

What are key research gaps in the child welfare field?

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What can we learn from this study?

Child maltreatment is a public health problem with long-term negative consequences. A large and growing body of research demonstrates that outcomes for youth who experience foster care are worse than their peers in the general population. Despite this research, important gaps in knowledge remain. To address those gaps, key stakeholders were surveyed. This article summarizes what they identified as the most significant evidence gaps in child welfare to help prioritize funding for future research and build a greater evidence base on what works best to support children and families.

Study details:

- **Population:** 300 surveyed stakeholders (individuals with experience in child welfare, including parents, youth, caseworkers, administrators, providers, policymakers, advocates, researchers, and funders)
- **Data source:** Survey responses through existing child welfare listservs and affinity groups
- **Methodology:** Descriptive statistics; purposive sampling
- **Dates:** Completed by February 2020

What are the critical findings?

Survey respondents rated the evidence gap in 12 topic areas: agency policy/rules; tools and instruments; child welfare practices; federal and state policy; post-system involvement; kin and foster parents; use of research; residential alternatives; prevention of abuse or neglect; cross-system involvement; workforce; and preventing foster care entry. Nearly half of the respondents identified large gaps in most areas:

- The highest priority topic areas for research funding were foster care entry (48%), prevention of abuse or neglect (35%), and workforce (33%). Preventing foster care entry was rated as both a large gap and a high priority.
- Respondents identified children who are immigrants (52%) and LGBTQ youth (52%) as demographic groups child welfare needs to know more about, as well as transition-age youth (43%) and children from tribal communities (40%).
- Respondents identified that families with intergenerational child welfare involvement is a population that the field of child welfare knows the least about (47%).
- Respondents emphasized the need for services and interventions that are culturally responsive and stressed that middle-class white families not be the standard for comparison.

Why is this important for our work?

The process of conducting research impacts communities, and community members have a right to be part of that process. A more coordinated, focused, and culturally responsive approach to research has the potential to better direct funding and resources to understanding how to effectively support families.

This summary synthesizes the findings from a single research study. For summaries of other recent and salient child welfare research, please see [Research from the Field](#).

For additional information, [access the article directly](#) or email KMResources@casey.org.