

F F T A



Foster Family-based Treatment Association

Annotations of Research in Treatment Foster Care

Citation

Poirier, M.-A., & Simard, M. (2006). Parental involvement during the placement of a child in family foster care: Factors associated with the continuation of parental roles. *Child & Youth Care Forum, 35*, 277–288.

Keywords

Parents, involvement, family foster care

Research Questions

- To what extent do parents participate in their child's care during placement in foster care?
- What characteristics of parents, children, and placements are associated with greater parental participation?

Method

Subjects: Fifty-eight (58) parents (46 mothers and 12 fathers) who had a child in family foster care and had had at least one unsupervised contact with their child in the past 6 months participated.

Design: The study was a cross-sectional, descriptive investigation.

Measures and Procedures: Data were collected via a survey instrument that covered multiple areas, including family characteristics, child characteristics, placement history, characteristics of the current placement situation, parent involvement during the placement of the child and characteristics of the intervention, and parent perception of the social worker and foster parents. Factor analyses of questions regarding the participation of parents resulted in factors that measured (1) participation in care-related tasks or school activities, and (2) participation in decisions or discussions regarding the child's education and progress, and the planning of visits.

Data were collected via a survey administered during face-to-face interviews at the participants' homes.

Results/Findings

Results indicated that parents participated little in care-related tasks or school activities but were more involved in decision making and discussions concerning the child.

Greater participation was associated with having a partner or spouse (most often not the child's parent). Parents were more likely to participate in discussions and decisions if their child had been removed for reasons of neglect rather than physical abuse, sexual abuse, or long-term emotional rejection.

Parents who did not experience problems during their child's placement were more likely to participate than those who reported problems such as a lack of information, large geographical distance between the placement setting and their residence, or personal problems.

Parents who perceived that their social worker had a positive opinion of them participated in more activities than other parents. Similarly, parents who perceived the foster parents as being in favor of their participation took part in a greater number of care-related tasks and school activities than those who perceived the foster parents as being opposed to their participation. There was no difference in participation among parents who had a high level of contact with social workers and those who did not.

Limitations

The study is correlational and therefore no causal link can be established between parental participation and other variables. Sample selection was voluntary and the sample size was small. Therefore, results here may not generalize to all parents who have a child placed in family foster care.

Application to Practice

Support to the parent seems to be an important consideration in whether or not parents participate in the care of their children during foster placements as evidenced by the greater involvement of parents who had a partner or spouse. In addition, the attitudes and roles of social workers and foster parents seem to be important in facilitating parental participation. These findings suggest that providing support, clear role definition, and a positive attitude toward parental participation are all important in enhancing parental participation in the care of their children during foster placements.

Application to Policy

It is important to note that although legislation such as the Youth Protection Act is created to assign "primary responsibility for children" to parents, it is clear that parental involvement is still lacking in some areas. In order for policy and legislation to really take effect, professionals in the foster care system need to be aware of and address the reasons why there is a limited amount of parental involvement in the lives of children in foster care, specifically in relation to methods used to solicit parent involvement.

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