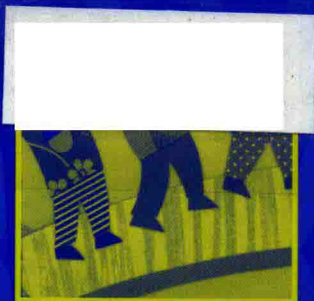




Child Welfare

CASE STUDIES



Venessa Ann Brown



CHILD WELFARE

Case Studies

VENESSA ANN BROWN

Southern Illinois University—Edwardsville

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*To my professor and mentor,
Dr. James Elliott Hollister*

*To my wonderful parents,
Richard and Clytee Brown*

*In loving memory of my grandmother and friend,
Celia Mae Jones Woods*

FOREWORD

I first met Dr. Venessa Brown years ago when she was a social worker for the DeKalb County, Georgia, Department of Children and Family Services and I was a DeKalb County Juvenile Court judge presiding over cases concerning abused, neglected, and deprived children. At that time, her dedication to the best interests of the children and her insight into their circumstances impressed me, and I considered the children with whom she worked to be fortunate, indeed, to have her as an advocate. I have followed her career with interest as she broadened her horizons into academia, applying her practical knowledge to teaching. It is with pride that I introduce this book of case studies, which will allow her to reach beyond the confines of the classroom to educate many more students. By reading and analyzing actual case studies, answering questions, and critiquing these cases, students will learn to synthesize basic theory with reality, bridging the gap between “learning” and “doing.” This book will be invaluable in helping students to develop skills that they will ultimately use to serve the best interests of real children in desperate circumstances, helping those children to rise above abuse, neglect, and deprivation with the goal of becoming productive citizens.

Senior Judge Edward D. Wheeler
Decatur, Georgia

Case studies are very valuable in child welfare practice as well as social work practice. They are a part of social work history and were used to set the stage for what we now know as social work practice. The documentation of the Mary Ellen case in 1874 set the stage for child welfare practice, and is a case that is widely used to discuss early child welfare history.

It is exciting to see case studies in child welfare become a vital part of social work education today. Students tend to learn better by actually working with cases from the field. Using cases as an introduction to child welfare practice is valuable because students and new practitioners get firsthand experience working with children and families, and they are not disillusioned about the complexities of this field of practice. The use of case studies will continue to be applicable as we strive to understand the complexity of problems that plague children and families.

Case studies in child welfare are valuable across disciplines as families present with multiple issues (e.g., biological, psychological, social). Case studies help to link theoretical frameworks from other disciplines to what is practical in working with children and families. Case vignettes and case scenarios as well as full case studies are already being included in social work and other human services fields texts to help guide students in their understanding of content and concepts.

PLAN FOR THE TEXT

The book is designed to provide students and practitioners with actual case studies from the field of child welfare. The chapters are arranged so that the reader gets a sense of diverse cases in child welfare practice, including questions to guide a student through safety and risk assessments, a family case analysis, and an opportunity to become familiar with assessment diagrams. Also, at the end of each chapter is a brief list of suggested readings for further understanding of working with children and families. Chapter 1 is an overview of child abuse and neglect and also gives an understanding of how to do a case analysis. Chapter 2 includes cases that have issues of physical abuse. Students will have an opportunity to see how physical abuse is manifested in different families. Chapter 3 consists of cases that deal with

various forms of neglect. Poverty and neglect of children are among the most horrible forms of maltreatment. Chapter 4 consists of cases that include issues of emotional and verbal abuse. These cases are often difficult to assess, but this is an opportunity to expose students to this type of maltreatment. Chapter 5 consists of cases that deal with the sexual abuse of children. Child sexual abuse cases are emotional but are a reality in our society. They are probably the most difficult to deal with, because students are forced to deal with their own values, ethics, and biases when it comes to working with the alleged perpetrator. Overall, students will have an opportunity to address their biases from a systems theoretical perspective and recognize the value of treating the whole family. The book concludes with Chapter 6, which consists of cases that deal directly with some of the most prevalent contemporary societal problems. Although all of the cases deal with societal problems, these cases pay particular attention to specific problems and might present more complex analysis.

A MESSAGE TO THE STUDENT

Many of you who use these cases will be new to the profession of social work and the field of child welfare. You have embarked on one of the most exciting fields of practice in social work practice and education today. The case studies in this book will give you an overview of the kinds of complex problems and issues facing children and families in the child welfare profession. The cases will help guide you through child welfare practice and the family case assessment process.

The cases will give meaning to helping you integrate theory with practice. You will be challenged to look at the cases from a systems perspective. All too often, workers in child welfare assess only the issues surrounding the child and not those of the family. You will see the value of treating the whole family system. The cases will help you understand why the generalist perspective and the strengths perspective are so valuable in working with children and families. You will struggle with your value system, encountering ethical dilemmas that will challenge you. This is good. The questions and assessment diagrams at the end of each chapter will direct your analysis and assist you in processing the complexities and diversity of issues embedded in each case. The questions will guide you through a case analysis. Performing case analyses will strengthen your problem-solving skills and help you to assess a family situation better.

For many of you, working with people might not be a new adventure, but working in child welfare might be. Webb (1996) states: "Social workers in

child welfare settings have a multifaceted role—one that includes direct work with culturally diverse children and families; work with the family court and the department of social services; and the necessity of functioning on an interdisciplinary team” (p. 223). I hope that these actual cases will benefit you and give you an introduction to the diverse kinds of problems, cultural values, social and economic justice, poverty, safety, and risk factors facing children and families in the twenty-first century.

I hope this book will help you understand the value of doing a case analysis and allow you to process a case through the generalist problem-solving method. You will process the case by exploring the family and learning to engage, assess, plan, design a case plan, and finally use two assessment diagrams (ecomaps and genograms) to help guide you in understanding the dynamics of the family. Webb (1996) notes that “it is important for social workers in this field of practice to have a solid knowledge base in child assessment, including diagnostic classifications, family systems assessment, substance abuse assessment, and evaluation of the impact of trauma on children (especially that resulting from physical and sexual abuse)” (p. 223). The cases will expose you to different diverse cultures, challenge your practice skills, and help you understand families who come from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

A MESSAGE TO THE INSTRUCTOR

First, let me take this opportunity to thank you for choosing *Child Welfare: Case Studies*. I know that you will find this book a very useful tool in creating a classroom of learning that is exciting and stimulating. You will find that these cases will encourage students to think critically about the assessments they make when working with children and families. Case method learning can help you create class conditions conducive to active learning and can initiate an empowering and active experience for learners. It has been suggested that this method of learning encourages “student-generated” analysis rather than teacher-manufactured analysis (Rivas & Hull, 1996).

The complexity of these cases will help to create a classroom climate that is stimulating, empowering, challenging, and exciting to students as they strive to integrate theory and practice. These cases will help students incorporate knowledge from their previous courses: social work practice, child welfare, and human behavior.

I hope that students will find these cases challenging and useful in guiding them in their work with children and families. I also think it is an opportunity for students to try out the interpersonal skills that they have

learned by role-playing the cases in a classroom setting. The cases are diverse enough that students will have the opportunity to confront some of their biases and, most of all, challenge some of their cultural beliefs and work toward cultural competency as families redefine themselves in the twenty-first century.

I hope that students will enjoy working with actual cases from the field. The field of child welfare is very complex, and families today present with multiple problems. Many of them will treasure the hands-on experience that these cases will bring to their educational preparation for the field of child welfare.

Writing this book was an opportunity for me to share my experience from my work in child welfare. I have had many valuable experiences in the field, and my ten years in the trenches have cemented my commitment to working on behalf of children and families in our society. My clients were my best teachers. They taught me the value of meeting them right where they were and also the value of working from a strengths perspective regardless of how bad their situations were. Carl Rogers says it best when he says that clients ultimately know the solutions to their own problems. I often remind students that our job as social work practitioners is to empower our clients and support them as they begin to work through their pain and their often traumatic life experiences. The analogy that I often use in class is that people's lives are often like a ball of yarn and that our job is to help them peel away the layers of pain and weave in all of their strengths and resources, and ultimately to work with them until they are able to manage their own lives.

Thank you for choosing *Child Welfare: Case Studies* and for finding my years in the trenches a value worth sharing. I hope you find these cases as rewarding and beneficial in your teaching of working with children and families as I have.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Venessa Ann Brown, M.S.W., Ph.D., is an assistant professor of social work at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville (SIUE). Dr. Brown has written articles about her child welfare experiences and has trained child welfare workers in clinical practice. She authored *From One Hand to Another: The Story of a Sexually Abused Child's Strength and Courage*, published by Reflections.

Dr. Brown brings to the writing of this book more than ten years of experience in child welfare practice. She has worked as a protective services investigator for the DeKalb County Department of Children and Family Services in DeKalb County, Georgia. Her career has included teaching at Greenville College and at Southern Illinois University—Edwardsville.

In addition to her teaching, she has traveled to South Africa looking at child welfare issues from a global perspective. She hopes to continue her research in international child welfare issues in South Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book represents my work with children and families during my ten years as a social worker in child welfare. All of the case materials have been disguised to protect client confidentiality. The social work profession and the field of child welfare owe a debt to children and families for allowing us to become effective practitioners by using their stories to educate future social workers and human services professionals regardless of their field of study. Thank you to my clients who told me their stories and enriched my life.

I cannot possibly name all of the significant people and influences in my life who contributed indirectly to this book. You know who you are, and I thank you. However, I must thank those who have contributed new knowledge to enhancing the child welfare profession, and the family theorists who, recognizing that children cannot function without their families, saw the need to create a body of knowledge that included the entire family system. Many thanks to my friends at the DeKalb County Department of Children and Family Services for all of your support over the years and for always remembering me as a part of the family. I miss you all.

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Special thanks to Enrique Howell, my graduate student, who supported me with all of the complicated tasks and assisted me with all of my graphic designs. Thank you for your commitment to ensuring that children and families are respected and protected. It has been a delight to see you

develop professionally in the field of child welfare over the past few years. In addition, thank you to all of my students who engaged in the many discussions about child welfare and family case analysis. More than anything, thank you for allowing me to share with you my years in the trenches to enhance your academic experience.

A number of people provided me with support and counsel as I developed my ideas for writing this book. Some good friends who encouraged me and anchored me during my many storms are Dr. Abdul Turay, Dr. Bill Woods, and Dr. Marvin Finkleston (my mentors), Barbara Johnson, Jennifer Hamer, Virginia Baker, Albert Seline, Sharon and Maurice Almon, Karen McGill, Fredrick Thompson, and Mom and Dad Hollister. To my lifelong student and friend, Cathy Burgos, thank you for your support and for providing a place of refuge when I needed solitude. To my cruise partner Cynthia Jackson, who was with me when I first discovered cruising as a "way of living" that has ultimately changed my life. Special thanks to all my friends at sea and across the world, especially Carlos Quea, who created a climate where I could think and write, and most of all for enhancing my life and stretching my world view.

I owe special thanks to Judy Fifer and Alyssa Pratt at Allyn and Bacon for taking an interest in my work, and ensuring that the voices of my children and families are heard. Also, thank you to the following reviewers for their comments on the manuscript: Joan Abbey, University of Michigan; Carol Boyd, Delta State University; George W. Caulton, Western New England College; Mary Collins, Boston University; John Herrick, Michigan State University; John Kayser, University of Denver; and Carol Massat, University of Illinois-Chicago. Also, thank you to Erica Graff at Allyn and Bacon for encouraging me to submit a prospectus.

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INTRODUCTION

Children are very important to our society, and they are our future. They have hopes and dreams, and they need our protection. The field of child welfare can no longer assess the well-being of children alone. Child welfare professionals must assess the child within the context of their family. Webb (1996) states: "Children and their families are interdependent. Therefore, when one member of a family system experiences difficulties, the stress reverberates to all members of the family. Although a child may be singled out as having a 'problem,' the practitioner must look beyond the individual and think about the meaning and significance of that problem to all the family members, in order to understand the problem's source and to determine how best to focus helping efforts" (p. 115). Child welfare is becoming more complex as families are plagued with more social ills. Families no longer seek counseling for one problem; they have many. More than ever, issues surrounding children require that the child be assessed within his or her own environment, because the family is the most dominant part of a child's environment (Downs, Moore, McFadden, & Costin, 2000).

Downs et al. (2000) note: "The field of child welfare is becoming known as *family and child services*. The field is vastly more complex than it was in the nineteenth and early twentieth century when our ancestors confidently responded to problems of family functioning by 'rescuing' children of poor or neglectful parents and placing them in institutions of one kind or another. Since then, for at least half a century, social changes have impelled child and family agencies to adapt and innovate services" (p. 2). The decisions have gone from removing children from their homes to working with children within the home and to providing services to families in which the child must grow and function.

The welfare of children is very important to me. Many children are both abused and neglected in their own homes. This is one reason that the family must be considered when addressing and assessing issues of child abuse and neglect. "In 1996 there were over three million reports of child abuse and neglect. Although three million reports were received, only about

one in three cases were confirmed, after investigation, as victims of maltreatment, for a total of just under one million children" (Downs et al., 2000, p. 215). Although one million is less than three million, the number is still too high. And these are just the cases that are reported. What about the cases that are not reported? Families are in desperate need of intervention and support when it comes to caring for their children.

While writing this book I thought of the many abused and neglected children that I have come in contact with, and how they touched my life personally and professionally. I am often reminded of the tears in their eyes and the smiles on their faces when I walked into their homes. They were always welcoming and without a doubt they were always grateful for my intervention, even if it meant they had a temporary change in environment that was for their safety and well-being. I will never forget Andy, a 4-year-old boy who opened the door to his house one rainy day as I was making a visit to his home for suspected neglect of him and his little sister, April. When I walked into the house Andy said, "Do you want my mommy?" He went into the living room and attempted to wake her up from what seemed to be a deep sleep. She woke up and greeted me, and then told me that she had just fallen to sleep. It appeared that she had slept in her clothing all night.

Andy's mother went into another room to get their shot records. While she was away, Andy picked up his baby sister, who was only 8 months old, walked over to me and whispered in my ear, "Hey lady, do you want a boy and a girl?" Andy went on to say, "I am a good mommy and we are good." Andy was suggesting that I take him and his sister with me. I did everything in my power not to show how his statement affected me. I fought the tears as I talked to Andy's mother. She was 18 years old and had a substance abuse problem. She had grown up in a single-parent home with very little parental supervision, because her mother worked two jobs to keep them off welfare. She was 14 when she had Andy and dropped out of school. She had been an A student and had high hopes of going to college. After she had Andy, however, she lost her focus and became involved with a man who turned her on to crack cocaine.

There are far too many young mothers like this one—ill-prepared and often overwhelmed by parenthood—who may find themselves emotionally abusing their children (Crosson-Towers, 1998). Parents who emotionally abuse their children are often not happy with their lives. They are generally frustrated, disappointed, and have unmet emotional needs of their own (Crosson-Towers, 1998).

"Family structure also plays an important part in cases of child abuse. Single parents are more likely to abuse their children than are parents who live together. Abuse in single-parent families appears to be linked to poverty