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The Decision Making Ecology of Placing a Child into Foster Care: A Structural Equation Model

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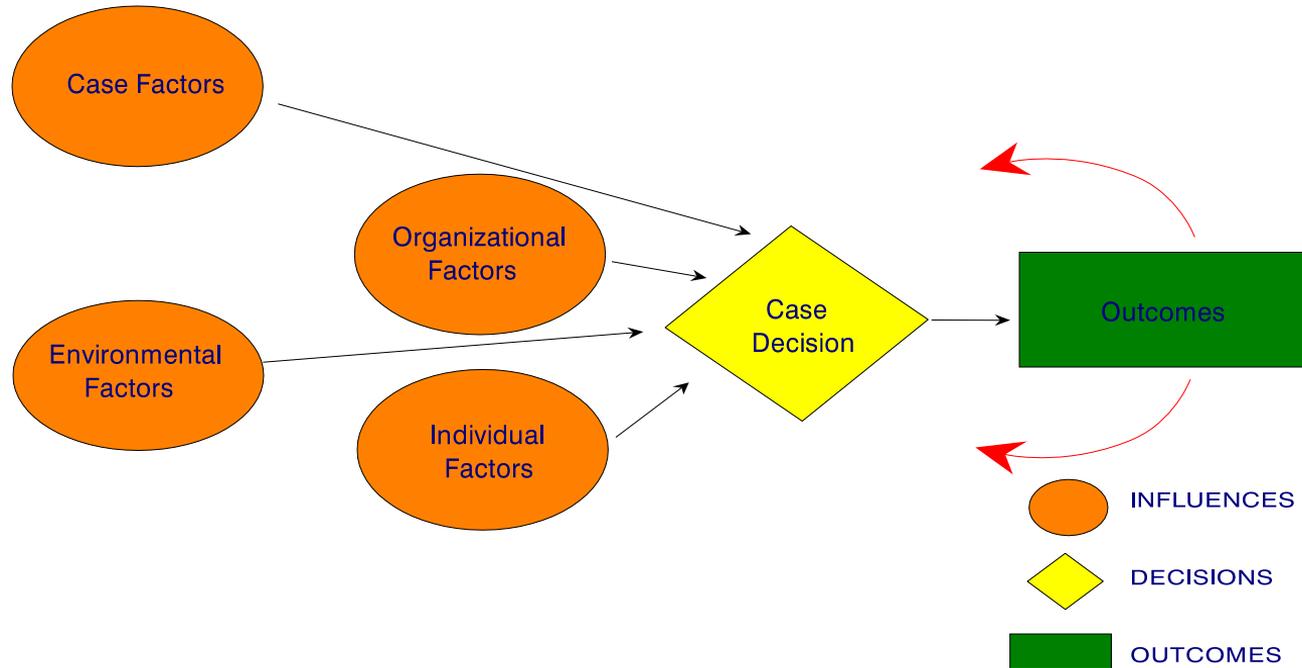
Aim of the Study

To further explore the context of the placement decision, and the inter-relationships among:

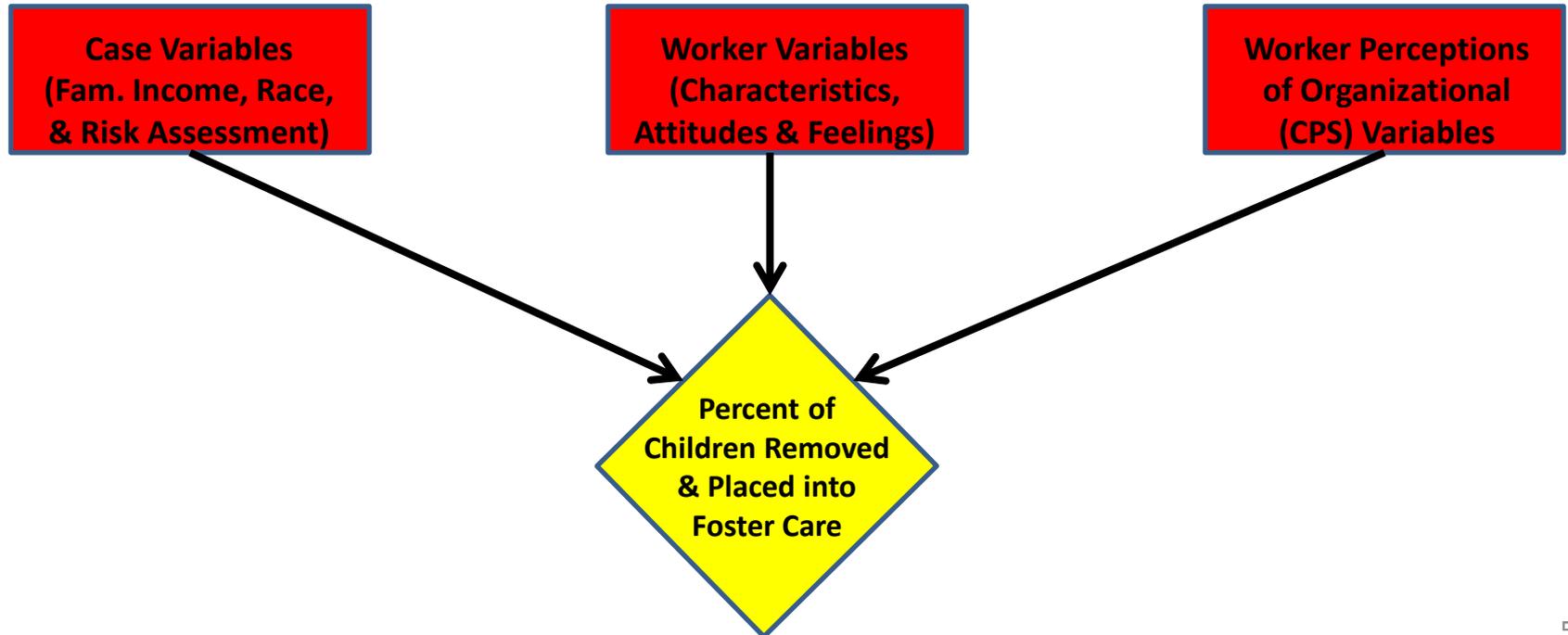
- case factors,
- caseworker factors
- organizational factors

(at least as they are perceived by caseworkers).

Original Decision Making Ecology



Schematic Diagram of Hypothesized Relations of DME Domains Involved in the Placement Decision



Study Sample

- 1,103 CPS investigative caseworkers in the State of Texas
- Surveyed during the period August through December 2007
- Matched to administrative records of cases and personnel records from September 2004 through the end of February 2008

General Description of the Scales

CASEWORKER SURVEY SCALES	
Scale	Items
Caseworker Skills	Items assess caseworkers' interpersonal and case-related work skills.
Job Experiences	Items assess caseworkers' experiences with on-the-job conditions including workload, resources, supervision, and co-worker support.
Removal Decisions (INV) Case Closure Decisions (CVS)	Items evaluate caseworkers' attitudes about removals and factors associated with willingness to remove.
Disposition Decisions (INV only)	Items evaluate considerations made by caseworkers when determining case disposition.
Difficult Situations	Items evaluate caseworkers' comfort level and skills when working with hostile or difficult clients.
Consensus Over Liability	Items evaluate the extent to which caseworkers' concerns about liability influence decision-making.
Community Services	Items evaluate caseworkers' abilities to access available community resources.

Psychometrics

As part of the Texas Disproportionality Project, Chris Graham conducted a reliability analysis of the two survey scales and subscales, and a principal components analysis (PCA) of the “Removal” Scale. Two components were extracted.

With one exception (“Disposition Decisions”), we considered the scales reliable enough for further use (ranging from alpha = .55 to .95), though there is room for improvement.

Decision-Making Ecology Categories – Worker Variables

- Male
- Seniority
- Interpersonal skills (1AL)
- Case skills (1BL)
- External reference (3AL)
- Internal reference (3BL)
- Difficult situations (5AL)
- Worry about Liability(6AL)
- Worry that CPS sometimes makes things worse for child (V58)
- Believes professional collateral information is more reliable (V57)
- Disposition decision is based upon risk assessment (V56)

Decision-Making Ecology Categories – Organizational Variables

Organizational Variables (Worker Perceptions of)

- Workload/resources (not enough) (2AL)
- Supervision/work unit (2BL)
- Support (6BL)
- Services (7AL)

Decision-Making Ecology Categories – Case Variables (& Decision)

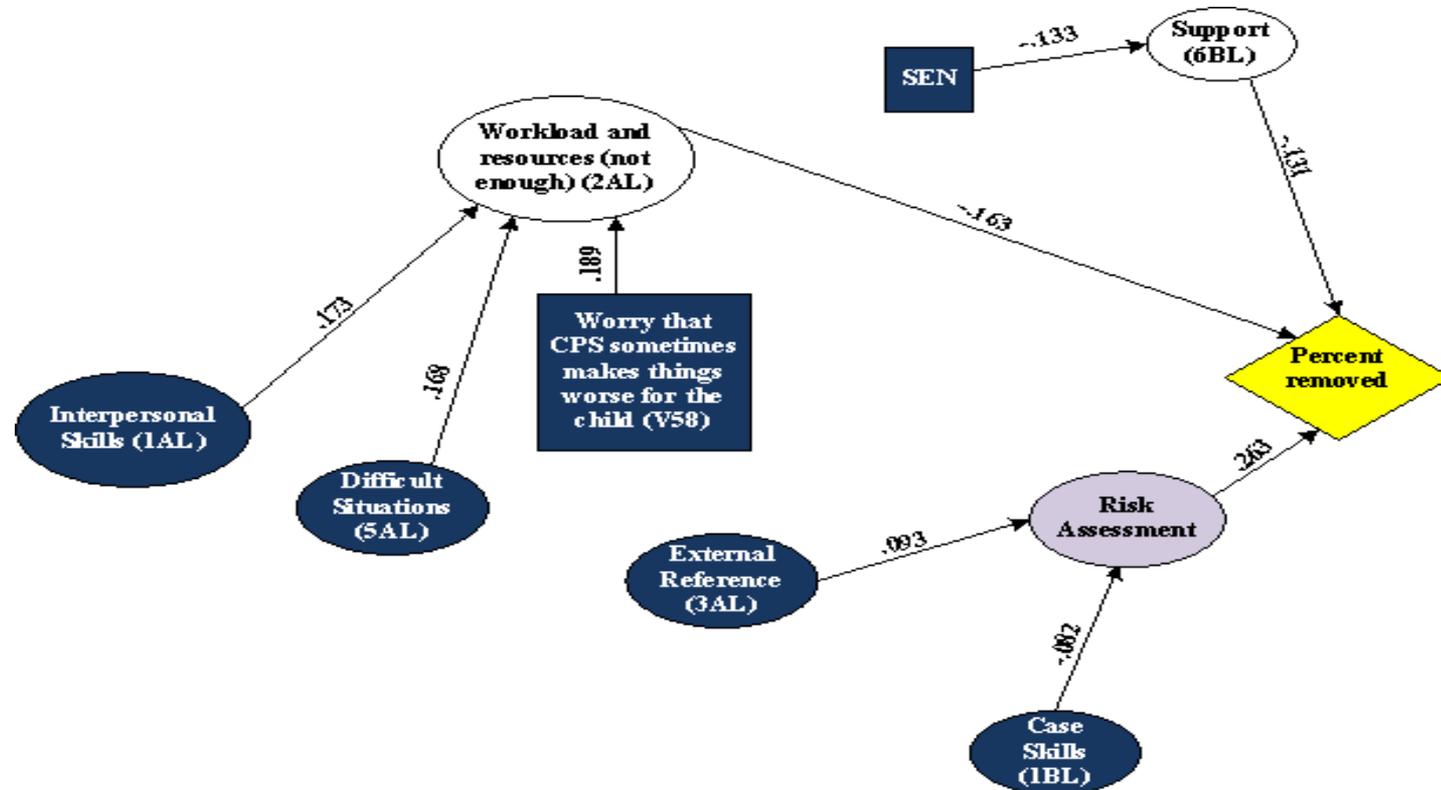
Case Variables

- Risk assessment (across cases)
- Low Income (across cases)
- Proportion African-American on caseload
- Proportion Hispanic on caseload

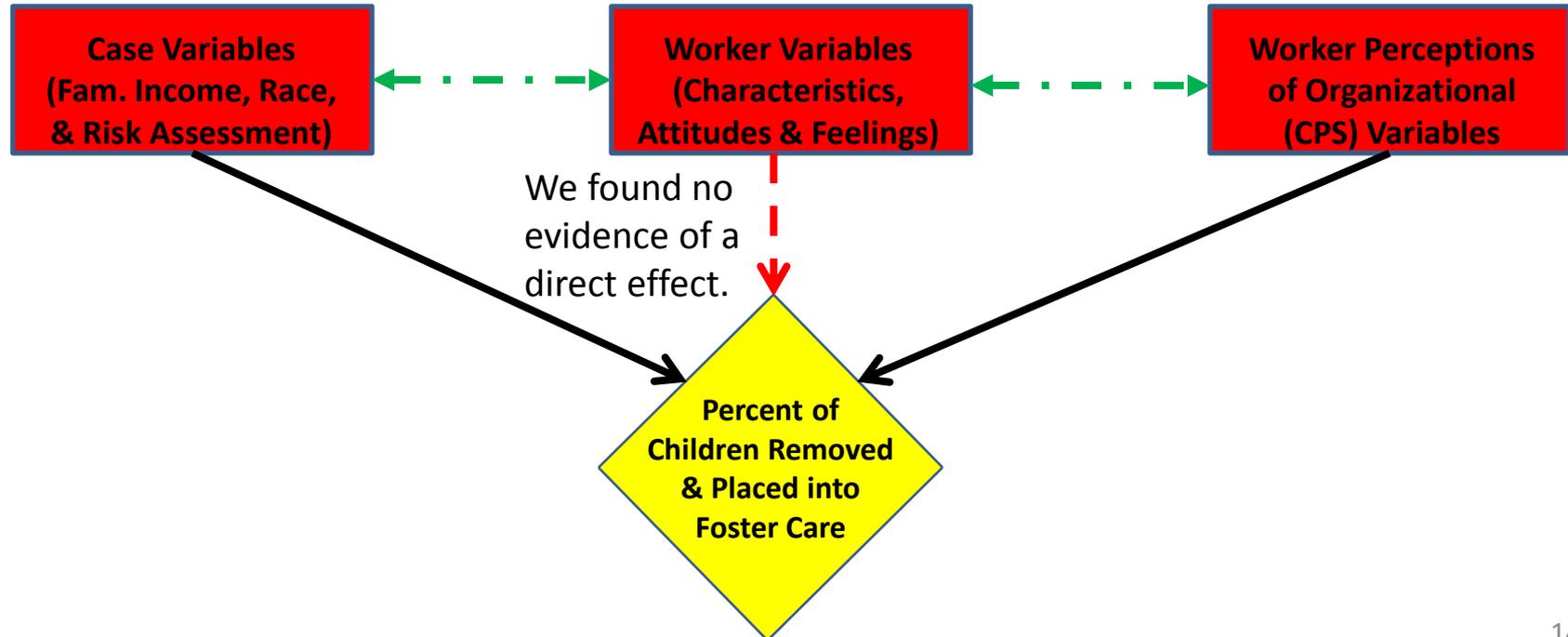
Decision(s)

- Percent removed (across cases)

Structural Diagram – 6. First-Order Mediated Worker Effects



Schematic Diagram of Hypothesized Relations of DME Domains Involved in the Placement Decision



Observations – Placement Decisions

- We found five factors to significantly influence the percent of cases that resulted in removal of a child and placement into foster care, though together they explained only a modest proportion of the decision's variance ($R^2 = .12$).
- *Individual* factors, i.e. variables characterizing the caseworkers, in this model were not found to directly influence the placement decision.

Observations – Placement Decisions

Case factors even as aggregated to the worker level were of most importance:

- Risk being assessed ($\beta = .108$)
- More families on a worker's caseload being Low Income ($\beta = .103$)
- Also, the placement percentage was decreased by higher proportions of **Hispanic families being on the caseload** ($\beta = -.099$).

Organizational variables that were associated with lower percentages of removals :

- Higher levels of perceived organizational Support ($\beta = -.131$)
- Perceived Workload and Resources being problematic ($\beta = -.163$)

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