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Full report is available on the Center for Families, Children & the Courts website at

www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/resources/publications/articles.

STAT SHEET

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Domestic Violence in California Court-Based Child Custody Mediation

Study Overview

A recent report from the California Administrative Office of the Courts, "Domestic Violence in Court-Based Child Custody Mediation in California", highlights the prevalence of interpersonal violence among parents in court-based child custody mediation in California. This stat sheet presents some of the key findings from the report.

Data on interpersonal violence in these cases come from surveys administered to parents and to mediators by the California Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) as part of the Statewide Uniform Statistical Reporting System. These data were collected in 1999. At that time, 2,500 mothers and fathers and 2,812 mediators from a representative sample of cases were surveyed in 51 of California's 58 county court systems.

Key Findings

- Violence between parents was reported in more than three-quarters of the cases. In 76% of cases, at least one parent reported that interparental violence (definition on reverse) had occurred in the relationship.
- Asking parents if "physical violence" has occurred in their relationship may result in under-reporting of domestic violence. More cases reported that "pushing, grabbing, shoving, throwing things, slapping, kicking, biting, or hitting" had occurred in the relationship (66%) than reported that "physical violence" had occurred (55%).
- If threats of violence have occurred in a case, physical violence usually has as well. In 97% of cases that reported threats of violence had occurred, at least one parent also reported that one or more violent behaviors had occurred.
- In 41% of all cases, at least one parent reported that their child(ren) had witnessed violence between the parents.
- Mothers reported that interparental violence had occurred between the parents more often than did fathers (71% versus 58%).
- In 47% of all cases, at least one parent reported on their survey that interparental violence had occurred, but neither parent raised domestic violence as an issue before or during the mediation session.
- About half of cases (57%) that raised domestic violence as an issue received separate mediation sessions.

Methodology

Data presented in this report come from the Statewide Uniform Statistical Reporting System (SUSRS), a series of studies conducted by the California Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts. The SUSRS consists of a network of discrete but interlocking studies containing representative and longitudinal data from over 18,000 child custody cases. Data were collected in 1991, 1993, 1996, and 1999. The 1999 Client Baseline Study collected information about 3,038 Family Court Services sessions (79 percent of all covered types of sessions conducted during the two-week study period). The four client baseline studies all used the same basic methodology: during a designated two-week study period, information was collected about every child custody and visitation mediation session offered in the state. For each mediation session conducted during the study period, both the parents and the mediator completed surveys.

- In most cases, both the mother and father in a family filled out a survey. Surveys were completed by parents in 2,500 cases. In 2,018 of those cases (81 percent), both the mother and father completed surveys; in 299 (12 percent), only the mother completed a survey; and in 183 (7 percent), only the father completed a survey.
- In 1999, 2,812 mediators completed SUSRS surveys. In 312 cases, mediators completed surveys but neither parent completed a survey.

Levels of Analysis

Data for this report are taken from the 1999 Client Profile survey and the 1999 Counselor Report survey. The Client Profile survey was filled out by each parent before the mediation session, and the Counselor Report survey was completed by each mediator just after the session. Data are aggregated to two levels:

- **Parent level.** Parent level data reports mother and father survey responses separately. In 1999, 2,317 mothers and 2,201 fathers filled out Client Profile surveys.
- **Case level.** Case level reports combine the responses of the mother and the father in a case. Mothers and fathers from 2,500 cases filled out Client Profile surveys in 1999.

Description of Selected Variables

- **Interparental violence.** Report by parent(s) that any of the following ever occurred in the relationship: a restraining order; physical violence in the relationship; physical violence in the relationship in the last 6 months; use of a weapon, knife, or firearm; sexual assault; children witnessed physical violence between the parents; pushing, grabbing, shoving, throwing things, slapping, kicking, biting, or hitting; or threats of violence.
- **Separate sessions.** Mediator reported that he or she met with the mother alone or with the father alone.

A more extensive report is available that describes a full analysis of 1999 SUSRS data on domestic violence in court-based child custody mediation cases. This report "Research Update: Domestic Violence in Court-Based Child Custody Mediation in California" is available on the CFCC website.

www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/pdffiles/resupDV99.pdf

For more information on the 1999 SUSRS studies, see *Data Collection Methods (Center for Families, Children & the Courts, March 2001)*. www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/pdffiles/dcm99ss.pdf

This publication was prepared by Alexa Hirst, Senior Research Analyst at the AOC, Center for Families, Children & the Courts. The views expressed in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the Judicial Council of California.