

Preface

The purpose of this book is to inform an approach to child welfare service delivery to African American children and families that is based on cultural adaptation as the mediating construct with the existing system of care. This approach requires identification of the current system's limitations in meeting the needs of African American children and their families, and then using the needs and conditions of families to propose policy and program responses that make requisite cultural adaptations targeted to this population. The disparate experience of African American children and youths in the out-of-home child welfare system provides the primary rationale for considering an alternative approach to the study of child welfare.

The primary objective is to describe how cultural adaptations can be used in the delivery of child welfare services to African American children and families. To accomplish the objective, the book entails a review and evaluation of the three major child welfare goals: (1) *protection*; (2) *permanency*; and (3) *well-being*. Specifically, we explore the effect of these three goals on African American children and families. An important feature of the book is the recommendations for policy, practice, and research that can guide intervention with this population.

USING THE BOOK

The book is intended for use by people who have a basic knowledge of systems of care, human behavior theories, and social work practice skills. The practitioners who use it may be enrolled in a graduate program in social work or a graduate course of study, or be a participant in training directed to government bureaucrats, administrators, or program

managers concerned with improving the child welfare service delivery system. Emphasis is placed on knowledge building, policy analysis, and research to improve the strategies and skill sets used when working with African American children and families.

The book will be useful for child welfare professionals (practitioners and administrators), students, grassroots organizers and policy advocates, researchers, and instructors. With its hallmark feature, the cultural adaptation approach, it provides readers with an explication of basic skills, steps, and strategies that are useful in the delivery of child welfare services to African American children and families. The book integrates practice, policy, and research and includes study tools and resources (a glossary, discussion questions, and activities for ongoing learning); thus it can be easily incorporated into such courses as child welfare, family practice, social work and the law, social work practice, cultural diversity, policy, child welfare integrative seminar, and special topic electives. Following are recommendations for how readers can make best use of the book.

Students

We recommend that students begin by reading each chapter thoroughly. Some students might find it helpful to use the glossary as an outline to structure their note taking. The glossary contains some of the most vital concepts and content covered in the chapters. Additionally, students might want to use one or more of the chapters as a topic area or theme for a term paper. For example, a student considering child well-being as a topic for a course paper will want to pay special attention to chapter 6 and can use the components contained in that chapter as headings and subheadings to structure the paper. Students may also consider using the book as a study tool to prepare for graduate comprehensive or qualifying examinations, given the fact that it includes detailed discussion of the three major child welfare components: protection, permanency, and well-being.

Child Welfare Professionals

Chapters 4, 5, and 6, respectively, include discussions of how existing and traditional child protection, permanency, and well-being strategies

can be culturally adapted so that they are more effective with African American children and families. After reading these chapters in particular, some child welfare professionals may be prompted to engage in a critical analysis of the approaches that are currently being used in their local child welfare systems. Some may find that they can use the recommended approaches in their day-to-day interactions with clients.

Grassroots Organizers and Policy Advocates

Advocates will find the conceptual framework (chapter 1), historical review (chapter 2), and policy analysis (chapter 3) compelling and useful for data mining as they prepare arguments for system reform. Several empirical studies, national analyses, and government reports have been synthesized and are presented throughout the book, especially in the first three chapters. Policy advocates will find a plethora of facts and figures they can use to educate and inform decision makers.

Researchers

A research direction and several research ideas are presented in chapter 7. Using the cultural adaptation framework, researchers are presented with a strategy for evaluating the adequacy of evidence-based interventions. Additionally, researchers can incorporate some of the suggested advocacy-based research strategies into their own work. Finally, some may be motivated to develop pilot studies or seek funding for demonstration sites that test the proposed performance-based research approach.

Instructors

Instructors can use this book in multiple ways: First, as required reading for undergraduate and graduate students, instructors can use the chapters and the related discussion questions as lecture topics or in group or class discussions. Second, instructors can use the recommended projects and assignments as tools to increase students' comprehension of class and book content. Third, although the entire book is useful for all students, instructors will find that the first three chapters are especially

valuable for bringing undergraduate and early-stage graduate students up to speed on the history and nature of the child welfare system. The remaining chapters and especially chapter 8 provide excellent food for thought for advanced students as they prepare major papers.

In short, whatever the status of the reader, this book is best used as a tool for challenging one's critical thinking skills and expanding ideas about the possibilities for reforming a child welfare system that remains inadequate to address the needs of African American children and families. The book can be used as both an academic textbook and a professional training tool.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Each chapter is formatted so that readers can make easy reference to research citations. A glossary of terms is provided at the end of the book to facilitate the use of the book as a practical tool in the workplace or the classroom.

In chapter 1 we share our philosophy in writing the book and the critical need for an examination of the child welfare system in the United States relative to African American children and families. Using the cultural adaptation framework, we suggest strategies for more responsive interventions and policy reforms based on African American cultural tenets.

Chapter 2 discusses major historical, cultural, and political influences that shape both the condition of African American families today and the child welfare system of care as it has evolved over time. Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive list of the primary laws that inform the child welfare out-of-home care system in this country. These major laws are discussed in the context of a legal framework for child welfare, emphasizing both the legal intent and limitations associated with implementation at the state and local levels. Specifically, we discuss laws that inform the process of child protection, permanency planning, and the delivery of family support services and family reunification services. Implications of other recent statutes are also addressed, including the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act (PL 108-36), the Child and Family Services Improvement Act (PL 109-288), and the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (PL 110-35). We propose cultural adaptations to existing policies and the creation of new approaches to child

welfare policy aimed at improving overall effectiveness and strengthening service delivery, particularly relative to the most vulnerable within this system of care.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore core statutory-mandated services once considered polar opposites on a services continuum—child protection and permanency planning. With passage of PL 105-89, the Adoption and Safe Families Act, concurrent planning for all children in child protective service (CPS) is mandated. Policy implications of this statutory requirement for African American families are discussed along with consideration of how the application of policy and implementation strategies may affect outcomes.

Chapter 6 addresses child well-being and considers the effect of the social environment on family life. Emotional and physical health, education, and exposure to the criminal justice system are addressed as factors that may affect quality-of-life experiences for family members. Caregiver needs are also addressed as the quality of parenting is affected by personal challenges and obstacles that when addressed will strengthen families.

Chapter 7 articulates the critical importance of social science research to inform the practice of those who work with and on behalf of children and their families. Research outcomes in child welfare may have limited generalizability for defining evidence-based practices, based on the populations on which research is conducted. This chapter discusses the limitations of some approaches to research and offers recommendations to enhance the capacity of research to reveal critical information about African American children and families. Additionally, three essential elements pertaining to child welfare research are discussed: (1) evidence-based intervention; (2) advocacy-based research; and (3) performance-based research. The chapter proposes a specific research agenda as it pertains to African American children, based on consideration of the cultural adaptation conceptual framework and the interests of children and families served by the child welfare system.

The concluding chapter provides an integrative perspective in which conditions in the child welfare system as well as the families' social environment are discussed, with an emphasis placed on opportunities for meaningful change. Strategies are proposed for practitioners and child advocates to promote the interests and well-being of African American children in the child welfare system while also improving our system of care for all children.

A WORD ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Together we have more than thirty years of professional experience working with and on behalf of children and families. Our combined mix of experience creates a unique perspective enabling us to draw on our experiences in working directly with families in child protection; advocating for children and families at the federal, state, and local levels; and engaging in policy formulation at all levels of government. Our pooled experiences include extensive conduct of program evaluation and outcomes-focused research. Because of our shared professional experiences and the unique strengths we each bring to this effort, we shared equally the conceptualization, research, and writing, as well as our passion for the well-being of all children and their families.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my loving husband, Jesse, for his enduring support and insight, and for always reminding me to assume that there are “good intentions” in all aspects of life. A huge debt of gratitude is extended to my dear friend Keith Alford for his listening ear and his commitment to children and families, especially those who face vulnerabilities and challenges, which inspired my work throughout this project. I dedicate this book to social workers, students, caseworkers, legal advocates, caregivers, providers, and all who are champions of children and families and whose hard work and dedication often go unnoticed.

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. (Galatians 6:9)

Ramona W. Denby

After years of working in child welfare and advocating on behalf of children and families, I developed a keen awareness of the inequities experienced by African American children in the child welfare system, the mental health system, and the juvenile justice system. Inequities have resulted in disparate experiences among African American and other children of color served by these systems nationwide. My early contributions to social research literature were typically focused on public policy–related research and advocacy-directed practice. While sharing my experiences as social worker and social work educator, several friends and my former dean, Tony Tripodi, encouraged me to share my thoughts about what might improve our national system of child welfare, from my viewpoint. Dean Tripodi offered great advice, which I did not always