THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TIMELY CASE REVIEW, REVIEW FINDINGS, AND CHILD WELFARE OUTCOMES

A Dissertation

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the Faculty of the Graduate School of Social Work

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Statement of the Problem

- The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (AACWA) (P.L. 96-272), designed to prevent "foster care drift" required states to incorporate a system of review into foster care programs.

- *Review* is an increasingly significant intervention for the evaluation of public child welfare systems; *review* is a primary intervention for the examination of the experience of children served by the public child welfare system as well as a tool for monitoring and evaluation of child welfare outcomes for children and families served.

- The idea that the *review* itself may be related to outcomes for children is an area of child welfare research that has been minimally explored and not well defined.

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Purpose of This Study

This general intent of this study was to demonstrate that administrative case review in Colorado is a social work intervention that will moderate the effect of case practice and will have a relationship to child welfare outcomes for children in out-of-home care in Colorado.

- This study examined one dimension of the administrative case review, specifically, the timing of the administrative case review, and explored if different levels of timely case review moderated the effect of case practice (i.e. appropriate placement, case planning, contacts, services, and visitation), as measured by case review findings, and further examined if different levels of timely case review was a moderator to four specific child welfare outcomes including: placement stability, length of stay in out of home care, permanency, and reentry.

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Types of Review

- Three forms of case review are in practice throughout the United States including:
  - Administrative Review Bodies
  - Citizen Review Boards, and
  - Judicial Review Systems

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Foster Care Review: The Research

- Few research studies have been conducted.
- Research is primarily focused on citizen review boards as opposed to judicial and administrative review bodies.
- Mostly descriptive, process oriented.
- A significant amount of the research was prior to 1985.
- Nationally, there is recent evidence that periodic case review is a factor related to improved outcomes for children served by the child welfare system.

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The Case Review "intervention"

- The primary role of a reviewer is to perform the six-month periodic reviews for children in out-of-home care as mandated in State and Federal law.
- During the review process, the reviewer is required to interpret State and Federal rules to the situation and to the policies of the judicial district and county departments serving children in out-of-home care across the state.
- The reviewer is required to negotiate, mediate and facilitate problem solving sessions and conflicts during face-to-face reviews.
- Through the review process, the reviewer evaluates the casework processes and experiences of the child in the child welfare system during the review period.
- The reviewer provides expert guidance and consultation to county child welfare workers and managers.
- The reviewer highlights strengths of the casework process as well as identify problems and systemic issues within the case planning and casework process that may directly and indirectly effect the experiences for children served in out-of-home care in Colorado.
- Through the review process, the reviewer assesses the casework processes of decision-making and case planning, educates caseworkers on pertinent State and Federal regulations, and when necessary problem solves and identifies possible solutions with county child welfare workers and agencies with the goal of improving both the lives of children and families served through the child welfare system and strengthening the child welfare system in Colorado.

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Theoretical Framework: The Theory of Planned Behavior

The theoretical/conceptual framework to explain why the administrative review process may be a moderator to child welfare outcomes draws on the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen, 2002).

Using the theory of planned behavior as a theoretical model, the argument for this study is conceptualized as follows:

- Behavioral Beliefs: The administrative case review, as a social work intervention, influences the attitudes of caseworkers around important and necessary casework processes.
- Normative Beliefs: The administrative case review includes compliance findings and potential sanctions for case workers and counties and therefore influences the motivation to comply with the expectations as set forth by the policy and rules/practice guidelines for child welfare practice in Colorado.
- Control Beliefs: Interactions between the reviewer and caseworker that may influence beliefs about the caseworker's role in the casework process (e.g. reviewer as educator and coach) resulting in the caseworker having an increased sense of perceived control over the casework process and thus resulting in improved casework practice.

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Major Hypotheses

- H_1: When controlling for demographic and other child welfare case variables, timely case review will moderate the effect of case practice, as measured by case review findings, and will have an effect on a child's **length of stay in out-of-home care.**

- $H_{2:}$ When controlling for demographic and other child welfare case variables, timely case review will moderate the effect of case practice, as measured by case review findings, and will have an effect on a child's **placement stability**.

- $H_{3:}$ When controlling for demographic and other child welfare case variables, timely case review will moderate the effect of case practice, as measured by case review findings, and will have an effect on a child **achieving permanency**.

- $H_{4:}$ When controlling for demographic and other child welfare case variables, timely case review will moderate the effect of case practice, as measured by case review findings, and will have an effect on a child's **subsequent reentry into out-of-home care.**

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The Sample

- Using, Trails a retrospective entry cohort was extracted from Trails in January 2007.
- The sample was defined as children and youth entering out-of-home care for the first time between January 1, 2004 and June 30, 2005, identified as PA5, who remained in out-of-home care for six-months or longer, and received at least one administrative case review by the ARD.
- The child welfare outcomes are based on the child's experience as of December 31, 2006.

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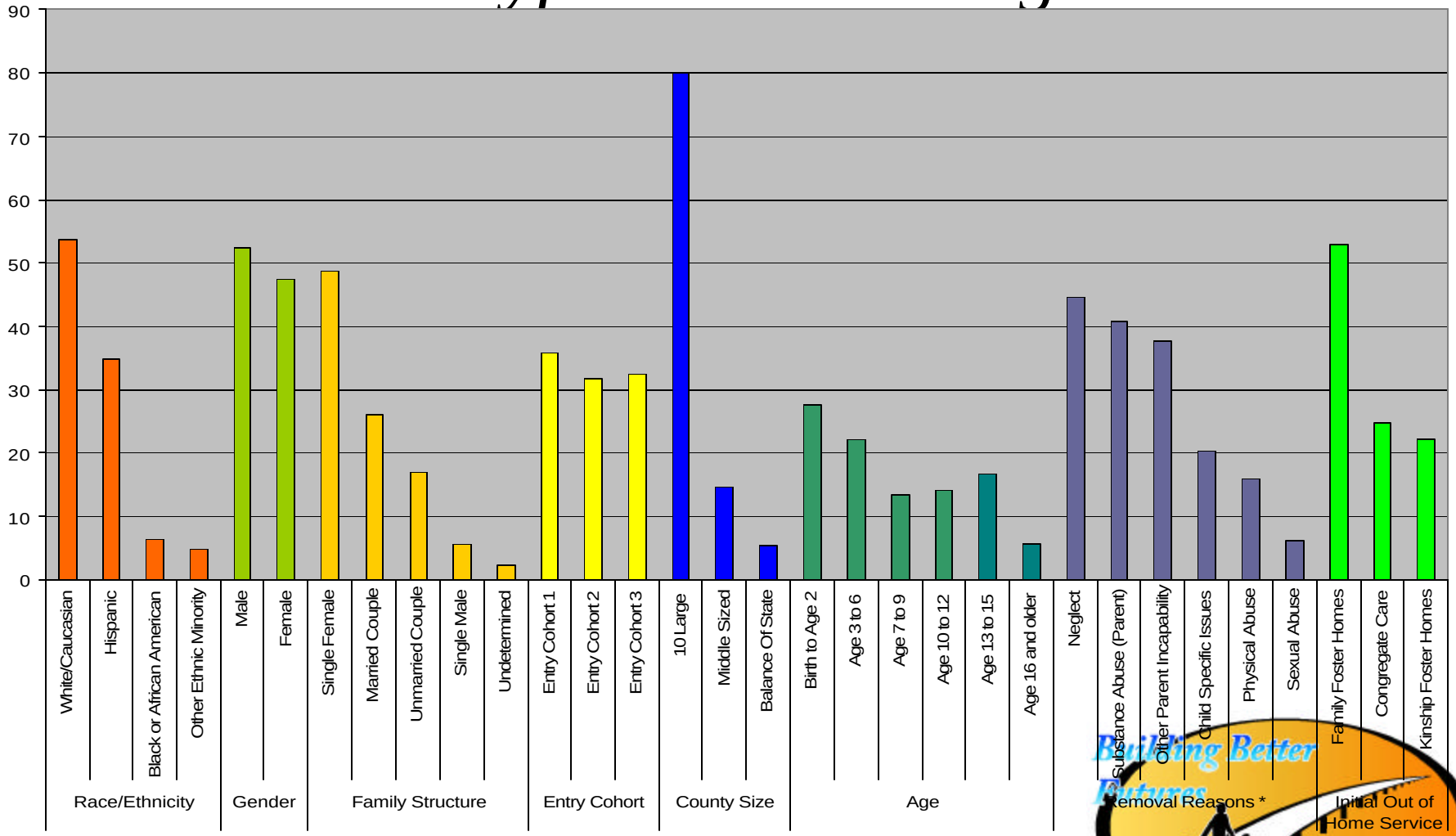
Demographics of Children included in Hypotheses Testing



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Measures

Dependent Variables

- Length of stay in out of home care
- Permanency
- Placement Stability
- Length of Time To Re-entry into out of home care

Independent Variables

- Appropriate placement
- Case planning
- Contacts
- Services
- Visitation
- Review Attendance
- Timely Case Review

Control Variables

- Age at removal begin date
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- County
- Removal Reasons
- Initial Placement Setting
- Family Structure
- Entry Cohort

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Timely Case Review

- The initial data extraction process identified that 2, 258 children required an administrative case review during the study time frame. However, 309 children (13.7%) were not reviewed by the ARD.
- Most of the children (47%) included in the hypotheses testing received only one administrative case review during the study time frame.
- The mean for timely case review was .811
- Most of the children (67%) included in the analyses received timely case review for all reviews required.
- Bivariate analyses were conducted to understand the relationship between timely case review and other variables included in this study. The results show that timely case review is significantly related to:
    - contacts ($r = .085$, $p < .001$, two tailed)
    - case planning ($r = .073$, $p = .002$, two tailed).
    - cohort ($F = 7.678$ (3,1755), $p < .001$).
    - the removal reason parental substance abuse ($F = 4.124$ (2,1756), $p = .013$).
    - the removal reason other incapability ($F = 6.149$ (2,1756), $p = .042$).

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Permanency

- Using SPSS, A binary logistic regression analysis was performed with the two-category outcome variable *permanency* as the dependent variable to test the hypotheses: *When controlling for demographic and other child welfare case variables, timely case review will moderate the effect of case practice, as measured by case review findings, and will have an effect on a child achieving permanency.*
- Predictor variables were entered into the model in blocks.
- The first block included child demographic and other child specific variables including race, gender, age, and family structure, initial out of home placement category, county size, entry cohort, and removal reasons.
- The second block included the casework process variables, as measured by case review findings, including: appropriate placement, case planning, contacts, services, and visitation.
- The third block included the composite scores related to review attendance and timely case review.
- Finally, the fourth block included interaction terms. The interactions examined in block four included the interactions between timely case review and the casework process variables.

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Summary of Results for Logistic Regression Model: Permanency

- A total of 1,759 cases were analyzed and the full model was significantly reliable (X^2 = 190.16, df = 27, P = <.001).
- The result from the Hosmer-Lemeshow test for model fit was non-significant indicating that the data fit the model well (X^2 = 7.36, df = 8, P = .50).
- This model accounted for between 10% and 14% of the variance in the dependent variable achieved permanency, correctly predicting that the child achieved permanency 77% of the time.
- This model was not as successful in predicting who did not achieve permanency, only 47.7% of the predictions for children not achieving permanency were classified correctly.
- Overall, this model accurately predicted 64% of the cases.

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Summary of Findings: Permanency

The model shows several variables including race/ethnicity, age at removal, initial placement setting, removal reasons including: other parental incapability and child specific issues, entry cohort, case planning, visitation, review attendance and timely case review are significant predictors of a child achieving permanency.

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Child Characteristics

- Hispanic/Latino children were 36% less likely than White children to achieve permanency during the study time frame.
- Children who were initially placed in kinship care arrangements were 31% more likely to achieve permanency compared to children initially placed in family foster home settings.
- Children who were initially placed in congregate care arrangements were 40% more likely to achieve permanency compared to children initially placed in family foster home settings.
- As the age of the child at removal increased the odds of achieving permanency decreased. Specifically, a one-year increase in the age at time of removal decreased the odds of achieving permanency by the end of the study time by 4%.
- Children with the removal reason of other parental incapability identified were 30% less likely to achieve permanency by the end of the study time frame compared to children without this removal reason identified.
- Children with the removal reason of child specific issues were 38% less likely to achieve permanency by the end of the study time frame compared to children without this removal reason identified.
- Children who entered care later in the study, specifically with Cohort 3 (entering out of home care between January 1, 2005-June 30, 2005) were 41% less likely to achieve permanency by the end of the study time frame compared to children in cohort 1 and cohort 2.

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Casework Processes (as measured by review findings)

- As scores on the independent variable case planning increased the odds of achieving permanency increased. A one-unit change in the independent variable case planning increased the odds of achieving permanency by a factor of 13.
- As scores on the independent variable visitation increased the odds of achieving permanency increased. A one-unit change in the independent variable visitation increased the odds of achieving permanency by a factor of 2.81.

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Administrative Case Review Variables

- As scores on the independent variable review attendance increased the odds of achieving permanency increased. A one-unit change in the independent variable review attendance increased the odds of achieving permanency by 55%.
- A one-unit change in the independent variable timely case review increases the odds of a child achieving permanency by a factor of 2.02.

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Length of Stay

- Using SPSS, Cox regression analysis was performed with the outcome variable *length of stay* as the dependent variable to test the hypotheses: *When controlling for demographic and other child welfare case variables, timely case review will moderate the effect of case practice, as measured by case review findings, and will have an effect on a child' length of stay in out of home care.*

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Summary of Findings: Length of Stay

- Because the variables permanency and length of stay are analogous, the results are similar (though not identical) to those found when testing the hypothesis related to the outcome variable permanency. The results of the Cox Regression model show several variables including race/ethnicity, age at removal, initial placement setting, removal reason of other parental incapability, county size, and the interaction between timely case review and caseworker contacts are significant predictors of a child's length of stay.

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Specific Findings Related to Length of Stay

- The odds for exiting out of home care for Hispanic/Latino children was 15% less compared to White children, during the study time frame.
- Children who were initially placed in kinship care arrangements were 40% more likely to exit out of home care compared to children initially placed in family foster home settings.
- Children who were initially placed in congregate care arrangements were 20% more likely to exit out of home care compared to children initially placed in family foster home settings.
- As the age of the child at removal increased the odds of exiting out of home care decreased. Specifically, a one-year increase in the age at time of removal decreased the odds of exiting by the end of the study time by 3%.
- Children with the removal reason of other parental incapability identified were 24% less likely to exit out of home care by the end of the study time frame compared to children without this removal reason identified.
- As scores on the independent variable review attendance increased the odds of exiting out of home care increased. A one-unit change in the independent variable review attendance increased the odds of exiting out of home care by 25%.
- The independent variable timely case review increases the odds of a child exiting out of home care.
- Timely Case Review moderates the casework process contacts and the interaction between timely case review and caseworker contacts is related to a child's length of stay in out of home care.

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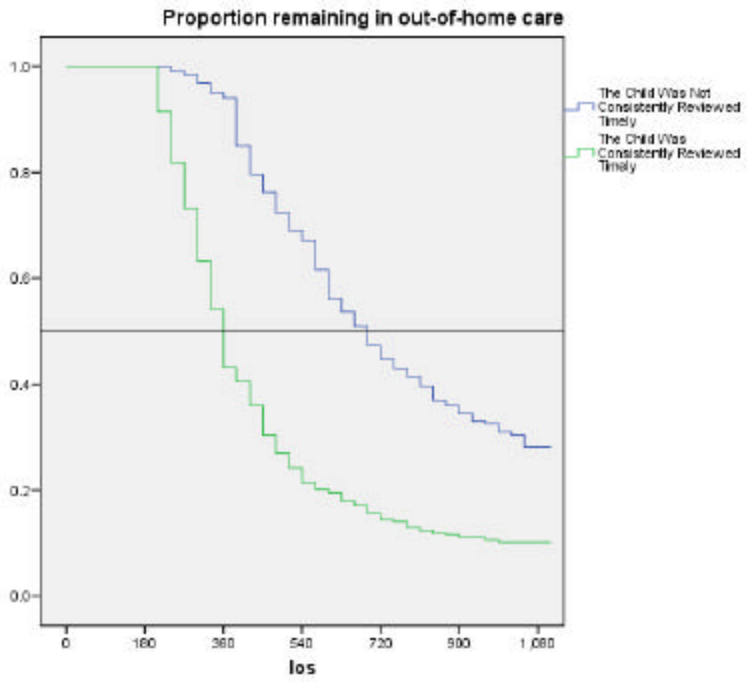
Timely Case Review and Length of Stay

- Results indicate a median length of stay approximately 10.76 months longer for children who do not consistently receive timely case reviews.



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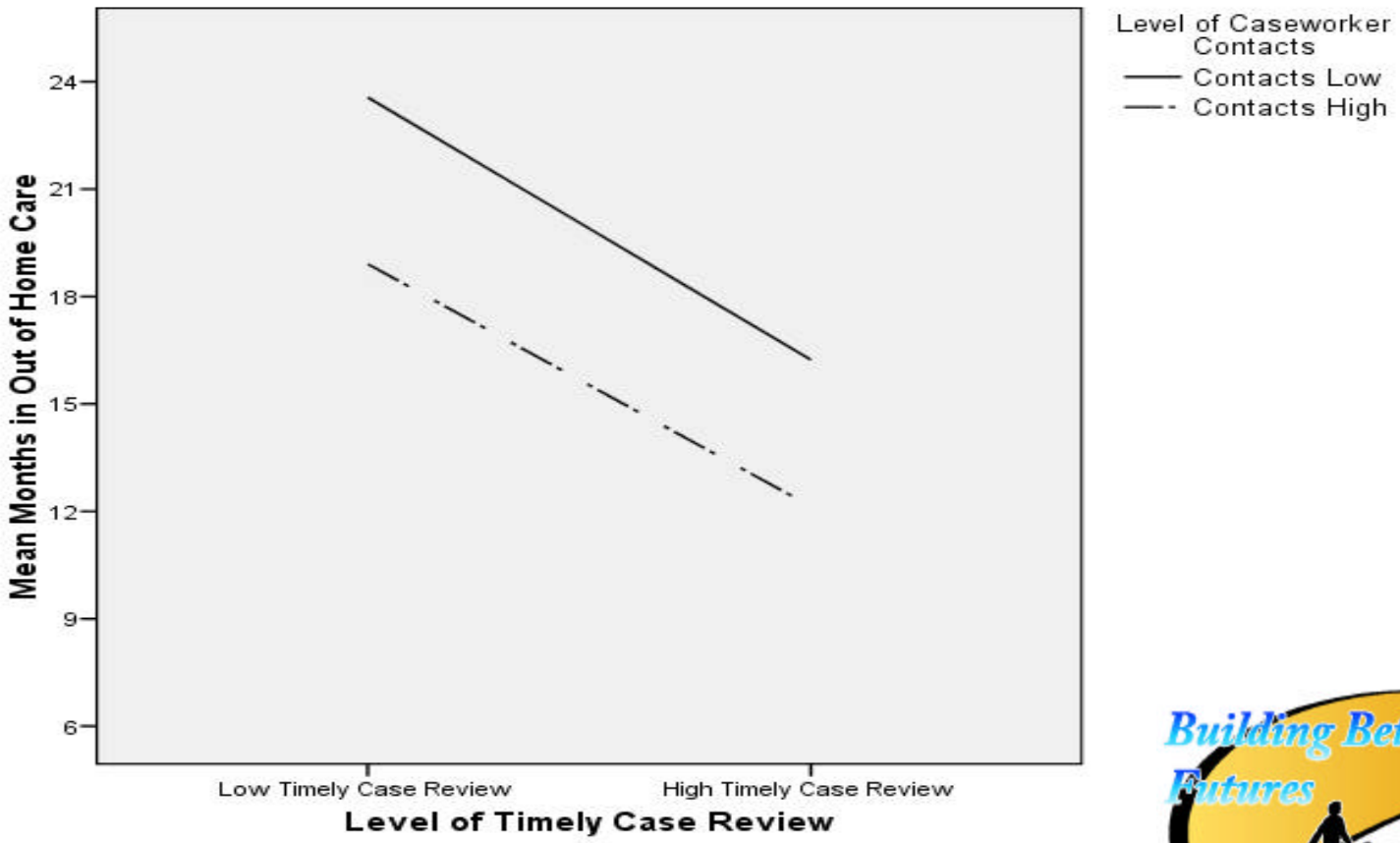
What does the interaction look like?



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Discussion Points

- The six-month requirement
- Staffing Levels
- Intervention Delivery
- Scheduling Policy

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