

***Quality Improvement Center on the Representation of
Children in the Child Welfare System***

**Needs Assessment
Gaps in Research**

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Gaps in Research

Limited Research

Overall, there are not many studies focused on the field of child representation (14 studies were identified and reviewed). There is a need for further research in this area in relation to the many areas that impact quality representation.

Narrow Focus of Research

The summary of topics indicates that approximately half of the research that has been conducted concentrates on CASA. CASA does not provide *legal* representation of children, however. CASA programs provide one alternative to enhancing the quality of child representation and for advocating for the best interests of a child, but there are many other variables and approaches that require further research. These studies were included for relevant information on outcomes, measures, and methods.

Limited Rigorous Designs

As evident in the summary table, only one study can be classified as an experimental design and six studies can be classified as quasi-experimental design. Without a rigorous design, it is difficult to make causal inferences regarding the impact of certain interventions. Although descriptive designs often provide a very detailed examination of the topic being researched they do not provide a controlled design that can isolate variables that impact outcomes.

Few Comprehensive Evaluations

Few rigorous studies provide the additional descriptive data that supplement and explain findings. Both the quantitative and qualitative descriptive data provide a more comprehensive understanding as to why such interventions yield certain results. In addition this descriptive data will often provide contextual variables that help to further explain and interpret findings.

Few Short-Term Outcomes

For the experimental and quasi-experimental designs, the outcomes most frequently measured included both intermediate and long-term outcomes. When trying to understand what it is that the child representative does that leads to changes in intermediate and long-term outcomes, it is important to collect data specific to the actions of the child representative (e.g., the frequency of meetings with clients, the amount of time spent with the client) to see if a control or comparison group differs in respect to these short term outcomes.