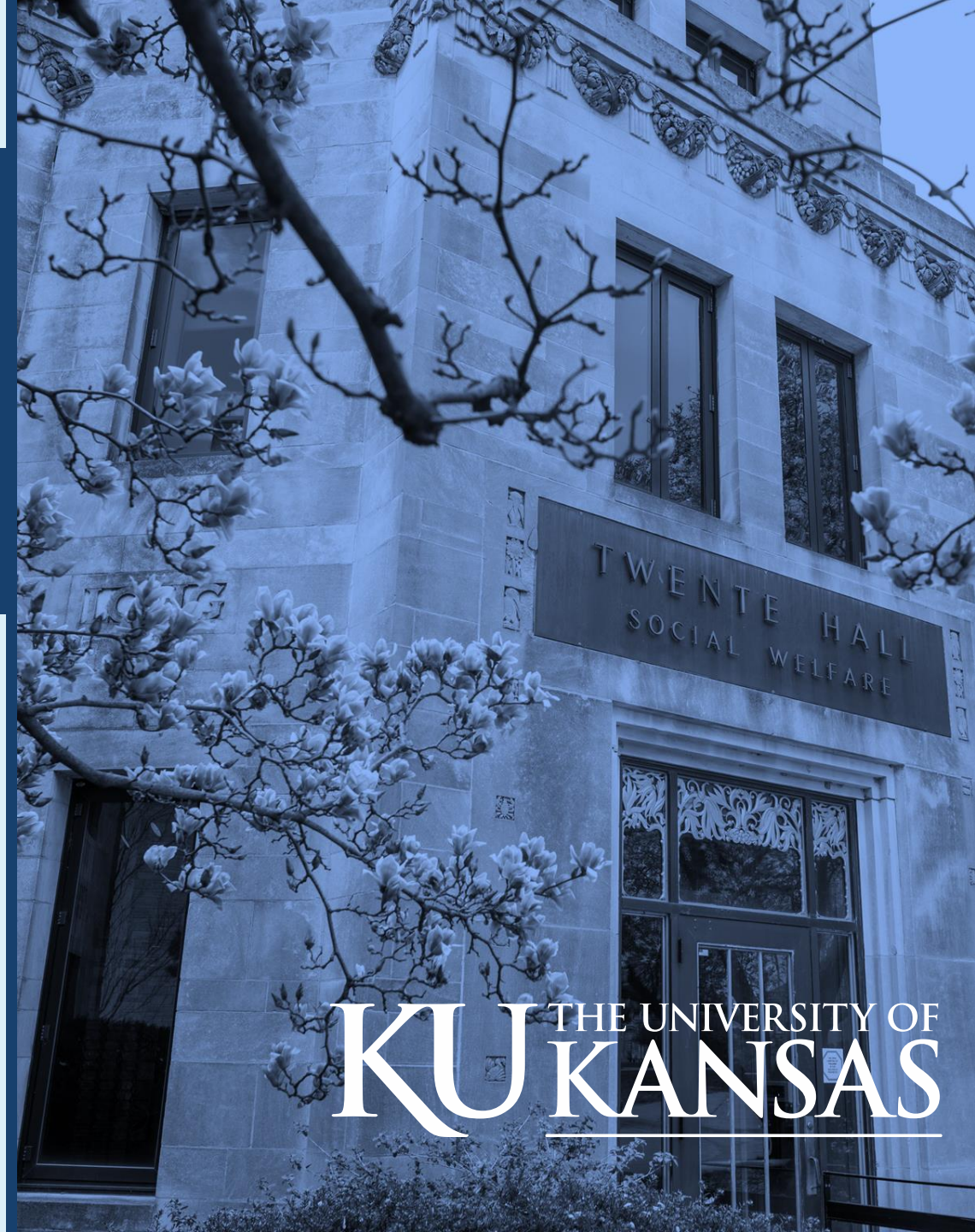


# PARENTS' AND PROFESSIONALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE COURT AND LEGAL SYSTEM

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# Central Objective & Conclusion

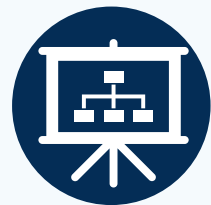
**Study objective: Explore parents' and professionals' perceptions of court & legal practices and examine whether they differ by demographic or other characteristics.**



Parents' significant differences based on age (younger parents rated courts/legal system more favorably) may indicate parents' perceptions of legal professionals decline with age and experience.



Parents' significant differences based on geographic region suggest court norms and culture vary by specific communities/courts, especially among attorneys



Professionals' significant differences based on organization (public vs private) and level of position (frontline, supervisor, administrator) may reflect divergent experiences with court & legal professionals, and may suggest work is needed to coordinate and build relationship between public and private agencies.

# Method & Key Results

## Parents (N = 305)

- Paper survey in private foster care agencies, urban & rural offices
- 17 items, rated on 5-point scale to assess level of agreement on practices of judges and attorneys
- Factor analysis and ANOVA

## Professionals (N = 238)

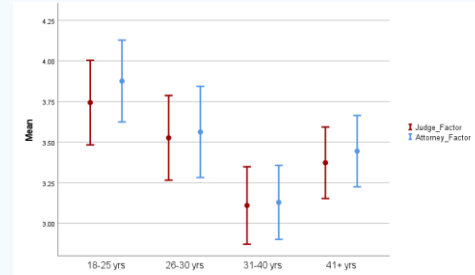
- Online survey of child welfare professionals, statewide
- 8 items, rated court & legal stakeholders on a 5-point scale to assess their being (a) influential and (b) beneficial for foster care entry and permanency decisions
- Included: Judges, prosecutors, parent attorneys, guardian ad litem, court service officers, and court-appointed special advocates
- ANOVA

## PARENTS

### Parents' Four Lowest Rated Items

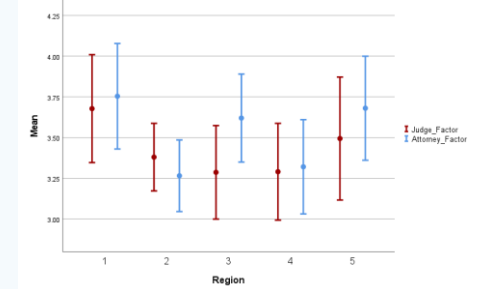
- My attorney gives enough time to my case.
- My attorney calms my fears about what might happen...
- The judge gives enough time to my case.
- My attorney returns my call.

Mean of Judge and Attorney Factors by Age Groups



Judge,  $p = .004$  ; Attorney,  $p < .001$

Mean of Judge and Attorney Factors by Region



Judge,  $p = .497$  ; Attorney,  $p = .05$

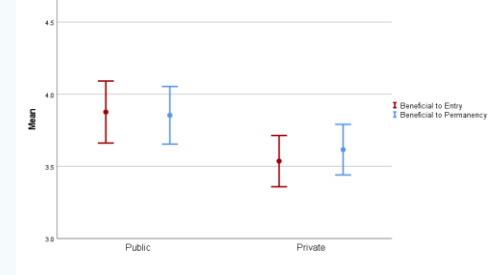
Parents' ratings of attorneys differed significantly by age group and geographic region; and ratings of judges were significantly different by age groups, but not region.

## PROFESSIONALS

### Frontline Workers Reported Court Practices (% reported)

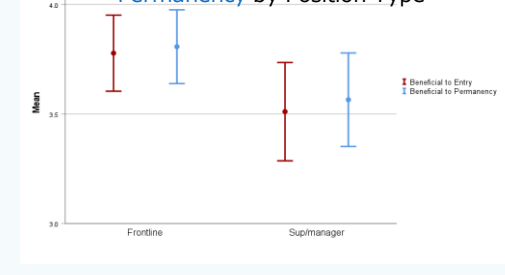
Verbal directives	43.7%
Asks me questions	41.3%
Seeks my input	35.7%
Makes suggestions	26.8%
Gives positive feedback	16.9%
Makes threats	7.5%

Mean Ratings for Judge Beneficial to Entry & Permanency by Agency Type



Entry,  $p = .02$ ; Permanency,  $p = .07$

Mean Ratings for Judge Beneficial to Entry & Permanency by Position Type



Entry,  $p = .05$ ; Permanency,  $p = .05$

Professionals' ratings of court stakeholders varied by outcome (entry and permanency), agency, and position type with largest differences on the influence and benefits of judges and prosecuting attorneys.

# Implications



This study should be replicated across samples and jurisdictions to confirm findings



Future research needed to examine changes over time in parents' and professionals' perceptions of the court/legal system



Professionals' discrepant ratings and parents' low ratings of court practices suggest attention to quality legal representation



Differences by geographic area may suggest cross-jurisdiction training is needed to gain consistency in quality legal representation



Differences between public and private agencies deserve deeper exploration to understand incongruent views of the court/legal system



# Acknowledgements, Contacts, and Thank You

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