



Welfare Reform and Adoption Policy: Unfinished Business

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The Problem:

The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) mandates that families receiving welfare benefits have work requirements after 24 months and receive support a maximum of 60 months. Under the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), in pursuit of a child's best interests, the focus is on child maltreatment and away from such confounding family issues as addiction, poverty, domestic violence, mental health issues, and family risk factors. Thus, the intended good measures of the legislature have created unfair challenges and barriers for children and families served by Child Protective Services (CPS).

Research Evidence:

An estimated 872,000 children were victims of maltreatment in 2004, many of them poor children. In addition, minority children are more likely to live in foster care. While poverty and minority statuses do not cause maltreatment, less affluent children of color experience a higher rate of other conditions associated with child maltreatment, including depression, isolation, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, substance abuse, and family violence. Research shows that the association between mental health, substance abuse, and poverty is a critical factor that has not been addressed in child welfare policies.

Proposed Solutions:

- Reexamine and evaluate the impact of the ASFA timeline mandates at the national, state, and local levels to determine the effect of these directives and stipulations on the well-being of children and their families.
- Support ASFA changes at the national and state levels to allow states more discretion and autonomy, without imposing punitive measures, in the process of service delivery.
- Support initiatives for additional funding and initiate the changes needed to support families affected by the PRWORA. Consider the holistic and contextual needs of CPS/at-risk families, and revise existing policies to address root causes of family distress. Focus more on primary prevention.

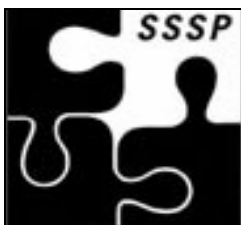
About the Author:

Irma J. Gibson, PhD Irma J. Gibson is Assistant Professor of Social Work at the Savannah State University.
Contact: gibsoni@savstate.edu

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