

Case Assessment and Research Intervention Paper

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Abstract

The Prince Edward Department of Social Services received a report of alleged physical neglect regarding young twin sisters. The mother, Monica, is homeless and was staying at a shelter in Farmville, Virginia. There was a high risk of the mother fleeing from social services due to prior history, and the mother had just been asked to leave the shelter. Due to the high concern of no shelter and improper supervision of her children, an emergency removal order was placed. The twins were placed in foster care. The mother attempted to appeal the Founded Level Two Physical Neglect decision but was denied. Erik Erikson's stages of development help to explain the importance of the children's wellbeing and lack of development. Monica was experiencing symptoms of mental illness, and was offered many different resources but denied all even housing and/or an income to provide for her twin daughters. The children have been with the same foster family since the removal. Many of the interventions can't be properly assessed due to a lack of attendance, and refusal for the services and assistance.

Identifying Information

The Prince Edward County Department of Social Services received concerns about two children who were possibly being physically neglected. The mother of the children was reported as the alleged neglecter. The mother's name was Monica and she was thirty-three years old with twin girls. The twins were sixteen months old around the time that Prince Edward DSS became involved. The twins' names are Hope and Love. They lived in Farmville, Virginia during the time of this case. Monica was an only child, born in California but had also lived in Texas and Virginia. Monica was raised by her mother and step father, she mentioned multiple times during conversation with DSS that she "has two dads". Monica did not meet her biological father until she was fifteen years old. She had a close relationship with her mother as a child, but that changed when she became a teenager. Monica states that she isn't in contact with any of her family due to trauma. Monica said her mother was on disability for mental health problems and her step dad was a drunk, and she "didn't like him much". Monica shared that her family history is filled with sexual violence and exploitation.

Monica ended up getting her GED, and claims to have gotten an associates degree. Monica stated that she worked in human resources and around children in daycares or schools for over ten years. The twin girls were at a developmentally appropriate level and were meeting most milestones. However, the twins weren't able to speak at all yet, and it is expected for children of this age to have a couple of words in their vocabulary. Monica and the twins were homeless, and have been living out of her car and various homeless shelters. They were in Virginia Beach for a while and then came to Farmville. Monica has been unemployed since giving birth to her children. Monica has SNAP and TANF benefits. Monica is a white woman,

her twins are female and have different complexions. The father of the children is unknown, and he does not pay child support.

Presenting Problem/Reason For Services

The Prince Edward County Department of Social Services received a child protective services complaint that believed the twin girls may have been physically neglected by their mother. This report was determined to be valid. The mandated reporter stated that Monica, Love, and Hope had been residing at a shelter for almost two weeks. Monica confided in one of the counselors at the shelter stating that she was on the run from an abusive partner, and that she hadn't obtained housing for a majority of her children's lives. She had been living in the car with two children, a dog, and a cat. There were many concerns about Monica not properly watching and supervising her children. One major concern was that one of the children ate feces while the mother was not supervising her and had to be taken to the hospital. The child was determined not to have been harmed, but the mother stormed out of the hospital before she could receive discharge papers. There have been multiple instances of the children putting dangerous objects into their mouths, and Monica attempts to find excuses for each instance. The reporter stated that while they were attempting to find housing for this family, they held Hope and Love. While the children were asleep in the reporter's arms, Monica held the twins' noses until they were forcibly awake. She claimed that she didn't want the children to nap. Monica had also gotten locked out of the shelter for an hour leaving the children unattended at night. The reporter stated that they are worried about the mothers ability to properly care for the children, especially because she denied all parenting resources and training that was offered to her. Monica and her children were dismissed from the shelter early due to the lack of her supervision of the children. The Prince Edward County Department of Social Services began to have concerns about the well being of

the children. They contacted the shelter in which the family was staying. They extended the day that she was allowed to be there just so that Monica could meet with social services. When social services attempted to meet her, she had already left and never showed up to social services. A “Be on the Look Out” was placed, and police were alerted to pull her over if she was located. The police found Monica and the twins a few miles from the agency's office. The family services specialist came to meet her from the agency and police escorted her to social services. At social services, workers began to ask Monica questions regarding the report they received and the conversation began to escalate.

During the interview there was bizarre behavior, including Monica beginning to become paranoid and speaking about a dark figure following her. She said that she knew when she was being followed because meth would come out of the vents and get her children sick. She stated that she did not have a plan of where she was going to live but that they were doing just fine in her car. When the conversation about allowing her children to put dangerous objects in their mouth was discussed she said that it's just what children do. The children hadn't eaten that day, so a worker offered to take the children to get something to eat in the kitchen. Monica was not allowed to come back there due to it being only workers allowed. Monica stated that she needed to change the twins and rushed to the bathroom. She stayed in the bathroom with the door locked for almost thirty minutes. During this time social workers and police officers were asking Monica to come out of the bathroom and that they just wanted to help. Monica was playing music and was on the phone with a counselor. The police decided to break the lock on the bathroom because they weren't able to hear the twins and it had been an extended amount of time. Monica was taken to be psychologically evaluated at a local agency. The children were removed from their mother due to the major concern of physical neglect. A judge ordered an

emergency removal and a preliminary order was issued. The children entered foster care. The children were taken to a foster home that same day. The agency was concerned that Monica was going to flee due to prior interactions from previous DSS' in Virginia. The concern for physical neglect was founded based on three points. The mother had agreed that she had a lack of stable housing even though other opportunities had been offered to her; including an apartment with paid rent for 6 months or a trailer. Monica agreed that she didn't have a home or a job since having her twins and that they have been living in shelters and her car. Monica's results from the evaluations and prior clinical assessments raised concerns for her ability to take care of her children.

Assessment Activities

Two days after the children were placed in foster care DSS requested any and all CPS records and 911 phone calls involving Monica and her twins. Medical records were also requested. Social services requested for a family partnership meeting to take place as soon as possible. It took place days after the children were removed. The family partnership meeting consisted of Monica, and her parents. Monica and the children's history were now available to Prince Edward Social Services. Monica had an open CPS case active in Virginia Beach, but they hadn't been able to locate her. Her prior case manager stated that she believes her mental health is a serious concern. Previous records showed that there were many instances where the children could've been harmed due to the mothers improper supervision and paranoid delusions. Monica's parents stated that they don't believe Monica can provide for her children in most capacities. The family partnership meeting also highlighted many of the family's strengths including being Christian, involved, educated, and being loving. None of the grandparents were

able to house the children while they were in foster care. It was assessed that neither of the children had any physical or mental limitations.

Impressions

Based on Monica's several interviews and conversations with the Prince Edward Department of Social Services, it is apparent that she was struggling with her mental health issues. There were multiple reports throughout the span of her interactions with various social services that mention visual hallucinations. She mentioned a dark figure following her through multiple states but was unable to identify the individual, made comments referencing drugs and how they come out of vents at various shelters and make her children sick. Monica reported feeling like people were out to get her and that she was unsafe. Monica couldn't comprehend why social services was involved and what the major concern was. Monica's mental health had gotten to the point where she wasn't always able to differentiate reality and often had contradictory beliefs and conversations. Monica had the family support but due to her trauma she didn't want anything to do with them, which was one of the reasons she refused her children going to her parents.

Monica's mental state left her in a situation where she wasn't able to comprehend the consequences of her actions and unstable housing. She had reported having nowhere to go. Monica started using drugs during her teenage years, and she reported growing distant from her mother during this time. Much of the trauma in her early life started around this age, and its possible drugs could've triggered psychosis and paranoid delusions. Monica was a flight risk, and threatened to leave so social services wouldn't be able to find her and I believe this is one of the factors that sped up the removal of her children. Her capacity to understand the consequences of fleeing was not there.

Developmental Stages

When assessing families and children's well-being, it is important to understand how actions of the adult can impact the child's development. Erik Erikson's stages of development state that an infant under the age of eighteen months is going through stage one. Stage one of development is classified as "trust versus mistrust" (Gunderman, 2022, p.1420). During this age children are learning if their parents are reliable and trustworthy (Gunderman, 2022, p.1420). As it relates to Monica and the children, although harm did not happen to the children, there were many instances in which they could've been extremely harmed or in need of something their mother was unable to provide. Because this is such a crucial stage, it makes sense why such rapid measures were taken to ensure the twins safety.

Monica is going through the stage that is called "Intimacy versus Isolation" that focuses on developing intimate and personal relationships (Gunderman, 2022, p.1421). If the individual doesn't reach this, it can have negative outcomes causing them to feel isolated and alone. In one of her assessments, it stated that she struggles maintaining relationships and often feels alone and depressed. Monica's only consistent relationships were her children, and it was sometimes difficult for her. However, she often displayed love and cared for her children. She wanted her children to thrive, but wasn't able to accept the resources to be the one to provide it for them. Monica was scared that her children were going to be taken away and locked herself in the bathroom because those were the most important relationships to her.

Issues Addressed and Services Provided

The Prince Edward Department of Social Services, and other Social Services attempted to offer various homeless shelters. It became a pattern of improper supervision and overstepped boundaries that resulted in Monica and the twins being asked to leave from several shelters.

Many different behavioral services such as therapy, psychological assessments, evaluations, and medications were also offered but Monica denied or often was untruthful with providers. She was offered employment services, transportation assistance, a parent aide, and parenting training and education and declined all. Paid housing was offered through multiple social services and all were denied each time, due to Monica wanting a house next to a beach.

Ethical Values, Considerations, and Policy

Monica was under the impression that all children need in Virginia is food, water, and shelter. Monica didn't understand that a car is not a viable shelter for a child, especially for an extended period of time after being offered a safe home. Much of this case was going on during the beginning of COVID-19 and social services were extremely limited due to policies and restrictions. Poverty was a large consideration during the duration of this case, however with all of the resources offered and Monica refusing to take advantage of them, there was nothing that social services could do. It is important to understand that many individuals are fearful of social services, especially when child protective services are involved. Monica was a part of a vulnerable population who often experienced discrimination, as a homeless woman while also being a mother of two.

Outcome and Effectiveness & Termination

The disposition of the case was found due to level two physical neglect. Monica attempted to appeal, focusing on the effects of poverty and that she felt mentally well. The many evaluations showed that Monica had frequent suicidal ideation, difficulty carrying out daily activities including preparing food and managing finances. Monica also had difficulty having interpersonal relationships and some professionals reported potential psychosis or narcissistic personality disorder, due to her having a distorted sense of self and paranoid delusions.

This appeal was denied and stayed as founded. The hearing was held over the telephone due to COVID 19. The agency had given the courts their investigative reports and the history from other social services. Visitation was allowed at first but repeatedly was canceled or rescheduled. Monica ended up leaving the state and having another child. The twins have been with the same foster family since the removal, and are being adopted in one month. They are still developmentally on track, and are thriving in a healthy home.

What Would I Do Differently

I believe the social workers at the Prince Edward County Department of Social Services did the best they could do with this family at the time. It happened very suddenly, and concerns were high. I wanted to assess a case that has been completed so I could understand their view point and also consider what could've been done differently now. While Monica and the children were in the bathroom, Monica was on the phone with a counselor stating that she was having a panic attack. If possible, I would've gotten someone qualified to work with mental health and gotten them to calm her down and understand the situation. I feel like for someone who is struggling with their mental health and thinks that people are coming after them, a qualified mental health professional intervention could've been useful before the police had to intervene to that extent.

I believe Monica could've been struggling with symptoms that are often associated with psychosis and similar diagnosis. She denied it when it was mentioned at one of the clinical assessments but I think further education and more support during that moment could've made it an educational change in her lifestyle. I believe she was afraid of it being on her record and affecting her situation with the involvement of child protective services. I do believe that because of the flight risk concerns that drastic measures were taken just to ensure the children's safety.

References

- Gunderman, R. B. (2022). Psychology and ethics: Erik Erikson. *Pediatric Radiology*, 52(8), 1420-1422. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00247-022-05382-y>