

FFTA



Foster Family-based Treatment Association

Annotations of Research in Treatment Foster Care

Citation

Gibbs, D., & Wildfire, J. (2007). Length of service for foster parents: Using administrative data to understand retention. *Children and Youth Service Review*, 29, 588–599.

Keywords

Retention, foster parents, length of service

Research Questions

What correlates are associated with length of service for foster parents?

Method

Design: The study used a longitudinal, nonexperimental format that correlated various demographic and foster home characteristics with retention periods.

Materials/Measures: Administrative records were used to cull data for the analyses. The study used data from foster parent licensing and child placement records in New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Oregon. The authors reviewed 662 records from New Mexico, 2,833 records from Oklahoma, and 11,947 records from Oregon.

Procedures: Data were collected from only the states of New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Oregon because these states were willing to contribute data and participate in ongoing consultation.

Results/Findings

Although results from the analyses were mixed, the authors emphasized four central findings:

1. On average, foster homes care for one or two children during their tenures.
2. The median length of service in foster parenting was 8 to 14 months.
3. A small minority of foster parents (about 20%) provided the majority of service fostering children (60–72%).
4. Longer tenure of foster parents was associated with more difficult client populations and metropolitan settings.

Limitations

Because the study involved such a small sample of states, the findings cannot be generalized to other states. In addition, the study does not provide meaningful information on foster parent motivation for continuing service. Finally, because of missing information and systematic coding difficulties, the study did not have consistent data sets from the three participating states.

Application to Practice

By providing a benchmark on the length of service of foster parents, this study can be useful to those interested in program planning and development. In addition, the study suggests that, contrary to expectations, difficult client populations are not factors associated with attrition.

Application to Policy

This study highlights the need for supporting and funding the ongoing recruitment and support of foster parents to compensate for foster parent resignations. In addition, it points to the need for more research into motivation and retention of foster parents.

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