

F F T A



Foster Family-based Treatment Association

## Annotations of Research in Treatment Foster Care

### Citation

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### Keywords

Foster care, kinship care, child welfare outcomes

### Research Questions

- Are there significant differences between children in kinship care and foster care on permanency outcomes (e.g., rates of reunification), safety outcomes (e.g., new allegations of institutional abuse or neglect), and stability outcomes (e.g., still in placement)?
- Are there significant differences between children in paid and unpaid kinship care on outcomes?

### Method

*Subjects:* Although the theoretical population for this study was all children placed in formal kinship care in the United States, the accessible population was all children placed in formal kinship care from 12 of 64 counties in Colorado. Children were selected from this population based on the following criteria:

- Designated in Program Areas 5 (abused or neglected children) and 6 (children with special needs)
- First out-of-home (OOH) placement occurred in 2002
- OOH length of stay was greater than 60 days
- 90% of OOH days were spent in either kinship care or foster care
- Last placement was in the specified placement type

A total of 1,377 children met these criteria and were included in the study. Of these children, 505 were in kinship care and 872 were in foster care. The two groups were matched on gender, ethnicity, program area, county, and age at entry. The final matched sample included 636 children.

*Design:* This study used data from individual case records entered into Colorado Trails, an online data management and analysis system used for child welfare case management

documentation. The data set used in this study comprised information entered into Colorado Trails in late August 2005. The sample was divided into two groups: (1) children in kinship care, and (2) children in foster care. The authors used a matched sample design to ensure that the kinship and foster care groups consisted of comparable cases with regard to demographic and placement characteristics.

*Materials/Measures and Procedures:* This study compared the kinship and foster care groups in terms of nine outcome variables reported in the Colorado Trails data set. These variables are:

- Number of OOH placements
- Days in out-of-home care
- Reunification with biological parent(s)
- Whether or not the child was adopted or placed for adoption
- Whether or not permanent custody of the child was awarded to relatives through guardianship or allocation of parental rights (APR)
- Reentry into OOH care after achieving permanency
- New allegation of institutional abuse/neglect after the initial OOH entry date
- Admission to a Division of Youth Corrections (DYC) facility after the initial OOH entry date
- Whether the child was still in OOH care as of August 2005

### **Results/Findings**

- Children in kinship care had significantly fewer placements than did children in foster care. There was a medium to large effect size in favor of children in kinship care.
- There was no difference between days in OOH care for children in kinship care and children in foster care.
- Children in foster care were 2.2 times more likely than children in kinship care to be reunified.
- There was a nonsignificant association between children in kinship care and those in foster care on the measure of adoption/placed for adoption.
- Children in kinship care were 7.7 times more likely than children in foster care to achieve permanency through guardianship or APR.
- There was a nonsignificant relationship between children in kinship care and those in foster care on reentry into OOH care after achieving permanency.
- Children in foster care were 10.1 times more likely than children in kinship care to have a new allegation of institutional abuse or neglect.
- Children in foster care were 6.3 times more likely than children in kinship care to be involved with the juvenile justice system after the initial out-of-home entry date.
- Children in foster care were 4.1 times more likely than children in kinship care to still be in placement.

The authors used the 505 children in kinship care from the initial sample to compare children in paid and unpaid kinship care on the available child welfare outcomes. Of these children, 268 were in paid and 237 were in unpaid kinship placements.

- There were no statistically significant differences between children in paid and unpaid kinship care placements on the number of placements and days in out-of-home care.
- There was a nonsignificant association between children in paid and unpaid kinship care on the reunification measure. However, children in paid kinship placements were more likely to be adopted or placed for adoption than were children in unpaid kinship placements. Children in unpaid placements were more likely to be in guardianship.
- There were no statistically significant associations between children in paid and unpaid kinship care placements on reentry, DYC involvement, and remaining in placement. However, children from paid kinship placements were more likely to have a new allegation of institutional abuse or neglect.

### **Limitations**

Because children could not be randomly assigned to the kinship and foster care group conditions, selection bias may exist in the placement of children into the two groups.

There were inconsistencies, both within and between counties, in data collection, resulting mostly from changeable data entry requirements in Colorado Trails. Therefore, some outcomes were missing data from certain counties.

The Colorado Trails data set did not include all the outcome variables of interest, which limits the scope of the study. Well-being for physical and mental health, behavior problems, educational attainment, and service utilization could not be measured.

All the outcomes were measured over a relatively short period, which may have influenced the rates of permanency and stability in this study.

### **Application to Practice**

The findings from this study support the use of kinship placements for children removed from the home. However, kinship placement would not be beneficial for all children requiring OOH placement, and this decision must be based on professional judgment and evaluation of the needs of children and the ability of kinship caregivers to meet these needs. Because children placed in paid kinship care do not differ in outcomes from children placed in unpaid kinship care, it may be more cost-effective to place children in kinship care rather than foster care. However, more research is needed on the costs and benefits of kinship care. Caseworkers, social workers, and caregivers should consider the findings of this study in making decisions on whether to place a child in kinship or foster care. These professionals should develop strategies to increase access to resources for kinship caregivers and the children in their care. In terms of policy implications, this study supports the enactment of legislation solidifying kinship care as a viable out-of-home placement option.

### **Contact Information**

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