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Foster Family-based Treatment Association

Annotations of Research in Treatment Foster Care

Citation

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Keywords

Emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), out-of-home care placement, placement

Research Question

- Do children with EBD who enter substitute care change placements differently than their non-EBD peers?

Method

Subjects: The sample for this study was taken from the NSCAW (National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being) Child Protective Services (CPS) sample of a nationally representative group of 5,501 children whose circumstances were investigated by child welfare services between October 1999 and December 2000. Children and their families participated in this research study. The researchers excluded children younger than 7 or older than 14 years as well as those who did not speak English.

The sample size was 362 for children with EBD and 363 for children without EBD. The children with EBD were assigned to either a low-moving group (fewer than four placement changes) or a high-moving group (four or more placement changes). The low-movement group had 224 subjects, and the high-movement group had 128 subjects.

Design: Researchers used a three-stage process to test their hypothesis. First, they reaffirmed the relationship between having an EBD at baseline and higher numbers of placement moves. Next, they compared children in the EBD group who had a larger number of moves with children who had a lower number of moves as well as comparing the EBD group with the non-EBD group. Finally, the researchers determined which factors were significant to the placement movement of children with EBD and children without EBD.

Materials/Measures: Youth with EBD were divided into low-moving or high-moving placements to assess the relationship between being in the EBD group and high placement mobility. To identify children with EBD, the researchers used the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). A score of 63 or greater on either the Internalizing or Externalizing subscales of the CBCL indicates the presence of EBD. A court appearance by the child to answer a criminal charge because of negative behaviors was included as a variable. Psychological trauma was assessed by the Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children–Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) subscale. For assessing depression, the researchers used the Children’s Depression Inventory.

Procedures: The researchers conducted the analyses using SUDAAN version 9.0.1. Two sets of cross-tabulations were completed. The first cross-tabulation compared high- and low-movement children with EBD on each independent variable. The second compared children with EBD and children without EBD. Finally, the researchers used two Poisson regressions. The first model predicted the number of placement movements of children with EBD, and the identical second model predicted moves for children without EBD.

Results/Findings

1. Children with EBD were 2.5 times more likely than their peers without EBD to be in the high-movement group.
2. Children with EBD and children in the high-movement group differed from children in the low-movement group.
3. More non-EBD children were placed into kinship care than children in the EBD group, but the reverse was true for residential care. Youth who had a criminal court appearance were more likely to be in the EBD group, whereas children who were living with siblings were less likely to be in the EBD group than their peers who were not living with siblings or who were only children.
4. For the nonclinical group, the researchers found that older age proved to be the strongest predictor of placement movements, with children older than 11 years significantly more likely to have more placements.

Limitations

The most serious limitation was the decision to model only part of a larger phenomenon. The models only accounted for children who had an EBD at baseline rather than including youth who developed an EBD during their out-of-home placement. Another limitation was the lack of information about the reasons for placement. The researchers did not focus on racial differences when comparing the children with EBD and the children without EBD.

Application to Practice

This research provides several important points for practice. Two factors influenced placement moves: care out of home without siblings, and depression. However, the direction of the influence of siblings could not be determined. It is possible that children were not placed with siblings because of sibling-related abuse or that they were placed alone because of the negative influence of the sibling. As a result, there should be clinical implications for child welfare leaders and practitioners. The influence of depression is consistent with the experience of practitioners in that youth with depressive disorders may be difficult for a foster parent to manage without additional help. This finding suggests that substitute caregivers may require additional training to effectively manage the symptoms of children's EBD.

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