

FFTA



Foster Family-based Treatment Association

Annotations of Research in Treatment Foster Care

Citation

Brown, J., & Bednar, L. (2006). Foster parent perception of placement breakdowns. *Child and Youth Services Review, 28*, 1497–1511.

Keywords

Foster parents, placement breakdowns, perception

Research Questions

This study asked foster parents to share their perceptions of the conditions that might lead to a placement breakdown. As the authors point out, the existing literature focuses on analyses from other members of the foster care system as to factors that stress families and might lead to placement breakdown. This study asks the foster parents themselves to identify reasons that might lead them to terminate a placement.

Method

Subjects: Participants were randomly selected from the 1,664 members of the Manitoba Foster Family Network. Telephone interviews were conducted until redundancy was found in the responses (redundancy being operationally defined as no new responses in five interviews). Redundancy was reached after interviewing 63 foster parents from 50 families.

Design: The design used was concept mapping, which involved asking participants (who had previously agreed to do so) to group the responses into themes. The researchers first reduced the number of responses from 194 to 61 by editing them for clarity and redundancy. Participants received the list of responses through the mail and submitted their responses by phone. The researchers then subjected the responses to statistical analysis to rank them and form the cluster map. Once this was completed, the researchers gave names to the clusters.

Results/Findings

The resulting clusters show that foster parents might terminate a placement if faced with the following conditions:

- Danger to family
- Child not adapting
- Child's conduct being too much for the foster parent to deal with
- Complex needs of child, especially those that might change over time
- Problems in the foster parents' relationship with the workers and agency

- Feeling that placement was not working (after exhausting all personal and agency resources)
- Changes in personal circumstances
- Changes in personal health
- Lack of community resources

The following findings are unique to this study and could benefit from further research:

- The frequency and severity of violent acts by foster children
- Foster parents' perceptions of strategies that lead to successful reintegration of foster children and their biological families
- The process that foster parents would follow in deciding to terminate a placement

Limitations

This study is based on responses from foster parents who are affiliated with a Canadian provincial foster family association. The random selection of participants in the study precludes the possibility of knowing whether this group was representative of the membership of the association and how they match the known demographics of foster parents. However, the findings are consistent with those in the existing literature, which lends credibility to the findings.

Application to Practice

This study could add significantly to the practice of foster care in general and treatment foster care in particular. Hearing from foster families should be a key component in any attempt to develop a more successful foster care system, and this study gives voice to the foster parent. Although many of the items the foster parents indicate would lead them to terminate a placement may be unpredictable and uncontrollable, others, such as lack of support from the agency, are within the control of the agency.

Recognizing and responding to the identified need of the foster family is likely one of the best ways to retain successful foster families, thus both improving the outcomes of fostering and reducing the need to spend resources on recruitment and orientation. Foster parents' understanding of the children in their care should be recognized and applied. For example, the study identifies foster parents' perceptions of how to make reintegration successful. Understanding the way foster parents go about deciding whether to terminate a placement should help agencies plan ways to support their foster families and to lessen the likelihood that the decision to terminate will come as a surprise to the agency, prompting an emergency placement. Finally, attention must be given to the risk agencies ask families to take when accepting a child into their care.

Application to Policy

Decisions based on the current literature may generate ineffective policies that do not focus funding on the actual needs of foster parents, thus exacerbating higher than necessary levels of placement disruption.

Contact Information

Dr. Jason Brown, Assistant Professor in Counseling Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada. E-mail: jbrow97@uwo.ca