

F F T A



Foster Family-based Treatment Association

Annotations of Research in Treatment Foster Care

Citation

Leathers, S. J. (2006). Placement disruption and negative placement outcomes among adolescents in long-term foster care: The role of behavior problems. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 30*, 307–324.

Keywords

Foster children, behavior problems, placement stability, placement disruption, negative placement outcomes

Research Questions

- To what extent do foster child externalizing behavior problems, as reported by foster parents and caseworkers, lead to placement disruption and negative placement outcomes?
- Whose report of behavior problems is a more accurate predictor of placement disruption and negative placement outcomes: the caseworker or the foster parents?
- Is any association between behavior problems and placement disruption mediated by the youth's integration in the foster home?

Method

Subjects: Caseworkers and foster parents of 179 randomly selected 12- to 13-year-old adolescents placed in traditional, non-relative family foster care for a year or longer in Cook County, Illinois.

Design: The study used a prospective design and multivariate statistical models (logistic regression).

Materials/Measures: Behavioral problems were measured using questions assessing the severity of oppositional defiant and conduct disorder symptomatology from the Children's Symptom Inventory (CSI; Gadow & Sprafkin, 1997).

Placement disruptions and negative placement outcomes were measured using state administrative data.

Foster home integration was measured by adapting a measure of foster family attachment created by Fanshel (1982) and later modified by Poulin (1985).

Procedures: Data were collected from a larger study of placement experiences that was conducted via telephone interviews with foster parents and caseworkers between July 1997 and March 1998. Disruption from the youth's foster home was prospectively tracked for 5 years from the date of the interview.

Results/Findings

A foster parent's report of more externalizing behavior problems was not associated with placement disruption during the follow-up period, but a caseworker's report was.

A foster parent's report of externalizing behavior problems was significantly associated with negative placement outcome. The associations between the caseworker's report and negative placement outcome were only marginally significant.

Low foster home integration was a strong predictor of placement disruption but not of negative placement outcome.

Limitations

The study used a cross-sectional sample and did not include information on mental health services provided to the foster children. Also, the findings will not necessarily generalize to the entire population of adolescents in foster care because the study's participants were limited to young adolescents who were placed for a year or longer in non-relative family foster care, and participants were primarily African American, and from an urban area.

Application to Practice

Foster children's externalizing behavior problems should be assessed in early adolescence to provide an indicator of risk for both placement disruption (caseworker's assessment) and long-term negative placement outcomes (foster parent's assessment). A foster youth's degree of integration and belonging in the foster home should also be assessed as a risk factor for placement disruption.

Application to Policy

This article has shown that enabling the foster family to be a truly equal member of the team when discussing living situations and negative behaviors with foster children is important. Understanding the foster parent's perspective is necessary when trying to resolve issues with behavior in order to limit the number of placement disruptions. On a macro level, more time and money needs to be allocated to train foster parents on how to perceive and manage disruptive behavior and assist with the integration of the foster youth into the family. In turn, this may decrease the amount of out of the home placements for foster youth.

Contact Information

Sonya J. Leathers, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Chicago, Jane Addams College of Social Work, 1040 W. Harrison Avenue, Chicago, IL 60607. E-mail: sonyal@uic.edu