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RESEARCH REPORT
2013 CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT
INSTITUTE IN ATLANTA, GA



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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JUVENILE
AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

JUVENILE LAW PROGRAMS

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The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges® (NCJFCJ) headquartered on the University of Nevada campus in Reno since 1969, provides cutting-edge training, wide-ranging technical assistance, and research to help the nation's courts, judges, and staff in their important work. Since its founding in 1937 by a group of judges dedicated to improving the effectiveness of the nation's juvenile courts, the NCJFCJ has pursued a mission to improve courts and systems practice and raise awareness of the core issues that touch the lives of many of our nation's children and families.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) provides training and technical assistance to juvenile and family courts across the nation. For the last 18 years, one of the foundational trainings has been the Child Abuse and Neglect Institute (CANI), typically held in Reno, NV. More recently, this training has been provided regionally, to allow states or regions to better educate their judicial officers new to the juvenile dependency court bench. As part of this training, staff regularly administers training evaluations to participants attending CANI to assess training satisfaction. For the CANI training held in Atlanta, GA from September 30 to October 4, 2013, NCJFCJ research staff obtained participant satisfaction information, but added two additional evaluation components: knowledge and decision-making. The research staff evaluated pre-CANI and post-CANI knowledge acquisition and decision-making across various topics. This evaluation was done in two ways.

The first approach was to circulate a survey 20 days prior to CANI (pre-CANI) and four months after the completion of the training (post-CANI). For the pre-CANI survey, 36 participants (of 55; 65%) indicated their current level of knowledge across various topics, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, and reasonable efforts. For the post-CANI survey, 24 participants (44%) indicated their level of knowledge on the same topics after attending CANI. They also indicated which topics they wish they would have learned about at the CANI training, their overall experience at CANI, the topics they would like to see addressed at future CANI trainings, and whether CANI can help them address the top challenges in their jurisdiction.

For the second approach, NCJFCJ research staff administered a newly created case scenario instrument specifically designed to test the impact of CANI training on judicial decision-making. On the first morning of the program, NCJFCJ research staff asked participants to read a hypothetical juvenile dependency case and respond to several questions as a “pre-test” (pre-CANI). On the last morning of the program, participants completed the same written decision-making exercise as a “post-test” (post-CANI). Pre-CANI and post-CANI responses were collected from 51 participants.

The following are the highlights of the pre-CANI to post-CANI responses:

KNOWLEDGE, SATISFACTION, AND IMPROVEMENTS

- The majority (62.5%) of participants rated their increase in knowledge from pre-CANI to post-CANI as “Considerable,” 29.2% rated it as “Fair,” and 8.3% rated it as “Modest.”

- There was a significant difference between pre-CANI and post-CANI training knowledge across all sessions; participants showed an *increase* in knowledge across all topic areas following participation in CANI.
- Most participants (91.7%) indicated that there were no additional topics that they would have liked to have learned about.
- Participants' overall experiences at CANI were positive.
- Participants indicated they would like to learn more about court docketing, collaboration with other child welfare staff, and trauma related topics.
- The overwhelming majority (95%) of respondents indicated that CANI provided them with the tools and strategies to address the top challenges in their jurisdiction.

DECISION-MAKING

Following participation in CANI:

- Participants were more likely to recommend that the child in the scenario be placed with the father instead of kept in care.
- Participants were more likely to order services for the father.
- There was a substantial increase in Indian and Child Welfare Act (ICWA) inquiries. When asked, "What findings need to be made at this hearing?" participants were much more likely to indicate that ICWA findings needed to be made. In addition, participants were much more likely to request additional information regarding ICWA.
- Participants were more likely to ask for information that focused on the child's history of abuse and neglect and the child's current risk for injury.

Overall, the findings suggest that CANI is helping to increase participants' knowledge on various topics and that many of the relevant topics are being covered during the trainings. In addition, CANI seems to be helping to change some of the decision-making behaviors of its attendees. Specifically, CANI appears to bring attention to the importance of engaging the father and to making ICWA inquiries and findings. Whether these changes are long-lasting and carry over across cases remains to be seen. However, future studies can be done to assess these aspects, as well as others, in order to continually improve upon and tailor future CANI trainings.

The Child Abuse and Neglect Institute (CANI) was recently evaluated in terms of its effects on knowledge acquisition of key topic areas and decision-making in mock child abuse and neglect case. In accordance with the [NCJFCJ Policy Statement on Evidence of Effectiveness](#), CANI has been classified by NCJFCJ research staff as a **Promising Direction** using the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Continuum of Evidence of Effectiveness, specifically as it relates to the outcomes identified above.

STUDY OVERVIEW

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) conducts trainings across the country on myriad topics related to juvenile and family court systems, such as judicial leadership and ethics; federal child welfare legislation; implicit bias; and domestic violence. A recurring training is the Child Abuse and Neglect Institute (CANI), which provides instruction in dependency court best practices for judicial officers who have been newly assigned to child abuse and neglect (i.e., juvenile dependency) cases, or experienced juvenile dependency judges who would like to learn about emerging and promising practices in this field. To help improve the quality of these trainings, NCJFCJ consistently provides participants with the opportunity to provide feedback. Recently, NCJFCJ has added to this by conducting two additional evaluations to assess changes in participants' knowledge and decision-making before and after trainings. During the September 30 - October 4, 2013 training in Atlanta, GA, NCJFCJ obtained feedback from participants after attending CANI to assess participant satisfaction and areas for future improvement. As an added component of the CANI evaluation process, NCJFCJ assessed changes in participants' knowledge and decision-making before and after CANI. The purpose of evaluating changes in participant knowledge is to assess whether CANI is successfully providing judicial personnel with new information. The purpose of evaluating changes in decision-making was to determine if judicial officers make different decisions or think about cases differently after attending the 5-day training. Specifically, research questions for decision-making included:

- 1) Did the likelihood of making a given order change?
- 2) Did the list of findings (i.e., making the required findings at the hearing) become more accurate?
- 3) Did the information that participants found most important to their decision-making change?
- 4) Did the additional information that participants would like to know change?
- 5) Did the amount of additional information that participants would like to know increase?

METHOD

KNOWLEDGE

To assess knowledge, research staff employed a pre/post-test design using online surveys. Twenty days prior to CANI (hereafter pre-CANI), NCJFCJ research staff emailed participants a link to an online survey. The survey asked participants to indicate their current level of knowledge on several topics: child bonding and attachment; child abuse and neglect case law; domestic violence; federal legislation, including the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA); Fostering Connections Act; implementing the Resource Guidelines; implementing the Adoption and Permanency Guidelines; implicit bias; Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA); judicial leadership; judicial ethics; medical aspects of child abuse and neglect; reasonable efforts; role of a dependency court judge; state and tribal collaboration; and substance abuse. Thirty-six participants (out of 55; response rate of 65%) rated their current knowledge on each topic on a 4-point scale (1 = No knowledge at all, 2 = Little knowledge, 3 = Fair amount of knowledge, and 4 = Great deal of knowledge). Four months after the completion of the training (post-CANI), participants were emailed another link to an online survey. Twenty-four participants (44% of the sample) rated their knowledge on the same topics from the pre-CANI survey using the same 4-point scale. Participants also indicated which topics they wish they would have learned about at CANI, their overall experience at CANI, the topics they would like to see addressed at future CANI trainings, and whether they believe that CANI can help them address the top challenges in their jurisdiction.

DECISION-MAKING

To assess decision-making, researchers also employed a pre/post-test design. At the beginning (i.e., the first activity of the first day) of the CANI conference (hereafter pre-CANI), participants were given a description of a hypothetical juvenile dependency shelter care hearing and the accompanying case facts that precipitated the removal of a child from the home. After reading the scenario, participants responded to a series of closed-ended questions (i.e., those that offer a pre-defined response) as if they were the presiding judge over this case. For example, participants indicated how likely they would be to make a judicial order regarding appointment of a CASA for the child, to place the child with the paternal grandmother, to place the child in non-relative foster care, and to order services for the mother. All responses were made using a 4-point scale in which 1 = Very Unlikely and 4 = Very Likely. Participants also responded to a series of open-ended questions (i.e., those that allow the participant to respond in any way they see fit), including “What information (from the case scenario) was most important in your decision-making?”, “What findings do you need to make at this hearing?”, and “What else do you need to know to make a decision on this case?”

On the last morning of the CANI conference (hereafter post-CANI), participants were given the same hypothetical juvenile dependency shelter care hearing and case facts. The participants responded to the same closed-ended and open-ended questions from the pre-CANI questionnaire. Participant surveys were numbered so that pre- and post-CANI responses could be matched to identify any potential change that occurred by participant. Overall, 51 participants (of 55; 93%) provided pre-CANI and post-CANI responses.

RESULTS

KNOWLEDGE

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

Respondents were asked to rate their overall increase in knowledge as a result of attending CANI. The majority (62.5%) rated their increase as “Considerable,” 29.2% rated it as “Fair,” and 8.3% rated it as “Modest.”

Pre- and post-survey responses were explored for changes in knowledge. Responses were averaged from pre- and post-survey and compared to explore if there were statistically significant differences between pre- and post-CANI training by session. There were significant differences in **all** sessions. “State and tribal collaboration” was the only session for which someone responded in the post survey “No knowledge at all.” See *Figure 1* below for a complete ranking of all sessions, from least to greatest knowledge acquired.

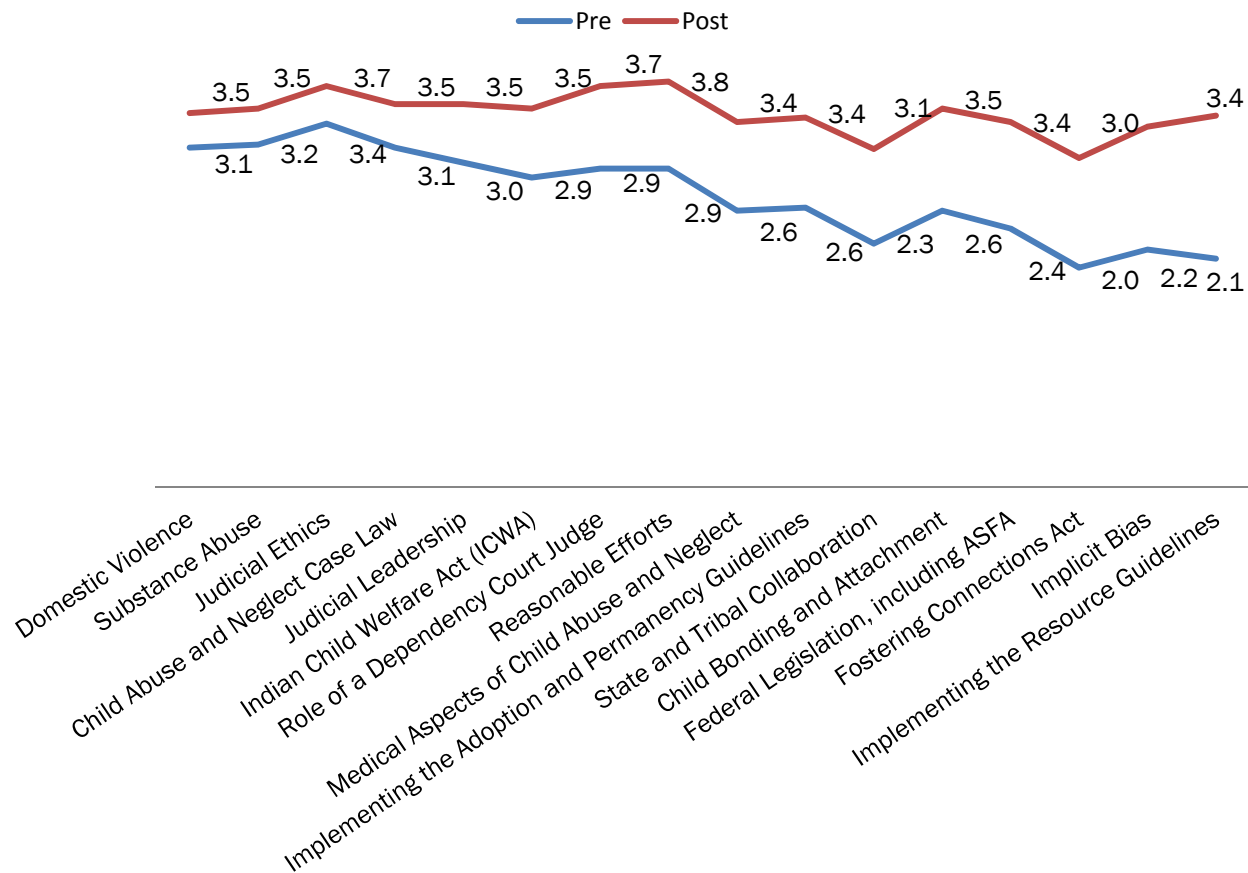


Figure 1. Average of pre-CANI and post-CANI survey responses, sorted by least amount of change to most.

TOPICS NOT ADDRESSED AT CANI

Survey participants were asked “What, if anything, did you hope to learn at CANI that was not addressed?” Most respondents said nothing, but the few responses were:

- Efficient administration of child abuse and neglect cases in terms of in court procedures and timelines of cases.
- Reasonable/successful approaches in developing working relationships between Tribal Courts and State Courts.

EXPERIENCES

Survey participants were asked to provide their overall experience at CANI. Responses included:

- I found it very stimulating to be with so many colleagues learning and brainstorming about child abuse and neglect issues in juvenile court. I always have been a relational judge, interacting with all parties and trying to make a meaningful difference. In all good humor, the attorneys who regularly appear before me have asked that I forewarn them the next time I plan on attending a CANI conference so they can be prepared to field new questions upon my return.
- I thought all of the instructors were excellent. Very impressed.
- It was a great experience!! Even though I have been a Judge and previously worked in the area, I really learned a lot.

FUTURE CANI DEVELOPMENT

Survey participants were asked what topics they would like to see at future CANI trainings. Responses included:

- Court docket administration and efficiency while maintaining effectiveness.
- Sessions on collaboration with state and local child welfare staff and examples in some areas how there was little to no communication, to where they are now collaborating.
- More focus on trauma and appropriate treatment.

Ninety percent of respondents said they feel like they would benefit from “Advanced CANI.”

FACILITATING CHANGE

Survey participants were asked if CANI provided them with the tools and strategies to address their top challenges in their jurisdiction. The overwhelming majority (95%) of respondents replied yes.

DECISION-MAKING

To assess decision-making, a scenario was provided to the judges. The scenario provided information on a mock juvenile dependency case at the shelter care hearing. In this scenario, the child is removed from the father's girlfriend, who has serious substance abuse allegations. The mother's whereabouts are unknown and the father is incarcerated. Judges were asked both pre- and post-CANI about the likelihood that they would order:

- Further investigation by DHS
- Appointment of a CASA for the child
- Placement of the child with paternal grandmother
- Placement of the child in non-relative foster care
- Placement of the child with the father once he was released [from prison]
- Placement with the mother once she is located
- Services for the mother
- Services for the father
- Services for the child

They were also asked what information was most important in their decision-making for the case, what findings they needed to make at the shelter care hearing, and what else they would like to know about the case. Pre- and post-CANI survey responses are compared below to determine if there were any significant changes in the likelihood of making an order, what information the judges found most helpful, and the number or type of information they wanted to make a more informed decision.

LIKELIHOOD OF ORDER CHANGE

When asked, "Should the child be returned home immediately or kept in care prior to the adjudication [hearing]?" 98% ($n^1 = 48$) of respondents initially indicated that the child should be kept in care. After attending the CANI conference, 91.4% ($n = 32$)² of respondents indicated that the child should be kept in care.

In addition to a question about placement, participants responded to several questions that asked them to indicate how likely they would be to make a given ruling using the information from the Emergency Removal

¹ n represents a portion of the full sample. For example, if the total number of participants was 51 and 23 of these participants responded to a question a certain way, the n would equal 23 or 45% of participants.

² Respondents did not complete all pre-CANI and post-CANI questions. The percentages that are presented are "valid percents." "Valid percents" are calculated from the total number of applicable responses. For example, there may be 51 participants in the full sample, but only 48 of them may have responded to a given question. This means that the percentage for this given question was calculated from 48 participants and not 51. If 23 participants responded a certain way to a question, this would constitute 48% (23/48), compared to 45% (23/51) if all participants had responded to the question.

Report. There was a statistically significant difference in likelihood from pre- to post-CANI for two orders: (1) placement of the child with the father once he is released and (2) service referrals for the father. As indicated in Table 1, participants were more likely to place the child with father post-CANI ($M = 2.24$) than pre-CANI ($M = 1.94$). Participants were also more likely to order service referrals for the father post-CANI ($M = 3.59$) than pre-CANI ($M = 3.29$).

Table 1. Responses to Pre- and Post-CANI Questions		
How likely are you to order...	Pre-CANI	Post-CANI
Further investigation by DHS?	3.83	3.91
Appointment of a CASA for the child?	3.45	3.42
Placement of the child with the paternal grandmother?	3.29	3.32
Placement of the child in non-relative foster care?	2.15	1.97
Placement of the child with the father once he is released?	1.94	2.24*
Placement of the child with the mother once she is located?	1.64	1.82
Service referrals for the mother?	3.37	3.51
Service referrals for the father?	3.29	3.59*
Service referrals for the child?	3.86	3.86
Note: Responses on a 4-point scale, with 1 = Very Unlikely and 4 = Very Likely; * denotes a statistically significant difference from pre-CANI to post-CANI		

LIST OF FINDINGS

Participants responded to the question, “What findings do you need to make at this hearing?” In several instances, participants’ pre-CANI and post-CANI responses differed. For example, one participant indicated pre-CANI that he/she would make findings regarding custody, paternity, possible family/kinship placements, and prior referrals on the child. Post-CANI, this same participant indicated that he/she would make findings regarding paternity, ICWA, attempts to locate the mother, medical history of the child, medical condition of the child when removed, home evaluation on relative, and a health check for the child. Another participant indicated pre-CANI that he/she would make findings regarding whether the placement was the least restrictive and whether the placement was appropriate. Post-CANI, this participant indicated that he/she would make

findings regarding ICWA; paternity; father's anticipated release date from jail; the child's continued temporary custody with the department; the child's placement with a foster family; medical, dental, and developmental/behavior assessment for the child; the child's schooling; reasonable efforts; and appointment of a GAL for the child. On the aggregate, however, there was only one noticeable difference in the findings that were made pre-CANI and post-CANI. Pre-CANI, the most common responses were reasonable efforts/no reasonable efforts, the child at risk of imminent harm, contrary to the welfare of the child, and discussion regarding placements for the child (primarily discussion about placement with the grandmother). Post-CANI, these same findings were the most common. However, findings regarding ICWA were noticeably more common post-CANI.

There was an increase in understanding of the required findings that need to be made at the shelter hearing from pre-CANI to post-CANI. For example, one participant indicated in his or her pre-CANI response that the required findings were, "Why the father is incarcerated? How long the father will be incarcerated?...If the child is familiar and comfortable with her paternal grandmother..." Post-CANI, this participant indicated that the required findings were "contrary to the welfare of the child to be returned home; child to be returned home; child needed to be immediately removed due to risk of harm..." However, this difference may be an increase in the understanding of what the question was asking rather than an increase in knowledge.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Participants responded to the question "What information (from the case scenario) was most important in your decision-making?" Individual participant's pre-CANI and post-CANI responses tended to differ. On the aggregate, there were also some differences in the information that was deemed most important. Pre-CANI, the respondents were more likely to focus on information about the parents. For example, respondents indicated that the most important information was the fact that the father was currently incarcerated, the mother's whereabouts were unknown/mother's lack of contact with the child/mother's lack of bonding with the child, and the drug use of the father's girlfriend (the behavior that precipitated the child's removal). Post-CANI, respondents were still interested in the fact that the father was currently incarcerated and the drug use of the father's girlfriend. However, participants now had more of a focus on the child. Overall, participants deemed the child's history of prior neglect and her injuries as the most important piece of information—an aspect that was the sixth most common response pre-CANI.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Participants responded to the question “What else would you like to know in order to make an informed decision on this case?” Once again, individual pre-CANI and post-CANI responses tended to differ in the additional pieces of information that were requested. On the aggregate, there was one noticeable difference from pre-CANI to post-CANI. The number of participants who wanted to know about the child’s Native American status increased. Across all other topics, the information that was requested stayed the same from pre-CANI to post-CANI.

AMOUNT OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

To assess the amount of additional information requested by participants, researchers counted the number of topics or items mentioned by participants on the open-ended question “What else would you like to know in order to make an informed decision on this case?” One researcher was responsible for counting the number of topics mentioned by each participant. An additional researcher randomly selected 10 cases (18% of the overall sample) and independently counted the number of topics listed by these participants as a reliability check. There was 100% agreement between both researchers regarding the amount of information requested.

The amount of additional information was significantly different from pre-CANI to post-CANI. However, this difference was not in the predicted direction. Pre-CANI, participants indicated that they would have liked to have an average of 4.49 pieces of information to make an informed decision. Post-CANI, participants indicated that they would have liked to have an average of 3.06 pieces of information.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that participants are generally satisfied with the CANI training. Participants found the training to be enlightening, engaging, and useful in helping to prepare them to address the challenges in their respective jurisdictions. Participants also indicated that CANI covered many of the topics they believe to be relevant to their practice. There were only a few areas in which the participants would like additional training, such as court docket administration, collaboration with other child welfare staff, and trauma related topics.

From an educational perspective, the CANI training has several positive aspects. CANI assists in facilitating an increase in knowledge of its participants. Across all topics, participants indicated a significant increase in their knowledge from pre-CANI to post-CANI. It appears that the sessions that resulted in the most change were ones in which participants had little background in the subject matter, while the sessions that resulted in the least change were ones in which participants came in with more background in the subject matter. This information can be helpful as a needs assessment for the development of future CANIs or other trainings. Identifying the participants' level of knowledge prior to a training can help to inform the training agenda and give trainers an opportunity to spend more time on the topics that are lesser known.

The findings also suggest that CANI facilitates changes in judicial decision-making. Post-CANI, participants had a higher likelihood of placement with the father and a higher likelihood of ordering services for the father. This seems to indicate that CANI has prompted participants to explore potential paternal placements further, and/or to recognize that fathers are in need of services as much as mothers. As engagement of fathers in the system is vital, this illustrates that an important strength of CANI may be bringing awareness to the father as a significant parent or caregiver in the child's life.

Participants were more likely to indicate that ICWA findings needed to be made after CANI than before CANI. In addition, participants were much more likely to request additional information regarding the child's Native American status post-CANI. These findings suggest that CANI increased judges' awareness of ICWA issues and will likely be a topic that they incorporate into their future decision-making. Nationally, Native American children are entering the foster care system at a rate that is more than twice the rate in the general population. In part, this may be due to a lack of understanding of ICWA and how to effectively apply it in cases. Often, judges are not familiar with ICWA or may not inquire about Native American heritage in the case, which would result in not applying the stricter ICWA standards. The fact that post-CANI responses were more likely to include ICWA illustrates a move in the right direction. CANI appears to help familiarize the judges with the importance of the federal law and the need to apply it in all cases.

When asked what other pieces of information they would like in making their decision about the shelter care scenario, participants post-CANI were more likely to ask for information that focused on the child's history of abuse and neglect, as well as the child's current risk for injury than were participants pre-CANI. On the other hand, pre-CANI participants were more likely to focus on the parents—they wanted to know why the father was incarcerated, the mother's whereabouts, and the reasons why the mother had not "appropriately" bonded with the child, etc. This may suggest that CANI trained participants that they should examine all aspects of a case, but there should be a deliberate effort to focus on the child's well-being. These findings suggest that CANI has shifted participants' focus to doing just that. This is an important shift since the main purpose of the shelter hearing is to make a decision about whether the child can be immediately and safely returned to the home.

These results should be interpreted within context and considering the limitations of this study. First, there may have been a misunderstanding about the purpose of the question regarding the findings that should be made at the hearing. The question asked participants to indicate the findings that they would make at the initial hearing (e.g., reasonable efforts, contrary to the welfare of the child, etc.). However, several participants did not make actual findings. Instead, they posed questions (e.g., "What is in the best interest of the child?", "Does the child know the grandmother?", and "Are there any placement requests of the putative father?") and made statements about the case facts that would likely be included in findings at the adjudication hearing (e.g., drug dependency of parents and caretaker, incarceration of father, and child's obvious signs of neglect).

Second, despite efforts to ensure its reliability, the count variable used for the number of pieces of additional information requested by the judges is a crude measure. Some participants indicated multiple items in their pre-CANI responses and then collapsed those items in the post-CANI responses. For example, one participant indicated in his or her pre-CANI questionnaire that he or she would like to know "What is father's background? Is he the father? Mother's recent history? Why child hasn't been with her? How long did girlfriend have the child?" In the post-CANI questionnaire, the participant indicated that he or she would like to know "more about parties' recent past." Information about the parties' past would subsume all of the questions asked pre-CANI.

Third, when asked "What else would you like to know in order to make an informed decision on this case?" it may not have been clear to participants that they were to ask new or similar questions to their pre-CANI ones in their post-CANI questionnaires. Instead, it appeared that several participants added new questions that they assumed were *in addition to* the ones they had already indicated. For example, one participant indicated on his or her pre-CANI questionnaire that he or she would like "more information about grandmother's environment and other relatives if any." On the post-CANI questionnaire, this participant indicated that he or she was interested in "father's legal criminal and medical history; paternity test for father." Unless the relative information was no longer considered important—which seems unlikely based upon the fact that several participants indicated they wanted to know more about potential relative placements—it appears that this

participant was including the paternity information as something that he or she wanted to know in addition to the relative information previously mentioned in the pre-CANI questionnaire.

Finally, the findings regarding the pre-CANI and post-CANI open-ended responses should be interpreted in the context that they were examined in the aggregate. That is, individual responses were not compared. Had we compared individual open-ended responses at both periods, the numbers would have been smaller because of the post-CANI missing data. Post-CANI, only 71% of participants responded to the “What findings do you need to make at this hearing?” Similarly, only 69% of participants responded to the “What information (from the case scenario) was most important in your decision-making?” and the “What else would you like to know in order to make an informed decision on this case?” questions. These findings highlight a possible area of examination for future CANI conferences regarding participant fatigue, participants’ understanding of the importance of these questionnaires, and the timing of the administration of the questionnaires (in the event that missing responses are a result of participants having to leave the conference early).

CONCLUSION

NCJFCJ has been holding the CANI training for nearly 20 years. Although there have been evaluations of participants’ perceptions of the utility of each session and their changes in knowledge after each session, there have not been evaluations on changes in post-CANI decision-making. The results of the current evaluation (specifically related to knowledge attainment and decision-making) support the classification of CANI as “Promising Direction” according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Continuum of Evidence of Effectiveness](#). In addition to increasing knowledge across a variety of topics, the current findings suggest that CANI has been helpful in changing some of the behaviors of new and experienced juvenile dependency judges. CANI appears to improve attention to fathers and ICWA, and shifts the focus from parent-centric to child-centric. Whether these changes are long-lasting or appropriate is unclear. Going forward, it will be important to further identify the specific goals and desired outcomes of CANI and evaluate how effective the training is in meeting these goals. Future research should also seek to explore ways to examine how judicial officers put these changes in decision-making and knowledge directly into practice and, whether these changes affect outcomes for children and families involved in the system. While this type of research is challenging (and often impractical) with small (50 participant) trainings of judicial officers from all over the country, it is important to begin the research efforts and explore creative ways to test the effectiveness of trainings.