

Public Abstract

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Graduation Term:SS 2009

Department:Social Work

Degree:PhD

Title:Legalized orphans: Parental relinquishment to child welfare

This exploratory study examines the phenomenon of voluntary parental relinquishment to alternative care. In 2006 there were 51,984 children voluntarily placed into alternative care by a parent (Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). The occurrence of parents relinquishing a child to the state's custody is not a recent one. Literature evidence (Cohen, et al., 2003; GAO, 2002; NAMI, 1999) most frequently attributes mental illness of the child and subsequent unmet mental health needs as a predecessor to voluntary placement. Both federal and state research indicates that voluntary relinquishment is occurring for families who are economically unable to provide mental health services to a child. However, some children are voluntarily relinquished with no known history of mental health issues (AFCARS, 2006). This raises the question of what makes a child or a family vulnerable to voluntary placement in alternative care. This study will enhance current literature through an exploratory analysis of the nationwide population of children in alternative care to determine those factors which influence a parent's voluntary relinquishment.