The Need to Prioritize Relational Health

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Child welfare in the United States both reflects and perpetuates relational poverty. As a symptom, it exposes the consequences of social isolation and lack of resources for families. As a cause, it disrupts family integrity through punitive laws that prioritize severing family ties and redistributing children. Less than half of children in foster care return home, and policies often penalize families for vulnerabilities rooted in poverty and systemic racism.

The child welfare system prioritizes services over relational health—defined as the connection, belonging, and relationships essential to well-being. This approach fixates on clinical models and sustaining service providers while neglecting proactive family support. It pathologizes families' struggles, disregards cultural and community contexts, and prioritizes safety over connection, harming children's relational, physical, mental, and spiritual health.

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