

F F T A



Foster Family-based Treatment Association

Annotations of Research in Treatment Foster Care

Citation

Chamberlain, P., Price, J., Reid, J., Landsverk, J., Fisher, P., & Stoolmiller, M. (2006). Who disrupts from placement in foster and kinship care? *Child Abuse & Neglect* 30, 409–424.

Keywords

Foster care, kinship care, disruption, behavior problems

Research Questions

- Can predictors of disruption be identified?
- Can the financial burden of placement movement be alleviated?

The authors chose to focus on these research questions because of several pertinent issues in foster care, including but not limited to the following: children in foster care are at a high risk of behavioral and emotional problems; multiple placement movements increase a youth's chances of disruption and ultimate system failure; during any 12-month period of residence in foster care, a youth has as much as a 50% chance of placement disruption; foster youth movements pose a significant cost to the child welfare system in general.

Method

Subjects: The authors used a sample of youth from a related study that recruited all foster children in San Diego County, California, between the ages of 5 and 12. This included both youth who were entering the foster care system for the first time and those who had multiple previous placements. Youth who were intended for short-term placements (3 months or less) were not included in this study. The final sample of 246 youth (aged 5–12) included 131 boys and 115 girls (non-kinship care: $n = 158$; kinship care: $n = 88$). The ethnicities of the youth reflected the demographics of the region from which the sample was drawn.

Design: In this correlation study/design, foster parents of kinship (control group) and non-kinship youth were contacted by telephone and given overviews of the study to assess interest. If foster parents expressed interest in participating in the study, a member of the research team conducted a home interview during which consent forms and descriptions were offered. Following the initial interview, three phone calls were placed on consecutive or closely spaced days. During these calls the Parent Daily Report Checklist (PDR) was administered.

Materials/Measures and Procedures: The Parent Daily Report Checklist (Chamberlain & Reid, 1987) is a 30-item scale designed in part to measure a youth's behavior problems and to assess the possibility of an imminent foster disruption (some items on the scale are arguing,

destruction/vandalism, fighting, lying, running away, depression, truancy, skipping meals, school problems, and stealing). The PDR was designed to avoid a need for aggregate recall and estimations of behavior problems over a number of days. The stability and inter-rater reliability were examined in previous studies and found to be satisfactory.

Foster placement disruption was defined as any exit from the foster or kinship placement home that was made for a negative reason. Foster parents were contacted 4 and 12 months after the study to determine whether the youth remained in the placement.

Results/Findings

Thirty problem behaviors are listed on the PDR. The youth in this study exhibited an average of 5.77 problems per day.

- Children who exhibited greater than 6 problem behaviors on the PDR were more likely to disrupt.
- Youth placed in homes that contained multiple other youth (regardless of whether those youth were foster children or biological children) were more likely to disrupt.
- Risk of disruption rose by 17% for every successive problem behavior reported.
- Placements in a non-kin home were three times more likely to experience disruption.
- Gender, ethnicity (youth or parent), and age were not related to placement disruption.
- Each successive behavior problem greater than 6 increased the chance of disruption an additional 25%.

Limitations

The authors cite an inadequate data set, which included only basic demographic information on the child and foster parent, and subjective foster parent reports of the youth's problems as a limitation of the study. The study was conducted in this manner because of (1) the potentially costly nature of obtaining more potent data from system files and background data, and (2) the dearth of resources in the child welfare system.

Other limitations were that the follow-up period was restricted to one year and that the participants included only latency-aged youth (between the ages of 5 and 12).

Application to Practice

The authors believe the implications of their study, as related to child welfare policy, lie in three areas:

1. Interventions that focus on reducing the amount of behavioral problems and increasing fostering skills could reduce placement disruptions.
2. Limiting the number of youths placed in each foster home could reduce placement disruption.

3. Increasing efforts to identify, recruit, train, and support appropriate kinship placements could reduce placement disruptions.

Ultimately, upon replication, the authors of the study believe that the Parent Daily Report Checklist could be both an expedient method for estimating the environmental resiliency of a foster home and a predictive index for possible disruption. Coupled with appropriate service interventions, this information would alleviate some of the negative financial and emotional burdens resulting from multiple placement moves in foster care.

Application to Policy

- Interventions related to the reduction of high behaviors.
- Reduction of the number of children placed in foster care annually.
- Support increased efforts to identify, train, and support kinship placements.

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