



# Exploring the Perspectives and Needs of Child Welfare Caseworkers in Their Work with Children with Disabilities

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## Background

- 28% - 50% of youth in foster care are diagnosed with developmental disabilities (DD)
- DD status of children in foster care is rarely tracked
- Little is known about service provision for children with DD within the child welfare system (CWS)
- Minimal to no training or support for caseworkers about the specific needs of this population

## Objectives

- Assess the knowledge, experience, and comfort levels of caseworkers from eight NYS counties' Departments of Social Services (DSS) related to children with DD
- Identify what, if any, additional training and resources caseworkers need to adequately serve children with DD within the CWS

## Methods

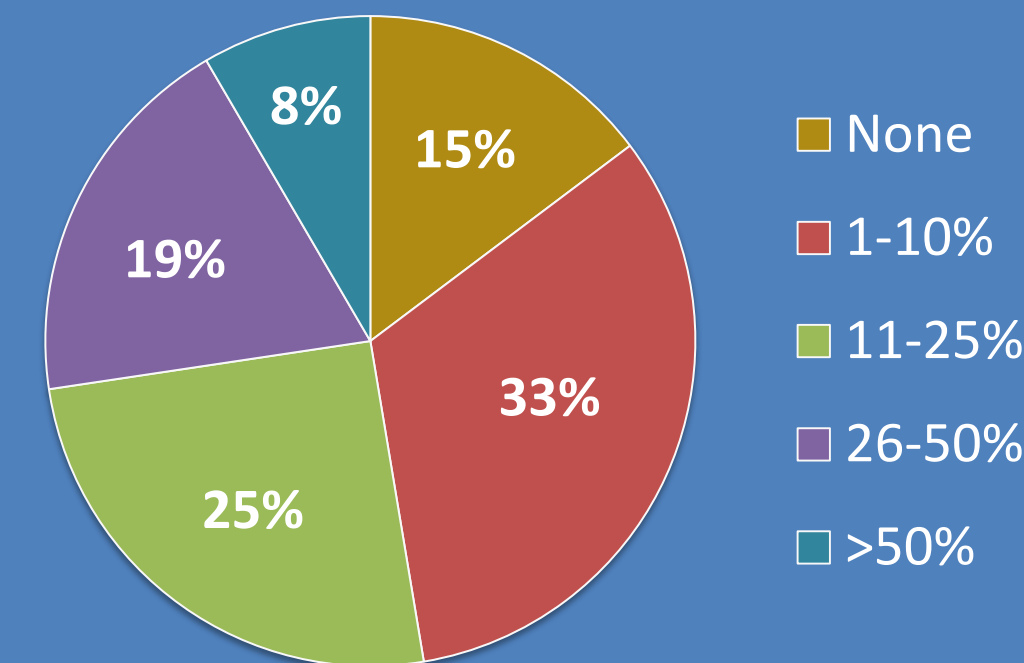
- Developed online survey to measure objectives
- Obtained approval from NYMC IRB
- Anonymously administered online survey and offered incentive for participation
- Conducted Two-Way ANOVA comparing effects of training and experience on DD knowledge scores (scores based on accurate DD identification)
- Compiled caseworkers' self-ratings of knowledge, exposure & comfort with DD and utilized Mann Whitney analyses to explore how caseworker demographics impacted these constructs
- Conducted Chi-square analysis to assess differences in barriers by county

## Participants (N=251)

- **Counties:** Westchester (32%), Suffolk (42%), Orange (16%), Rockland (7%), Ulster (1%), Putnam (2%), Nassau & Dutchess (0%)
- **Unit:** Child Protective (54%), Preventive (25%), Foster Care (22%), Cross-systems (4%), Other (9%)
- **Gender:** Female (80%), Male (18%), Transgender (<1%)
- **Length of Experience:** <10 years (44%), >10 years (54%), no response (2%)
- **Education:** HS diploma (<1%), Associate's (1%), Bachelor's (63%), Master's (32%), LCSW (2%), Doctoral (0%), Other (1%)
- **Size of Caseload:** 0 (12%), 1-10 (13%), 11-20 (31%), 21-30 (17%), 31-40 (9%), 41-50 (5%), >50 (9%), no response (4%)

## Quantitative Results

Percentage of Children with Developmental Disabilities on Caseload



- 57% ( $n = 142$ ) of caseworkers suspected additional *undiagnosed* DD in their caseload
- Over 60% ( $n = 151$ ) of caseworkers accurately identified DD versus other conditions
- A non-significant trend suggested that having DD-specific training produced higher scores, particularly for more seasoned caseworkers

### Relationships Between Caseworker Demographics and Constructs

	Perceived Knowledge Med.	$p$	Perceived Exposure Med.	$p$	Perceived Comfort Med.	$p$
High Knowledge Score	28	.282	26	.002*	39	.602
Low Knowledge Score	27		24		40	
Had Training	29	.000*	26	.001*	40	.001*
No Training	26		24		37	
Worked <10 Years	27	.664	24	.001*	38	.044*
Worked > 10 Years	28		26		40	
Frequent Outside Work Interactions	29	.004*	26	.009*	40	.045*
No Outside of Work Interactions	26		25		38	

Note: Med. = median score out of 40; \* = significant ( $p < 0.05$ )

- Chi-square analysis of barriers to accessing services by county was not significant

## Qualitative Results

- Qualitative themes highlighted lack of community resources, increased need for training, and need for increased supervisory and administrative support
- "Having ...navigated the [DD] systems for my own child, I found the process overwhelming. I can only imagine a parent with [more] barriers completely giving up."

## Community Partners



Traci LaLiberte, Ph.D., Executive Director at Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work



Philip Goldstein, Director of Program Development at the Child Welfare Academy of the Westchester Department of Social Services

## Conclusions

- Caseworkers confirm high percentages of children with DD in CWS, stressing need for attention to this population
- Training and outside interactions with DD increase knowledge, exposure and comfort perceptions
- Results suggest caseworkers with limited DD knowledge perceive themselves as having similar levels of knowledge and comfort as those with greater DD knowledge
- Overall, caseworkers report notably high comfort levels in working with children with DD despite variable levels of knowledge and perceived knowledge and exposure
- Barriers include lack of resources, supports, and time
- Next steps include dissemination of results and future work with larger/more diverse geographic samples