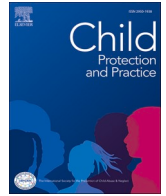




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Child Protection and Practice

journal homepage: www.sciencedirect.com/journal/child-protection-and-practice

Research Article

Dalgleish scores difference amongst professional roles within the greater child welfare community

Matthew Trail¹

Max Planck Institute for Research on Collective Goods, Kurt-Schumacher-Str. 10, 53113, Bonn, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Dalgleish Scale
 Caseworker beliefs
 Family preservation vs child safety
 Child welfare roles
 CASA
 Child welfare attorney
 Kiship
 Foster parent
 Care experienced

ABSTRACT

Background: The central tension of the child welfare system is the need to protect children while also encouraging the stability of families. Researchers have attempted to capture this conflict through the use of the Dalgleish Scale (Fluke et al., 2016), which measures attitudes about family preservation versus child safety.

Objective: Though used multiple times by researchers over the last decade to test state agency child protection worker's beliefs, the Dalgleish Scale has never before been given to the wider child welfare community.

Participants setting: Taken from data collected from more than a 1000 U.S. participants as part of two separate online child welfare decision making survey vignette experiments, this present research is the first to administer the Dalgleish to people from multiple professional roles within the child welfare system.

Methods: Dalgleish scores for 13 child welfare professional roles were compared using Mann Whitney U to test for significance and Cohen's d for effect size, while demographic variables within the roles were tested using ANOVA.

Results: The results demonstrate significant differences in beliefs about child safety and family preservation between the roles within the child welfare system. On average lawyers tended to rate family preservation higher than any other role. Foster parents, CASA/GAL workers and former foster youth tended to score the highest on child safety scores. State agency caseworkers scored in the middle though still on the child safety side of the scale.

Conclusions: These significant variances in the Dalgleish score based on role suggest that participants' professional role within child welfare has an impact on how they view the central dynamic question of family preservation and child safety.

1. Introduction

The child protection system encompasses many roles from state agency caseworkers to foster parents to the legal community and beyond. Children within the system will encounter adults in these different contexts with different views of the system's ultimate goal for children in care all with varying degrees of power over those children. How these various child welfare professionals view the basic function of the child welfare system, either to strengthen families or protect children in danger, has the potential to affect how they make decisions on behalf of children in care. This research is the first to question multiple roles within the child welfare community about this basic belief using the Dalgleish Scale (Dalgleish, 2010) and shows important differences in how the various roles interpret family preservation versus child safety.

Created by the late Len Dalgleish (2010), the Dalgleish Scale is a

binary forced choice set of 8 questions between paired statements followed by question asking participants to rank the strength of the statement they chose with choices being statements such as "Work should be focused on keeping the family together" or "Child protection workers should be willing to be an advocate for the child". The result is a score that places participants on a spectrum of child safety for higher scores versus family preservation for lower scores and previous researcher have found it to be moderately reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.664 (Fluke et al., 2016). The scale has been used to test child protection workers beliefs on child safety and family preservation and their relationship with numerous other child welfare metrics.

2. Literature

The Dalgleish Scale is often used in conjunction with research of

E-mail address: trail@coll.mpg.de.

¹ University of Bonn PhD (expected 2024).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chipro.2024.100047>

Received 30 April 2024; Received in revised form 4 June 2024; Accepted 8 July 2024

Available online 11 July 2024

2950-1938/© 2024 The Author. Published by Elsevier Inc. on behalf of International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

decision making in child welfare under the framework of the decision making ecology (DME) (Detlaff et al., 2020; Fluke et al., 2016; Hollinshead et al., 2021; Hollinshead & Orsi, 2023; Nikolova et al., 2017; Strolin-Goltzman & Holbrook, 2023). A full discussion of the DME is beyond the narrow scope of this paper. In brief however, the DME is a child welfare decision making framework that incorporates case factors, organizational factors, external factors and decision maker factors into decision making outcomes and those outcomes then influence the original four factors in a repeating cycle (Baumann et al., 2011).

2.1. Caseworker and agency factors

Several of the studies using the Dagleish Scale attempted to find correlations between individual worker and agency characteristic and their internal beliefs about child safety and family preservation.

Experience and role within the agency have been found to correlate with belief. Fluke et al. (2016) used the Dagleish Scale to measure 290 responses from three states and found that workers who have worked in child welfare longer or do not carry a caseload are more likely to be oriented toward family preservation, while workers who are newer or have a caseload are more likely to be oriented toward child safety.

This aligns with later studies that found similar results. Nikolova et al. (2017), tested 1781 workers from two states and found significant difference between roles within the child protection agency, with investigators and those with less training tending to have leanings towards family preservation and those in other roles with more training tended to favor child safety. In a Kansas study of 241 child welfare workers, Clark et al. (2021) found that professionals in supervisory roles and those with more than 7 years' experience trended towards family preservation, whereas younger and less experienced workers tended towards child safety. Lastly, Middel et al. (2024) recently also linked experience with a higher score on family preservation.

Relatedly, age is also identified as factor that is related to belief. Both Nikolova et al. (2017) and Strolin-Goltzman and Holbrook (2023) found that older workers were more likely to favor family preservation than younger workers.

Gender also seems to have some influence as multiple studies have shown that women tend to score higher on child safety than men (Middel et al., 2024; Nikolova et al., 2017; Vanderloo, 2017). Though this was not found in every study (Fluke et al., 2016).

Education is another variable with mixed correlation to belief on the Dagleish Scale. Fluke et al. (2016) found no link between education levels and preferences for child safety or family preservation, whereas Nikolova et al. (2017) reported that workers with a graduate degree tended to favor child safety, while those with college degrees favored family preservation.

Some studies have also looked at other internal worker qualities related to belief, Strolin-Goltzman and Holbrook (2023) compared 133 Northeastern state child welfare workers and reported that workers that scored clinically higher on a secondary trauma scale were more likely to favor child safety, while those that collaborated more with other child welfare workers were more likely to be in the family preservation group. Nikolova et al. (2017) also found that workers who were confident in their own skills leaned toward child safety.

Finally, researchers have also identified various factors linked to worker perception of their agency and community that are related to their beliefs. Fluke et al. (2016) found that workers who perceive a higher level of shared vision among their colleagues are more likely to be oriented toward child safety. Nikolova et al. (2017) found that older workers who were confident in the resources of the community favored family preservation while workers who were their own agency favored child safety.

2.2. Relationship to practice

Other researchers have used the Dagleish Scale to test if beliefs

about child safety and family preservation have connections to child welfare decisions, practice and workforce retention.

Vanderloo's (2017) study of 224 Utah child protection workers, found that beliefs about child safety and family preservation were not associated with child removal decisions.

This is contrasted some by, Hollinshead et al. (2021) who recorded responses from 278 workers from a southeastern state. The researchers found that workers who scored higher on family preservation tended to be less likely to place a child out of their home. However, they found no relationship between the scale and first-time investigation placement decisions (Hollinshead et al., 2021).

In an upcoming paper, Middel et al. (2024) used the Dagleish Scale as part of a vignette study to compare how caseworkers perceive a parent's internal qualities versus their own internal beliefs about child protection. They found that workers with higher child safety scores also rated the parents in their vignette as less moral and competent and were subsequently more likely to order family supervision (Middel et al., 2024).

Hollinshead and Orsi (2023) recruited 276 Midwestern caseworkers as part of their study on worker turnover. They found that the Dagleish Scale had varying effects on the three measures of turnover intentions, depending on the outcome measure. For example, a stronger preference for family preservation over child safety is associated with lower levels of thinking about quitting and intending to search, but higher levels of intending to leave (Hollinshead & Orsi, 2023). Finally, Williams et al. (2015) found that the scale did not have any relationship between workers perceptions of family group conferences.

3. Methods

The data for this present study was collected as part of two separate anonymous surveys regarding decision making that were sent to different practitioners in the child welfare system. For the sake of this article, I will refer to them as Survey A and Survey B. The Dagleish Scale was only a small part of the original surveys and was included as a variable in the decision-making studies to measure if participant beliefs affected their survey decisions.

Data collection for both surveys began in August 2022 and was completed in July 2023. Survey A was distributed primarily via targeted foster care social media communities with group membership restrictions and through local contacts with state guardian ad litem court appointed special advocate (GAL/CASA) programs. Participant categories for Survey A included state agency child protective service (CPS) employees, other state agency workers, GAL/CASA volunteers and workers, foster parents, former foster youth, nonprofit employees, kinship parents and social work students with approximately 795 completed responses total.

Survey A consisted of demographic questions followed by a randomized short legal decision-making framework primer, followed by a randomized vignette describing a 15-year-old female foster child in various states of stability in her placement. Then participants were asked to answer 8 questions regarding the foster child's expressed wishes. The research was designed to study if best interest, stability and normalcy influenced decisions making. Participants completed the Dagleish Scale to finish the survey.

Survey B was distributed to child welfare and juvenile lawyers, law students and judges through email solicitations to child welfare law offices, through restricted membership social media groups and during presentations to the National Association of Children's Council and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. After excluding incomplete responses, a total of 255 responses were obtained.

Survey B consisted of demographic information followed by a foster child removal vignette where participants answered questions about removal and placement for the child. Participants then saw a randomized algorithmic predictive risk model score for the child and then were asked the same removal and placement questions. They did the same

procedure for a second vignette and then took the Dalglish Scale at the end. The purpose of the study was to determine if predictive models might have an effect on legal decision making.

Both surveys were distributed nationally and participants were found in almost every state, however given my former professional contacts, I was able to obtain more responses from Florida CASA which was 104 of the 147 total CASA/GAL. However, there was not a significant difference between mean non-Florida scores and Florida scores, so while the CASA/GAL worker answers need to be interpreted with caution, the total scores potentially are representative. Since neither survey included any financial incentive or prize and they were both targeted specifically to these people in the child welfare system, it seems likely that the participants are correctly identified. Unfortunately, because the surveys were distributed on social media, list serves, conference websites and through internal office emails, it is impossible to know the response rate.

The participants are heavily weighted towards women with 950 of the total response, with males at 76, non-binary 16 and 11 with no answer. The skewedness of these responses reflects the nature of the child welfare field. Women make almost up 90 percent of social workers (Salsburg et al., 2020), the majority of foster parents (Kirby, 1997), the majority of legal aid attorneys (The Legal Services Corporation, 2021) and the majority of CASA volunteers (Cooley et al., 2019).

The Dalglish Scale itself (Appendix 1) consist of 8 short forced choice binary questions regarding a participant’s belief about family preservation or child safety. Following each question, participants are asked to rank the strength of their answer on a 1 to 5 Likert question. Each forced choice question is scored either 1 for child safety or -1 for family preservation. These scores are then multiplied by the Likert score, so that each question could be ranked between -5 and 5. When added together, each participant receives a total score between -40 and 40. Higher scores represent a more child safety orientation, while lower scores indicate a preference for family preservation. For both of the decision-making surveys, the Dalglish Scale questions were the final portion of the survey and all of the questions were presented in the same order.

In the original surveys, Survey A included nine individual child welfare role options and Survey B included 14 legal roles for a combination of 23 roles total. Ten of the total roles representing 55 total participants out of both surveys have been excluded from this analysis as those roles did not have enough participants to make meaningful comparisons. Thirteen total roles taken from both Survey A and Survey B are used in the following analysis and are described below in Table 1.

There are obvious limitations in this data in that some of the roles are broad and not well defined. Any follow up study would want to refine and define the role categories more clearly. Still, some insights can be gained from what data are available.

Table 1
Participant roles in child welfare.

Role	Description
CASAGAL	Volunteers and staff of the National CASA/GAL Association for Children
Foster Alumni	Adults that are foster care experienced.
Foster Parent	Foster parents who take in unrelated children.
Kinship	Parents who are taking in children from their larger family group.
Nonprofit	People who work in a nonprofit related to foster care.
Other Foster	People who work in another job related to foster care.
State CPS	Employees of the state child protection agency.
Student	University level social work students.
CASA Lawyer	Attorneys for the National CASA/GAL Association for Children.
CPS Lawyer	Attorneys that represent the state child protection agency.
Nonprofit Lawyer	Attorneys that work for a child welfare related nonprofit.
Other Law	Attorneys that have another role related to child welfare.
Private Lawyer	Attorney in private practice that includes some child welfare.

4. Results

As can be seen from the central tendencies in Table 2, there are significant difference in the way different groups align on the child safety/family preservation spectrum.

The most striking difference is between attorneys and all other types of roles within the child welfare system. The boxplot in Fig. 1 shows the differences clearly with lawyer scores being consistently lower than all other groups. Attorneys score lower on child safety than any other group with nonprofit attorneys and other lawyers even scoring into the family preservation range.

Social work students, foster alumni and kinship parents have the highest scores representing a strong preference towards child safety followed closely by CASA staff and volunteers and foster parents. Nonprofit and other foster professionals score a bit lower still and CPS workers fall somewhere towards the middle of the scores.

Using Mann Whitney U to test for significance and Cohen’s d for effect size, there are some particularly notable differences. Starting first with the non-attorney child welfare roles, as can be seen on Table 3, state CPS employees have significantly lower scores than all seven other categories with medium or large effects reported for five of those. In comparison to other non-lawyers, CPS employees score lower on child safety than any other group that was tested, though they still are solidly within the child safety side of the scale.

An ANOVA analysis of the demographic variables tested on the combined non-attorney child welfare roles found some demographic difference as well including that ethnicity did not have any effect on their Dalglish score.

Educational level demonstrated a statistically significant relationship with Dalglish score ($F(7, 360) = 2.77, p = 0.0051$). Specifically, each incremental rise in educational level was associated with a decrease of approximately 0.436 points. The trend indicated an initial increase in the score with lower levels of education, followed by a decline beyond the level of “Some college but no degree”.

Similarly, years of experience were found to be statistically significant in influencing the score ($F(6, 361) = 2.40, p = 0.0198$). Each one-unit increase in experience corresponded with a 0.481-point reduction, although an uptick was noted for professionals with 18+ years of experience. This is reasonably consistent with Fluke et al. (2016) Clark et al. (2021) and Middel et al. (2024) that found that those with more experience tend to favor family preservation.

Age also showed a significant relationship ($F(6, 361) = 3.19, p = 0.0025$), with each one-unit increase in age category leading to a 1.23-point rise in the Dalglish score.

In the individual roles, age had a modest impact on the State CPS group’s score, with an effect size of 0.13. Older individuals generally had higher scores. For Foster parents, years of experience had a small effect size of 0.04 and were negatively related to their score. More experience led to lower scores. In the Foster alumni group, educational level had a medium effect size of 0.22 and was negatively related such that higher

Table 2
Dalglish scale summary.

Role	Participant Count	Mean	Median
CASAGAL	147	23.86	26
FosterAlumn	59	26.32	30
Fosterparent	335	22.22	25
Kinship	41	25.34	30
Nonprofit	66	19.89	24
Other Foster	57	18.89	22
State CPS	103	14.68	16
Student	23	26.52	31
CASALawyer	51	7.31	11
CPSLawyer	19	5.21	9
NonProflawyer	43	-3.21	-8
OtherLaw	37	-2.0	-6
Private Lawyer	74	1.95	0.0

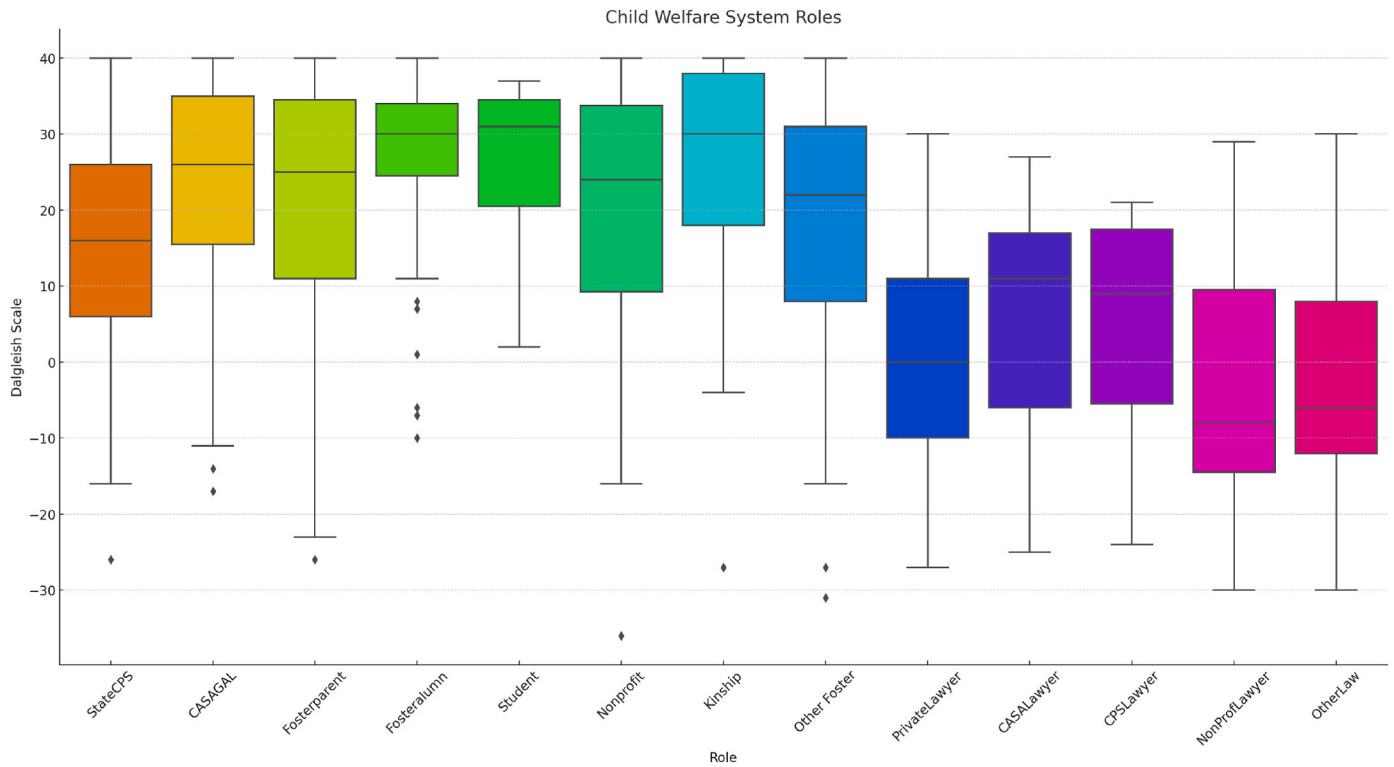


Fig. 1. Boxplot of Dalgleish scores.

Table 3
Significant Pairs amongst Child welfare professionals.

Significant Pairs	P-Value	Cohen's D
State CPS vs CASA/GAL \bar{X} 14.68 \bar{X} 23.86	$p < 2.86e-07$	-0.68
State CPS vs Foster parent \bar{X} 14.68 \bar{X} 22.22	$p < 1.43e-06$	-0.51
State CPS vs Foster alumni \bar{X} 14.68 \bar{X} 26.32	$p < 1.34e-07$	-0.85
State CPS vs Student \bar{X} 14.68 \bar{X} 26.52	$p < 1.20e-04$	-0.89
State CPS vs Nonprofit \bar{X} 14.68 \bar{X} 19.89	$p < 1.19e-02$	-0.35
State CPS vs Kinship \bar{X} 14.68 \bar{X} 25.34	$p < 1.65e-05$	-0.74
State CPS vs Other Foster \bar{X} 14.68 \bar{X} 18.89	$p < 3.09e-02$	-0.28
Foster alumni vs Nonprofit \bar{X} 26.32 \bar{X} 19.89	$p < 2.72e-02$	0.44
Foster alumni vs Other Foster \bar{X} 26.32 \bar{X} 18.89	$p < 8.23e-03$	0.49
Nonprofit vs Kinship \bar{X} 19.89 \bar{X} 25.34	$p < 4.01e-02$	-0.34
Kinship vs Other Foster \bar{X} 25.34 \bar{X} 18.89	$p < 2.17e-02$	0.39

education led to lower scores. Lastly, in the Nonprofit group, years of experience had a medium effect size of 0.26 and were also negatively associated so more experience resulted in lower scores.

As seen in Table 4, the lawyer group on its own also has some significant pairings coming entirely from difference between CASA lawyers and other types of lawyers. CASA lawyers scored higher than any other category of lawyer.

For the attorney demographics, there were not enough individual observations per category for most statistical tests. However, when ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis were run none of the demographic variables had any significant effects. This needs to be retested on a larger dataset.

When comparing the lawyer group with the child welfare

Table 4
Significant Pairs amongst lawyers.

Comparison	p-value	Cohen's d
Private Lawyer vs CASA Lawyer \bar{X} 1.95 \bar{X} 7.31	$p < 0.03$	-0.37
CASA Lawyer vs Nonprofit Lawyer \bar{X} 7.21 \bar{X} -3.21	$p < 0.00$	0.70
CASA Lawyer vs Other Lawyer \bar{X} 7.21 \bar{X} -2	$p < 0.01$	0.62

professional group it is important to note the primary limitation with the current data. The attorneys and the child welfare professionals took completely different surveys about different topics. The Dalgleish Scale was presented in the same order at the end of both surveys and results were collected over the same time period, but the subject matter of the different surveys could have influenced the final Dalgleish Scores for each group. Still, given how large the differences in the scores between lawyers and child welfare professionals, the results are worth considering.

Again, using Mann Whitney U and Cohen's D, there are 67 combinations of lawyer role with child welfare professional role that have statistical significance and at least a medium effect size, including 37 with a large effect size. This is better seen in Fig. 2, where red values indicate the comparisons with the strongest effects such as between students and nonprofit lawyers. Even CASA lawyers, which were the highest child safety scoring lawyer role have significantly lower scores than any other child welfare professional including CASA employees.

5. Discussion

The only group to which comparisons to prior research can be done is with the State CPS that represents different jobs within the state child protection agency. Not all of the studies report the Dalgleish mean score of their participants, but those that have, show lower mean scores than what was found presently. Nikolova et al. (2017) reported a mean of 1.9, Vanderloo (2017), reported a 2.56. Hollinshead et al. (2021) and Hollinshead and Orsi (2023) both used a shorter version of the Dalgleish Scale with only 6 question and a range of +30 to -30 and reported means of 2.47 and 5.4 respectively. Even with adjusted Z scores, these means are still significantly below the 14.68 State CPS mean found in this data. The overall weighted mean for the four reported sets 2.68. The only study to show a higher overall mean was Middel et al. (2024) that reported a mean of 10. 23, which is more in line with the mean of this study. In their related study, Middel and colleagues (2022) found that changes to their vignette also correlated to differences in Dalgleish

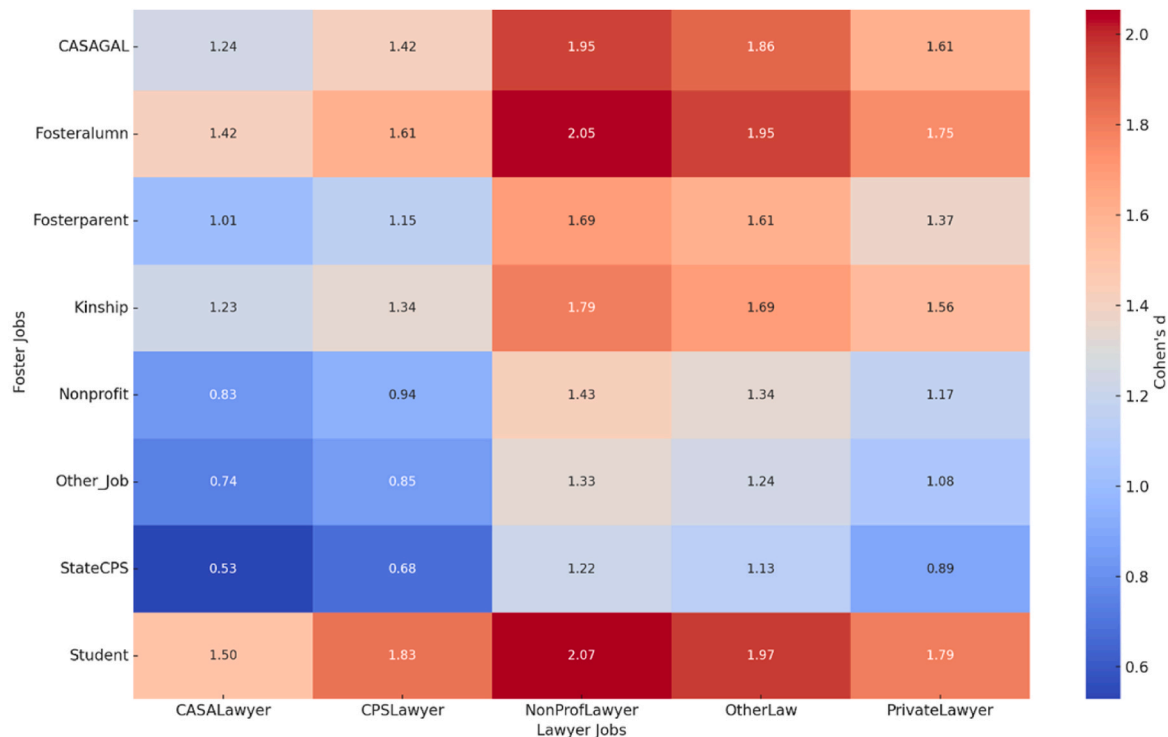


Fig. 2. Heat Map Comparison of Lawyer vs Child Welfare Professionals.

scores, however in the experiment, the Dagleish was given before the vignette, so causation is problematic.

Unfortunately, it is not completely clear why these scores should vary so much, but a few explanations are possible. As stated before, the Dagleish Scale in the present study was given as part of an experimental vignette design involving a teenage girl experiencing instability and making a series of requests that would affect her placement, health, education and identity. The Dagleish Scale was the last section of the survey and directly followed participants exposure to the vignette as well as their answering of 8 questions about responding to the expressed wishes of this hypothetical foster child. The four studies that reported means used multiple rating scales that were primarily focused on case-worker factors and none included the Dagleish as part of an experimental vignette study (Hollinshead et al., 2021; Hollinshead & Orsi, 2023; Nikolova et al., 2017; Vanderloo, 2017). Since the Middel et al. (2024) study is the only other one to include a vignette and it also reported a higher mean, it is possible that the inclusion of a real-life vignette that focuses participants on an actual case had an effect on the final answers.

Additionally, the other studies included more participants, each study included more than double the amount of state agency protection workers than found in this present data. They also were recruited from particular states as part of workforce development (Hollinshead & Orsi, 2023) and quality improvement projects (Hollinshead et al., 2021; Nikolova et al., 2017; Vanderloo, 2017). The Middel et al. (2024) study that reported the higher mean were also recruited from just one state. Conversely, the participants in this study were mostly recruited nationwide using social media, so there is possibly also of a sample bias of those who self-selected to participate.

Finally, of the 103 State CPS participants in the present study, 101 identified as female. Both Nikolova et al. (2017), Vanderloo (2017) and Middel et al. (2024) reported that women scored higher on child safety than did men. As this sample is almost entirely women, it is possible that also drove Dagleish mean scores higher than previous studies.

Most likely, some combination of all of the above contributed to the higher score. Even so, the State CPS scores in the present study are

significantly lower than the other non-lawyer groups who were recruited similarly and took the same experimental survey, so their scores are still comparable. Why State CPS has such a different score than the other non-lawyer groups is still an open question. CASA workers and volunteer, foster parents, kinship parents, foster alumni and social work students are all scoring much higher on the child safety scale.

Since this question has never been asked to these groups before, there is not any literature to compare directly. Something inherent in the roles themselves or the people that take on those roles seems to be operating on their perceptions of family preservation and child safety. Certainly, their roles within the child welfare system ask them to perform different tasks under different sets of obligations.

State CPS workers have dual roles of both protecting children, but also, when possible, to strengthen families and promote reunification. This inherent tension possibly explains why their scores are significantly lower than those of the other non-lawyer groups.

Foster and kinship parents, while also potentially important for reunification, have a more specific and focused task of caring for the children placed in their homes. The understanding that those children in their homes have been abused or neglected, might strengthen their belief that the child welfare system is primarily about the protection of children.

CASA worker and volunteers role within the U.S. child welfare system is to represent the child's best interest. One possible explanation of their higher child safety scores is that CASA tends to be appointed to more difficult cases. Osborne et al. (2020) found that in comparison to cases without CASA assigned, children with CASA appointments were more likely to have multiple placements, less likely to be placed with kin, more likely to have prior child welfare case history and have more risk factors and removal reasons. This profile of a more troubled child and family to which CASA is assigned, could account for their overall higher scores.

Why foster care experienced adults reported the highest scores is less clear. Their own experience with trauma as children could be informing the attitudes towards child safety. Foster children are more likely to

experience an Adverse Childhood Event (ACE) than the non-foster peers and are more likely to experience multiple types of ACEs (Turney & Wildeman, 2017). Taken together with Strolin-Goltzman and Holbrook's (2023) finding that caseworkers with high secondary trauma also scored higher on the Dalglish Scale than their peers, the idea that trauma could lead to higher scores is possible.

As for the attorney roles, the lower scores possibly represent attorney's focus on the legal rights of clients and what is allowed under the law. For those in the nonprofit and private groups, these attorneys are more likely to represent the foster children directly or the biological parents and therefore their representation is often guided firstly by the idea of reunification which would lead to a more family preservation orientation. As the federal Children's Bureau notes, the law generally requires more than a year's worth of reunification planning and services before termination can be ordered and three out of five foster cases ultimately resolves with reunification (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). The law's initial requirement for reunification planning is a possible explanation for why attorney scores in general are lower, but other non-lawyers in the child welfare system would generally also be aware of this requirement, so perhaps lawyers process these legal requirements differently.

For CASA and CPS attorneys with slightly higher scores, their role as representing the child's best interest and the state's interests in protecting children, might explain the difference in scores. CASA attorneys, who scored the highest of any attorney group, have the same client base that could be influencing higher CASA scores overall.

Unfortunately, without more data from more sources, much of this is simply speculation. To truly understand the difference across groups, additional research is needed. Still, the current findings point to large differences amongst these various roles about the core purpose of the child welfare system. Future research can hopefully help understand why.

5.1. Limitations

There are many limitations to this present research. To begin with, neither Survey A or Survey B were specifically designed for questions regarding variations in belief by different types of child welfare practitioners. The Dalglish Scale was intended in both surveys as simply another variable to test against the research questions.

The surveys themselves were asking different questions to different types of participants. Survey A was testing best interest, normalcy and stability effects on decision making regarding children's wishes. Survey B was testing if a predictive model score would alter an attorney or judges' removal and placement decision. Comparing the attorney results to the non-attorney results may not be appropriate given the number of confounders in the data.

The roles themselves are not well defined so there is not any nuance in the categories. There are a number of jobs within CPS agencies that have all been grouped together. Foster parents in different states operate under different structures and care for different types of children. Private attorneys might have a three child welfare cases a year or 30. The other foster care job and other law categories are likewise poorly defined.

Finally, because of the distribution methods and lack of response rate, it is unclear how accurate the participant sample is to the actual population.

Any follow up research should look specifically at the question of internal beliefs and might benefit from the use of multiple scales measuring attitudes about trauma and risk as well questions about their perceived purpose within the system. All of the groups need to be tested using a variety of instruments that can help researchers understand if there are personality traits, ethical beliefs, organizational factors or life events that might influence how people in these different roles perceive child safety and family reunification. Roles within the child welfare system would need to be more precisely defined and questions related to

the participants experience in each role would be beneficial. Ideally, the participants could be drawn from a representative sample and the data could be collected in a shorter time frame, perhaps collecting data from each group at their respective professional conferences.

5.2. Implications

Assuming that these findings are correct, the idea that different roles within the child welfare have strong beliefs about the fundamental purpose of the system has important implications for the field especially involving removal, placement and reunification. The child welfare field is more than just CPS agency workers. There are a host of people influencing every important decision and making decisions of their own.

We do not know yet if the findings on removals, (Vanderloo, 2017) placement (Hollinshead et al., 2021) and moral judgment against parents (Middel et al., 2024) also apply to other decision makers. Certainly, the internal beliefs of judges, who ultimately have the final decision on all matter of the case are worth understanding.

On example where this conflict in belief might arise is in reunification. The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2020) noted that reunification in most cases is the primary goal and that CPS agencies must make reasonable efforts to reunify families, though the term reasonable efforts is generally left vague. If foster parents, CASA volunteers and CASA lawyers are more likely to have strong child safety related beliefs, perhaps they might have a lower tolerance for parents and thusly push CPS and courts towards fewer reunification services.

While internal beliefs do not always dictate actions, if different groups within the child welfare community perceive its purpose differently and are working towards different goals, then case planning, mediation, and family group conferences to name just a few might be affected. This could help explain potential conflicts between these groups and point to ways they might cooperate better.

6. Conclusion

This study has highlighted significant difference amongst different roles within the child welfare system on how they view the balance between child safety and family preservation as measured by the Dalglish Scale. The study points to the need for further research on the beliefs of other actors within the child welfare field and the interaction between the various roles in decision making. Understanding of how these different roles perceive child welfare might allow for better case planning and smoother case resolution.

Funding statement

This work was funded by the Max Planck Institute for Research on Collective Goods.

Conflict of interests

None.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Matthew Trail: Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chipro.2024.100047>.

References

- Baumann, D. J., Dalglish, L., Fluke, J., & Kern, H. (2011). *The decision-making ecology*. Washington, DC: American Humane Association. Retrieved May 1, 2024 https://www.researchgate.net/profile/John-Fluke/publication/240245616_The-Decision-Making-Ecology/links/0deec51c4af8feb30e000000/The-Decision-Making-Ecology.pdf.
- Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2016). *Reunification: Bringing your children home from foster care*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reunification/>. (Accessed 27 October 2023).
- Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2020). Reasonable efforts to preserve or reunify families and achieve permanency for children. *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau*. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/statutes/reunify/>.
- Clark, S., Byers, K., Akin, B. A., Dunkerley, S., Wright, K., & McCall, S. (2021). Child safety and family preservation: Investigating the relationships between tenure, type of Employment, and values influencing decision making among child welfare professionals. *25th Annual Society for Social Work and Research Annual Conference, Social Work Science for Social Change*. Retrieved on <https://socwel.ku.edu/child-safety-and-family-preservation-investigating-relationships-between-tenure-type-employment-and>. (Accessed 25 October 2023).
- Cooley, M. E., Thompson, H. M., & Colvin, M. L. (2019). A qualitative examination of recruitment and motivation to become a Guardian ad Litem in the child welfare system. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 99, 115–124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2019.01.031>
- Dalglish, L. (2010). *Balance of work focus in child welfare*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Detlaff, A. J., Hollinshead, D., Baumann, D. J., & Fluke, J. D. (2020). 81Instrumentation to understand the child protective services decision-making Processes. In J. D. Fluke, M. L. López, R. Benbenishty, E. J. Knorth, & D. J. Baumann (Eds.), *Decision-making and judgment in child welfare and protection: Theory, research, and practice*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190059538.003.0004>.
- Fluke, J. D., Corwin, T. W., Hollinshead, D. M., & Maher, E. J. (2016). Family preservation or child safety? Associations between child welfare workers' experience, position, and perspectives. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 69, 210–218. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2016.08.012>
- Hollinshead, D., Currie, D., Kroll, K., Feldman, S. W., Monahan-Price, K., & Fluke, J. (2021). Associations between case, staff, and agency characteristics and the decision to place a child in out-of-home care. *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice*, 4(3), 325–347. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42448-021-00083-9>
- Hollinshead, D., & Orsi, R. (2023). Developing an Ecological model of turnover intent: Associations among child welfare caseworkers' characteristics, Lived experience, professional attitudes, agency Culture, and Proclivity to leave. *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice*, 6, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42448-022-00139-4>
- Kirby, K. (1997). Foster parent demographics: A research note. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, 24(2). <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol24/iss2/10>.
- Middel, F., Fluke, J., & Hahn, A. (2024). The effect of child protection attitudes on child protection decision-making. *The Mediating Role of Stereotypes. Manuscript in Preparation*. University of Groningen.
- Nikolova, K., Lwin, K., & Fluke, J. D. (2017). Attitudes on the Responsibility for child safety: Key child protection worker characteristics. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 11(3), 318–338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2016.1278069>
- Osborne, C., Warner-Doe, H., LeClear, M., & Sexton, H. (2020). The effect of CASA on child welfare permanency outcomes. *Child Maltreatment*, 25(3), 328–338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559519879510>
- Salsberg, E., Quigley, L., Richwine, C., Sliwa, S., Acquaviva, K., & Wyche, K. (2020). The social work profession: Findings from three years of surveys of new social workers. *A report to the Council on Social Work Education and the National Association of Social Workers I. Fitzhugh Mullan Institute for Health Workforce Equity*. <https://www.cswe.org/CSWE/media/Workforce-Study/The-Social-Work-Profession-Findings-from-Three-Years-of-Surveys-of-New-Social-Workers-Dec-2020.pdf>. (Accessed 16 October 2023).
- Strolin-Goltzman, J., & Holbrook, H. (2023). The influence of Decision-making ecology on placement into foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 148, Article 106882. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2023.106882>
- Turney, K., & Wildeman, C. (2017). Adverse childhood experiences among children placed in and adopted from foster care: Evidence from a nationally representative survey. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 64, 117–129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2016.12.009>
- Vanderloo, M. J. (2017). Caseworker factors that influence removal decisions in child welfare investigations. In *Doctoral Dissertation*. University of Utah, college of social work. https://collections.lib.utah.edu/dl_files/55/fa/55fac9934240bce85020026a5fb8d411856aea9.pdf. (Accessed 20 October 2023).
- Williams, J. R., Merkel-Holguin, L., Allan, H., Maher, E. J., Fluke, J., & Hollinshead, D. (2015). Factors associated with staff perceptions of the Effectiveness of family group conferences. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, 6(3), 343–366. <https://doi.org/10.1086/682730>