

KINSHIP



Impact of Kinship Care on Behavioral Well-being for Children in Out-of-home Care

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Issue

In 2002, an estimated 542,000 children were living with kin following the involvement of a child welfare agency which exceeded the number of children living in nonrelative foster care arrangements. The growth in kinship care is the result of a sustained effort to improve permanency for children since the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. A review of the literature delineates conflicting evidence regarding the benefits and trade-offs of raising children with kin. A large body of research acknowledges the evidence, that compared with children in general foster care, children in kinship care are less likely to change placements, benefiting from increased placement stability. Placement stability is a common goal of child welfare systems and has consistently been shown to result in better outcomes for all children living in out-of-home care. The primary outcome for this study was the child's behavioral well-being at 18 and 36 months, as measured by the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL).

Findings

For the initial placement of study subjects, 50 percent began their out-of-home care with kin. An additional 17 percent who were initially placed with non-kin were later placed with kin.

Children placed in kin foster care were found to have a lower initial risk of behavioral problems than children placed in non-kin foster care. Additionally, placement stability was greater for those children placed with kin as opposed to those placed with non-kin. Analysis of behavioral outcomes of children revealed that youth placed in kin foster care were at a 32 percent risk factor of developing significant behavioral problems. This is compared to children initially placed with non-kin foster care, who at 36 months post initial placement, were at a 46 percent risk factor of developing significant behavioral problems. Children initially placed with non-kin and subsequently moved to kin foster care were at an elevated risk of developing behavioral problems.

The primary risk factor of developing behavioral problems as reported by the study authors was initial placement—specifically with non-kin foster care. Placement with kin foster care was reported as a significant factor in preventing and/or successfully redressing any behavioral problems which arose. Youth placed with kin showed better outcomes three years post permanency achievement.

PLACEMENT	PERCENTAGE DEVELOP BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS POST 36 MONTHS
Kin Foster Care	32%
Non-kin Foster Care	46%

Implications

This study demonstrates that for children who are removed from their home of origin, it is in their best interest to be placed with family or individuals the parents consider to be kin. For the children who were initially placed with non-kin foster providers, this type of placement increased the behavioral problems in the studied population. The study authors also found that even when a child was removed from non-kin and placed with kin, the increase in later behavioral problems was not reduced. This is indicative that placing children outside of their known comfort zone (i.e., family, neighborhood, school, etc.) has a potentially harmful effect.

The study demonstrated a protective effect of kinship care on the early behavioral outcomes of a nationally representative cohort of children entering out-of-home care. Increasing efforts to identify and obtain approval for kin to take physical custody of children removed from their family of origin are strongly implied as a best practice.

Two primary recommendations arise: 1) "streamlining" the kin placement is likely to increase the number of kin available within the system to provide a healthier and more stable placement thus reducing incidental trauma due to the exigencies of the respective cases and placing the needs of the child first; and 2) when and where kin placements are not available or viable, additional care and attention to the needs of the child are indicated to ameliorate the trauma of being placed in the care of strangers and apart from their community and comfort zone.