

A Report of the
Department of Social Services
Commonwealth of Virginia

**ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN
RESEARCH
State Fiscal Year 2014**

to the Governor and the
General Assembly of Virginia

October 2014

Preface

Section 63.2-218 of the Code of Virginia (Code) requires the State Board of Social Services to adopt regulations regarding human research. The statute further requires the human research committee, referred to as the Institutional Review Board (IRB), to provide an annual report to the Governor and General Assembly on the human research projects reviewed and approved during the operating year:

The Board shall adopt regulations to effectuate the provisions of Chapter 5.1 (§ 32.1-162.16 et seq.) of Title 32.1 for human research, as defined in § 32.1-162.16, to be conducted or authorized by the Department, any agency or facility licensed by the Department, or any local department. The regulations shall require the human research committee to submit to the Governor, the General Assembly, and the Commissioner at least annually a report on the human research projects reviewed and approved by the committee and shall require the committee to report any significant deviations from the proposals as approved.

This report on human research projects reviewed and approved by the IRB during State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2014 is in response to the mandate in § 63.2-218.

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Executive Summary

In SFY 2014, the Department of Social Services' (DSS) human research committee, referred to as the Institutional Review Board (IRB), reviewed seven proposed research projects. Four studies qualified as exempt from IRB review. Three studies qualified for expedited review; none required a full IRB review. Two of the three studies that underwent expedited review were approved by the IRB. In addition, two ongoing studies were each approved for one-year continuations. There were no major modifications reported for ongoing studies.

Research involving DSS clients generally involves no risk of physical harm because it is not clinical research but observational studies of human behavior. The potential risk for DSS studies most often involves issues of client privacy and, to a lesser extent, psychological harm (for example, from surveys that include sensitive questions). The IRB has a responsibility to protect client privacy and, more generally, to minimize the risks of research activities to DSS clients.

Department of Social Services Annual Report on Human Research, SFY 2014

Report Mandate

The purpose of this report is to provide the Governor and the General Assembly with a summary of the activities of the DSS IRB for SFY 2014 (July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014). The IRB is charged with reviewing, approving, and monitoring research conducted or authorized by DSS, local departments of social services, DSS contractors, and DSS-licensed facilities.

Section 63.2-218 of the code of Virginia requires the IRB to “submit to the Governor, the General Assembly, and the Commissioner at least annually a report on the human research projects reviewed and approved by the committee and shall require the committee to report any significant deviations from the proposals as approved.” Appendix A provides the full text of Section 63.2-218.

Introduction

Research involving DSS clients is not biomedical in nature. Typically, DSS clients participate in social or behavioral studies and in evaluations. Unlike medical studies, physical risk from this type of research is rare. Most often, the potential risk in DSS-related studies involves privacy issues. DSS-related research projects may also include survey questions concerning issues that are psychologically or sociologically sensitive.

The IRB reviews such research in advance to ensure, first, that the rights of clients are protected and, second, that the proposed research maintains the privacy and welfare of the participants. Using established criteria for IRB approval of research, the IRB may determine that a study is exempt from review, appropriate for expedited review, or requires full review. If a study is not exempt, it may be appropriate for an expedited review, depending on the type of human subjects being studied and the nature of those activities. An expedited review is carried by the IRB Chair and one other member. In a full review, all IRB members must review and approve the study.

Human Research Activities for SFY 2014

The DSS Division of Research and Planning is responsible for administering the IRB and ensuring compliance with federal and state regulations regarding human subject research. Gail Jennings, Ph.D., a research associate senior in Research and Planning, is the Coordinator and Chairperson for the DSS IRB.¹

Major activities in support of the IRB for SFY 2014 included:

¹ Dr. Jennings has served as the IRB Coordinator since January 2012. She also assumed the role of Chairperson in July 2012, upon appointment by the DSS Commissioner.

- Providing input and feedback for proposed research and evaluation studies and informing involved Principal Investigators (PIs) and DSS division directors and program managers about relevant IRB regulations and requirements;
- Reviewing research protocols submitted for IRB review and determining whether they met the criteria for IRB approval;
- Reviewing requests from PIs to extend approval for studies planned for continuation beyond their initial one-year approval;
- Informing DSS IRB members about procedural changes via conference calls and e-mail correspondence;
- Maintaining an Access database for tracking the status of IRB reviews, study modifications, and continuations; and
- Maintaining the IRB web page on the VDSS public web site (<http://www.dss.virginia.gov/about/irb.cgi>). The web page is where IRB forms and guidance documents (e.g., Guidelines and Procedures manual) reside. The most recent revision to the IRB Guidelines and Procedures Manual was released in December 2012.

The State Board of Social Services human research regulation requires that IRB members “ensure the competent, complete, and professional review of human research.” State regulations require that the Board have a minimum of seven members, including two members who represent non-scientific disciplines.

In June 2012, the DSS Commissioner appointed a new board consisting of nine members (including the IRB Coordinator/Chairperson) to serve a three-year term (through June 30, 2015). Since then, four original members are no longer with the IRB.² Three new members have been added: Jeff Price Ph.D, and Myra Owens, Ph.D, both of the VDSS Office of Research and Planning; and Em Parente, Ph.D, of VDSS Division of Family Services. Dr. Parente was recruited specifically for her expertise in the area of child welfare policy.

The DSS IRB currently has eight active members. Six IRB members represent the social services system: five come from the state office and one from a local department of social services. Two members come from the community, specifically, partner agencies. Several members have research experience (five members have doctoral degrees), including some that served on other institutional review boards. The IRB membership fully complies with state and federal human research regulations. A roster of current DSS IRB members (as of June 2014) is located in Appendix B.

The agency IRB maintains its registration with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). The registration is effective through May 2015. Furthermore, the agency maintains its status as an organization conducting human research (Federal-Wide Assurance) with the OHRP. The agency’s FWA registration expires in June 2017.

² Drs. Erik Beecroft and Jennifer Behrens left DSS prior to the end of SFY 2013. Dr. Najmah Thomas left the Virginia Community College System in April 2014. Dr. Greg Stolcis of Virginia Commonwealth University passed away in early 2014.

Projects Reviewed

Seven studies were reviewed in SFY 2014. Three studies qualified for *expedited* review; no studies required *full board* review. All but one study was approved by the DSS IRB.

Study # 2014-02K
Principal Investigator: Seth Kaplan, Ph.D
Affiliation: George Mason University
Title of Study: “An Examination of Activities to Improve Employee Well-Being”
Decision & Date: Approved - 7/31/2013
Review Type: Expedited
Description of Study: This study examines whether or not self-guided activities (e.g., self-reflection on aspects of work for which they are grateful, implementing strategies to foster social ties with co-workers/clients) have a positive impact on employee well-being. Participants are local department of social services’ employees. Participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental groups (social ties exercise, gratitude exercise, combination) or a control group (no intervention). Email prompts were sent to participants in the experimental groups, who were asked to engage in these activities twice a week for a four-week period. Participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire about their well-being at the end of the four-week period, and again at weeks 8 and 12. The study will address whether the interventions were effective and if there were any moderating effects of employee characteristics. The IRB approved the study with recommendations of minor modifications. The PI was requested to disseminate findings to the Virginia League of Social Services Directors at the conclusion of the study. The study is now closed; a report of findings is pending.

Study # 2014-04M
Principal Investigator: Karin Malm, Ph.D
Affiliation: Child Trends
Title of Study: “Wendy's Wonderful Kids Post-Adoption Study: How are adopted foster youth faring as young adults”
Decision & Date: Approved - 3/26/2014
Review Type: Expedited
Description of Study: Child Trends, with funding from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption (DTFA), proposed to conduct a nationwide study to assess the well-being of youth adopted through the Wendy’s Wonderful Kids (WWK) adoption recruitment program. The study sample are youth who were formerly in state foster care, entering at age 8 years or later, and who were later adopted through the WWK program (an estimated 30 youth in Virginia would be eligible for the study). Upon turning age 19, WWK youth and their families would be contacted by the researchers and asked to participate in the study. Local departments of social services are requested to be involved in the recruitment process. Through an in-person interview, participants would be asked about their well-being and challenges they faced during and after the adoption process (including disruption of the adoption). Older adopted youth were targeted for this study because of their elevated risk of poor outcomes in young adulthood. Findings would be

compared to results from other studies of young adults who aged out of foster care. The study was approved by the IRB.

Study # 2014-07
Principal Investigator: Beth Green, Ph.D.
Affiliation: Portland State University
Title of Study: “A Retrospective Collection of Child Protective Service Reports among National Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project Participants”
Decision & Date: Denied - 7/02/2014
Review Type: Expedited
Description of Study: The study proposed to conduct a secondary data analysis of administrative child welfare records of former study participants in the multi-state Early Head Start (EHS) longitudinal study (1996-1999). The purpose was to examine the impact of Early Head Start intervention on preventing later involvement of the family in the child welfare system (e.g., child protective services, removal from the home, foster care). The study PI requested permission to obtain state DSS administrative records (for 1996 through 2014) on 200 Virginia participants from the original study. The records were to be linked to EHS project data. Since the data request involved releasing personally identifying data without obtaining informed consent from participants/clients, the IRB required this study to undergo an expedited review. The request was also presented to the DSS Division of Information Security and Risk Management. This study was approved by the home institution’s IRB (Portland State University) and supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. However, based on a decision rendered by the state Attorney General’s Office, DSS was prevented from granting permission. The request to approve this study was denied by the IRB.

The following studies were deemed **exempt** from review:

- “Albemarle County Department of Social Services External Customer Satisfaction Survey” (PI: Sarah Fisher, Albemarle County Department of Social Services). This study, submitted to the DSS IRB on 7/7/2013, was exempt from review because the activities involved administration of a customer satisfaction survey. The findings are to be used to improve delivery of local departmental services.
- “Gaps in Assisted Living Pain Management Practices” (PI: Pamela Wisor, Capella University). This study, submitted to the DSS IRB on 8/15/2013, was exempt from review because the activities involved assessment of pain management education and training for direct care staff at select assisted living facilities. The nursing assistants are not affiliated with DSS, and no DSS clients will be assessed.
- “Evaluation of the Virginia Star Quality Initiative (SQI)” (PI: Kathryn Tout, Child Trends). This study, submitted to the DSS IRB on 1/23/2014, was exempt from review because the activities involved non-research, program evaluation activities sponsored by DSS.
- “Project Social Emotional Education & Development (SEED) Evaluation” (PI: Parthenia Dinora, Virginia Commonwealth University). For this study, submitted to the IRB on 3/20/2014, only the first phase was reviewed and it was rendered exempt because it involved exclusively non-research, program evaluation activities sponsored

by DSS. Because the design of the second phase (listed as an “exploratory study” in the PI’s evaluation plan) was not finalized at the time of the review, the second phase was not considered in the IRB’s review and decision. The IRB did not render a decision that the second phase was exempt from review. The PI was notified in April 2014 that a separate request for review of the second phase would be required. The second request will be reviewed by the IRB if and when the second phase design (to involve data collection from families) is finalized.

Continuation Reviews and Modifications

Two ongoing studies were approved for continuation in SFY2014:

- “Building an Integrated Child and Family Policy Research Data Capacity for the Commonwealth of Virginia” (PI: Isabel Bradburn, Ph.D, Virginia Tech University). The study was initially approved in May 2009 and approved for continuation yearly through 2014. The study recently ended after the close of SFY 2014. The DSS IRB is waiting to receive a copy of the study’s activities and findings. No modifications to the study were noted.
- “Understanding the Rates, Causes, and Costs of Churning in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program” (PI: Gregory Mills, Ph.D, Urban Institute). The study was initially approved in January 2013 and approved for continuation through May 2015. No modifications to the study were noted.

Significant Changes to Approved Projects

There were none to report.

IRB Meetings

The IRB Chair/Coordinator did not convene an in-person meeting with the IRB during SFY 2014. However, the IRB Chair/Coordinator communicated with members via email and conference call about IRB matters, including discussion of specific studies under review and new and updated IRB policies.

Results of Completed Research

Chapter 413 of the 2007 Acts of Assembly amended and reenacted § 32.1-162.19, relating to human research review committees, by adding a new sub-section E that states:

Each human research review committee of a state institution or agency shall ensure that an overview of approved human research projects and the results of such projects are made public on the institution’s or agency’s website unless otherwise exempt from disclosure under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (i.e., § 2.2-3700 et seq.).

In compliance with this legislative mandate, the results of all completed IRB-approved research studies are listed on the IRB Internet web site by year of approval, under the heading “Results of Approved Projects.” The address of the IRB Internet web site is: <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/about/irb.cgi>. Results from studies initiated in SFY 2005 through SFY 2013 are available.

The following study was completed in SFY 2014:

- “Accountability Management at the Street-Level: The impact of formal and informal accountability on the child welfare program performance in Virginia” (PI: Kwangseon Hwang, doctoral candidate, Virginia Tech University), was approved by the IRB in March 2013 and concluded in 2013. The PI defended his dissertation study in July 2013. A link to the dissertation findings was provided (<http://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/handle/10919/23743>). A description is included in Appendix C.

The following study was never started and was closed upon notification by the PI:

- “Respite to Enable Permanent Placement for Children with Reactive Attachment “(PI: Mark Kilgus, M.D., Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine). The study, which was approved by the IRB in November 2011 and approved for continuation into 2014, did not recruit a sufficient number of respite families to start data collection activities. Instead, the PI analyzed existing client administrative data to answer other research questions about the effect of prior foster care placement disruptions on subsequent foster care placements. A brief summary of findings (obtained from an unpublished manuscript) is also included in Appendix C.

Appendix A: Code of Virginia Mandate

§ 63.2-218. Board to adopt regulations regarding human research.

The Board shall adopt regulations to effectuate the provisions of Chapter 5.1 (§ 32.1-162.16 et seq.) of Title 32.1 for human research, as defined in § 32.1-162.16, to be conducted or authorized by the Department, any agency or facility licensed by the Department, or any local department. The regulations shall require the human research committee to submit to the Governor, the General Assembly, and the Commissioner at least annually a report on the human research projects reviewed and approved by the committee and shall require the committee to report any significant deviations from the proposals as approved.

(1992, c. 603, § 63.1-25.01; 2002, c. 747.)

Appendix B: DSS IRB Membership

DSS Institutional Review Board, 2013-2015 (as of June 30, 2014)		
Name	Educational Degree	Institutional Affiliation (Position Title)
Gail Jennings (Chair & Coordinator)	Ph.D., Psychology	Virginia Department of Social Services, Office of Research and Planning (Statistical Analyst Senior)
Mary Disse**	B.A., Psychology Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Information Systems	Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Information Systems (Business Analyst)
Erika Jones-Haskins*	Master of Social Work	Virginia Housing and Development Authority (Community Housing Officer for Homelessness and Non-Profits; formerly with Homeward)
Myra Owens	Ph.D., Health-Related Sciences	Virginia Department of Social Services, Office of Research and Planning (Statistical Analyst Senior)
Em Parente	Ph.D., Social Work	Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Family Services (Program Manager)
Jeff Price	Ph.D., Agricultural and Applied Economics M.A., Anthropology	Virginia Department of Social Services, Office of Research and Planning (Office Director)
Susan K. Spain*	M.S., Sociology	None (formerly with Virginia Commonwealth University)
Tamara Temoney	Ph.D., Public Policy and Administration	Hanover County Department of Social Services (Assistant Agency Director)

* Community member or represents agency serving community members. ** Non-research

Appendix C: Summary of Study Findings

Principal Investigator: Kwangseon Hwang (doctoral candidate)

Institutional Affiliation: Virginia Tech University, Center for Public Administration and Policy

Study Title: Accountability Management at the Street-Level: The impact of formal and informal accountability on the child welfare program performance in Virginia

Term of IRB Approval: March 14, 2013 – March 13, 2014

Study Completed: July 2013 (Dissertation defended in July 23, 2013)

Summary or Abstract:

Performance management is prevalent in public organizations and public services, but the push for performance may harm genuine accountability. One critical reason for this is that little [is known] about the scope and effect of actual accountability requirements in the public management field. This dissertation furthers our understanding of accountability and performance by distinguishing them as different dimensions of public management. Building on this distinction, the effect of accountability (A) on performance (P) and accountability management's (M) mediating role in the relationship between accountability and performance were investigated empirically in child welfare service [agencies] in Virginia. The study had two stages: interviews and a survey [administered to child welfare services case workers and supervisors in local departments of social services]. The qualitative content analysis of the interviews provides several noteworthy findings. Accountability can be understood more with the terms: explanation, expectation, people/society, action/decision, and values. Conversely, performance can be considered more in line with the terms: productivity/outcome, timely work, team playing, learning, and strategy. The incompatible characteristics found between accountability and performance highlight problems behind performance-driven accountability. The survey portion of the study, built upon the interview data, also presents notable findings: (1) Accountability affects performance both directly and indirectly, and (2) accountability management matters in the relationship between accountability and performance. While the empirical literature on the A → P link focuses on the effects of competing accountability requirements, [this] study examines dimensions of the accountability requirements' impact. Formal (e.g., legal) as well as informal (e.g., ethical) accountability requirements are critical for ensuring higher performance. Compliance strategies implicitly connect informal accountability requirements with work performance. The findings support the study's argument that accountability should be stressed for better performance and highlight the need for the careful design of accountability mechanisms in social services. Ultimately, this study may serve as a foundation for future efforts to establish more appropriate accountability and performance arrangements.

Principal Investigator: Mark D. Kilgus, M.D.

Institutional Affiliation: Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine

Study Title: Respite to Enable Permanent Placement for Children with Reactive Attachment (unpublished manuscript titled “Effect of Repeat Foster Placement Disruptions on Duration of Future Placements and Implications for Children with Reactive Attachment Disorder”)

Term of IRB Approval: November 29, 2011 – November 1, 2013

Study Completed: Study not completed. In May 2014, the PI informed the VDSS IRB that data collection activities never began due to failure to recruit a sufficient number of respite family participants. Instead, the PI analyzed existing client administrative data obtained from VDSS to answer other research questions about the effect of prior multiple foster care placement disruptions on subsequent foster care placements. A copy of the analysis findings in an unpublished manuscript were submitted to the IRB.

Summary or Abstract:

Using existing VDSS client administrative data, the investigator examined the start and stop dates of each foster care placement for approximately 27,000 children who were in foster care in Virginia. The objective was to determine the effect that a history of multiple foster care placements, especially disrupted placements, has on future foster care placements and placement duration in foster homes (including non-finalized adoptions). (Note: Placements in emergency shelters, group homes, residential and psychiatric facilities, and crisis placements were excluded from the analysis.) The hypothesis is that children who have disrupted multiple foster placements may disrupt future placements at even earlier intervals than they have in the past. Performing multiple regression analyses, the investigator examined the child’s sex, age, and time in care as predictors of number of future placements and placement duration. The investigator also examined number of previous disruptions, testing the hypothesis that children with two or more prior disruptions (a possible indicator of reactive attachment disorder, or attachment anxiety) have more future disrupted placements and shorter mean duration of placements. Findings indicate that the mean duration of future foster care placements significantly declined with each additional prior placement. Age and sex of the child were not significant predictors. Although reactive attachment disorder was not directly measured in this study, the study has implications for how reactive attachment disorder affects subsequent foster care placements. Placements in multiple foster homes may be a mechanism of reinforcing attachment trauma in and of itself for children in the foster care system. Without stable and long-term foster home placement, adaptive attachment is unlikely, which can have lasting effects on a child’s future relationships and social behavior. It would be important to investigate ways to prevent disruptions in this group of children.