An exploratory descriptive study of the outcome of the length of time foster children spend in the foster care system in Floyd county Georgia

Paula Kay Lyon
Clark Atlanta University
ABSTRACT

SOCIAL WORK

LYON, PAULA K. B.S. BERRY COLLEGE, 1991

AN EXPLORATORY DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE OUTCOME OF THE LENGTH OF TIME FOSTER CHILDREN SPEND IN THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM IN FLOYD COUNTY GEORGIA

Advisor: Professor Naomi T. Ward

Thesis dated May, 1999

The purpose of this exploratory descriptive study was to compare the length of time foster care children were spending in care two years prior to the passage of Senate Bill 611 and two years after the legislation took effect in one Northwest Georgia county, Floyd County. Length of time in care was also examined to determine if differences existed among age, reason for placement, and racial background. An interview was utilized to complete the Agency Protocol and Procedures instrument with the local county Director of the Department of Family and Children Services and the Floyd County Juvenile Court Judge. Findings indicated that new written policies are in place and extensive training has been completed in the Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services in relation to the changes associated with Georgia’s Senate Bill 611. A case study method was employed to complete the study of a sample size of forty children in foster care reviewed by the Citizen Review Panel of the Floyd County Juvenile Court.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Paired t-tests were conducted to
determine if the mean length of time in foster care for children sampled differed prior to the passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611 from July 1, 1994 to June 30, 1996 as compared to after its passage and implementation for the period of July 1, 1996 to June 30, 1998. Non-significant results were found when comparing all children as a group. However, the average placement time from pre and post legislation was found to be 16 months. Similar results were found when making comparisons by age, racial background, and reason for primary placement. Almost all age, racial background, and primary reason for placement subgroups were found to show large reductions in mean length of time in foster care. However, when considering age subgroups, mean increases were actually found in the two youngest categories. Small numbers of children within subgroups and large variability may contribute to the non-significant results even though some large reductions in mean length of time were found.
AN EXPLORATORY DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE OUTCOME OF THE LENGTH OF TIME FOSTER CHILDREN SPEND IN THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM IN FLOYD COUNTY GEORGIA

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
PAULA K. LYON

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

MAY 1999
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with heartfelt gratitude that I extend thanks to those people who influenced this thesis. I am grateful to Professor Naomi T. Ward for her encouragement and her guidance throughout the last few months. Her challenging my thoughts will extend beyond the parameters of this thesis. I also express appreciation to my friend and Intern Advisor, Mrs. Pat Rickman, who assisted in research efforts and humored me throughout the process. I am indebted to Mr. Art Bangert and Mrs. Barbara Ware who assisted with the completion of this project in a timely manner. Without their assistance and patience, this would not be possible.

I appreciate Judge Timothy Pape of the Floyd County Juvenile Court for his support in allowing me to access the records at the Juvenile Court in Rome, Georgia. Without his assistance, this would not be possible.

A very special thanks to my dear friends, Jan Rosen, Angela McCormick and Erin Nida, who encouraged, inspired, and nudged me along this process. There are many others, friends, colleagues, and family that contributed to this work in their own way and I say thanks to you, too.

Finally, I must pay tribute to my loving mother, Jane Lyon, who provided not only monetary assistance during this process but also and more importantly, gave her unselfish and undying love, guidance to me. She has given me a vision to pursue my dreams. I love you. Thanks to God for answers to my prayers!
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ......................................................................................................................... ii

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................................. v

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................. 1
   Costs of Foster Care ......................................................................................................................... 3
   Effects of Foster Care on Foster Children ..................................................................................... 5
   Statement of the Problem ............................................................................................................... 8
   Purpose and Significance of the Study ......................................................................................... 9

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ................................................................................................... 12
   Historical Overview of Permanency Planning ............................................................................. 12
   Public Law 87-31 ............................................................................................................................ 14
   Public Law 96-272 .......................................................................................................................... 15
   The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-89) ......................................................... 17
   Georgia’s Senate Bill 611 ................................................................................................................. 19
   Related Research ............................................................................................................................ 21
   Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................................. 25
   Operational Definitions ................................................................................................................ 27
   Research Questions ......................................................................................................................... 29

III. METHODOLOGY .......................................................................................................................... 30
   Research Design ............................................................................................................................ 31
   Site And Setting ............................................................................................................................ 31
   Sample Population ......................................................................................................................... 32
   Instrumentation ............................................................................................................................... 33
   Data Collection Procedures .......................................................................................................... 36
   Data Analysis ................................................................................................................................. 36
   Summary of Methods .................................................................................................................... 37

IV. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS ................................................................................................... 39
   Protocol and Procedures ................................................................................................................. 39
   Demographics ............................................................................................................................... 42
   Placement Reason ........................................................................................................................ 47
   Foster Care Length of Stay ............................................................................................................ 48
   Summary of Findings ..................................................................................................................... 61
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Children By Age</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Children By Sex</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Children By Racial Background</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Children By Primary Placement Reason</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Pre and Post Legislative Frequencies for Disposition of Cases</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Case Reviews Prior to the Passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Case Reviews Subsequent to the Passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Total Frequencies of Case Reviews Prior To and After the Passage of Senate Bill 611</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Guardian Ad Litem Involvement Before and After the Passage of Senate Bill 611</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Pre and Post Senate Bill 611 Legislation For All Children</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Pre and Post Senate Bill 611 by the Age of the Child</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Pre and Post Senate Bill 611 by the Sex of the Child</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Pre and Post Senate Bill 611 Legislation by Racial Background</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Pre and Post Senate Bill 611 Legislation by Placement Reason</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The care of children in the child welfare system is so complex that the problem has drawn the attention of print media as well as professional literature. Nearly half a million American children are in foster care at any given time, some for as long as several years (Atlanta Journal and Constitution, February 15, 1997). The Atlanta Journal and Constitution (February 15, 1997) states that many children are placed in foster care because of an isolated instance of abuse or a sudden crisis in the family, and are returned to their biological families within several months, but one-fifth of the children in foster care never are returned to their original families.

Policy data from a study by the National Center for Policy Analysis released in August 1997 cited Georgia as “one of the worst states” for placing foster children into adoptive homes, ranking 34th out of 41 states studied (The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, February 15, 1997). There are about 19,000 children in foster care in Georgia (Georgia Department of Human Resources, 1998). According to the Georgia Department of Human Resources (1998), most of the children are there because of poverty-related conditions that have led to neglect. Half return to their families within 6 months (Georgia Department of Human Resources, 1998); for those who do not return to their families that soon, the average length of stay in foster care is 14 months. But the print media indicated that there were about 400 children whose families were so fractured
by drug use, the propensity for abuse, or the inability to care for a child, that the children can never return home (Atlanta Journal and Constitution, November 1997). Those are believed to be the children most in need of adoption and permanency.

Permanency is not just a legal issue. It is also a social issue. It is a term that indicates security, stability and connectedness.

Foster care is not an optimal situation, especially as a permanent solution. State child welfare agencies and the courts are confronted with the dilemma of whether to reunite families as quickly as possible or keep the children in foster care with the expectation of future reunification (Pelton, 1991). The states must also determine at what point to abandon hope of reunification, terminate parental rights, and initiate a search for an adoptive home or other permanent placement for the child. Pelton states in his article that if children are reunited with their families too quickly, they may return to foster care because the home environment may still be unstable. On the other hand, when children remain in foster care too long, it is difficult to reestablish emotional ties with their families. Furthermore, the chances for adoption can be reduced because the child is older than the most desirable adoption age or may have developed behavioral problems.

According to Nadel (1997), what brings a foster child into the system is complex, but the real tragedy is what happens after they enter a system rife with bureaucratic indifference. Many children are growing up in the foster care system with no real parents. Various legislation throughout the years have attempted to address the issue of the length of time children spend in state custody, but implementation of these laws from the 1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (Fein, 1992) to the most recent Safe Families Act of 1997 (Clinton, 1997), has not been successful.
Determining an appropriate placement option for children quickly is of twofold importance. First, finding permanent placements for children removed from their families is critical to ensure their overall well being. Children without permanent homes and stable caregivers may be more likely to develop emotional, intellectual, and behavioral problems. A second reason for placing children more quickly is the financial costs of children remaining in foster care. A permanent placement can range from reuniting children with their parents, to finding adoptive homes and, in increasing numbers, to placing foster children with relatives. Yet navigating the child welfare system in pursuit of permanent homes for these children can be a daunting task (Nadel, 1997). Nadel further states that state child welfare agencies guide a child through temporary or shelter placements, multiple court hearings, and, as often happens, more than one foster family placement. This circuitous and burdensome route to a permanent placement can often take years, cost thousands of dollars for each child, and have serious emotional consequences for the children.

Costs of Foster Care

The mid-1980's through the mid-1990’s witnessed dramatic increases in the number of children placed in foster care to protect them from abuse and neglect at home. In a review of the nation’s foster care system, the General Accounting Office found that the population in out-of-home care grew from 276,000 in 1985 to 429,000 in 1991, or 55% in six short years (Goerge, Wulczyn, & Fanshel, 1994, p. 525). Another study showed that foster care caseloads doubled over a period of ten years in five of the largest states (Goerge et al., 1994, p. 526). Similarly, the State of Georgia has had
increases in the number of children in care during that ten year period. In Fiscal Year 1995, there were 16,500 children in the custody of the Georgia Department of Family and Children Services (Georgia Department of Human Resources, 1995, p. 17), and 19,000 children in care in Fiscal Year 1996 (Georgia Department of Human Resources, 1998), an increase of 2,500 children in one year.

The relative growth in federal costs of the foster care program is astounding. Federal expenditures for foster care maintenance payments and administration leapt from $309 million to 2.55 billion from 1981 to 1993 (Courtney, 1995, p. 28). In 1995, according to Courtney, States received more than $2.8 billion in federal assistance for approximately half of these 494,000 children in foster care. Further, Courtney relates that the Congressional Budget Office estimates that by 2001, federal costs will rise to $4.8 billion with caseloads of federally assisted foster care children increasing by almost 26 percent (Courtney, 1995, p. 28). Again, the issues are publicly addressed by the print media citing that the federal share of the average monthly maintenance payment for Title IV-E payments was $574.00 in 1996 in the State of Georgia (Atlanta Journal and Constitution, February 15, 1997).

Longer stays in foster care have contributed to these rising costs. For children who left care in 1995, the median length of time in care was 10.9 months. For those still in care at the end of 1995, the median length of time was 22.1 months, compared to 29 months in 1977 (Child Welfare League of America, 1998). If children are not discharged within a short period after initial placement in foster care, they are likely to remain in care for longer periods of time. In addition to the factor of the cost of foster care stays, many of these children are among the nation’s most at risk for future problems, having
suffered the effects of both physical and emotional abuse, and poverty.

Effects of Foster Care on Foster Children

Studies have documented a range of health and developmental problems in foster care populations (Hochstadt 1987; Kavalen 1983; Kluger et. al 1986; Schor 1982; White and et al. 1987; White and Benedict 1985). Children in foster care are three to six times more likely than children not in care to have emotional, behavioral and developmental problems, including conduct disorders, depression, difficulties in school and impaired social relationships (Benedict & White, 1991, p.48). These authors estimate that about 30% of the children in care have “marked or severe” emotional problems. Benedict and White indicate that according to General Accounting Office study, 58% of young children in foster care had serious health problems and 62% had been subject to prenatal drug exposure, placing them at significant risk for numerous health problems.

The mental health and physical health problems of foster children create a significant impact on the need for services. For example, four years ago a study of the use of Medi-Cal, California’s Medicaid program, found that foster children are almost ten times more likely to use mental health services, and are likely to be hospitalized almost twice as long, as other children enrolled in Medi-Cal (Courtney, 1995). Thus, while foster children included only four percent of California children on Medi-Cal, they account for forty percent of all Medi-Cal mental health expenditures.

The education needs of children in care can be substantial. The Child Welfare League of America (1998) indicates that various studies have indicated that children and young people in foster care tend to have limited education and job skills, perform poorly
in school compared to children who are not in foster care, lag behind in their education by at least one year, and have lower educational attainment than the general population.

Children in foster care sometimes live in “limbo.” Wilkes (1992, p. 680) has defined limbo as a “prolonged period of separation of a child from nurturing parents, a period in which there is a persistent confusion, conflict or uncertainty about future plans, parental authority, family relationships, and past history.” Earlier, Bowlby (1951) and Freud (1946) had brought about a general recognition of the fundamental importance of providing children with continuity of care in a nurturing environment (Aitken, 1995), and as such permanency planning has become a primary objective, based on the knowledge that a child’s mental health and ability to form relationships can be permanently affected by lengthy periods of limbo. Wilkes (1992) has summarized some of the clinical effects of “limbo” as “problem behavior associated with impaired ego capacity, poor impulse control and low frustration tolerance.” Steinhauer (1991) has indicated that negative self-image, antisocial behavior, and chronic dependency are long lasting effects of prolonged limbo.

Another clinical effect of foster care on many children in care is that they suffer from attachment disorder. Attachment Disorder is defined as a mental and emotional condition occurring in the first two years of life that causes a child not to attach, to bond, or to trust the primary caretaker (Van Bloem, 1997). A number of the factors, especially occurring to a child during the first two years of life, put the child at high risk for developing an attachment disorder. Van Bloem suggests that these factors are: a) maternal drug and alcohol use during pregnancy, b) premature birth, c) abuse, d) neglect,
e) sudden separation from a caretaker, f) frequent moves or placements, g) inconsistent care, h) chronic maternal depression, i) teenage mothers with poor parenting skills, and j) drug addicted infant.

Poverty is the best predictor of child neglect (Courtney, 1995, p.33). According to Courtney, half of the children in foster care came from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) eligible families. Further, most of these children were in foster care because of neglect or parental incapacity due to factors such as substance abuse. Courtney (1995) indicated that comparing the size of the foster care program with AFDC itself provides a strong argument for a better understanding of foster care and its relationship to overall poverty policy (Courtney). He states that the number of child recipients of AFDC increased by 29%, from approximately 7 million in 1985 to 9 million in 1992; and over the same period, the foster care population grew by 60%—twice the rate of AFDC growth—from 276,000 in 1985 to 442,000 in 1992.

While there are predictors of child neglect due to children remaining in poverty, evidence of escalating cost of foster care, and documentation of the clinical effects on children remaining in care for long periods, there are factors that influence the development of permanency once children enter care. Among these as discussed in this chapter are: 1) the demographics of the children, 2) the reasons the children have been placed in care, 3) the socioeconomic and emotional state of the birth or extended family, 4) the services provided to and in the interest of the families and children, and 5) the interrelations between the agency and the legal system.
Statement of the Problem

The need for research in the arena of foster care lengths of stay has never been greater with the increased numbers of children in care. The growing numbers have led to changes in legislation both on the state and federal levels. One recent attempt toward solution to the foster care case overload in Georgia has been the passage and enactment of Georgia’s Senate Bill 611 in July 1996 (M. Shepherd, personal communication, February 22, 1999). On the national level, President Clinton (1997) signed into law similar national legislation, The Safe Families Act, in November 1997 due to the prevalence of the problem nationally. However in Georgia, Senate Bill 611 is aimed to reduce the amount of time children spend in foster care (Worthington, 1997, in press-b). The law makes it easier to terminate the parental rights of abusive parents and make children available for adoption sooner.

While legislation is a key factor that influences the length of time children remain in foster care, there are other factors that affect the length of stay. Among these are demographics, such as the age of the child, the sex of the child, the race of the child, the reason the child came into care, the socioeconomic and the emotional state of the child and family, the quality of services provided to the family by the agency, and the interrelations between the agency and the legal system. The length of time that children remain in foster care is often related to the work of several child welfare and juvenile justice systems and how they interface.

In the state of Georgia, which has been cited as ranking 34 out of 41 states, the local county Department of Family and Children Services and the local Juvenile Court interface in determining the critical care dispositions that influence a child’s stay in foster care. One such county among the 159 counties in Georgia is Floyd County. The Annual Report of the Work of the Floyd County Juvenile Court 1993-1995 reports “in counting the total number of counts of deprivation, the number increased from 102 in 1994 to 139
in 1995, a 37% increase in one year (p.25). Frequently, from this researcher’s observation as a former Department of Family and Children Services Foster Care caseworker and as an employee of the Council of Juvenile Court Judges, children lingered in care. The judge of the Floyd County Juvenile Court in Rome, Georgia and the Director of the Department of Family and Children Services cite changes in their policies since the enactment of Senate Bill and increased services, yet there is a void in empirical data that reveal whether or not there is a decrease in the time that children in Floyd County, Georgia remain in foster care.

**Purpose and Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship of Senate Bill 611 to the length of time children spend in foster care in Floyd County, Georgia. To accomplish this purpose, this study focused on two areas. The first area was comprised of the policies and procedures of the Floyd County Juvenile Court system and the Floyd County Department of Family and Children Service prior to and since the enactment of Senate Bill 611. Secondly, the study examined whether or not Senate Bill 611 had a positive effect on foster care in Georgia. Positive effect was defined as a decrease in the length of time children are spending in care. This was accomplished by comparing the length of time children spent in foster care the two years (1994-1996) prior to Senate Bill 611’s passage and the two years (1996-1998) since Senate Bill 611 was enacted.

This study is important because of the increased number of children who are spending excessive amounts of time in the foster care system. The foster care population has increased nationally by 60% from 276,000 children in 1985 to about 442,000 children in 1992 (Courtney, 1995, p.27). In Floyd County, Georgia, the foster care population in FY97 was 70 per month in FY98 the foster care population was 110 per month (Georgia Department of Human Resources, 1998).
Considering these facts, there is not a great deal of research concerning the topic of the length of time that children spend in foster care placement. Although Senate Bill 611 has been implemented, the State of Georgia has not systematically evaluated the impact of the new law. Data regarding foster care placement as a result of Senate Bill 611 legislation are limited, thus making it difficult to evaluate its effectiveness. While a similar study (Guggenheim, 1995) was conducted in New York and Michigan using event history analysis, there is not a completed study in the State of Georgia related to Georgia Senate Bill 611. Currently, Jim Gaudin of the University of Georgia, is researching the effects of Senate Bill 611 in eight counties in Georgia (Oglesby, 1997). Gaudin’s study is examining the effects of Senate Bill 611 legislation two years prior to the passage of the bill and three years since the bill has been passed (J. Gaudin, e-mail personal communication, December 30, 1998). The study at the University of Georgia focused on eight counties in the State of Georgia, whereas, this study focuses on one Northwest Georgia county, Floyd County, two years prior and two years after the passage and enactment of Senate Bill 611.

The information gained from this study may assist caseworkers, supervisors, social workers, Juvenile Court Judges, Attorneys, and Legislators in developing a better understanding of whether Senate Bill 611 is succeeding. Understanding and acknowledging the impact of Senate Bill 611 on children might assist in making timely adjustments and policy changes to expedite the placement of children in the child’s “best interest.”

This study will be of value to social work education because it could increase the student’s awareness of the complexity associated with the needs of the foster care child, the various systems involved and the concomitant effects of different systems on the foster child. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 1994), the primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and
help meet basic human needs, with particular attention to the needs of vulnerable, oppressed, and poor people” (NASW, 1994). It is of utmost importance for the social work student to understand his or her role in “enhancing well-being” includes being an advocate for clients inclusive of children on a macro-level, in the policymaking arena. Social work students may also have a better understanding of foster care policy and the foster care system as a result of this study.

Findings from this study will also be significant to this researcher because the researcher was employed in the child welfare arena, both as a foster care caseworker with the Department of Family and Children Services and as a Field Representative and Panel Member Trainer with the Council of Juvenile Court Judges. Through observation, the researcher believes that oftentimes policy-making and following policy has become more important than individualizing court orders and case plans to best assist the child in finding permanency. A solution to the extensive lengths of time children spend in care must be found. It is difficult to dispute the general proposition that legal processes should be child-centered and responsive to the needs of children. Children must be understood as full and unique beings who come into this world with a certain set of profound connections and who will continue to develop connections throughout their lives. Only when we recognize that children are capable of and enriched by developing and maintaining multiple relationships can permanency planning be transformed into a truly flexible and child-centered practice (Appel and Boyer, 1995).
The review of literature includes a historical overview of permanency planning with a description of the legal context in the United States in the area of foster care and termination of parental rights. The chapter concludes with a synopsis of similar studies conducted in the area of child welfare and foster care lengths of stay.

Historical Overview of Permanency Planning

Child welfare and its practice of foster care have always had a place in the story of the human family (Fein & Maluccio, 1992). The public responsibility for the care of children who have been abused, neglected or destitute has been a social issue in America since the early settlers. Even some of the original thirteen colonies had laws against certain forms of child maltreatment (Bersharov, 1983). Historically, orphaned, poor, abused or neglected children were placed in out-of-home care with substitute families or in institutions until the nineteenth century (Samantrai, 1993).

Modern child welfare practices can be traced to the middle of the nineteenth century, when the movement originated “to seek out and to rescue” children who were neglected or cruelly treated (Fein & Maluccio, 1992, p.336). In 1875, The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was founded as the first specialized “child protective agency” (Besharov, 1983). Agencies devoted to the rescue of children
were modeled after the animal rescue societies, and a common outcome of the investigation of complaints was placement in an institution (Fein & Maluccio, 1992, p. 336). From these institutions, and from almshouses and orphanages, children were often placed with surrogate families who could use their labor or to whom they were indentured. The first choice for placement was a rural, preferably farm, family, which provided free care for the children.

The early twentieth century brought a change in the care of poor children from out-of-home care to care in their own homes. Samantrai (1993) states that several states passed laws that would provide pensions to widowed or deserted mothers called Mother's Aid laws so that children could remain at home rather than being placed in substitute care. Samantrai also states that this principle was extended to all states in 1935 under Title IV-A of the Social Security Act, which required that government funds be provided to all states for the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program. Title V of the Social Security Act established Child Welfare Services which were designed to help state and local agencies provide preventive and protective services for children, including foster care (Farthel, 1992, p. 56).

The Social Security Act of 1935, with its support to families with dependent children, weakened the economic grounds for taking children from their parents. Concern for children began to focus on efforts to protect them from abuse and neglect rather than rescue them from poverty. By this time, the growth of social casework and the influence of psychoanalytic theory led to the expectation that parents could be rehabilitated to care for their children appropriately, and the perception of foster care as child rearing by a substitute family on a temporary basis gradually evolved (Fein & Maluccio, 1992).

In the 1940's and 1950's, the total number of dependent children being cared for outside of their own homes stayed relatively stable, between 3.5 and 4.5 per
thousand children under the age of 18 (Hacsi, 1996). During the 1960’s and 1970’s, however, the foster care population exploded due to the rediscovery of child abuse (Hacsi, 1996).

**Public Law 87-31**

In 1961, the Aid To Families With Dependent Children (AFDC)-Foster Care Act, Public Law 87-31, expanded the AFDC program to include federal funds for foster care on a temporary basis for children being removed from their homes as a result of a judicial determination (Pizzini, 1994, p. 33). By the 1970’s, foster care policies were aimed at removing children from any unsafe environment (Guggenheim, 1995, p. 122). Studies conducted between 1950 and 1980 confirmed that children were being placed in foster care unnecessarily because there were no alternative services for even the most simple difficulties confronting the family (Gelles & Lancaster, 1987, p. 19). Public Law 87-31, which made federal funds for foster care available combined with the child abuse reporting laws, contributed to the vast increase in the number of maltreated children being placed in foster care (Pizzini, 1994).

Once children entered the foster care system they tended to stay in the system and moved from foster home to foster home until adulthood (Pizzini, 1994). The frequent moves from one home to another resulted in the coinage of the term, “foster care drift.” Following research findings documenting the “drift” of children in foster care, a movement emerged to provide permanence for children coming to the attention of the child welfare system. The Oregon Project demonstrated various strategies for attaining permanence. It focused on intensive services to parents and goal-directed case planning, resulting in permanent plans for 72% of the 509 project children (Katz, 1990). Child advocacy groups severely criticized pre-1980 foster care policy because it did not prevent separation from, or promote reunification with, the family (Pelton, 1991). As a result of
the Oregon Project and the child advocacy groups, Public Law 96-272 was developed.

**Public Law 96-272**

In response to the problem of the "foster care drift," Congress enacted major legislation in 1980 that emphasized preservation and unification which was the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, also known as Public Law 96-272 (Pizzini, 1994). The fundamental principle behind this law was to provide permanent homes for abused and neglected children. The policy clearly established the scope of public responsibility to children. However, this was a shift in thinking and practice from the traditional practice of indefinite out-of-home placements to assisting families in maintaining biological families and preventing out-of-home placements as well as improved adoption when it was determined that children could not return to their biological homes.

Critical to the changed policy was that for the state to be reimbursed by the federal government, states must make "reasonable efforts" to both prevent separation of children from their families and promote reunification with the families if separated. Furthermore, the act provided for the speedy adoption of children who would not return home (Alexander & Alexander, 1995). The Act was designed to end the drift of children in foster care, encourage planning for permanency for each child through options ranging from return to biological parents to adoption and long-term foster care, provide oversight to move cases through the child welfare system, and develop preventive services to avert family breakdown (Fein & Maluccio, 1992, p. 337).

The passage of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980
represented the first step in permanency planning for foster children (Alexander & Alexander, 1995). Through this Act, Congress moved toward nationalizing the rules by which children enter state supervised foster care, the obligations states owe to families with children in foster care, and the expected conditions and timelines under which children were to remain in foster care. The aim of the law was to prevent unnecessary foster care placements, to reunify families when possible, and to limit time spent in foster care by encouraging adoption when return to a natural parent is not possible.

The Adoption and Child Welfare Act of 1980, first, mandated that each state, by submitting a specific plan, commit to making reasonable efforts to prevent the removal of children from their families and to return them as soon as reasonably possible (Alexander & Alexander, 1995). The rationale for this policy initiative was to entice states, with the promise of federal monies, to focus on prevention and reunification. Alexander & Alexander indicate that second, beginning October 1, 1983, a judicial determination had to be made that reasonable efforts were used to prevent the removal of each child from his or her family before foster placement was made. The rationale for the judicial determination was that it would ensure scrutiny of the social services provided to each child and would ensure that the rights of the child and family were respected. Additionally, Alexander and Alexander state that to effect the judicial determination, states would be forced to amend their statutes, but many advocates were skeptical whether states would fully implement the act.

Services provided by P.L. 96-272 included 24-hour emergency caretaker services, homemaker services, day care, crisis counseling, individual and family counseling, emergency shelters, procedures and arrangements for access to available emergency
financial assistance, and arrangements for the provision of temporary child care to provide respite to the family for a brief period as part of a plan for preventing children’s removal from the home (Alexander & Alexander, 1995). These authors cited other services that the Act identified as necessary and appropriate which included home-based family services, self-help groups, services to unmarried parents, provision of or arrangements for mental health or drug and alcohol abuse counseling, vocational counseling, vocational rehabilitation, and post-adoption services. These services, appropriately matched to client’s problems, constituted “reasonable efforts.”

Until 1984, the legislation seemed to be working, and up to that point, the permanency planning movement was considered a success. As children moved out of care more readily, those remaining were the ones with whom the system had the most difficulty. They were older, more had special needs, and minority representation was greater than that in the general population (Gershenson, 1986). By the latter half of the 1980’s, some of the earlier successes were being reversed. The number of children in care was again rising, more very young children were entering care, and reentry rates were increasing, suggesting repeated episodes of short-term care (Ooms, 1990).

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-89)

On November 19, 1997, President Clinton signed “The Adoption and Safe Families Act,” also known as Public Law No. 105-89 (Clinton, 1997). This was less than a year after the President directed his administration to develop a plan to double the number (54,000) of children moved from foster care to adoptive homes by the year 2002 (Atlanta Journal and Constitution, February 15, 1997).
Clinton (1997, p. 1863) states, “The Act is consistent with the work of the 2002 report and goals. It fundamentally alters our nation’s approach to foster care and adoption. The new law will help us to speed children out of foster care into permanent families by setting meaningful time limits for child welfare decisions, by clarifying which family situations call for reasonable reunification efforts and which simply do not. It will provide States with financial incentives to increase the number of children adopted each year. It will ensure that adopted children with special needs never lose their health coverage. It will reauthorize federal funding for timely services to alleviate crises before they become serious, aid in the reunification of families, and help to meet post-adoption needs. We’ve come together in an extraordinary example of bipartisan cooperation to meet the urgent needs of children at risk. We put our differences aside and put our children first”.

The Act changed federal legislation such as the Adoption and Child Welfare Act of 1980, P.L. 96-272, which has been in place for 17 years (Worthington, 1998, press-a). The newly revised federal law, The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, emphasizes permanency over reunification and encourages termination of parental rights after a child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months (Worthington, 1998, press-a, p. 46); whereas, P.L. 96-272 emphasized children remaining in the home. Worthington states that the emphasis of The Adoption and Safe Families Act (P.L. 105-89) is on the health and safety of children.

The major provisions to P.L. 105-89 are the changes in “reasonable efforts,” termination of parental rights, and measure of time in foster care (Worthington, 1998, press-b). If reunification services are the initial goal, Worthington suggests that family reunification services are to be provided, but they are now called “time-limited family reunification services.” Worthington further states that the services are only to be provided for a 15-month period after the child has been placed in foster care.

A second change in relation to “reasonable efforts” is the social service agency,
such as the Department of Family and Children Services, which does not have to provide reunification services with certain cases. Examples of such cases are when a parent has subjected the child to “aggravated circumstances” when the parent has committed a felony assault resulting in serious injury to a child, and when the parent’s rights to another child have been previously terminated (Worthington, 1998, press-b).

The statute, according to Worthington, provides that if a child has been in agency foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, if the child is abandoned as an infant, if the parent has killed another child or has seriously injured the child or a sibling, the state shall file a petition to terminate the parental rights. Parental rights will not be terminated in the above cases if the child resides with a relative, if termination is not in the best interest of the child, or if the state has not provided appropriate reunification services.

A third major change is how “time” foster care is measured. While P.L. 96-272 measured time from the child’s initial placement, The Adoption and Safe Families Act now reads that a child is “considered to have entered foster care on the earlier of the date of the first judicial finding that the child is deprived or the date 60 days after the date on which the child is removed from the home” (Worthington, 1998, press-b). No other sources that interpreted P.L. 105-89 was available to the researcher.

**Georgia’s Senate Bill 611**

Senate Bill 611 was enacted in 1996, one year before P.L. 105-89 took effect. It implemented many of the same provisions in P.L. 105-89. SB611 shortened the length of time a judge can initially place a child in the custody of the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) from 18 months to 12 months. Senate Bill 611 requires DFCS to declare if and when it plans to proceed with termination proceedings. It allows a judge
to appoint a Guardian Ad Litem for the specific purpose of determining whether a petition for Termination of Parental Rights should be filed. While Georgia needs to improve the collection of information on children in state custody, according to Karen Worthington (1998, press-b), Georgia is in compliance with most of the provisions of the federal law.

Senate Bill 611 makes it easier to terminate the rights of abusive parents and make children available for adoption sooner. But just because children are available for adoption, does not mean someone will take them. Some advocates and people involved in the state’s foster care system think children will be better served by putting more money into recruiting adoptive parents and broadening the idea of what permanency means, including long term foster care (Atlanta Journal and Constitution, November 5, 1997). Legislators intended to help children waiting for adoption, but some foster parents believe it could harm the black community, the population from which most of the children waiting for adoption come. For many reasons, formal adoption is countercultural to the black community, said Jim Gaudin, a University of Georgia professor studying the effects of the law. Sixty percent of the children in foster care are black, and many are cared for by relatives (Georgia Department of Human Resources, 1997). Doris Walker (personal communication, December, 1998) with the Department of Human Resources Foster Care Unit states that the State of Georgia is not in the business of orphaning black children.

Two states with laws similar to Senate Bill 611 have experienced the adverse effect of creating more legal orphans, children who have lost all ties to their parents and have virtually no chance of being adopted (Guggenheim, 1995). Guggenheim states that a study of the Michigan and New York laws states children spent more time without parents. Gaudin (1998) states, “we hope that is not what happens in Georgia. If the goal is permanency, it doesn’t mean it has to be adoption. That is the fallacy of the
legislation—that adoption is the only option.” Although the law is two and a half years old, state leaders do not know yet what the effect has been. Caseworkers provide anecdotal information about infants being adopted sooner, and that’s a plus. Generally, Gaudin said, people want younger children, and making them adoptable at a younger age can be beneficial. What remains unknown is whether it will help older children. While uncertainty remains regarding the outcomes related to Senate Bill 611, research has been done on similar issues.

Related Research

Research related to permanency tends to focus on gaps and noncumulative data in child welfare, the significance of demographics, and outcomes related to legislation. Goerge, Wulczyn, & Fanshel (1994) recommend new research in the area of foster care be shaped in a way that both builds upon past efforts and yet is contemporary in the concerns it addresses. Goerge et al. (1994) state child welfare research has tended to be noncumulative. Investigators have too often ignored the findings of previous research, thus adding to the fragmentation of the knowledge base. Courtney (1995) states that foster care remains a poorly studied and poorly understood social service program. Relatively new research themes have emerged as policy and practice have shifted to meet the demands of today’s families (Goerge et al., 1994).

The information available with reference to the length of stay in foster care varies according to time periods, data source, and study methodology. Most of the available information characterizes children who entered foster care well before the impact of the permanency plan legislation, although some of the reports were published well into the 1980’s. Many of these early studies documented foster care drift suggesting that
many children remained in care for extended time periods. Magura (1979) and Fanshel and Shinn (1978) suggested that the longer a child remained in care, the less likely discharge could be effected. Most recent findings by Goerge et al. (1994) show that rapid short-term growth in state foster care populations has occurred almost entirely in large urban centers of the states. In examining an additional study (Benedict and White, 1991), results showed over 50% of the children were discharged within the first six months and an important proportion of children were discharged within one month of placement. Benedict and White (1991) found that only 25% of children remained longer than two years in care.

Demographics have been significant and nonsignificant in previous studies. Benedict and White (1991) found that child demographics such as age, sex, and race were not associated with length of stay in the population studied. Conversely, in a contradictory study, Courtney’s (1995) Multistate Foster Care data reports that children have been entering foster care at much younger ages than in the past, between 1990 and 1992, infants accounted for nearly 25% of all first admissions of children entering care in California, Illinois, Michigan, New York and Texas. In all these states, the children remained in care considerably longer than children in any other age group (Courtney, 1995). Courtney indicates that to the Children’s Defense Fund reports that black children stay in foster care longer than children from other racial groups: In Illinois, between 1988 and 1992, the average length of time in care was 50.9 months for blacks; 12.9 months for whites. Courtney (1995) supports the Children’s Defense Fund findings in a study, which reports that in 1990, African American children in Texas were 3 times as likely as European American children to be in foster care, and over ten times as likely in
New York. Courtney (1995) states the overall foster care prevalence rate in 1990 for African American children was about 4.4% in California and 4.2% in New York, the states with the largest foster care populations. Over 5% of African American infants in these two states lived in foster care at any given time in 1990 (Courtney, 1995).

Research supports findings, which do not offer much hope in legislation changing the variable of length of time in care. McMurty (1992) examined legal and procedural innovations designed to speed the process of freeing foster children in Arizona for adoption when they could not be returned to their original homes. The goal of the study was to evaluate the effects of three legal and procedural innovations on facilitating the process of freeing children for adoption in Arizona. It was hypothesized that exposure to each of these innovations would be associated with a more rapid rate at which children were freed for adoption when this was their case plan. The sample for the study was taken from foster children who were adoption candidates reviewed by the Arizona Foster Care Review Board every six months. The findings of the study indicated that children exposed to the innovations were not freed at a greater rate than children who were not exposed (McMurty, 1992).

states to take action that put children in a worse position than they were in before the reforms were passed. The author concluded that reforms aimed at helping families in need have resulted in the highest number of unnatural orphans in the history of the United States (Guggenheim, 1995). Guggenheim (1995, p. 140) stated, “no national data on the total number of unnatural orphans exist, and it is not possible to obtain a firm number of this population. However, by extrapolating on the data from Michigan and New York, it was estimated that there were somewhere between 40,000 and 80,000 children who had been freed for adoption but had not yet been adopted.” It was recommended that indicators be developed and continually updated in all states and at the federal level if the field is going to be cognizant of and responsive to changes in the population and service outcomes (Guggenheim, 1995).

According to a study at the University of Georgia on the effects of Senate Bill 611, preliminary results show no difference in time in care and number of placements for the two years pre Senate Bill 611 and the one year after the Bill was passed (J. Gaudin, e-mail personal communication, November 16, 1998). However, Gaudin (1998) states the study did not expect to see much in the first year of passage. It appears that the rural counties show less significant change than the larger metropolitan counties (Gaudin, 1998). Gaudin’s study is using qualitative interviews with child welfare supervisors, workers, special advocate attorney generals, and judges in various counties concerning the impact of Senate Bill 611. The preliminary results are very diverse reports Gaudin. According to Gaudin, the effectiveness of the legislation appears to be highly dependent upon the relationship between the Department of Family and Children Services and the Special Advocate Attorney General, and the attitudes of the attorneys and judges toward
the law. The difficulty had been in collecting hard data as Gaudin states, “we do not have a reliable child welfare data system in Georgia.” Gaudin suggests that indicators must be developed and continually updated in all states and at the federal level if the field is going to be cognizant of and responsive to changes in the population and service outcomes.

Johnson and Canon (1984) and McMurty (1992) concluded that some studies have indicated that the effects of legal changes are often nebulous and difficult to measure, or they are not discernible until after lengthy delays. In other cases, such reforms may be undermined by judicial noncompliance or by an implementation process that imposes too many changes on too many different individuals or organizations (McMurty, 1992; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Ross & Foley, 1987)

Theoretical Framework

Research on the length of stay in foster care has utilized a wide range of theories. The theoretical framework used for this study is the general systems theory and the case study theory. The systems theory encompasses the policy, organizational, family and service delivery systems in the broad context. However, in this study, systems relate to two organizational systems, The Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services and the Floyd County Juvenile Court. The case study theory is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances (Stake, 1995). By using both theories, the study focuses on policy, procedures, and service changes and their concomitant effects on foster care cases. The origin of the term case study is linked to that of case history. Stake (1995)
states such studies are conducted “by giving special attention to totalizing in the observation, reconstruction and analysis of cases under study.” The goal is to reconstruct and analyze a case from a sociological perspective (Yin, 1989). In this light, case theory is utilized to inform the method of study by identifying specific data and the history of events in cases of children in foster care.

For the purpose of this study, the social systems theory is used to explain how the federal system, the state system, the county system, and the family system are related. Multiple systems are involved in the delivery of foster care services. There is an interrelatedness of the federal system, the state system, the county system, and the family in the delivery of timely services to the children in state custody. The United States, Congress, and the federal system are responsible for developing federal policy and providing federal funds for each state program. The state system, The Department of Human Services, including the divisions of the Office of Adoptions and the Department of Family and Children Services, and the Department of Justice, their division being the Juvenile Court System, are both responsible for administering the programs at the county level to the children and families which reside in the state.

The general systems theory represents a general conceptual approach to human interaction and groupings. It characterizes social systems as composed of persons or groups of persons who interact and influence one another’s behaviors. Systems theory stresses the need to view the immediate system being dealt within the context of its significant environment or the social situations within which it operates (Allen-Meares and Lane, 1987). The theory suggests that a change in one part of a system will bring about changes in all of the other parts and in the system as a whole (Allen-Meares et al.,
In this study, the child (the individual system) through the case record is viewed in the context of the actions of the Floyd County Juvenile Court on the organizational system. Changes made by the Juvenile Court impact changes in the life of the child. Instead of looking at the parts in isolation, this theory stresses looking at the relationship between the parts and taking a holistic approach to assessing the family situation (Allen-Meares et al., 1987). Walter Buckley defined systems as “complexes of elements or components directly or indirectly related in a causal network, such that each component is related to at least some others in a more or less stable way within a particular period” (Allen-Meares et al., 1987). The theory is very useful in analyzing the trends of foster care lengths of stay because it is apparent that, historically speaking, new legislations by federal and state systems have appeared on the forefront during the times when there have been crises in the foster care system.

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are used.

**Age of Child:** The age of the child recorded in the case record at the time of this study was conducted. The case records of the children sampled were between the ages of 0 and 19 years of age. The reason for including children over 18 years of age was because some foster children remain in care past the age of majority in order to receive financial assistance with education.

**Date Entered Care:** The initial date the child was removed from the home and placed in custody of the Department of Family and Children Services.

**Case Review:** A judicial review of the foster child’s case, including case plan
goals and child’s placement, carried out by the Floyd County Juvenile Court, usually by a panel of citizens (Council of Juvenile Court Judges, 1996, p. 156). The case review is carried out by the Floyd County Juvenile Court. The words “case review” and “dispositional hearing” are used interchangeably throughout this study.

**Custody:** The right to a child’s care and control carrying with it the duty of providing food, shelter, medical care, education and discipline (Council of Juvenile Court Judges, 1996, p. 155). Children in the custody of the Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services and under the court order of the Floyd County Juvenile Court.

**Foster Care:** A 24 hour care provided in a home not also occupied by either biological parent. Included are all children served by the foster care program for whom a foster care payment is made (Benedict and White, 1991). A temporary residential care provided to a minor which may include care in foster family homes, child care institutions, group homes, or residential care facilities (Council of Juvenile Court Judges, 1996). Specifically, foster care refers to all children in temporary foster homes, relative placements, or residential care facilities in Floyd County, Georgia.

**Guardian Ad Litem Involvement:** Records reviewed show Guardian Ad Litem present at the case review.

**Primary Placement Reason:** The circumstances under which the child came into the care and custody of the Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services of the State of Georgia. Examples include: Abandonment, Emotional Abuse, Neglect, Parents Deceased, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Voluntary Placement, and other.

**Length of Time in Foster Care:** Refers to the length of stay in foster care, in
months that a child remains in foster care system from the initial placement permanency plan is met, which could include return to biological family, adoptive home, or the date of guardianship for children adopted by foster parents (Benedict and White, 1991).

**Permanency Plan:** A discharge objective for the child, which includes the following: Adoption, Independent Living/Emancipation, Legal Guardianship, Foster Care, Return To Birth or Legal Family, Transfer of Temporary Custody (Council of Juvenile Court Judges, 1996, p. 156).

**Race of Child:** The child’s racial background, which includes African American, Asian, Caucasian, Hispanic, Native American, or Other (Council Of Juvenile Court Judges, 1996).

**Sex of Child:** The gender of the child, which includes male, female

**Research Questions**

This study will attempt to resolve the following research questions:

1. Has the length of time for children in foster care who reside in Floyd County, Georgia been reduced since the passage and enactment of Senate Bill 611 in 1996? (2) Has the enactment of Senate Bill 611 significantly reduce the length of time in foster care when considering the race of children? (3) Since the passage and enactment of Senate Bill 611 has there been a significant reduction in the length of time in foster care considering the reason for placement of children? And, (4) Since the passage and enactment of Senate Bill 611 has there been a significant reduction in the length of time that children remain in foster care when considering the age of children?
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This exploratory descriptive study was designed to evaluate the relationship of Senate Bill 611 to the length of time that children spend in foster care in Floyd County, Georgia. The study is exploratory in that there is a dearth of research related to legislation, particularly Senate Bill 611, and the length of time children remain in foster care in the state of Georgia. This study sought to answer the following primary research question: Has the amount of time children spend in foster care in Floyd County, Georgia decreased since the enactment of Georgia’s Senate Bill 611. In addition, differences in length of placement were also examined to determine if differences existed among age, reason for placement and racial groups in relation to the length of time children remained in foster care. In order to answer the research questions posed, the length of time that a Floyd county foster care children spend in foster care prior to the passage of Senate Bill 611 was compared to the length of time in Floyd County foster care children spent in foster care after the enactment of Senate Bill 611. In addition, age, placement, and racial comparisons regarding the length of time in foster care prior to and after the passage of Senate Bill 611 were also made. In addition, qualitative interviews with the Floyd County Juvenile Court Judge and the Department of Family and Children Services Director will be conducted to determine the emergent themes and policy changes regarding the effectiveness of Senate Bill 611 for reducing the children’s length of time in the foster care system.
Research Design

A one group pretest-posttest design was employed to answer the research question posed for this study. The group under study for this research was all the cases of the foster care children who were reviewed by the Citizens Review Panel Program in Floyd County, Georgia under the custody of the Department of Family and Children Services and adjudicated as neglected, abused, or abandoned by the Floyd County Juvenile Court. The case study method was utilized. Case files of children in foster care were reviewed and data on the length of time in foster care for this group were collected prior to the enactment of Senate Bill 611 and after the enactment of Senate Bill 611. In addition, age, gender, race, disposition of the child, Guardian Ad Litem involvement, and number of case reviews held were collected for the purpose of comparisons in length of time in care. Once data was collected, pre and post legislation comparisons, using descriptive and inferential statistics, were made on the length of time for the entire group of children in foster care. In addition, pre and post legislation comparisons were made by age, placement, and race.

Site and Setting

The site for this study was the state of Georgia and more specifically, Floyd County. Floyd County, Georgia, which is nestled in the North Georgia Mountains, has three rivers, Coosa, Etowah, and Oostanula. Floyd County, Georgia has a population of 84,840 people and the City of Rome has a population of 29,359 people with the median age being 35.6. Floyd County, Georgia has approximately 18,500 children under the age of eighteen. The county is ranked 12th in economic strength among Georgia’s 159 counties (Greater Rome Visitors Bureau, 1998, p. 12). The Chamber of Commerce
(1998) states that the community's labor force of more than 124,000 workers is drawn from a six county area. Approximately 40% of jobs in the county are in manufacturing, with the balance of the local work force employed in the service, retail and public sectors (Greater Rome Chamber of Commerce, 1999, p.26). Permission to conduct the study was requested from the Honorable Timothy Pape, Juvenile Court Judge of Floyd County, Georgia (Appendix A). The on-site case reviews were conducted in the office setting at the Floyd County Juvenile Court Conference Room. Forty cases were selected from the county for study. Policy and protocol interviews were conducted with Judge Pape in the Floyd County Juvenile Court and with Kathy Floyd, Director, of the Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services, prior to conducting the case studies.

Sample Population

The initial sample consisted of representatives of two agencies, the Floyd County Department of Family Children Services and the Floyd County Juvenile Court. Case records of children with foster care status were selected from the Floyd County Juvenile Court records in Rome, Georgia. The initial criterion for selecting cases for the study were case records maintained by the Floyd County Citizens Panel Review Board. In Georgia, foster care children are reviewed by a Citizens Review Panel or the Judge of the Juvenile Court at least once every six months after being taken into the custody of the State. Therefore, the sample was selected from all children who were in the custody of the State of Georgia, Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services, for at least six months between July 1, 1994 and June 30, 1998.

The sample was constructed to allow comparison across cases that were in custody for at least two years prior to the Senate Bill 611 passage. All children in the
sample were tracked until their cases closed or until February 19, 1999, the study's cutoff date. There were 400 children who had received Citizens Review Panel Program reviews from July 1, 1994 to June 30, 1998. Systematic random sampling (Grinnell, 1993) was used to select the forty case files of children in foster care to be included in the two comparison groups defined for conducting this study. The cases were pulled in alphabetical order. The Floyd County Juvenile Court Citizen Review Panel Program reviews a total of 400 foster care cases in a six-month period. The total number of cases, being 410, was divided into the number ten to arrive at a sample size of 41 cases of foster care children. This insured that the bias of having the same family members with the same lengths of stay in care would be lessened.

Convenience sampling was used for Judge of Juvenile Court and the Department of Family and Children Services Director. The two were selected because of the presumed knowledge of policy as related to this study.

The researcher obtained permission from the Honorable Timothy Pape, Juvenile Court Judge, to use data collected by the Permanent Homes Program, Foster Care Review Board as part of the completion for a Master’s thesis (see Appendix B).

Instrumentation

Two questionnaires, the Agency Protocol and Procedures Interview and the Foster Care Length of Stay Questionnaire were utilized. The Agency Protocol and Procedures Interview (see Appendix C) consisted of four questions, both open and close-ended questions. The instruments were utilized in interviews with representatives of the Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services and the Floyd County Juvenile
Court to obtain information on policy and services changes since the enactment of Georgia's Senate Bill 611.

A questionnaire was designed to assist the researcher in collecting data from the cases reviewed for this study (see Appendix D). The questionnaire was composed of six sections. The first section of the questionnaire included demographical information on the child such as age of the child, sex of the child, and race of the child. The second section gave the reason the child initially came into care. The section included the choices of physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, parents deceased, abandonment, emotional abuse, voluntary placement, and other. Section three posed the question of the length of time the child spent in the foster care system. Sections four through six were based on pre and post Senate Bill data collection. The fourth section asked for the disposition, or final placement, for the child. The choices were: a) return to birth and legal family, b) long term foster care agreement, c) independent living and emancipation, d) legal guardianship, e) adoption, f) transfer of temporary custody, or g) other. Only one choice could be made for both pre and post Senate Bill 611. The fifth and sixth sections were structured in order to discern if the policy and protocol changes had been made in order to implement Senate Bill 611 within the Floyd County Juvenile Court System. The fifth section inquired as to how many case reviews were held per year. The sixth section inquired into whether or not the case had a Guardian ad Litem involved with the case.

To address the issue of content validity, the researcher interviewed three other social workers from the Department of Family and Children Services and the Juvenile Court for content, clarity, and accurateness of questions. The reliability of this instrument was documented by determining the level of intra-observer agreement. A
sample of twenty percent of the cases reviewed were recoded by the researcher two days later and the overall percentage of agreements in coding was calculated to determine the consistency of this questionnaire.

The external validity of the instrument is compromised by the fact that there are no normative data to compare scores against and uniform administration procedures are not specified, as in standardized instruments (Grinnell, 1993), thus exploratory.

Internal validity is concerned with reducing or eliminating measurement error in the content of the instrument. The questions are clearly stated, short, and are in simple terms. In addition, the questionnaire was only used by the researcher to compile data from case records. The clarity of questions was examined by pretesting the instrument on a sample of ten cases which would not be a part of the final study.

The instrument was developed by the researcher and adapted from information in the Council of Juvenile Court Judges Panel Review Program Manual (1996). The instrument was pre-tested by reviewing 10 cases.

In addition to collection of data from case files, qualitative interviews were conducted with the Judge of the Juvenile Court of Floyd County and the Director of the Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services. Both were interviewed to gather information on their perceptions of policy changes made in their respective systems in relation to Senate Bill 611. This method of interviewing was undertaken to assist in corroborating the findings from the inferential analysis of this study. The interview questions (see Appendix C) were developed by the researcher in relation to changes made as a result of the enactment of Senate Bill 611.
Data Collection Procedures

The case study method was used through the use of a questionnaire developed by the researcher (See Appendix D). The questionnaire was validated by the Floyd County Juvenile Court Administrative Secretary and a representative from the Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services. Data was collected over a two-week period from February 8-19, 1999. A total of 15 hours were spent compiling data at the Floyd County Juvenile Court. Interviews were scheduled for February 5, 1999 with the Juvenile Court Judge of Floyd County and with the Director of the Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services utilizing the Agency Policy and Protocol Interview (see Appendix C).

Systematic random sampling (Grinnell, 1993) was used to select the forty case files of children in foster care to be included in the two comparison groups defined for conducting this study. The cases were pulled in alphabetical order. The Floyd County Juvenile Court reviews a total of 400 foster care cases in a six-month period. The total number of cases, being 400, was divided into the number ten to arrive at a sample size of 40 cases of foster care children.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to answer the research questions posed for this study. Mean length of foster care placement for all the files reviewed were reported by age, placement, and race. Paired t-tests were conducted to determine if the mean length of time in foster care for the children sampled for this study significantly differed prior to the passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611 from July 1, 1994 to June 30,
1996 as compared to after its passage and implementation of Senate Bill 611 for the period of July 1, 1996 to June 30, 1998. Paired t-tests were also employed to make pre and post Senate Bill 611 legislation comparison for age, placement, and racial groups. A series of Wilcoxin’s Matched – Pairs Signed Ranks Tests were used to compare the mean length of children within age, sex, racial background, primary placement reason, disposition, case reviews, and Guardian Ad Litem status. In addition, information from qualitative interviews with the Judge of the Floyd County Juvenile Court and the Director of the Department of Family and Children Services were analyzed to determine changes in services and policies and the emergent themes regarding the implementation and effectiveness of Georgia Senate Bill 611.

Summary of Methods

An interview method was used to collect information from the Juvenile Court Judge of Floyd County and the Director of the Department of Family and Children Services. The perceptions of the changes which have occurred in their policies and procedures since the passage and enactment of Georgia Senate Bill 611 were recorded.

A one group pretest-posttest research design was employed to answer the research questions posed for this study. Pre and post Senate Bill 611 data were collected on 40 cases of children who were in foster care placement at the time this study was undertaken. Paired t-tests were conducted to determine if significant differences existed when comparing mean length of time in foster care of children prior to and after passage of Senate Bill 611. In addition, qualitative interviews regarding the effectiveness of this legislation were conducted with the Juvenile Court Judge and the Director of the Department of Children and Family Services. Information from these interviews will be analyzed to determine emergent themes regarding the implementation and effectiveness
of Senate Bill 611.
CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This two part exploratory descriptive study was designed to examine the effects of Georgia Senate Bill 611 on the length of time that Floyd County children spend in foster care. The findings of this study are presented as two separate sections as follows: a) Protocol and Procedures and b) Foster Care Length of Stay. The first part of this study consisted of interviews with the Floyd County Juvenile Court Judge and the Director of the Floyd County Department Of Family and Children Services. These interviews were conducted to determine their perceptions of the effectiveness of Senate Bill 611 for reducing the length of time children spend in foster care in Floyd County, Georgia. In addition, common themes emerging from these interviews regarding the impact of Senate Bill 611 on children in foster care were also reported. The second part of this study, Foster Care Length of Stay, was designed to compare the length of time in foster care placement for pre and post Senate Bill 611 legislation. The section includes the findings with regard to frequency of age, racial background and placement reason, and with regard to comparisons of pre and post Senate Bill 611 for all children by age, racial background, and placement reason.

Protocol and Procedures

Kathy Floyd, Director of the Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services.
Services, was interviewed using the Agency Procedures and Protocol instrument. The interviewee indicates that the agency reports that prior to the enactment of Senate Bill 611, the agency’s policy and guidelines manual on foster care were based on the Adoption and Child Welfare Act of 1980, P.L.96-272 (personal communication, February 1999). Ms. Floyd reports that since the enactment of Senate Bill 611, the entire policy and guidelines manual has been updated to reflect the changes in legislation as a result of Senate Bill 611. The most drastic policy implementation was that a caseworker no longer is required to provide reunification services in certain instances. If reunification is the goal, family reunification services are to be provided, but are now time-limited. The services only need to be provided for a 15-month period following the child’s placement in foster care. Previously, the Department of Family and Children Services was required to provide reunification efforts to the greatest extent possible before grounds for termination would be found to exist. Now, the Department of Family and Children Services can file for termination of parental rights if the child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, if the child is abandoned as an infant, or if the parent has killed another child or seriously injured the child or sibling.

The agency reports changes have been made as a result of the passage and enactment of Senate Bill 611. Adoptions increased in Floyd County last year, seventy-three of the seventy-eight children awaiting adoption were permanently placed in 1998. Floyd County accounted for 8% of the adoptions statewide in 1998. According to Kathy Floyd (1999), the number of children entering the Department of Family and Children Services custody has increased but the average number of children in care each month has decreased. This means children are staying in foster care a shorter period of time. The Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services Director reports the changes are due to policy implementation from the enactment of Senate Bill 611 as well as the National Safe Families Act of 1997.
Ms. Floyd (personal communication, February 1999) states that Senate Bill 611 continues to have an impact on services, “Permanency plans for our children in custody continue to be determined as early as possible.” These permanency plans include reunification with the family, nonreunification with the family, termination of parental rights for the purpose of adoption, and emancipation. Ms. Floyd reports that the Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services had 70 children per month in foster care in fiscal year 1997. In fiscal year 1998, the agency had 110 children in care per month, a 64% increase in one year (Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services, 1998). Ms. Floyd (1999) reports the staff turnover rate is extremely volatile, of 30 case manager positions, 16 workers have been in their position for less than 6 months.

According to Judge Timothy Pape (personal communication, January 1999), Juvenile Court Judge of Floyd County, Georgia, the Floyd County Juvenile Court system has not made “many changes” in policy or protocol as a result of the passage of Senate Bill 611. The Judge (1999) stated that the main difference in policy implementation since the passage of Senate Bill 611 is the shorter amount of time that the disposition of a child must be decided. As stated in the legislation, dispositional hearings must be held within twelve months of the date that the child entered care. The previous legislation, The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, required dispositional hearings to be held within 18 months from the date the child entered care. Judge Pape (1999) stated that as a result of the dispositional hearings being held within twelve months, the children are being seen or represented more frequently in the courtroom and in panel reviews. Judge Pape (1999) also insisted that he places special emphasis on placing children five years old and younger in a permanent placement as soon as possible.
This exploratory descriptive study was designed to study the relationship of Georgia Senate Bill 611 to the length of time that Floyd County Children spend in foster care. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to answer the following research questions: (1) Has the length of time for children in foster care who reside in Floyd County, Georgia been reduced as a result of the enactment of Georgia Senate Bill 611? (2) Did the passage of Senate Bill 611 significantly reduce the length of time in foster care when considering the racial background of placed children and (3) Did the passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611 significantly reduce the length of time in foster care when considering primary placement of children in foster care? In order to answer these questions all children were compared from pre to post test legislative time frames on the mean number of months spent in foster care. Similar comparisons were also made between age, racial background and primary placement reason for all children included in this study.

Demographics

The first variable to be considered for this study was the age group of the children. Thus, seven age groups of children in foster care were developed and examined with regards to frequency of children in each group. In addition, each age group was compared to determine the magnitude of increase or decrease in the length of time as a result of the passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611.
Frequencies by age for children examined in this study are reported in Table 1. It can be seen the most frequent age group of children studied came from the 16-18 age range. These children comprised approximately one-third of all the children studied. The 7-9 and 13-15 year olds were the next most frequently reported age groups comprising approximately 40% of all age groups studied.
The length of time in foster care was also studied by the sex of the child. This variable was shown to be an important variable for foster care placement in past studies.

Table 2

Children by Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>56.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 reports the frequencies of children examined for this study by the sex of the child. It can be seen that 43.9% were males and 56.1% were found to be females. None were reported as being in the “other” category.
The length of time in foster care as a result of Georgia Senate Bill 611 legislation was examined. The main racial background groups studied included African American, Asian, Caucasian, Hispanic, Native American, and Other. The category, "Other," was used to identify the children who could not be classified into one of the five main racial background groups previously identified for this study. Table 3 reports the frequencies of children examined for this study by racial background.

Table 3

Children by Racial Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Background</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 reports the frequencies of children examined for this study by racial background. It can be seen that the highest percentage of children (21%) were Caucasian followed by 13% of African American children. The least frequent racial background group of the forty-one children studied were found to be Hispanic (17%). There were no
Native American children or children in the “Other” category in the sample.

In summarizing the demographic variables, it can be seen that the most frequent age group of children studied came from the 16-18 age range. These children comprised approximately one-third of all the children studied. The 13-15 age group was found to be the next most frequent group compromising 22% of all children studied, followed by the 7-9 (17.1%) and the 4-6 age groups (14.6%). The 0-3 and 10-12 age groups compromised only 7.3% of the children in this study. None of the cases reviewed included children in the 19+ age group.

When examined for gender, twenty-three or 56.1% of the cases researched for this study were female. The remaining eighteen or 43.9% of the total files studied consisted of males. The most frequent racial background group consisted of Caucasian children (51.2%) followed by the African American children (31.7%). Hispanic children comprised 17.1% of the total number of children studied. No Asian children or “Other” groups were found within the total group of children studied.
Placement Reason

The study findings for the reason for primary placement of the child are presented in Table 4. Abandonment, Emotional Abuse, Neglect, Parents Deceased, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, and Voluntary Placement were the seven primary placement categories used to classify the children studied. Children who did not fall into one of those seven categories were identified in an eighth category entitled, "other." Each placement category was compared as to the mean length of time in foster care prior to and after the passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611.

Table 4

Children by Primary Placement Reason

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Placement Reason</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abandonment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Abuse</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Deceased</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Abuse</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Placement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen in Table 4 that the most frequent primary placement reason for the children studied was due to Neglect (51.2%). Physical abuse (31.7%) was the next most
Frequent reason for placement. Emotional abuse, Sexual abuse and Abandonment comprised the remaining 14.6 percent of the children studied.

Disposition of the cases for the children’s cases reviewed were also researched to determine if the passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611 had an affect on the length of time children spent in foster care. Return to Birth/Legal Family, Long Term Foster Care Agreement, Independent Living/Emancipation, Legal Guardianship, Adoption, and “Other” were used to classify the dispositions of children’s cases. Again, the “Other” category was used to classify the dispositions of children’s cases that did not fit the five previously defined categories. Frequencies are reported for pre and post legislative conditions in Table 5.
Table 5

Pre and Post Legislative Frequencies for Disposition of Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disposition</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to Birth</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Term Foster Care Agreement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Living Emancipation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Guardianship</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most frequent dispositions reported for all children studied was Adoption and Return to Birth/Legal Family. Prior to the enactment of Georgia Senate Bill 611, the frequency for adoption was reported to be 58.5% decreasing to 46.3% after the passage of Senate Bill 611. The frequency for the disposition “Return to Birth/Legal Family” decreased from pre to post Senate Bill 611 from 36.7% to 22%. Long Term Foster Care comprised 2.4% of the children studied prior to the passage of legislation, increasing to
The most frequent dispositions reported for all children studied was Adoption and Return to Birth/Legal Family. Prior to the enactment of Georgia Senate Bill 611, the frequency for adoption was reported to be 58.5% decreasing to 46.3% after the passage of Senate Bill 611. The frequency for the disposition “Return to Birth/Legal Family” decreased from pre to post Senate Bill 611 from 36.7% to 22%. Long Term Foster Care comprised 2.4% of the children studied prior to the passage of legislation, increasing to

### Table 5

**Pre and Post Legislative Frequencies for Disposition of Cases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disposition</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to Birth</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Family</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Term Foster Care Agreement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Living Emancipation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Guardianship</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>46.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
19.5% after implementation of Senate Bill 611. The percentage of children in Legal Guardianship increased from 2.4% to 4.9%. The percentage of dispositions classified in the other category were found to comprise 4.9% of the children after the passage of Senate Bill 611. None of dispositions for children were coded as other prior to Senate Bill 611.


table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of times the individual cases of children were reviewed was also collected for this study. Case reviews for all children studied were categorized as one, two, three, or four reviews. Data in this form were reported for all case reviews for all years prior to and after the passage of Senate Bill 611. Case reviews prior to the passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611 are reported in Table 6 and case reviews conducted after the passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611 are reported in Table 7.

Table 6
Case Reviews Prior to the Passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Reviews</th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>1996</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

Case Reviews Subsequent to the Passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Reviews</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1998</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>46.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 reports the data on the total frequencies of case reviews prior to and after the passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611. Case reviews reported prior to Senate Bill 611 were those that took place during the June 1994 to May 1996 time frame. The post legislative case reviews reported took place during the two year time period between July
Table 8

Total Frequencies of Case Reviews Prior To and After the Passage of Senate Bill 611

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre Senate Bill 611</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Senate Bill 611</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of case reviews for this study were collected for the 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, and 1998 calendar years. Case reviews for the years 1994-1996 were considered prior to the passage of Senate Bill 611. Those reviews conducted in 1996-1998 were considered post Senate Bill 611 case reviews. It can be seen that the most frequent number of case reviews was one case review per year for 1994 (51.2%) and 1995 (39%). In 1996, the most frequent number of case reviews was three (46.3%). The most frequent number of case reviews after the passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611 was three for both 1997 (46.3%) and 1998 (48.8%).

When considering the total number of case reviews for all the years studied, results indicate that 78% of the children’s cases reviewed for this study underwent case
Guardian Ad Litem status was reported as either “yes” or “no.” There were two cases in which a child’s file did not identify it’s Guardian Ad Litem status.

Table 9
Guardian Ad Litem Involvement Before and After the Passage of Senate Bill 611

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guardian Ad Litem Involvement</th>
<th>Pre Senate Bill 611</th>
<th>Post Senate Bill 611</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>95.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of children with Guardian Ad Litem involvement was not shown to change prior to or after the implementation of Senate Bill 611 legislation. All of the children’s files, except for two, indicated no Guardian Ad Litem involvement. Two files contained no information regarding Guardian Ad Litem status.

Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics are presented in Table 10 for the mean number of months that Floyd County children spent in foster care prior to and after the passage of Georgia Senate Bill 611. A Wilcoxon’s Matched – Pairs Signed Ranks Test
appropriate than its parametric equivalent (correlated samples t-test) due to the small numbers of children within each of the cells for each factor studied.

The z statistic is reported in Table 10 for the comparison of the mean length of time in foster care before the implementation of Senate Bill 611 and the mean length of time in foster care after legislation. This statistic is used to determine the magnitude of difference between the two means when considering the variability of the two samples being compared. The p column of Table 10 represents the probabilities or the level of significance for making the decision that means are significantly different from one another. The probability level accepted for statistical significance for this comparison was $P < 0.05$.

Table 10

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Pre and Post Senate Bill 611 Legislation For All Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre legislation</th>
<th>Post legislation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.61</td>
<td>30.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A series of Wilcoxin’s Matched – Pairs Signed Ranks Tests were also used to compare the mean length of children within age, sex, racial background, primary placement reason, disposition, case reviews, and Guardian Ad Litem status. Descriptive and inferential statistics for these groups are found in Tables 11, 12, and 13.

Z statistics and the probability (p) that the means are significantly different are reported in Table 11. The probability level accepted for statistical significance for all comparisons on the length of time in foster care for age, sex, racial background groups was set at P > .05. However, in order to maintain a .05 level of significance due to the number of comparisons, the Type I error rate must be held constant. This was done by making a Bonferroni adjustment in the alpha level based on the number of comparisons made for each of the factors considered.
Table 11

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Pre and Post Senate Bill 611 Legislation by the Age of the Child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pre legislation</th>
<th>Post legislation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 – 3</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>12.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – 6</td>
<td>11.75</td>
<td>19.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – 9</td>
<td>26.60</td>
<td>35.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 12</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>21.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 – 15</td>
<td>22.29</td>
<td>38.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 – 18</td>
<td>30.00</td>
<td>37.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The alpha level set for statistically significant differences for any age group was .008. It can be seen that nonsignificant age group differences were found between pre and post legislative conditions when considering mean number of months in foster care placement. However, large reductions in mean length of time in foster care were found
placement ranging from 4 to 6 months.

The gender of children was also considered when comparing length of time in foster care for pre and post legislation. Means and standard deviations in addition to Z scores and probability levels for each set of comparisons are located in Table 12.

Table 12

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Pre and Post Senate Bill 611 by the Sex of the Child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Pre Legislation</th>
<th>Post Legislation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24.17</td>
<td>31.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17.83</td>
<td>30.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this case since only two comparisons are being made, the alpha level to determine statistical significance was set at $P < .025$. A significant difference was not found between pre and post legislative mean length of time in foster care for both males ($Z = - .240, p = .810$) and females ($Z = -.848, p = .455$)
Descriptive and inferential statistics for mean comparisons by racial background group for the children studied are reported in Table 13.

### Table 13

**Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Pre and Post Senate Bill 611 Legislation by Racial Background**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pre legislation</th>
<th>Post legislation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>34.15</td>
<td>43.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>19.10</td>
<td>22.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The alpha level for these comparisons was set at .0125 in order to determine which means differed significantly from one another. Because of the nonrepresentation of Asians, Native Americans, and the “Other” category, mean length of time comparisons...
as with the age groupings, large decreases were shown. It can be seen that Caucasian children evidenced an average 5 month decrease in foster care placement with the African American children showing an even appreciably larger average 17 month reduction. Hispanic children were not represented in the sample during the pre legislation period.

Table 14 reports means and standard deviations in addition to Z statistics and the level of probability for each of the pre and post Senate Bill 611 comparisons when considering mean length of time in foster care placement.

Table 14
Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Pre and Post Senate Bill 611 Legislation by Placement Reason

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement Reason</th>
<th>Pre Legislation</th>
<th>Post Legislation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Abuse</td>
<td>23.50</td>
<td>9.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect</td>
<td>27.38</td>
<td>37.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Abuse</td>
<td>20.16</td>
<td>22.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The placement category of Abandonment contained only one child with the Voluntary Placement and Parents Deceased categories containing none of the cases examined for this study. Therefore, mean comparisons for pre and post legislative conditions could not be made for these categories and are not represented in Table 13. The level of significance set for these comparisons was .0125.

Nonsignificant results were also found when considering reason for primary placement. However large decreases in mean length of time in foster care were documented. Children who were placed due to emotional abuse and neglect evidenced an average decreases of 22 to 14 months in foster care placement while children placed due to sexual abuse showed an average 5 month decrease. Interestingly, physically abused children were found to show a mean increase of 7 months stay in foster care placement.

Summary of Findings

For the purposes of this study pre and post Georgia Senate Bill 611 comparisons were made on mean length of time in foster care for children of Floyd County. In addition, age, racial background, and primary reason for placement comparisons on mean length of time in foster care from pre to post legislative conditions were also made. When comparing all children as a group non-significant results were found. However, the average placement time from pre to post legislative conditions was found to be sixteen months. Similar results were found when making comparisons by age, racial background and reason for primary placement. Almost all age, racial background and primary reason
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In a 1994 study by Goerge, results showed rapid short-term growth in state foster care populations in large urban centers of states. This study showed that the growth has not only occurred in large cities but also in small counties, such as Floyd County, Georgia. In Floyd County, Georgia, there was a 64% increase in the number of children in foster care from Fiscal Year 1997 to Fiscal Year 1998. One consideration for the increases in the number of children in care shown in the 1998 Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services Annual Report is it could be a direct result of the passage and enactment of state legislation, particularly, Senate Bill 611, as opposed to national legislation. The State of Georgia has more control over the state policies and funding as opposed to the control given when under national legislation. The increase in the number of children in care is consistent with Guggenheim’s (1995) study in which he concluded that reforms resulted in higher numbers of children in care.

This study’s findings that reflected mean increase in the length of time in care in the two youngest age categories, 0-3 year olds and 4-6 year olds, were consistent with Courtney’s (1995) study which states infants remained in care considerably longer than children in any other age group. These findings were surprising to the researcher due to
There has been little consensus on direction or importance of many factors such as racial background and reason for placement across studies (Benedict & White, 1991). This study found no significant mean reductions in length of time in foster care. However, decreases in the length of time in care for the two racial background categories mainly represented were found. Caucasians evidenced an average 5 month decrease while African American children boasted an even larger decrease of 17 months. Minority race or ethnic origin has been associated with longer lengths of stay in some studies (Jenkins et al., 1983; Jenkins and Diamond, 1985; Seaberg and Tolley, 1986). Whereas, other investigations have found no relationship between race and length of stay (Lawder et al., 1986; Milner, 1987). This study surprisingly found that since the enactment of Senate Bill 611 in Georgia, decreases in length of time in foster care exist and the largest decreases can be found among the African American children, who historically, have spent the greatest amount of time in the foster care system. Benedict and White (1991) found no significant differences in median length of stay by the children’s age, sex or racial background.

Benedict and White (1991) found that 64% of a sample of 689 children were placed because of abuse and neglect. Benedict and White (1991) concluded where the primary placement reason was physical abuse, the median length of stay in foster care was shorter (4 months) than the median stay for other placement reasons such as neglect.
decrease of 8 months when comparing pre and post legislation results.

The researcher noted that population shifts are occurring in the state of Georgia. The foster care system is realizing an emerging multi-ethnic population. This is evidenced in the findings that 17% of the total makeup of the racial background category was made up of Hispanic children.

Johnson and Canon (1984) and McMurry (1992) concluded in their studies that the effects of legal changes are nebulous, difficult to measure, and are often not discernible until after lengthy delays. This is consistent with the nonsignificant results found in this study. The average placement time from pre to post legislative conditions was 16 months.

Limitations of the Study

The study only sampled foster children in the Northwest Georgia area, specifically Rome and Floyd County, Georgia. Another limitation of the study is the limited number of cases studied. As such, the sample size and the one county location do not allow for generalizations to other Juvenile Court systems in other counties across Georgia, although there could be implications for the Juvenile Court systems. The study could be used as a basis for a study with a larger number of counties.

Data do not reveal the length of time spent in foster care for the child whose parental rights were terminated. This is due to the fact that the Floyd County Citizens Review panel no longer reviews the child once the Juvenile Court Judge has signed the
which would include a review of these cases with the Department of Family and Children Services. Of importance is only two sources, other than the Floyd County Juvenile Court Judge and the Floyd County Director of the Department of Family and Children Services, were utilized for interpreting Georgia Senate Bill 611. Other individuals of the Juvenile Court system and of the Department of Family and Children Services in other counties in the state of Georgia might have different views on Senate Bill 611.
CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The basis of the Senate Bill 611 reform urges that efforts to reunify parent and child should be intensive but time-limited; if intensive efforts fail to permit reunification promptly, the reform advocates swift termination of parental rights in order to "free" the child for adoption (Worthington, 1998, press-a). As a social worker in the arena of foster care and welfare reform, it is imperative that the professional understand attachment and bonding theories and the powerful influence of the child's first attachment on his or her human development.

The study's findings of an increased length of time in care for the youngest age categories are of concern. Different strategies need to be in place based on the child, the family, and the service delivery information related to this increased length of stay. The social worker, for example, could implement procedures, which would be more comprehensive and specialized to this age group. If services are planned in light of the estimated time in care, they may be targeted more effectively not only to the child and family needs, but also to the agency needs in the face of limitations on its' resources.

Child welfare agencies face cost constraints that seriously limit agency effectiveness. As service providers, social workers must improve their ability to monitor what they are doing and evaluate how doing it to determine what programs can be taken to improve.
Providers must persist in their efforts to convince funders of the long-term costs of underfunding agencies in an era of increased litigiousness.

Given the increasing number of children in foster care in Floyd County, Georgia, a 64% increase in one year (Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services, 1998), it is of utmost importance for the autonomous social worker to understand the child and family as a microsystem while also understanding the effects of the macrosystem, the national and state legislation, on each individual case. As social workers, it is imperative to recognize the complexity of human beings and that the instruments that measure functioning and the policies that guide interventions only approximate the complexity. Instruments and policies apply to populations in the aggregate with some adequacy of fit, but are of limited use when applied to individuals. When we, as social workers, apply carefully designed policies, we must appreciate that informed judgment is the best tool we have for dealing with individuals. We must move away from the search for simple answers to complex questions. The complexity of human interactions precludes simple solutions, and the certainty of having solved a problem is destined to elude our grasp. They help to define the dimensions of the problem and provide a challenge to those who choose to work seriously with children, our society's most precious resource.

It is the hope of this researcher that if nothing else, the results of this study will encourage social workers, legislators, and community leaders to take an active role in the lives of foster children. While innovations, such as Senate Bill 611, can produce some improvements in decreasing the length of time foster care children spend in care; the
Dear Judge Pape:

I enjoyed speaking with you last week on the telephone. I was glad I had the chance to talk with Timmy, he is really growing up quickly! As we discussed last month and again this past week through telephone conversation, I am completing my thesis toward fulfilling part of the requirements for the Master of Social Work degree at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia. I believe the topic of my thesis will interest you. And, the results of the study may prove helpful to both you and other Juvenile Court Judges, Department of Family and Children Services, the Special Attorney Generals, and the Council of Juvenile Court Judges.

The title of the thesis is "The Length Of Time Foster Children Spend In The Foster Care System In Georgia". The thesis will compare the lengths of stay in foster care two years prior to the passage of Senate Bill 611 and two years since the bill has been enacted. I would greatly appreciate the use of the statistical data, which are completed by the Citizens Review Panel and case records. No extracting of identifying data that would divulge the identity of the child or family will be utilized in the study. The data used will be compiled in aggregate, assuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the child and family. Data will include the age of the child, the type of current placement, the initial date of placement, and the final disposition, if one has been made. The data from the panel reviews would assist in determining the study's hypothesis which is the positive relationship between the decreasing amount of time children are spending in care and the passage of Senate Bill 611.
APPENDIX D

LENGTH OF TIME IN CARE QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is designed to assist the researcher in abstracting data from the case records of children in foster care who are were reviewed by the Floyd County Panel Review Program from July 1, 1994-June 30, 1998. The researcher will check the appropriate line according to the data.

CHILD #______________________________(For Data Collection Purposes Only)

DATE ENTERED CARE: __________________

I. DEMOGRAPHICS

A. AGE OF CHILD

0. 0-3
1. 4-6
2. 7-9
3. 10-12
4. 13-15
5. 16-18
6. 19>

B. SEX OF CHILD

0. Male
1. Female
2. Other (Specify)

C. RACE

0. African American
1. Asian
2. Caucasian
3. Hispanic
4. Native American
5. Other (Specify)

II. PRIMARY PLACEMENT REASON
III. LENGTHS OF TIME IN CARE
(IN MONTHS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PRE SENATE BILL 611</th>
<th>POST SENATE BILL 611</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0. &lt;1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 1-6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 7-12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 13-18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 19-24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 25-30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 31-36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 37-42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. 43-48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. 49&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. DISPOSITION OF CHILD

Pre

0. Adoption
1. Independent Living/Emancipation
2. Legal Guardianship
3. Long Term Foster Care Agreement
4. Return to Birth or Legal Family
5. Transfer of Temporary Custody
6. Other (specify)

Post

0. Adoption
1. Independent Living/Emancipation
2. Legal Guardianship
3. Long Term Foster Care Agreement
4. Return to Birth or Legal Family
5. Transfer of Temporary Custody
6. Other (specify)

V. GUARDIAN AD LITEM INVOLVEMENT

Pre

0. Yes
1. No

Post

0. Yes
1. No

VI. NUMBER OF CASE REVIEWS PER YEAR

Pre

7/1/94-6/30/95
7/1/95-6/30/96
7/1/96-6/30/97

Post

7/1/97-6/30/98
REFERENCES


Annual Report on the Work of the Floyd County Juvenile Court for 1993-1995 Calendar Years:


World Health Organization.


Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services. Floyd County


Georgia Department of Family and Children Services Descriptive Data State Fiscal Year 1996. Report compiled by the Statistical Unit of the Georgia Department of Family and Children Services.


http://www2.state.ga.us/departments/dhr/facofa.html

Georgia Department of Human Resources. Facts on Foster Care. Retrieved October 4, 1998 from World Wide Web:
http://www2.state.ga.us/departments/dhr/facfost.html


Nadel, Mark V. Associate Director, Income Security Issues. Foster Care State

Ooms, Theodora. The Crisis in Foster Care: New Directions for the 1990’s. American Association for Marriage and Family Research and Education Foundation.

Pape, Timothy. Judge of the Floyd County Juvenile Court, Rome, GA. Interview February 1999.


