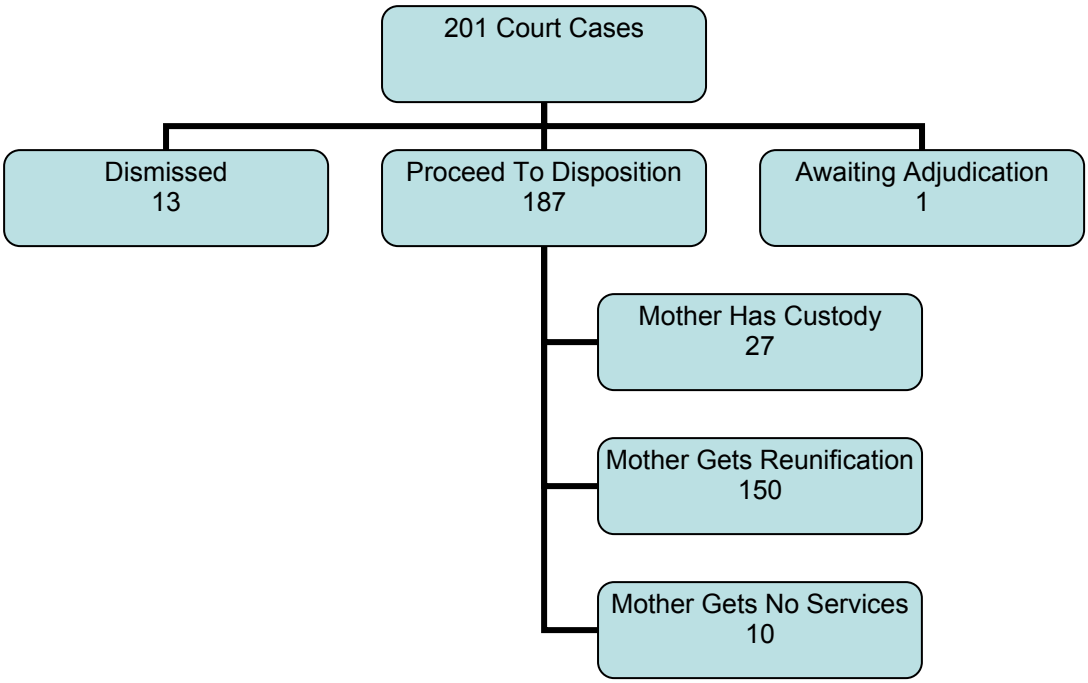


Of the 201 cases that went to court, 7% (13) had their cases dismissed. Of the 188 cases that were not dismissed, 1 case had not yet gone to adjudication or disposition at the time the file was reviewed. But as of the last hearing, the child was in the mother's custody. Of the remaining 187 cases, 14% (27) received family maintenance services. In all but 11% (3 of 27) of these cases, the social worker agreed with the disposition. On those cases where the social worker did not agree, they recommended that the adolescent mother receive family reunification services instead. 80% (150) of the 187 post adjudication cases received family reunification services. The social worker agreed with this outcome on all but 2% (3 of 150) of these cases. On those cases, the social worker recommended that the adolescent mother receive no services. In all, 95% (177 of 187) of the adolescent mothers who proceeded to disposition were provided with some type of services. Of the 5% (10 of 187) of cases where the adolescent mother was not

provided with services, 3 were denied services because they were whereabouts unknown at disposition and did not appear within 6 months, 1 because of a mental disability, 4 because the maltreatment involved the death of a child or serious harm to a child under the age of 5, 1 because the mother indicated she did not want reunification and 1 because the case was closed at disposition with the child in the custody of the father.

Figure 6.3 shows the outcome for all cases at the time of disposition.

Figure 6.3 - Outcomes At Disposition



Of the 150 cases where the adolescent mother was given family reunification services, 3% (5 of 150) of cases were transferred out of county before services ended and 1% (2 of 150) of the cases were still in the reunification period at the time the file was reviewed. For these cases, the ultimate case outcome is unknown. Of the 143 cases on which the reunification outcome is known, 38% (54 of 143) regained custody. With respect to regaining custody, as hypothesized in the conceptual model discussed in Chapter 3, an adolescent mother's compliance with services is related to regaining custody. The bench officers found that a majority of those who regained

custody had fully complied with the services ordered at disposition and that all of them had at least partially complied.

In sum, of the 187 cases that entered the Juvenile Court reunification process, 43% (81 of 187) regained custody. 27 regained custody through family maintenance and 54 regained custody through family reunification. With respect to subsequent maltreatment in these cases, 28% (23 of 81) had a subsequent maltreatment petition filed. In 9% (2 of 23) of the cases, the subsequent maltreatment petition was filed after the initial case had been closed. In the remaining 91% (21 of 23) of the cases, the subsequent petition was filed while the original case was still open and the family was receiving services. With respect to the nature of the subsequent maltreatment, in 1 case the subsequent petition was dismissed and the child remained in the custody of the mother with no further incidents. But as illustrated in Table 6.1[28], the subsequent incidents are substantially different from the original maltreatment. Whereas 24% of the original petitions involved bad judgment, more than 75% of the subsequent incidents involved this allegation. 46% of the original petitions involved 2 or more substantively different allegations while only 19% of the subsequent maltreatment incidents have this complication.

Table 6.1 - Distribution Of Sustained Allegations In Subsequent Maltreatment Cases

Bad judgment	77.27%
Drug	22.73%
Domestic violence	13.64%%
Physical abuse	4.55%

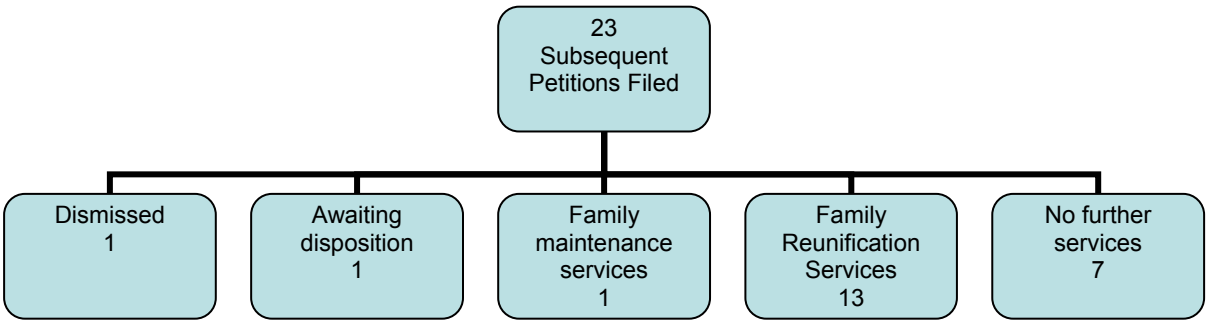
The higher prevalence of bad judgment allegations and lower prevalence of 2 or more allegations may be the result of a higher level of scrutiny. While the initial case is under supervision, social workers may be better able to identify small problems before they escalate into something more serious. Alternatively, the differences may reflect that the services available

[28] As a result of multiple allegations on the same case, the percentages in Table 10 do not add to 100%

through the child welfare system can address specific issues such as appropriate discipline methods but they are inadequate at addressing an adolescent mother's level of maturity and judgment.

For the 2 cases where the subsequent maltreatment happened after the initial case closed, only 1 had gone to disposition at the time the file was reviewed. For the other case, as discussed in Chapter 2, the law generally provides that they should still receive services and, in fact, on that case the adolescent mother received family reunification services. But for the 20 cases in which the subsequent maltreatment happened while the initial case was still open, as discussed in Chapter 2, continuing services were not necessarily required. Nonetheless, 65% (13 of 20) of the cases still received continuing services. Figure 6.4 details the disposition of the subsequent maltreatment cases.

Figure 6.4 - Disposition Of Subsequent Maltreatment Cases



6.2 PROCEDURAL CHARACTERISTICS

6.2.1 Social Workers, Attorneys and Bench Officers

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the social worker has significant influence over the reunification process. But based on the analysis above, there is no evidence of any systemic social worker bias against adolescent mothers. Only about 25% of the cases involve immediate removal and those generally entail serious maltreatment or assignment to the Emergency office as expected. The majority of the remaining cases received voluntary services and the majority of those successfully completed the services. With respect to Juvenile Court cases, almost 95% of

those that proceeded to disposition received some form of services with the social worker agreeing to such services in all but a handful of the cases. Of course, the above analysis does not account for the ways in which an individual social worker may affect a parent's progress, but that cannot be measured with this data.

With respect to attorneys, there is no significant problem with getting representation. 95% of the adolescent mothers had an assigned attorney by the disposition hearing. With respect to the type of attorney, 10% of the adolescent mothers had a CLCLA attorney while the rest had a panel attorney. Those who had a CLCLA attorney were generally already under Juvenile Court supervision themselves because of problems with their own parents.

With respect to the bench officer, cases are supposed to be assigned randomly except for those cases where the mother is already under supervision as a child herself. In those cases, her case as a mother is assigned to the courtroom to which her case as a child is assigned. Given the limited sample size and the large number of courtrooms, it is difficult to determine if there are statistically significant differences regarding the assignment of cases. But looking at Table 6.2, for cases in which the mother is not already under supervision, the only concentration appears to be in Lancaster. This is not surprising given that all cases from the Lancaster area are generally assigned to that courtroom. For cases in which the mother is already under supervision, the only concentration appears to be in courtroom 18. But overall, there is no real concentration and so there is no evidence that the random assignment system is not in effect.

Table 6.2 - Distribution Of Cases By Courtroom

Courtroom	Cases where mother is not already under supervision	Cases where mother is already under supervision	All Cases
2	5.92%	3.23%	5.50%
3	6.51%	0.00%	5.50%
4	3.55%	9.68%	4.50%
5	4.14%	3.23%	4.00%
6	4.14%	3.23%	4.00%

Courtroom	Cases where mother is not already under supervision	Cases where mother is already under supervision	All Cases
7	2.37%	9.68%	3.50%
8	5.33%	3.23%	5.00%
9	3.55%	6.45%	4.00%
10	7.10%	3.23%	6.50%
11	2.96%	6.45%	3.50%
12	1.78%	3.23%	2.00%
13	8.28%	6.45%	8.00%
14	2.96%	9.68%	4.00%
15	6.51%	6.45%	6.50%
16	2.96%	6.45%	3.50%
17	8.88%	3.23%	8.00%
18	5.92%	12.90%	7.00%
19	1.78%%	3.23%	2.00%
20	4.14%	0.00%	3.50%
Lancaster	10.65%	0.00%	9.00%
Out of county	.59%	0.00%	.50%

6.2.2 Child's Placement

As discussed in Chapter 2, at disposition, the bench officer first decides whether the child can live with one or both of his parents. If not, the court must decide on the appropriate out-of-home placement and, legally, preference is given to relatives of the child. To the extent a relative is not available or placement is not appropriate, the child is placed in a foster home. Of the 150 family reunification cases, 89% (133 of 150) had a relative identified by disposition as a possible placement resource. But by disposition, only 54% (81 of 150) of the cases had a child placed with a relative. In other words, in 40% (52 of 133) of the cases in which at least one relative was identified, the child was still placed in foster care. 73% (38 of 52) of the cases where a relative

was identified but the child was still placed in foster care involved the adolescent mother's relatives (as opposed to the child's father's relatives).

Table 6.3 details with whom the children lived at disposition, based on the individual's relationship with the child. Almost 50% of the children lived in foster care. For those that lived with a relative, they were most likely to live with a maternal relative, usually a grandmother or an extended maternal relative like a great aunt. For those that lived with a paternal relative, they are split between a paternal grandmother and other paternal relatives.

Table 6.3 - Out-Of-Home Living Arrangements At Disposition For Adolescent Mothers' Children

Father	6.77%
Maternal Grandmother	15.10%
Maternal Other	15.10%
Paternal Grandmother	7.81%
Paternal Other	7.29%
Foster Care	47.92%

6.2.3 Nature Of Services

Regardless of the nature of the maltreatment, in 95% of the cases the adolescent mother was required to complete a parenting class. Individual counseling was also fairly ubiquitous and used to address a myriad of underlying issues. 81% of the bad judgment cases, 74% of the bad home environment cases, 86% of the physical abuse cases and 94.12% of the mental health cases were assigned to individual counseling. Of the cases involving substance abuse, 96% were assigned to a drug treatment program. For domestic violence cases, 53% were assigned to attend a domestic violence program, with most of the others being assigned to individual counseling.

With respect to the actual provision of services, there is no way to determine the effectiveness of individual programs with this data. But on all cases the bench officer made the legal finding that adequate services had been provided.

6.2.4 Extension Of Services Beyond Initial Reunification Period

For the 143 family reunification cases where the ultimate outcome is known, the adolescent mothers in 14% (20 of 143) of the cases regained custody by or at the first reunification hearing. For the remaining 123 cases, 56% (69 of 123) of the adolescent mothers received extended services. The remaining 44% (54 of 123) had services terminated. 91% (63 of 69) of those who received extended services had a finding of partial or full compliance. Of those who had services terminated, none had fully complied, 11% (6 of 54) had partially complied and 89% (48 of 54) had not complied at all.

Of the 69 cases that received extended services, 49% (34 of 69) eventually regained custody.

6.2.5 Time Before Child Is Returned To The Adolescent Mother's Care

As discussed above, in 81 cases the adolescent mother regained custody through the Juvenile Court reunification process. For the 27 family maintenance cases, the time to return is 0 as they retained custody at disposition. For the 54 family reunification cases, the average time to return was 10.48 months.

6.2.6 Time Case Is Supervised Once The Adolescent Mother Regains Custody

There are 56 cases in which the adolescent mother regained custody without any subsequent maltreatment before the initial case was closed. In 2 of those cases the adolescent mother had a subsequent maltreatment incident after the initial case closed. Cases that initially closed but did not have subsequent maltreatment were supervised for an average of 6.84 months after the adolescent mother regained custody. Cases that initially closed and did have a subsequent maltreatment incident were supervised for an average of 12.13 months.

6.2.7 Visitation

At disposition, 95% of the adolescent mothers who did not have custody of their child received some form of monitored visits. But within the monitored visit category there was some

variation. In 30% of the monitored visit cases the bench officer ordered a more liberal form of visitation either specifying the minimum number of visits (i.e., more than once a week) or specifying the circumstances of the visit (i.e., the mother could be unsupervised as long as she visited at the child's placement).

6.3 CONCLUSIONS

Only a minority of adolescent mothers who receive family reunification services regain custody. But the low rate of regaining custody on family reunification cases does not seem to stem from any systematic bias. Adolescent mothers in Juvenile Court cases are almost universally represented by an attorney and the cases generally seem to be randomly assigned among the various courtrooms. The programs ordered at disposition for family reunification cases seem generally tailored to the adolescent mother's individual problem. There are no data on the actual effectiveness of the programs but services appear to be uniformly provided at the legally required minimum level. Finally, at disposition, monitored visitation is almost the universal order.

But there are some differences among the family reunification cases. Relative placement occurred on only about 50% of the cases even though almost 90% had a relative identified as a possible placement resource. With respect to the length of services, only about 50% of those who did not regain custody at the first disposition hearing received an extension of services. In the next chapter, I will explore in more depth whether these differences at least partially explain why some adolescent mothers successfully regain custody through family reunification and others do not.

With respect to subsequent maltreatment, about 33% of those who regain custody through voluntary services have another maltreatment incident. The majority of these incidents happen relatively soon after the initial maltreatment and occur while the initial case is still under supervision. In a minority of cases, however, the maltreatment incident occurs after the initial case is closed. In these cases, the subsequent incident generally occurs only after a significant period of time has passed. There is a similar pattern for adolescent mothers who regain custody

through the Juvenile Court reunification process. It may be that cases where subsequent maltreatment occurs while the initial case is still open are substantively different from cases where the maltreatment occurs after the initial case has closed. When a subsequent maltreatment incident occurs while the initial case is still open, it may be that the child was returned to the adolescent mother's care too soon. For cases where the subsequent incident occurs after the initial case is closed, however, the problem may be that the adolescent mother was not effectively transitioned to parent without the structure and support of supervision. In the next chapter I will explore these potential differences in more depth.

7. PROCEDURAL CHARACTERISTICS AND REUNIFICATION OUTCOMES

In this Chapter I explore the relationships between successful reunification and the heterogeneous procedural level characteristics identified in Chapter 6. To do so, I employ logistic regression, controlling for possible individual level heterogeneity to the extent it is measureable as discussed in Chapter 3.

In sum, for family reunification cases, it appears that a child's placement with a maternal relative reduces the likelihood that an adolescent mother will regain custody, holding all other variables constant. Conversely, it seems that extending services beyond the first reunification period increases the likelihood that an adolescent mother will regain custody, all other variables held constant. For all cases in which the adolescent mother regained custody through the Juvenile Court reunification process, it seems that the time period before a child is reunified with the adolescent mother is not related to subsequent maltreatment.

7.1 PROCEDURAL CHARACTERISTICS AND POLICIES RELATED TO SUCCESSFUL REUNIFICATION

As discussed in the conceptual framework in Chapter 3, the social worker, the attorney and the bench officer on a case all play an important role with respect to successful outcomes. But as discussed in Chapter 6, on a procedural level there do not appear to be any significant problems with respect to this aspect of the process. Social workers seem to generally provide appropriate services, at least as can be measured with this data. Almost all adolescent mothers have an attorney and bench officers seem to be randomly assigned. Of course, that does not account for the support and effectiveness of the social worker, attorney or bench officer on any particular case. Unfortunately, however, a detailed analysis regarding the impact of any individual social worker, attorney or bench officer is not possible because of data limitations and the small number of observations, notwithstanding the relative richness of the data set. With the data I have, I can only use the proxies discussed in Chapter 3 and below to capture some of the individual differences and, thereby, somewhat control for their effect.

In addition to the individuals involved in administering the system, the context in which the case is administered can also affect successful reunification. As discussed in Chapter 3, working in the more cooperative environment of voluntary services may improve the adolescent mother's relationship with the social worker. As discussed in Chapter 6, however, the majority of the cases already receive voluntary services and the majority of those cases are successful. This does not mean that the process for identifying which cases should receive voluntary services cannot be improved. Unfortunately, however, such analysis is not possible in this dissertation. As discussed in Chapter 4, I have only limited data regarding the successful voluntary service cases and with respect to the data I do have, there are significant problems with the accuracy of some of the data and missing data.

That essentially leaves policies employed in the Juvenile Court context. With respect to visitation and services, as discussed in Chapter 3, I only have proxies that measure what is ordered rather than what actually occurs. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 6, there is not much variation with respect to visitation orders and the orders regarding services seem reasonably tailored to the adolescent mother's needs.[29]

But I do have an exact measure of the child's placement and the length of service variables and, as discussed in Chapter 6, there is variation in these variables. As a result, I will focus my analysis on these policies.

7.2 METHOD FOR ASSESSING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUCCESSFUL REUNIFICATION AND PROCEDURAL LEVEL POLICIES

Pursuant to the discussion above, this Chapter will address the following research questions:

- Does relative placement and extending reunification services beyond the initial reunification period increase the likelihood of an adolescent mother regaining custody?

[29] This is not meant to imply that the programs the adolescent mothers attended were actually effective at resolving their underlying problems. As discussed in the Introduction, that relates to the more clinical aspect of reunification and is not addressed in this dissertation.

- Does the length of time before a child is returned to a parent affect the likelihood of subsequent maltreatment?

To answer these questions, a randomized control trial would be methodologically most useful. Through random assignment, one can essentially create two groups that are alike in terms of both observable and unobservable characteristics. One group is then provided with the treatment (i.e., placed with a relative) and the other is not (i.e., placed in foster care). Any significant differences in outcomes between the two groups can then be directly attributable to the treatment. But for obvious legal and ethical reasons, in this context it is not possible. Absent a randomized control trial, an instrumental variable can be used to look at the casual relationship between a policy and an outcome. This methodology uses a change (i.e., a policy restricting relative placement) that is directly related to the variable of interest (i.e., relative placement) but unrelated to the outcome (i.e., regaining custody). This method essentially mimics random assignment into a group before the change and a group after the change. If done properly, the two groups will be alike except for the impact of the change (i.e., fewer children placed with relatives after the policy is enacted), establishing a causal relationship between the change and the outcome. In California, however, the relative placement preference and length of services provisions have been in place since 1987 and 1996, respectively, without any major change. As a result, an instrumental variable approach does not seem viable.

Differences of differences is another methodology commonly used to examine the causal effect of policies. To employ this method, one needs data from a jurisdiction that adopted the policy and also from a jurisdiction that did not. The jurisdiction that did not adopt the policy is used as a baseline for what would have occurred absent the new policy. The outcomes in this jurisdiction are then compared to the outcomes in the jurisdiction that did adopt the policy. Here, the policies at issue are adopted at the state level and so one would need data from at least two different states. But even if one could identify differences among the states with respect to these policies, as discussed in Chapter 3, obtaining data just from Los Angeles County was a difficult and time consuming process. As a result, the data collection necessary to support a difference of

differences model would take a project of a much bigger magnitude and is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Consequently, the only realistic option to examine these policies with this data is a regression analysis controlling for variables that may be confounding the effect of the policy. Of course it is impossible to perfectly control for every possible confounding variable. First, there are data limitations on observable variables, either because data are missing or because they can only be measured through an inexact proxy. Second, even if all the observable variables are perfectly measured, there is always the potential for unobserved heterogeneity that affects outcomes. But given the richness of this data set, the available control variables are both extensive and comprehensive.

In addition to data limitations, endogenaity is a potential problem. To a certain degree, regaining custody, relative placement and length of services are choice variables for the social worker and the bench officer. The social worker makes recommendations and the bench officer makes the actual decision. So a liberal social worker or bench officer who may be more likely to place with a relative or extend services may also be more likely to return the child to the parent. The converse may also be true. But as discussed in Chapter 3, neither the social worker nor the bench officer have unfettered discretion. First, there are specific legal guidelines for the policies at issue. If a relative meets certain standards, the law mandates that the child be placed with the relative. If the relative does not meet those standards, the child generally cannot be placed there. Moreover, to extend services or keep the child out of a parent's care, the bench officer must make specific factual findings. Moreover, the bench officer, social worker and attorneys all act as a check on each other. To the extent a social worker makes a recommendation without a proper foundation, the other parties' attorneys can challenge it and present evidence to the contrary. Or, the bench officer, who has an independent duty to review all the evidence, can simply ignore the social worker's recommendation. Similarly, to the extent the bench officer makes a finding that is not supported by the evidence, the social worker and the attorney of the child or the parent can challenge the ruling. In any event, as discussed in Chapter 4 and below, I have already partially controlled for any differences among social workers and bench officers.

Most studies on the general population looking at reunification outcomes conduct the analysis based on the child as that is how data from the child welfare agencies is kept (Webster et al., 2005). But such analysis assumes that the observations are independent when, in fact, siblings on cases usually follow similar paths and have similar outcomes (Wulczyn and Zimmerman, 2005). Here, at least with respect to the adolescent mother regaining custody and subsequent maltreatment, the outcomes are identical for all the children who existed at the outset of the case. So this analysis will be conducted at the adolescent mother, or case, level rather than the child level, eliminating a major source of non-independence between the observations.

With respect to the specific methodology, the outcomes of interest are indicator variables: 1=regained custody and 0=did not regain custody and 1=subsequent maltreatment and 0=no subsequent maltreatment. Studies looking at such outcomes in the general child welfare population generally use either logistic regression or survival analysis such as Cox regression (Frame, 2002; Shaw, 2006). Survival analysis is useful for measuring the time to an event or when right censoring of data is necessary because the ultimate outcome is unknown. Using survival analysis, one can include cases that dropped out during the observation period (i.e., transferred to another county) and account for the fact that the event may not have happened during the observation period but may yet occur in the future (Frame 2002).

The analysis in this Chapter, however, focuses on whether the event occurred rather than the time to the event. First, for family reunification cases, it looks at whether the adolescent mother regained custody during the reunification period. Second, for those cases in which the adolescent mother regained custody, either through retaining custody at disposition or regaining it through family reunification, it looks at whether there was subsequent maltreatment while the initial case was under supervision. As a result, there is a defined risk period.

Within this defined risk period, right censoring is not a significant issue. As discussed in the introduction, the focus of this dissertation is on the procedural reunification process and how it can be improved. Consequently, the 25 cases which never entered that process, either because they were dismissed before the reunification process (13), had not yet started the reunification process (2) or because the mother was not granted reunification services (10), will be excluded.

That leaves 176 cases that entered the reunification process. With respect to the analysis regarding regaining custody, in 27 cases the mother retained custody at disposition. In these cases, there is no reunification that can occur because the child was not placed out of the parent's care. This leaves 149 cases where the mother was given the opportunity to regain custody. In 143 cases, it is known whether the adolescent mother regained custody during the reunification period. In the remaining 6 cases, the outcome is unknown. 5 of the cases were transferred to another county while the case was in the reunification stage and 1 case was still in the reunification stage when the Juvenile Court file was reviewed. In the cases that were transferred to another county, there is only limited data available as the actual Juvenile Court case files were also transferred and so could not be reviewed. As a result, these cases would be excluded from any analysis. That leaves only 1 case in which right censoring is an issue.

With respect to the analysis regarding subsequent maltreatment, there were 81 cases in which the mother regained custody through the reunification process. For the reasons discussed below, this analysis will focus on subsequent maltreatment occurring while the initial case was still under supervision. For this analysis, there are only 4 cases where right censoring is an issue (the initial case remained open and subsequent maltreatment had not yet occurred). For the cases that had a subsequent maltreatment incident, the incident occurred on average within 5.6 months with 95% of the incidents occurring within 1 year. For the 4 cases on which the maltreatment outcome is unknown, 1 has an observation time of more than 1 year. As a result, it is likely that any maltreatment on this case would have already occurred, leaving only 3 cases where right censoring is an issue. But these cases are missing certain data elements so they would be excluded from any analysis.

As there is a defined risk period and right censoring is not a significant issue within this period, event history analysis is not necessary (Webster 2005). Consequently, I will use logistic regression for the analysis.

7.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELATIVE PLACEMENT AND LEGNTH OF FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES AND REGAINING CUSTODY OF THE CHILD

7.3.1 Relative Placement Variable

Studies on the general child welfare population in California have found that placement with a relative either decreases the likelihood of a parent regaining custody (Webster, 2005) or that it has no effect (Frame, 2002). As these studies did not use any of the econometric methods discussed above, it may be that there is an omitted variable which is biasing the results. Alternatively, the true effect could be masked by the treatment of the relative placement variable. These studies group all types of relatives together. With respect to regaining custody, however, the impact of relative placement is likely to vary with the nature of the relationship between the parent and the individual. For example, if the parent has a conflict with the relative and the child is placed there, the individual may actually sabotage the parent's reunification efforts making regaining custody more difficult. Alternatively, if the parent has a good relationship with the individual and easy access to the child, she may actually be less motivated to regain custody. As a result, this analysis will look at both relative placement in general (relative vs. foster care) as well as placement with specific relatives (maternal vs. paternal). I will use an indicator variable for relative placement and each specific type of relative placement: 1 means placed with a relative and 0 means not placed with a relative.

7.3.2 Extension Of Services Beyond First Reunification Period Variable

As discussed in Chapter 3, this is an indicator variable where 1 means services were extended beyond the first reunification hearing and 0 means that reunification services were not extended.

7.3.3 Control Variables

As discussed in Chapter 3, with respect to family reunification, the primary factor affecting whether an adolescent mother regains custody after a child is removed is compliance with court ordered services. As discussed in Chapter 6, the bench officer's finding regarding the adolescent

mother's compliance with reunification services is a good predictor of whether she will regain custody. Indeed, everyone who regained custody was found to be at least in partial compliance. As a result, the finding regarding compliance is in essence a proxy for regaining custody. Consequently, the variable will be excluded from the analysis.

With respect to the variables discussed in Chapter 3 to control for heterogeneity regarding an adolescent mother's internal and external resources, completed years in school could only be measured in terms of graduation from high school. As a measure, however, it is only relevant within the population that actually had an opportunity to graduate. Otherwise it is simply a proxy for age. As discussed in chapter 5, the majority of adolescent mothers are under 19 and so never had an opportunity to graduate. As a result, this variable will be excluded. As discussed in Appendix B, the fathers' birthdate was only available on about 75% of the cases. Consequently, there are many cases on which the age difference between the adolescent mother and child's father is unavailable. Including this variable would significantly reduce the sample size for the regression so it will be excluded from the analysis. As discussed in Chapter 6, services ordered were generally tailored to the allegations and in all the cases the bench officer found that reasonable services had been provided. As a result, there is no real variation in the nature of services provided at least as it can be measured with this data so it will be excluded. Physical abuse allegations are already captured in the proxy for the adolescent mother's relationship with her child. Substance abuse allegations are already captured in the proxy for complexity of underlying problems. As a result, these allegations will be excluded as separate variables.

As discussed in Chapter 6, a fairly large portion of the cases had a relative identified as a possible placement but the child was still placed in foster care. Given the legal preference for placement with a relative, the fact that these children were still placed in foster care means that the relative was somehow inappropriate. For the child's maternal relatives, this may reflect a dysfunction in the adolescent mother's family. As discussed in Chapter 3, family dysfunction may affect reunification. As a result, it will be included as an additional control.

Based on the foregoing, the following control variables, will be included in the analysis:

Table 7.1 - Variables For Regaining Custody Analysis

VARIABLE	Percentage	# of observations
Outcome		
Regain custody	37.76%	143
Policies Of Interest		
Relative placement	52.45%	143
Placement with maternal relative	32.17%	143
Placement with paternal relative (including child's father)	22.38%	143
Services past first reunif hearing	48.95%	143
Proxies For Internal And External Resources		
Hispanic	53.85%	143
African American	25.87%	143
Average age at birth	16.90 years	143
Average age at disposition	18.45 years	143
Own maltreatment history	30.77%	143
Identified mental health problem	19.26%	135
Appear at disposition	64.33%	143
Criminal history or previous maltreatment referral	57.55%	139
Use of a court interpreter	10.37%	135
Child 6 months or younger[30]	40.56%	143
Child 18 months or older	25.17%	143
2 or more children at disposition	20.28%	143
Problem relationship between adolescent mother and child	24.29%	140
Child's father involved	62.24%	143
Living with family member	18.88%	143
Living in SPA 6	17.48%	143
Bad judgment	38.57%	140
Domestic violence	27.14%	140
Dirty home	17.86%	140
Complex problems	65.00%	140
Proxies For Procedural Characteristics		
Problematic relationship between social worker and parent	48.95%	143
Social worker offices		142
SPA 1	11.27%	
SPA 2	11.97%	
SPA 3	18.31%	
SPA 4	2.11%	
SPA 5	5.63%	

[30] As the analysis is done at the case level, to the extent there is more than 1 child on a case, I can only include the age of one of them. Studies have found that adolescent mothers of infants are less depressed than adolescent mothers of older children (Gelles, 1993). As a result, instead of actual age, I will use an indicator variable for having a child 6 months or younger on the case and an indicator variable for having a child 18 months or older on the case.

VARIABLE	Percentage	# of observations
SPA 6	15.49%	
SPA 7	11.27%	
SPA 8	21.83%	
Out-Of-County	2.11%	
CLC lawyer	6.99%	143
Lancaster	9.09%	143
Referee or commissioner	81.12%	143
Voluntary services initially	34.27%	143
Liberal visitation[31]	30.07%	143
Inappropriate maternal relative[32]	28.87%	143

7.3.4 Relationship Between Regaining Custody And Relative Placement

As illustrated in Table 7.2, when a child lives with a maternal relative, the adolescent mothers are significantly less likely to regain custody as compared to all other placements or even just compared to foster care. Living with a paternal relative, however, is not significant.

Table 7.2 – Regressions Of Regaining Custody On Relative Placement And Extending Services With Control Variables

	All Relatives vs. Foster care (N=128)	Maternal Relatives vs. Foster care, paternal relatives and father (N=128)	Paternal relatives and father vs. Foster care and maternal relatives (N=128)	Maternal relatives, Paternal relatives and father vs. foster care (N=128)
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
All relatives	0.38 (0.08, 1.88)	NA	NA	NA
Maternal relatives*	NA	**0.15 (0.03, 0.73)**	NA	**0.16 (0.027, 0.96)**
Paternal relatives and father	NA	NA	2.86 (0.63, 12.96)	1.11 (0.19, 6.50)
Services extended*	**3.63 (1.18, 11.13)**	**4.31 (1.32, 14.13)**	**3.29 (1.09, 9.91)**	**4.29 (1.30, 14.10)**

[31] Indicator variable where a 1 means liberal visitation (unmonitored and monitored with specific directions regarding number or location of visits)

[32] Indicator variable where a 1 means that a maternal relative of the child was identified as a possible placement but the child was still placed in foster care.

	All Relatives vs. Foster care (N=128)	Maternal Relatives vs. Foster care, paternal relatives and father (N=128)	Paternal relatives and father vs. Foster care and maternal relatives (N=128)	Maternal relatives, Paternal relatives and father vs. foster care (N=128)
Mother's age at 1st child birth	0.98 (0.44, 2.18)	0.99 *0.43, 2.28)	1.16 (0.50, 2.67)	1.00 (0.42, 2.63)
Mother's age at disposition	1.02 (0.47, 2.25)	0.99 (0.43, 2.28)	0.91 (0.39, 2.10)	1.04 (0.44, 2.48)
Identified mental health problem	1.90 (0.43, 8.26)	2/39 (0.53, 10.74)	2.51 (0.55, 11.49)	2.43 (0.53, 11.22)
Maltreatment history	1.34 (0.35, 5.17)	0.93 (0.22, 3.91)	1.31 (0.33, 5.23)	0.93 (0.22, 3.92)
Appear at dispo hearing*	**4.55 (1.15, 17.99)**	**6.64 (1.53, 28.89)**	**4.25 (1.14, 15.79)**	**6.62 (1.52, 28.72)**
Problematic background	0.31 (0.09, 1.02)	0.32 (0.09, 1.07)	0.37 (0.12, 1.18)	0.32 (0.10, 1.09)
Hispanic*	**5.19 (1.02, 26.43)**	**6.22 (1.17, 33.19)**	4.30 (0.86, 21.56)	**6.15 (1.14, 33.17)**
Black	1.45 (0.19, 10.88)	1.36 (0.17, 10.59)	0.98 (0.13, 7.70)	1.33 (0.17, 10.73)
Used interpreter	3.35 (0.52, 21.77)	2.42 (0.34, 17.11)	2.63 (0.39, 17.86)	2.40 (0.34, 17.08)
Child < 6 mos at dispo*	**0.15 (0.03, 0.70)**	**0.18 (0.04, 0.83)**	**0.16 (0.04, 0.75)**	**0.18 (0.04, 0.84)**
Child > 18 mos at dispo	0.42 (0.06, 2.65)	0.33 (0.05, 2.29)	0.60 (0.09, 3.82)	0.33 (0.05, 2.43)
2 or more kids at dispo	1.87 (0.28, 12.62)	1.85 (0.25, 13.86)	1.69 (0.26, 11.02)	1.83 (0.25, 13.78)
Mother-child problem*	**0.22 (0.06. 0.88)**	**0.21 (0.05, 0.86)**	0.29 (0.07, 1.12)	**0.22 (0.05, 0.89)**
Involved with child's father	1.69 (0.49, 5.76)	0.82 (0.21, 3.21)	1.20 (0.32, 4.44)	0.81 (0.20, 3.24)
Mother lives with family	0.95 (0.24, 3.82)	1.37 (0.33, 5.62)	1.40 (0.35, 5.65)	1.39 (0.33, 5.84)
Mother lives in SPA 6	1.48 (0.19, 11.25)	1.40 (0.18, 10.69)	1.29 (0.16, 10.36)	1.40 (0.18, 10.69)
Domestic violence allegation	1.31 (0.31, 5.51)	1.40 (0.33, 5.98)	1.21 (0.30, 4.89)	1.40 (0.33, 5.95)
Bad judgment allegation	1.28 (0.40, 4.09)	1.62 (0.48, 5.50)	1.34 (0.41, 4.40)	1.64 (0.48, 5.58)
Negligence allegation	0.70 (0.18, 2.62)	0.71 (0.18, 2.75)	0.89 (0.24, 3.26)	0.72 (0.18, 2.82)
Substance abuse or 2 or more allegations*	**0.26 (0.07, 0.92)**	**0.25 (0.06, 0.94)**	**0.25 (0.07, 0.88)**	**0.25 (0.07, 0.95)**
Problematic relationship with social worker	1.59 (0.53, 4.76)	1.48 (0.48, 4.62)	1.50 (0.49, 4.57)	1.48 (0.47, 4.62)

	All Relatives vs. Foster care (N=128)	Maternal Relatives vs. Foster care, paternal relatives and father (N=128)	Paternal relatives and father vs. Foster care and maternal relatives (N=128)	Maternal relatives, Paternal relatives and father vs. foster care (N=128)
Social Worker's office in SPA 2	0.88 (0.08, 9.39)	1.02 (0.09, 1.115)	1.45 (0.14, 14.88)	1.05 (0.09, 11.99)
Social Worker's office in SPA 3	1.12 (0.12, 10.19)	1.42 (0.15, 13.35)	1.25 (0.14, 11.22)	1.43 (0.15, 13.55)
Social Worker's office in SPA 4	0.29 (0.02, 15.67)	0.36 (0.01, 16.31)	0.36 (0.01, 18.78)	0.37 (0.01, 16.53)
Social Worker's office in SPA 5	0.47 (0.03, 8.43)	0.43 (0.03, 7.53)	0.78 (0.05, 12.87)	0.45 (0.03, 8.08)
Social Worker's office in SPA 6	0.15 (0.01, 3.10)	0.15 (0.01, 2.85)	0.29 (0.02, 5.04)	0.16 (0.01, 3.09)
Social Worker's office in SPA 7	0.76 (0.06, 9.13)	0.93 (0.08, 11.57)	0.93 (0.08, 10.87)	0.95 (0.08, 11.84)
Social Worker's office in SPA 8	1.72 (0.20, 14.42)	2.05 (0.25, 17.04)	1.95 (0.24, 15.57)	2.07 (0.25, 17.21)
CLC lawyer	0.16 (0.01, 2.74)	0.20 (0.01, 3.75)	0.21 (0.01, 3.46)	0.20 (0.01, 3.82)
Lancaster Courtroom	11.58 (0.92, 145.84)	13.74 (0.91, 207.8)	8.22 (0.65, 103.4)	13.42 (0.87, 208.2)
Referee or commissioner	0.52 (0.14, 1.98)	0.62 (0.15, 2.52)	0.63 (0.16, 2.47)	0.63 (0.15, 2.58)
Received informal supervision	0.38 (0.10, 1.39)	0.57 (0.14, 2.27)	0.50 (0.13, 1.87)	0.57 (0.14, 2.33)
Liberal visitation	0.51 (0.15, 1.76)	0.40 (0.11, 1.47)	0.48 (0.14, 1.68)	0.40 (0.11, 1.47)
Relative available but no placement	0.30 (0.04, 2.06	0.24 (0.05, 1.22)	0.99 (0.24, 4.16)	0.25 (0.04, 1.78)

* Denotes a significant relationship using a p-value <.05

The odds ratio for maternal placement means that, with all other variables held constant, placement with a maternal relative decreases the likelihood of regaining custody. But due to the nature of odds ratios, the actual change in the probability of regaining custody is difficult to directly interpret. An example using a mother with some typical characteristics (i.e., a Hispanic with a problematic background) will help illustrate.[33] Based on the above regression, the

[33] The specific characteristics of the adolescent mother in the example are: Hispanic, 14.34 years at the birth of her 1st child and 15.12 years at disposition. She was maltreated herself as a child. She had no identified mental health problem but did have a criminal history. She did not appear at the disposition and did not use an interpreter. She only had 1 child at

example adolescent mother who received an extension of services and whose child was not placed with a maternal relative has a 12.30% probability of regaining custody. That same adolescent mother whose child was placed with a relative has only a 2.10% probability of regaining custody.

This does not necessarily mean, however, that placement with a relative directly caused the reduction in the probability. Without using an econometric model to account for unobserved heterogeneity, there is always the chance of omitted variable bias. To the extent any unaccounted for positive omitted variable bias exists, however, controlling for it would only make the results regarding maternal placement more significant. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine an unobserved variable that would exert a significant negative bias. Anything that affects relative placement should affect regaining custody in the same direction. Most individual level characteristics that would make it harder for an adolescent mother to regain custody would also most likely make it less likely that for the adolescent mother would have an appropriate relative available for placement and vice versa. For example, an adolescent mother who has a difficult relationship with her family may be less likely to have a relative who is willing or appropriate to take custody of her child. The difficult family relationship may also make it less likely that the adolescent mother would have social support. As a result, she may have less access to the resources that are necessary to comply with court ordered services and, thus, be less likely to regain custody. The same is true for procedural level characteristics. As discussed in Chapter 3, an effective, sympathetic social worker can make it easier for an adolescent mother to regain custody and such a social worker may also be more likely to work hard to identify a relative that would be suitable for the child's placement.

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disposition who was neither an infant nor a toddler. She did not have a problematic relationship with the child. The child's father was involved. She lived with a family member in SPA 6 which is also where her social worker's office was located. She did have a relative identified as available but the child was still placed in foster care. She had a bad judgment and substance abuse allegation. She had a panel lawyer and was assigned to the main courthouse with a referee or commissioner. She received voluntary services initial and was not granted liberal visitation.

The diagnostics do not identify any significant problem with the model specification or the undue influence of any particular observations. But the confidence interval for the odds ratios on maternal placement are very wide, most likely due to the small number of observations and the large number of covariates. As a result, the exact magnitude of the effect should be interpreted with caution. But assuming that the sign of the maternal relative placement variable is accurate, there are at least two reasons that may explain this effect. First, when a child is placed with an adolescent mother's relatives, the adolescent mother may have greater access to the child and so may be less motivated to comply with services and regain custody. Essentially, the adolescent mother obtains many of the benefits of parenting without the responsibilities. Alternatively, it may be that the adolescent mother has a conflicted history with her own relatives such that they provide less access to the child and may actually sabotage her reunification efforts.

In any event, there is strong evidence suggesting that the type of relative placement matters for adolescent mothers. Maternal relative placement and paternal relative placement move in opposite directions with respect to the likelihood of reunification. As a result, any analysis that combines the two types of placements into one comprehensive variable is likely to miss the actual relationships that may exist.

7.3.5 Relationship Between Regaining Custody And Extending Services

As illustrated in Table 7.2, holding all other variables constant, extending services beyond the first reunification period significantly increases the likelihood that an adolescent mother will regain custody. Using the example from above will help put the exact nature of the change in context. Based on this regression, an adolescent mother with the set of characteristics discussed above whose child was placed with a maternal relative but who did not receive an extension of services had a 0.50% chance of regaining custody. That same mother who did receive an extension of services has a 2.10% chance of regaining custody.

As with the maternal placement analysis, the diagnostics do not identify any significant problem with the model specification or the undue influence of any particular observations. But

the confidence interval is very large – 1.3 to 14.1 - which may be the result of the relatively small sample size and large number of covariates. Consequently, although the relationship is significant, the magnitude of the relationship may not be as sizable as the odds ratio suggests.

The magnitude and significance of the relationship may also be undermined by potential omitted variable bias. One would expect that adolescent mothers who have low levels of resources may be less likely to participate in court ordered services and vice versa. Without compliance with court ordered services, it is unlikely that an adolescent mother will regain custody. Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 6, without compliance it is also unlikely that the adolescent mother will receive an extension of services. As a result, one would expect that an adolescent mother's level of resources may exert a positive bias with respect to an extension of services. To a certain degree, however, numerous controls regarding an adolescent mother's resources are already included in the model, reducing the likelihood of positive omitted variable bias. But since these are only proxies and may not capture the full extent of individual differences, the potential still exists.

7.3.6 Relationship Between Regaining Custody And Control Variables

As illustrated in Table 7.2, there are also several control variables that appear to be significantly related to regaining custody.

Holding all other things constant, an adolescent mother who appears at the disposition is more likely to regain custody while those with a complex problem or a problematic child are less likely to regain custody. One would expect that appearance at disposition would evidence greater resources while a complex problem or problematic child would evidence fewer resources. Consequently, these findings provide some evidence that these variables are at least capturing in part some of the individual heterogeniaty.

Those with a young child are also less likely to regain custody. It may be that children who are removed at a young age do not have sufficient time to bond with the adolescent mother. As a result, the adolescent mother may be less motivated to regain custody. But there is another possible explanation. Young children are generally more adoptable than older children and if the

caretaker wants to adopt the child, she may make it difficult for the adolescent mother to visit the child, making it less likely that she will regain custody. As a result, it may not actually be the age of the child that is affecting the result but, rather, the caretaker's interest in adoption.

Hispanics are significantly more likely to regain custody of their child. Many of the factors positively associated with being Hispanic and regaining custody (i.e., motivation and a lack of a child welfare history) are already included in the model. Consequently, it appears that Hispanic adolescent mothers are somehow differently situated from other ethnic groups in ways that are not directly observable.

7.4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LENGTH OF SERVICES AND SUBSEQUENT MALTREATMENT

7.4.1 Subsequent Maltreatment

There were 81 cases in which the adolescent mother regained custody through the reunification process. As discussed in Chapter 6, however, those cases with a subsequent maltreatment incident fall into 2 different categories: maltreatment while the initial case is still open and maltreatment after the initial case is closed. With respect to the latter, there are a total of 56 cases in which the initial case was closed without a further maltreatment incident during the pendency of the initial case. But of these 56 cases, only 2 had a subsequent maltreatment incident after the case was closed. Given the lack of variability in the outcome, there is no way to conduct any meaningful regression analysis regarding maltreatment after the initial case is closed. As a result, the regression analysis will focus only on those cases that had a subsequent maltreatment incident while the initial case was still open. For the purposes of this analysis, the 2 cases that had a subsequent incident after the initial case was closed will be treated as having no subsequent maltreatment incident.

7.4.2 Length Of Time Before A Child Is Returned To The Adolescent Mother

As discussed in Chapter 3, this is a continuous variable measured as follows: date of return minus date of disposition. For family maintenance cases, the time to return will be 0.

7.4.3 Control Variables

For the reasons discussed above, variables regarding physical abuse, substance abuse and mental health allegations will not be included as separate variables and completed years in school and difference in age between the adolescent mother and the child's father will be excluded. Compliance with services, visitation and having an available maternal relative with whom the child is not placed will also be excluded as the proxy to measure those variables is only available for family reunification cases.

With respect to services, as discussed above, there appears to be no significant variation at least as can be measured with this data. But, as discussed in Chapter 2, parents who regain custody of their children can also be provided with in home services designed to help the mother effectively parent. Here, in home services will be defined as the adolescent mother participating a program that provides in home services as identified in a court report. It will also include circumstances where the adolescent mother lives in a maternity group home or an in-patient drug treatment program as they provide parenting services as well. It will be an indicator variable with 1 meaning that the adolescent mother received such services at some point while she had custody of the child.

Based on the foregoing, Table 7.3 details the variables to be included in the analysis:

Table 7.3 - Variables For Subsequent Maltreatment Analysis

VARIABLE	Percentage	# of observations
Outcome		
Subsequent maltreatment petition	25.93%	81
Policy Of Interest		
Average Time Before Return	8.14 months	81
Proxies For Internal And External Resources		
Hispanic	69.15%	81
African American	17.28%	81
Average age at birth	16.75 years	81
Average age at return	18.93 years	81
Problematic relationship with mother	27.16%	81
Identified mental health problem	14.81	81
Appear at dispo hearing	77.78%	81
Criminal history or previous maltreatment referral	55.56%	81
Use of court interpreter	14.81%	81
Child 6 months or younger at return	9.88%	81

VARIABLE	Percentage	# of observations
Child 18 months or older at return	22.22%	81
2 or more children at subsequent maltreatment	27.86%	81
Problem relationship between adolescent mother and child	16.05%	81
Involved father	74.07%	81
Live with family member	29.63%	81
Live in SPA 6	16.05%	81
Bad judgment	38.46%	78
Negligence	14.10%	78
Domestic violence	37.18%	78
Complex problems	43.59%	78
Proxies For Procedural Characteristics		
Problematic relationship with social worker	53.09%	81
Social worker offices		81
SPA 1	17.28%	
SPA 2	13.58%	
SPA 3	19.75%	
SPA 4	3.70%	
SPA 5	3.70%	
SPA 6	13.58%	
SPA 7	7.41%	
SPA 8	19.75%	
Out-Of-County	1.23%	
CLC lawyer	7.41%	81
Lancaster	14.81%	81
Referee or commissioner	81.48%%	81
Voluntary services initially	32.10%	81
In home services	41.98%	81

7.4.5 Relationship Between Subsequent Maltreatment And Time To Return

Conducting a logistic regression using the control variables discussed above drops 15 cases on which negligence, SPA 4 or SPA 5 perfectly predict outcomes and the regression on the remaining cases does not work. The standard errors are missing due to hidden colinearity in the data.[34] When, as here, most of the independent variables are binary, certain variables can combine into a pattern that always predicts the same outcome. Here, there are 42 cases on which a specific pattern only predicts one outcome. If these cases were dropped from the analysis, the remaining cases would have colinearity among the variables (i.e., certain variables are always 1 while others are always 0) which prevents any meaningful analysis. Looking at the

[34] This effect is described in STATA's online technical support available at: http://www.stata.com/support/faqs/stat/logitcd.html. Accessed on July 14, 2008.

patterns, they are not substantively meaningful (i.e., being Hispanic and appearing at the disposition hearing always involves no subsequent maltreatment) but, instead, seem to be an anomaly of having so many indicator variables in the model.

An ordinary least squares (OLS) regression does not have the same constraints with respect to patterns. Running an OLS regression with all the control variables, time to return is insignificant. But the OLS regression identified 9 other variables that were at least marginally significant (p-value<=.10). Running a logistic regression with time to return and the variables identified as significant in the OLS regression, the problem of hidden colinearity disappears.[35] But, as illustrated in Table 7.4, time to return is still insignificant. Looking at just family reunification cases, time to return is still not significant and even looking at the regression with each control variable individually; there is no control variable that seems to affect the magnitude of the co-efficient for time to return.

Table 7.4 – Logistic Regression Of Subsequent Maltreatment On Time To Return With Limited Covariates

	Logistic With No Covariates (N=74)	Logistic With Limited Covariates (N=74)	Limited Logistic With Family Reunification Cases (N=53)
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Time to reunification	1.02 (0.95, 1.10)	1.05 (0.95, 1.18)	1.33 (0.95, 1.84)
Mother's age at return*	NA	**0.42** **(0.23, 0.79)**	**0.21** **(0.06, 0.71)**
Child < 6 mos at return	NA	7.12 (0.78, 64.72)	9.09 (0.11, 715.18)
2 or more kids at return*	NA	**8.42** **(1.64, 43.10)**	**106** **(2.12, 5301)**
Substance abuse or 2 or more allegations*	NA	**7.78** **(1.49, 40.51)**	11.79 (0.54, 255.71)
Mother lives in SPA 6	NA	0.17 (0.02, 1.54)	0.19 (0.00, 7.99)
Mother-child problem	NA	2.27 (0.26, 20.01)	0.52 (0.02, 12.44)

[35] Using a Cox regression with limited covariates returns a similar result.

Social Worker's office in SPA 3*	NA	**0.09 (0.01, 0.89)**	**0.00 (0.00, 0.75)**
Social Worker's office in SPA 8	NA	0.19 (0.02, 1.70)	0.06 (0.00, 2.54)
Lancaster Courtroom	NA	0.34 (0.03, 3.48)	0.54 (0.01, 19.73)

* Denotes a significant relationship using a p-value < .05

Of course, many of the control variables are measured inexactly and there may be omitted variable bias as well. But the relatively robust nature of the co-efficient provides some evidence that time to return does not significantly affect an adolescent mother's subsequent maltreatment.

7.4.6 Relationship Between Subsequent Maltreatment And Control Variables

As discussed above, a logistic regression including all the control variables is not possible and excluding some of the control variables may distort the relationships of the ones that are included. But the variables highlighted in Table 7.4 were significant in both the limited logistic and full OLS regressions.

Based on age at the time the child was returned, older adolescent mothers were less likely to have a subsequent maltreatment incident. As discussed in Chapter 3, it may be that older adolescent mothers are more mature and have more resources. But if true, one would expect that they would also have a higher rate of regaining custody, which is not the case. Consequently, it may be that older adolescent mothers are different in unobservable ways that affect parenting but not compliance.

Adolescent mothers having 2 or more children at the time of the maltreatment or having a complex underlying problem were more likely to have a subsequent maltreatment incident. The foregoing variables measure to some degree stressful circumstances, which make parenting more difficult (Schellenbach, Whitman, and Borkowski, 1992). As a result, one would expect that they would help predict subsequent maltreatment.

Finally, when a case is assigned to a social worker's office in SPA 3 (Pasadena), subsequent maltreatment is much less likely. Without additional data, however, I cannot determine the reason for this difference.

7.5 CONCLUSIONS

With respect to regaining custody, the type of relative with whom the child is placed seems to matter. A child's placement with a maternal relative makes it less likely that an adolescent mother will regain custody. Unfortunately, with the data I have I cannot determine the reason for this relationship. It may be that adolescent mothers have a conflicted history with their own relatives that make regaining custody more difficult. Alternatively, it may be that when a child is placed with an adolescent mother's relative, she gets many of the benefits of parenting without the obligations. As a result, the adolescent mother is less motivated to comply with the required programs. In any event, to better capture the true effect of relative placement, the type of relative with whom the child is placed should be included.

Extending services also seems to matter. Adolescent mothers who received services beyond the first reunification period were significantly more likely to regain custody. As discussed in Chapter 5, maltreating adolescent mothers face difficult circumstances. As a result, they may need more than the minimum period in which to resolve their underlying issues.

Having a young child has a significant negative relationship with regaining custody. Unfortunately, with the data I have I cannot determine the reason for this relationship. It may be that parenting an infant is more difficult or that an adolescent mother did not have sufficient time to bond with the child before removal. As a result, adolescent mothers with young children may be less motivated to regain custody. Or it may be that having a young child is actually a proxy for the caretaker's intention to adopt which can make reunification more difficult.

Being Hispanic seems to be related to better outcomes. As discussed in Chapter 5, compared to their non-maltreating peers, maltreating adolescent mothers are less likely to be Hispanic. Additionally, within the maltreating population, Hispanics are also more likely to regain custody of their children. The exact reason for this relationship, however, is unclear.

With respect to subsequent maltreatment, the time that a child remains out of the adolescent mother's custody does not seem to affect the likelihood of another incident and the lack of a significant relationship between subsequent maltreatment and time to return is robust. Instead, it appears that the adolescent mother's circumstances at the time the child is returned

are more important. Those with more outside demands, either through dealing with more than 1 child or a complicated underlying problem, are more likely to have another incident. Alternatively, those who are older are less likely to have another maltreatment incident. Being older, however, does not appear to increase the chance of regaining custody. As a result, older adolescent mothers may simply be different in unobservable ways that affect parenting but not compliance.

8. POLICY AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

The child welfare system in California is administered at the county level. Moreover, the demographics for the various counties, especially with respect to race, are not the same. Consequently, the results from this analysis may not be applicable outside of Los Angeles County. In addition to this limitation, many of the findings need to be further explored and refined. At the same time, research needs to be concurrently conducted into the more clinical aspects of the reunification process. As discussed in the Introduction, the clinical and procedural aspects of the reunification process are interlocking parts of an overall whole. To most effectively improve outcomes, both should be addressed. At the same time, research needs to be concurrently conducted into the more clinical aspects of the reunification process. As discussed in the Introduction, the clinical and procedural aspects of the reunification process are interlocking parts of an overall whole. To most effectively improve outcomes, both should be addressed. With these caveats, I make the following policy and research recommendations regarding the procedural aspects of the reunification process:

8.1 DEVELOP A SPECIAL SOCIAL WORKER UNIT THAT IS SPECIALLY TRAINED TO DEAL WITH ADOLESCENT MOTHERS.

As discussed in Chapter 5, adolescent mothers are a unique population. They also face difficult circumstances, even compared to their non-maltreating adolescent mother peers and maltreating adult mother counterparts (Bolton and Laner, 1981; Zuravin and DiBlasio, 1992) As a result, there should be a special unit of social workers dedicated to dealing with adolescent mothers. The children of adolescent mothers represent less than 1% of the overall Los Angeles County child welfare population. Consequently, the special unit does not need to be large and it can be created from the existing social worker population. It also does not necessarily need to be centralized. Instead, at least one social worker in each office can be trained to handle their special needs and circumstances, resulting in better service to this population as well as a more effective use of social worker resources.

8.2 INCLUDE MORE DATA ABOUT PARENTS IN THE CHILD WELFARE AGENCY ADMINISTRATIVE DATABASE

As discussed in Chapter 5, maltreating adolescent mothers are a heterogeneous group. As a result, in looking at procedural level policies, it is important to include variables that control for individual variation. As discussed in Chapter 4, it is relatively easy to extract information from the DCFS administrative database. But the information it contains is relatively limited with respect to the background and individual characteristics of the family. Conversely, the Juvenile Court files are rich in detailed information about the family. But it can be difficult and time consuming to review and extract data from these records. As a result, a merging of the data from the two sources would facilitate bigger scale and more meaningful analyses in the future.

Obviously, the primary purpose of the DCFS administrative database is to allow social workers to effectively manage their individual cases and a significant portion of the information contained in the Juvenile Court file is not necessarily crucial to subsequent research. As a result, there should not be a wholesale incorporation of the Juvenile Court file into the DCFS administrative database. But to effectively evaluate the impact of policies, whether for adolescent mothers or the general child welfare population, the data needs to be more comprehensive. Based on the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 3 and the analysis in Chapter 7 regarding significant control variables, I suggest including the following information in the DCFS administrative database:

- Whether a case involves substance abuse or two or more substantively different allegations;
- Mother's own child welfare history;
- Appearance at the disposition hearing;
- Previous involvement with the criminal system;
- Identified mental health problems for the parent;
- A child's physical, emotional or developmental disability;
- Number of children at the time an allegation is substantiated.

Finally, it would be useful if there were an easy method for tying children related to the same mother or father together in the administrative database. This would allow for analysis at both the case and individual level.

8.3 FURTHER RESEARCH REGARDING CASES IN THE SOUTH LOS ANGELES, LANCASTER, PASADENA AND WEST LOS ANGELES AREAS

As discussed in Chapters 5 and 7, the South Los Angeles, Lancaster, Pasadena and West Los Angeles areas seem to be differently situated from other areas of Los Angeles. Adolescent mothers in South Los Angeles are less likely to become involved in the child welfare system while those in Lancaster and West Los Angeles are more likely to become involved. Additionally, maltreating adolescent mothers assigned to a DCFS office in Pasadena who regain custody of their child are less likely to have a subsequent maltreatment incident. It is unclear exactly what is driving these differences and whether these differences apply only to adolescent mothers or are a trend in the general population. But further analysis should be done to determine whether cases from these areas are systematically being treated differently.

8.4 FURTHER RESEARCH REGARDING PLACEMENT WITH A MATERNAL RELATIVE

As discussed in Chapter 7, there is evidence suggesting that a child's placement with an adolescent mother's relatives inhibits reunification, controlling for other variables constant. Even assuming that this relationship exists, however, the reasons underlying the relationship are unclear. As a result, further research must be done before any policy recommendations regarding relative placement can be made.

8.5 ADDITIONAL REUNIFICATION TIME FOR ADOLESCENT MOTHERS

As discussed in Chapter 7, it is appears that extending services to adolescent mothers increases the likelihood of regaining custody, all other things held constant. This may indicate that the current system of selectively extending services adequately identifies those adolescent mothers with the best chance of regaining custody. Or it may be that some adolescent mothers

who are now denied an extension would have regained custody if given a further chance. As discussed in Chapter 5, maltreating adolescent mothers have difficult circumstances. Consequently, they may generally need more than the minimum 6 month period in which to resolve their underlying problems. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 6, social workers administering voluntary service cases routinely provide more than the minimum 6 month period of services and it is not uncommon for them to even provide services beyond the 1 year maximum that is legally allowed. As a result, a policy change to systematically extend family reunification services to all adolescent mothers may be appropriate.

If services are universally extended for adolescent mothers, there is no evidence suggesting that it will negatively impact outcomes for the child. For those children whose mother remains inappropriate at the end of the extended period, the child will remain out of her care, services can be terminated and an appropriate alternate plan can be found.[36] And for those adolescent mothers who actually regain custody, as discussed in Chapter 7, additional reunification time does not seem to increase the likelihood of subsequent maltreatment to the child.

Extending the reunification time frame will entail additional resources both in terms of providing additional services and a social worker's time in monitoring an adolescent mother's progress. But to the extent that more children return home, the cost of adoption and foster care are saved.

8.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GENERAL CHILD WELFARE POPULATION

Although maltreating adolescent and adult mothers are different, this analysis can still provide guidance for future research involving the general child welfare population. First, the

[36] In cases where the child was eligible for adoption when the adolescent mother's services were terminated and controlling for child related characteristics (infant, toddler, disabilities, placement with a maternal relative, placement with a paternal relative, having a sibling and race (African American and Hispanic), receiving an extension of services did not significantly change the likelihood of the child being adopted.

detailed description of the child welfare system in Chapter 2 applies to all parents. As a result, it can be used to inform future child welfare research, at least with respect to California. Second, other researchers looking for a more comprehensive and rich data source regarding the child welfare population can use the data collection model described in Chapter 4 to mine administrative and court records. Finally, there is strong evidence suggesting that the type of relative placement matters for adolescent mothers. Maternal relative placement and paternal relative placement move in opposite directions with respect to the likelihood of reunification. As a result, any analysis that combines the two types of placements into one comprehensive variable is likely to miss the actual relationships that may exist. Although it is unclear whether this same relationship exists in the general population, it is something that should be explored in future studies.

Appendix

A. SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

On 5/31/07 (with update for new articles 1/28/08), I searched Web of Science looking for the following key words in an article title[37]: (teen* OR adolesc* OR young* OR age*) AND (mother* OR father* OR parent*)[38] AND (abus* OR negle* OR maltreatment OR ((child AND protect*) OR "child welfare" OR reunif* OR outcome* OR reentry OR reoccur* OR foster*). This search returned 355 results. Using the abstract, I included any identified article unless it met the following exclusion criteria:

Exclude if (in hierarchical order):

1. Does not primarily involve teen parents
2. Does not explicitly involve child welfare population
3. Not published article or book chapter (i.e., meeting abstract)
4. Not in English
5. Not empirical or a literature review

Using these criteria, I identified 10 articles. Using a cited reference search in Web of Science (looks at articles that cited the identified article), I identified 3 additional articles. I repeated the cited reference search process an additional three times until there were no more additional articles identified

Through this process I identified 15 potentially relevant articles. In reviewing the full text for each article, I eliminated 5 of the studies. 1 study did not involve adolescent mothers, 3 of the studies involved adolescents at the time the child was born but not at the time of the maltreatment and 1 study did not involve adolescent mothers in the child welfare system. For the remaining 10 articles, I reviewed the references for each. Based on how the reference was described in the article, if it seemed relevant, I looked at the abstract or the full text of the reference and included

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[37] Using the terms in a keyword search returned too many articles (over 16,000) and failed to identify some of the relevant studies.

[38] Without this second term the search returned over 2,500 articles.

unless it met one of the original exclusion criteria. Through this process, I identified another 4 relevant articles but only included 2 of them in the literature review because the full text was unavailable at either the RAND or UCLA libraries and the studies used data sets from before 1980 and so were outdated.

For the additional 2 articles, I did a cited reference search in Web of Science. 1 of the articles was not in the Web of Science database because it had been published too long ago (1980) and the search on the other article did not identify any additional relevant articles.

In total, I reviewed over 600 articles and identified 12 as relevant. Of the 12 relevant articles, 2 look at the prevalence of adolescent mothers in the child welfare population, 6 look at characteristics of maltreating adolescent mothers, 2 include an at-risk sample of adolescent mothers and identify the rate and types of maltreatment, and 2 discuss treatments for maltreating adolescent mothers.

B. DATA COLLECTION AND CLEANING

DATA COLLECTION

For each major hearing I collected the following information from the minute orders:

- Date of hearing – Recorded as the actual date on which substantive orders were made.
- Number of continuances.
- Whether the hearing was contested – Indicator variable. Parents' attorneys often set a hearing for contest even when there is no disputed legal or factual issue simply to delay a potentially adverse ruling. As a result, a hearing was only identified as contested if there was evidence presented or arguments made as noted in the minute order.
- Whether the parents appeared at the hearing – Indicator variable.
- The type of attorney assigned to each parent and child – Indicator variable: Panel attorney, CLCLA1, CLCLA2, CLCLA3, private attorney, out-of-county attorney.
- Whether there had been a change in attorneys from the last hearing – Indicator variable created by looking at the attorney identified at the previous hearing.
- Child's placement – Categorical variable. The minute order contains the order regarding the general placement type (i.e., out-of-home, relative or parent). If a minute order contains no reference to the child's placement, then it has not legally changed from the prior hearing. The details of exactly with whom the child is placed (i.e. foster mother, maternal grandmother, etc) is found on the first page of a report. The variable is defined based on the caretaker's relationship to the child (i.e., foster mom, maternal grandmother, etc).
- Whether the child's placement changed from the last hearing – Indicator variable. To determine whether the placement had changed, I compared the child's placement at one hearing to his or her placement at the previous hearing. If it was not readily apparent from the face of the report whether a change had occurred, I looked at the section contained in the body of the report discussing the child's placement history.
- Visitation orders for each parent – Categorical variable: Restricted monitored visits (less than 1/week or to occur in a specified setting), liberal monitored visits (more than 1/week or unmonitored visits inside the child's placement), general monitored visits (no specified number or location), unmonitored visits restricted as to duration or location, general unmonitored day visits, unmonitored overnight visits restricted as to duration or location, general unmonitored overnight visits, visits determined by caretaker.

For each major hearing I collected the following information primarily from the social worker's court report:

- Availability of relatives for placement (at all reunification hearings): Categorical variable based on the relative's relationship with the child. A relative was defined as available if they were identified in the body of the report as wanting custody of the child or the minute order indicated an order to investigate the relative for placement purposes. If, however, there was a subsequent finding documented in the minute order that the relative was unsuitable for placement, the relative was thereafter not identified as available.

- The DCFS office submitting the report for the hearing – Categorical variable. Found on the face of the report in the upper left hand corner.

- The mother's placement type – Categorical variable. To determine mother's placement type, I looked in the section contained in the body of the report discussing the mother's current circumstances. If a specific placement type was not specifically identified (i.e., foster care, group home, jail or relative), the mother was identified as living on her own.

- Zip code of mother and father – Parents' addresses are usually found on the first page of the report. If not there, it can sometimes also be found on the copies of notices sent to parents which are usually attached to the back of the report.

- Whether mother moved since the last major court date – To determine whether mother's address had changed, I compared the mother's address at one hearing to her address at the previous hearing.

- The provision of in home services for the mother (at all reunification and family review hearings) – Indicator variable. Mother was defined as receiving in home services if she had participated in a program that provided services in her home or if she resided in an in-patient drug program or maternity group home. This information is found in the body of the report in the sections discussing the parent's current circumstances and services provided to the parents.

- Whether the social worker agreed with the court's substantive orders at the hearing – Indicator variable. The social worker's recommendations are found at the end of each report. If the court's order mirrored the social worker's recommendation, the social worker was identified as agreeing with the court's order.

For each family reunification hearing, I also collected the following information:

- Parents' compliance with court ordered services – Categorical variable. None, partial or no finding.

- Whether the child returned home to the adolescent mother or if reunification services were continued – Categorical variable. No return and reunification services terminated, no return and reunification services continued, return to adolescent mother.

For those each family maintenance hearing, I also collected the following information:

- Whether the case was closed or continued for further supervision – Indicator variable.

I also collected the following information at the outset of the case:

- Courtroom – Categorical variable. Found at the top of the minute order. After the detention hearing, the courtroom for a case generally will not change.

- Number of children subject to the petition, their birthdates and sex – Found in the detention hearing minute order.

- Parents' birthdates – Generally found on the first page of adjudication/disposition report along with their addresses.

- Which allegations were alleged and which were sustained – Categorical variable. The allegations are detailed in the petition and the minute order for the adjudication hearing specifies which ones were sustained and which were dismissed. The allegations were defined according to the type of activity (i.e., domestic violence, drug-exposed infant, bad judgment, etc) rather than by the alleged Welfare and Institutions Code sub-section.

- Native American findings on each child – Indicator variable. Usually contained in the detention, adjudication or disposition minute order.

- Status of father for each child (i.e. alleged, biological or presumed) – Categorical variable: alleged, biological, presumed, unknown or no order made. Usually contained in the detention, adjudication or disposition minute order.

- Reunification order for both mother and father – Categorical variable including the reason if an order for no reunification was made. Found in the disposition minute order.

- Programs mother required to attend – Indicator variable for following categories: parenting, domestic violence program, drug counseling, drug testing, individual counseling, other. Found in the disposition minute order or the disposition case plan found on the right side of the file with the minute orders.

- Parents' physical or mental handicaps – Indicator variable. This information is generally self-reported from the parents or their relatives and is found in the adjudication/disposition report. As social workers are legally required to document this information in the report, if the parent had been interviewed at some point by the social worker and there was no mention in the report of a handicap, it was assumed that one did not exist. If the parent had no contact with the social worker, it was defined as unknown.

- Whether mother was employed, married or a high school graduate – Indicator variables. This information is generally self-reported from the parents or their relatives and is found in the adjudication/disposition report. As social workers are legally required to document this information in the report, if the mother had been interviewed at some point by the social worker and there was no mention in the report that she was married, employed or a high school graduate, it was assumed that she was not. If this information was not contained in the report and the social worker did not interview the mother, it was defined as unknown.

- Parents' criminal history, including arrests and convictions and juvenile history – Indicator variable. This information is generally obtained through police records and found in the adjudication/disposition report. If it was noted in the report that the parent's criminal background information was not available, it was defined as unknown.

- Mother's involvement with the juvenile system – Categorical variable. If the mother was under child welfare supervision herself in Los Angeles County it is documented through DCFS' database. If the mother is currently on probation in Los Angeles County it is

identified through police records. This information is reported in the adjudication/disposition report.

- Number of prior child welfare referrals on the mother – Prior child welfare contacts within Los Angeles County are documented using DCFS' database and contacts outside of Los Angeles County are generally identified through interviews with the parents or relatives. This information is reported in the adjudication/disposition report.

- Party who reported the referral – Categorical variable. Generally identified in the detention report. To the extent the reporter was not identified, it was defined as unknown.

I also created a summary sheet that contained the following information:

- The date the court file was reviewed

- An indicator for whether the mother reunified with the child and the date of the reunification

- For those cases in which the mother was reunified, an indicator of whether there was a subsequent petition for maltreatment filed regarding the reunified child and the date of the petition was filed.

DATA CLEANING

For the 201 cases that went to court, I cross-referenced DCFS' information on the birthdate of the mother and oldest child with that listed in the court records. In the 6 cases in which there was a conflict, I used the birthdate listed in the court records as it is a more official source and, thus, more likely to be accurate.

With respect to the information I collected from the court files, since there were so few cases involving more than 1 child, I was concerned that I had inadvertently recorded an "x" for information on child 2 or father 2 when, in fact, there was substantive information about them. After cross-referencing different pieces of information collected on child 2 and father 2, I discovered that I had left out a few pieces of substantive information, inadvertently recording an "x" instead of the information. To remedy this, I re-reviewed the minute orders for those cases and recorded the actual information.

Once I validated which court cases had 2 or more children, I used the children's birthdates to identify which cases had 2 or more children at the time of the case start date. I then cross-referenced this information with the cases I identified as having 2 or more children from the

information DCFS provided. Using information from the court files, I identified 36 of the 201 court cases as having 2 or more children at the case start date (i.e., the date DCFS substantiated the maltreatment). Using the information DCFS provided, however, I could only identify 12 of the 201 court cases as having 2 or more children at the case start date. Given this disparity, it appears that using DCFS' information significantly underestimates the number of cases involving 2 or more children. I spoke with someone at the policy division within DCFS and looking at a sample of the additional 2nd children identified through the court records, it appears that they are actually identified in DCFS' database. As a result, it seems that they were simply inadvertently left out of the sample DCFS provided to me. I contacted DCFS' research division to determine whether there was a data field for how many children were involved at the case open date, but as DCFS records are kept by child rather than by mother in DCFS' electronic database, there is no such data field. Accordingly, I seemed to have accurate information on the oldest child on the case but there was no way easy and accurate way to identify from DCFS' database any younger siblings that were involved in a particular case at the case start date.

To validate certain data elements that were important to the analysis (i.e., child's placement status and information regarding reunification and reabuse), I cross-referenced different pieces of information regarding each data element and for the cases where there was a conflict, I re-reviewed the minute orders for that case and made any necessary adjustments. To ensure that I had correct information on dates in a case, I reviewed the hearing dates for each case in the order in which the hearings should have happened and for any case that seemed out of order or to fall outside of the statutory mandated time frame, I re-reviewed minute orders and made any necessary changes.

To check the validity of information regarding mother's own involvement as a child with the child welfare system, I cross-referenced information obtained from social worker court reports with information from the Juvenile Court's electronic databases. I found 13 cases where the court report indicated that the mother had a child welfare history but the electronic database did not and 24 cases where the electronic database indicated that the mother had a child welfare history but the social worker's report did not. Using different spellings for the mother's name and

confirming the correct individual through birthdate, information was found in the court's electronic databases for 8 of the 13 cases not initially identified. For the 24 cases identified in the electronic database but not in the social worker's report, all but 1 were confirmed as accurate by rechecking the information in the electronic database confirming that the mother's name and birthdate matched. As the information in the court's electronic database appears more complete, my analysis used information regarding mother's own child welfare history obtained from the court's electronic database.

I also made other changes as I discovered data inaccuracies through the course of my analysis.

In total, I made changes to less than 1% of the data elements in the various spreadsheets.

TREATMENT OF MISSING DATA

I filled in missing data elements as follows:

- Race: 2 cases were missing the oldest child's race, 7 cases were missing the mother's race and 1 case was missing the race of both the mother and child. For those cases missing the mother's race, I used the child's race instead and for those cases missing the child race I used the mother's race. The case missing both races was identified as missing. 21 cases were missing the younger child's race. For these cases I used the race of the oldest child.

- DCFS substantiated allegation: 41 cases were missing the DCFS substantiated allegation code for the younger child. For these cases I used the DCFS substantiated allegation code for the older child.

- Initial DCFS office assignment: 52 cases had no initial DCFS office identified. I contacted DCFS' research division regarding these cases and was informed that they could not find the initial DCFS office because there was no referral information for these cases. Apparently, in 2003 and 2004 entering referral information into the DCFS system was not a prerequisite for opening a DCFS case. So sometimes the information was simply omitted. For these cases, if the case subsequently went to Juvenile Court, I used the DCFS office assigned in the detention report. Using this method I was able to identify a DCFS office code for 29 of the 52 cases leaving only 24 (7.08%) of the cases without an initial DCFS office code designation.

- DCFS office assignment at Juvenile Court: There were 15 cases missing the DCFS office that filed the disposition report. For 3 of these cases I used the DCFS office that filed the detention report. For 5 of these cases, I used the assigned office that DCFS provided. On the remaining 7 cases the office code was left as missing.

- Case start date: In 6 cases, the case start date in DCFS' records was *after* the initial court date, which was inaccurate as a case must first be substantiated before a petition can be filed. In 3 of these cases, the date DCFS removed the children from the parents' custody was before the initial court date so I used the removal date as the case start

date. In the remaining 3 cases there was no removal date before the detention date. In 2 cases I re-reviewed the court file and used the date DCFS began providing services to the family, which was before the detention date and in 1 case the file was unavailable so I used the detention date as the case start date.

- Age at the time adolescent mother is provided services: The exact date on which services for the adolescent mother started is contained in the social worker's file to which I did not have access. As a proxy, for those cases that received voluntary services, I will assume that the services started at the case start date. For those cases that received services through Juvenile Court, I will assume that the services started at the disposition date.

- Child's placement: For those cases that received voluntary services, I have no data on where the child lived while those services were provided. But given that voluntary service cases are generally only provided in circumstances where the parent is cooperative and there is no serious risk of harm to the child, it seems reasonable to assume that the child would be living with the adolescent mother.

- Number of children: As previously discussed, this data element is only accurate for the Juvenile Court cases. So for the 201 cases that eventually went to Juvenile Court, I have used information from the court files regarding the children's birthdates to calculate how many children were involved at the DCFS case start. In looking at this information, for those cases that did not involve twins, 94% of the Juvenile Court cases that had 2 or more children also had an oldest child who was 15 months or older. For the 124 cases that did not go to Juvenile Court, 5 were identified from DCFS records as having 2 or more children. For the remaining 119, if the oldest child was 15 months or younger, I have assumed that there is only 1 child on the case. Using these definitions, 32 (9.85%) of the cases are missing information regarding the number of children at the case start.

- Compliance for voluntary service cases: There is one case that had no subsequent maltreatment petition filed but still remained open 3 years later at the time data was collected. As cases are not supposed to receive voluntary services for more than 1 year, I have assumed that the parent complied and the lack of a case close date is simply an oversight.

- Compliance for family reunification cases: There is no compliance finding at the first reunification hearing on 24 cases. Compliance is determined as follows:
    - There are 4 cases in which the case was transferred to another county before the hearing and there are 2 cases which have not yet had their first reunification hearing. Compliance on these cases will be left as missing.

    - There are 3 cases in which the child was returned before the hearing and there are 3 cases in which the child was returned at hearing but there was no compliance finding. 86% of the cases in which the child was returned at the first reunification hearing had a finding of full compliance. As a result, these 6 cases will be deemed as full compliance.

    - There are 6 cases in which the child was not returned and services were terminated at the hearing but no there was no compliance finding. 87.50% of the cases in which the child was not returned and services were terminated at the first reunification hearing had a finding of no compliance. As a result, these 6 cases will be deemed as no compliance.

    - There are 6 cases in which the child was not returned and services were continued but there was no compliance finding. 91% of the cases in which the

child was not returned and services were continued at the first reunification hearing had a finding of either partial or full compliance. But the cases were almost evenly split between partial and full compliance. As a result, the 3 cases with a study id less than 100 will be deemed as partially compliant and the 3 cases with a study id of more than 100 will be deemed as fully complainant.

- Voluntary vs. Juvenile Court supervision: Unfortunately, I did not have access to the social worker's file and so do not know the social worker's actual determination on each case. But, if the social worker removes a child from the parent's custody, the case must be heard in Juvenile Court within 3 business days. WIC §§313(a) and 315. Allowing for weekends, then, I have assumed that any case that has 5 or less days between the case open date and the detention date in which DCFS recommended that the child be removed from the parents' custody was one in which the social worker made a decision for immediate removal. If a child is not immediately removed from the parent's custody, the social worker must decide whether the family needs ongoing services. If so, the social worker has up to 30 days to complete a case plan for the family, which includes whether to offer voluntary services in lieu of formal Juvenile Court supervision. Handbook §0070-548.10. For any case not involving an immediate removal that closed within 30 days of the case open date, I have assumed that the social worker decided the family did not need ongoing services. For the remaining cases, if there was more than 30 days between the case open date and the detention date, I have assumed that the decision was made to provide voluntary services and, otherwise, I have assumed that the decision was made to proceed directly to Juvenile Court.

- Mother's own maltreatment history: As discussed above, data from the Juvenile Court's electronic files regarding this data element is more accurate and comprehensive. As a result, the proxy will be any adolescent mother who was under formal Juvenile Court supervision in Los Angeles County as a child. Although more accurate, this proxy is more limited as it does not capture adolescent mothers who received voluntary services and adolescent mothers under supervision in other jurisdictions.

- Living in SPA 6: Each SPA covers certain zip codes. I did not have the mother's zip code at the time the maltreatment was substantiated. But each DCFS office is located within a particular SPA and is generally assigned to a case based on where the custodial parent lives. As a result, I used the DCFS office assigned to a case to determine whether the adolescent mother lived in SPA 6 at the time of the initial maltreatment. For cases on which I did not have a DCFS office code or on cases involving the Emergency office (which covers all SPAs), I used the adolescent mother's zip code from the detention or disposition report to assign a SPA. Using this process, 9.85% (32 of 325) of the cases were missing a SPA designation based on the time of maltreatment. With respect to the cases that went to Juvenile Court, I used the adolescent mother's zip code in the disposition report to assign a case to SPA 6. To the extent the zip code was unavailable, I used the zip code from the detention report and if that was unavailable, I assigned the case a SPA based on the DCFS office that submitted the disposition report. Using this process I was able to assign a SPA to all but 1 of the cases at disposition.

- Completed years in school: This information was not available in the DCFS report as it generally only identified whether the adolescent mother had graduated from high school. As a result, I will use high school graduation as a proxy.

In addition to the changes discussed above, data are simply missing for the following variables:

- 46 cases had no substantiated DCFS allegation code identified. I contacted DCFS' research division regarding these cases and was informed that they could not find the substantiated allegation because there was no referral information for these cases. Apparently, in 2003 and 2004 entering referral information into the DCFS system was not a prerequisite for opening a DCFS case. So sometimes the information was simply omitted. As there was no way to systematically infer or determine the initial allegation, it was left as missing.

- Compliance for family maintenance cases: There are 3 cases on which there has been no subsequent maltreatment petition that are still receiving family maintenance services. Compliance for those cases is left as missing as the ultimate case outcome is unknown.

- Adolescent mother's physical and mental health: There are 17 cases on which there is no information either because the DCFS report was not available or because the adolescent mother never had contact with the social worker.

- Low internal resources: There are 20 cases on which there is no information either because the DCFS report was not available or the DCFS report did not contain the information.

- Number and quality of services: I have no data on the nature of the voluntary services as that information is contained in the social worker's file to which I did not have access.

- Voluntary service cases that never went to Juvenile Court: The only data available on these cases is information that DCFS provided through its administrative data base as there were no Juvenile Court files to review. As a result, there are no data on these cases for the following variables:
    - Completed years in school
    - Difference in age between the mother and father
    - Number and quality of services
    - Adolescent mother's physical and mental health
    - Adolescent mother's internal resources
    - Child's disabilities
    - Relationship between the adolescent mother and her child
    - Relationship between the adolescent mother and the child's father
    - Complexity of the adolescent mother's underlying problems
    - Social support from individuals
    - English as a second language

- Difference in age between the mother and the father. With respect to Juvenile Court cases, there were a total of 222 fathers. But I only have birthdates for 162. On the cases for which I have no birthdates for the father, there is no way to calculate the difference in age.

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