

**Title:** Parent Experiences with the Child Welfare System: Validation of Surveys Assessing Interactions with Caseworkers and the Court System

**Authors:** Amanda Brown, Pegah Naemi Jimenez, Kaela Byers, Becci Akin

**Cluster Area:** Measurement/Psychometrics

**Paper Presentation**

### **Background & Purpose:**

Although there is a growing emphasis on obtaining feedback from participants in social services in recent years, there are limited tools available to assess the experience of parents with children in foster care. In addition, parents navigating the child welfare system are in fact experiencing multiple interacting systems, including public and private agency systems, health systems, and the court system. In assessing parent experiences with the child welfare system, it is important to understand how these different systems are experienced by parents while their children are in care.

To address these questions, this study tested the reliability and construct validity of two measures of parent experiences with distinct arenas within the child welfare system: experiences with caseworkers and experiences with the legal system. These instruments were developed to include items important to understanding parent engagement with the child welfare system with the goal of designing and implementing relevant systems-level interventions.

### **Methods:**

As part of a large-scale project implementing and evaluating programs to improve the child welfare system, we developed two new scales of parent experiences, including subscale domains reflecting underlying constructs within the systems affecting parents; the Parent Legal Experience Survey (PLES) and the Parent Agency Caseworker Experience Survey (PACES). The PLES, a 16 item Likert-type survey was adapted from an instrument designed to evaluate child welfare workers' perceptions of the juvenile court system (Ellis, 2010). The PACES, a 26-item instrument, was adapted from two existing instruments measuring parent satisfaction with public and private agency workers (Kapp & Vela, 2004; Harris, Poertner & Joe, 2000). We conducted exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses on both newly adapted scales to establish the internal consistency validity and construct validity of each instrument. Data were collected in person via survey from 305 parents and caregivers with current or prior experience navigating the foster care system across 34 counties in one midwestern state. Data were collected by professional parent partners with lived child welfare experience. The PLES was developed with four theorized subscales: 1) attorney conscientiousness, 2) attorney relationship, 3) attorney guidance, and 4) system responsiveness. The PACES was developed with four subscales: 1) worker conscientiousness, 2) worker relationship, 3) worker sensitivity, and 4) worker communication.

### **Results:**

Results revealed preliminary evidence of reliability and construct validity for two instruments assessing parent experiences of child welfare. Both measures demonstrated acceptable fit with statistically significant factor loadings for each item and sufficient reliability (PACES: CFI=.94, TLI=.93, RMSEA=.08, Cronbach's alpha=.98; PLES: CFI=.938, TLI=.925, RMSEA=.12, Cronbach's alpha=.98). Although PLES RMSEA fit index is inconsistent, this initial survey shows promising results. Planned additional data collection and replication of analyses will further establish

**Title:** Parent Experiences with the Child Welfare System: Validation of Surveys Assessing Interactions with Caseworkers and the Court System

**Authors:** Amanda Brown, Pegah Naemi Jimenez, Kaela Byers, Becci Akin

**Cluster Area:** Measurement/Psychometrics

**Paper Presentation**

evidence for these models.

**Conclusion & Implications:**

Parent feedback is critical for understanding what works and improving the foster care system for the well-being of children and their families. These new instruments provide reliable and valid measures of parent experiences with distinct aspects of the child welfare system and can offer system leaders valuable and actionable quantitative data to improve court and agency practices.