

Kinship and Non-Kinship Foster Care Placements: Placement Stability, Academic Attainment, and Delinquency

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Abstract

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has reported that over 500,000 children entered the foster care system for the fiscal year of 2015. The overall annual cost of foster care placement in U.S. exceeds 9 billion dollars, a value shared by both the state and federal entities. Monetary costs associated with foster care placement consist of welfare subsidy payments, medical expenses, childcare assistance, and monthly payments to foster parents for daily essentials. Apart from monetary costs for the government, placing children in foster care has a significant impact on the overall wellbeing of children. The intangible costs may consist of emotional, physical, and psychological impairment, coupled with the separation of biological families, in many cases surpasses the monetary costs of foster care placement. Placement in foster care affects children's emotional development, which can lead to adverse outcomes on behavior and mental health due to inconsistent nurturing and lack of parental contact. The premise of non-kinship care was often based on the distrust of family members. Social workers conceptualized the removal of a child from a family, based on the analogy if there is one bad apple in the family, the full barrel (family) should be discarded. A random sampling was used to select 402 participants from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) dataset to construct a subset data file. According to Rubin and Babbie (2016), a sample size of 200 and above provides enough statistical power and effect size to avoid Type I and Type II errors, which are false positive and false negative. Secondary data analysis was conducted using descriptive analysis to test the relationship between placement type, placement stability, academic attainment, and delinquency.

Keywords: Foster care, removal, academic attainment, delinquency, and descriptive analysis.

1. Introduction

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that over 500,000 children enter the foster care system every year (Foster Care Statistics, 2015). Placement in foster care is often classified as kinship or non-kinship care. More than a quarter (30%) of children removed by child welfare workers, were placed in kinship foster family homes, and nearly half (45%) were in non-kinship systems. Kinship care is defined as, the full-time nurturing and protection of children by relatives or those adults to whom a child and the child's parents and family members ascribe a family relationship. A kinship resource is defined as either blood relatives (i.e., adult sibling, aunt, uncle, first cousin or grandparent of the child) or a significant adult to whom the child and the parent(s) assign the role of family based on culture, affectional ties, or individual family values (Foster Care Statistics, 2015). According to Vanschoonlandt, Vanderfaillie, Holen, De Maeyer, and Andries (2012), placement in kinship care is the first option when biological parents are unavailable or cannot raise the child. Relatives are the preferred resource for placement of children who are removed from their birth parents as it preserves the children's interrelatedness with their families. On the other hand, non-kinship care is the care of children by strangers. Until the latter part of the 20th century, non-kinship care was the most popular form of placement. The premise of non-kinship care was typically based on the distrust of family members.

Social workers conceptualized the removal of a child from a family as, based on the analogy, if there is one bad apple in the family, the full barrel (family) should be discarded (Peters, 2005; Testa, 2013). There are numerous non-kinship placement types, including group homes or institutions, pre-adoptive homes, foster family homes (non-relative), runaway placements, and supervised independent living. Placement is often driven by the need of the child and the possibility of reunification with biological parents or guardians. Studies have indicated a negative relationship between non-kinship placement and delinquency, which is exacerbated by high rates of placement stability (Testa, 2013; Ryan & Testa, 2005).

For the last two decades, there was a significant increase in the number of children entering the foster care system (Green, 2004). According to de Carvalho and Chima (2017), most of the youth placed in foster care are victimized by early childhood experiences filled with chaos, traumatic events, inconsistent caregiving, abuse, and neglect. Subsequently, these children often process the world around them as unpredictable, confusing, and unsafe. Youth in foster care often display many symptoms of trauma because of the abuse and neglect that brought them to the attention of the child welfare agencies (Igelman, Conradi, & Ryan, 2007). Children from a traumatized background often display symptoms that can include emotional, psychological, behavioral, and cognitive problems (McMillen, Zima, Scott, Auslander, Munson, Ollie, & Spitzn-Agel, 2005). Removal from home by itself is a severe disruption to children as they have adjusted to a new home and school environment and make new friends (McMillen et al., 2005; Igelman et al., 2007).

Furthermore, youth who "Age out" of foster care have a higher propensity to engage in deviant and criminal behaviors as opposed to children who grew up with biological parents, which further contributes to costs to the criminal justice system and state-funded indigent programs (Ryan & Testa, 2008b). Most of the youth who are referred to the child welfare system have experienced some form of maltreatment, which has a potential to exacerbate deviant behaviors. During the fiscal year 2015, approximately 4 million children in the United States were referred to Child Protective Services (CPS) for alleged maltreatment. Of this population, 2.2 million were deemed appropriate for out-of-home placement (McMillen et al., 2005). Children who experience maltreatment coupled with out-of-home placement tend to stay longer in the foster care system. Additionally, studies have shown that the prevalence rates of emotional and behavioral problems in children in foster care or out-of-home placements are much higher than those of children who are not in out of home placements. The internalizing problems often include anxiety and depression, and the externalizing problems are usually associated with aggression and behavioral issues (Pecora, 2012; Roberts, Roberts, & Xing, 2007).

2. Literature Review

An extensive review of the relevant literature showed that research studies on foster care began to be published in the late 1980s when formal kinship and non-kinship care arrangements were on the rise. The literature review first explores the major theories used to describe, explain, and make predictions about the outcomes of foster care children under kinship and non-kinship care (Tarren-Sweeney, 2008a). The role of Street-Level Bureaucracy theory and Social Control theory may play in kinship caregiving, and outcomes for children are described. In addition, the value of application of an instinctive theoretical premise in child welfare research, policy, and practice was presented. The literature describes the type of placements (e.g., kinship or non-kinship) by producing a summary definition of the characteristics of children in kinship and non-kinship care and their caregivers (Tarren-Sweeney, 2008b). Third, it critically examines the research studies regarding permanency outcomes as measured using criminal records and academic performance for children in kinship care vs. children placed in non-kinship care. Lastly, it identifies gaps in the literature regarding removal reasons as they relate to positive or negative outcomes of children in foster care. It is noteworthy that youth in foster care are considered a disadvantaged and fragile segment of the population due to traumas they experience in their homes before they enter the foster care system, which is often exacerbated by additional traumas experienced as they are moved around from one home to the next (Bruskas, 2008). Besides, factors such as genetics, prenatal conditions, and neurological development also make foster care youth disadvantaged and fragile population often striving to overcome their own deficits while been trampled by the difficulties of life (Bruskas, 2008; Tarren-Sweeney, 2008a).

Youth in foster care have been found to be at a higher risk for developing emotional and behavioral problems than children who are abused but are not placed in foster care (Lawrence, Carlson, & Egeland, 2006). The overall annual cost of providing foster care for children in the United States exceeds 9 billion dollars a year, a cost shared by both the state and federal agencies. Monetary costs associated with foster care placement consist of welfare subsidy payments, medical expenses, childcare assistance, and monthly payments to foster parents for daily essentials (Tarren-Sweeney, 2008b).

In addition to the significant overhead expense for the government, foster care has an everlasting impact on the overall well-being of children. The intangible costs for youth may consist of emotional, physical, and psychological impairment, coupled with the separation of biological families, and in many cases, surpasses the monetary costs of foster care placement. Placement in foster care affects children's emotional development, which can lead to adverse outcomes on behavior and mental health due to inconsistent nurturing and lack of parental contact (Lawrence et al., 2006; Wu, White, & Coleman, 2015).

2.1. Type of Placements

The main types of placements found in the literature are associated with kinship and non-kinship placements and child-related attributes. The concept of kin caregiver is defined by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) as "The full-time nurturing and protection of children who must be separated from their parents by relatives, step-parents or other adults who have a kinship bond with a child (Wu et al., 2015). This definition is designed to be inclusive and respectful of cultural values and ties of affection. It allows a child to grow to adulthood in a family environment" (CWLA, 1994b, p. 2). The practice of relatives caring for their children is a tradition common in most cultures (Bell & Garner, 1996). The term kinship care was inspired by the work of Ainsworth, and Hansen (2014) as they investigated kinship care networks in African American cultures. The term was subsequently referenced by the Child Welfare League's Commission on Family Foster Care in its efforts to promote the recognition of relatives as valuable resources for children in need of out-of-home care (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009; Wu et al., 2015).

Kinship care includes both formal and informal kinship foster care. Informal care involves private family arrangements without the child being taken into custody of the state. Formal kinship care is care provided for a child who is in the legal custody of the public child welfare Agency (Hegar & Scannapieco, 1999). Child welfare workers often initiate informal arrangements; however, these placements typically are agreed on with the parent and are considered a temporary placement that will prevent the child or children from entering the child welfare system. Informal kinship care providers are eligible to receive Medicaid and public assistance benefits on behalf of their child relative if the child received or was eligible to receive such benefits before the placement (Green, 2004). On the other hand, non-kinship foster care is defined by Jenkins (2002) as a living arrangement for children whom a child protective services worker or a court has decided cannot live safely at home. Consequently, non-kinship foster care involves placement with a licensed non-related foster family while the state maintains custody of the child. According to Green (2004), non-kinship foster care has been the primary choice for out of home placements for removed children, but this practice has changed in the last two decades (Green, 2004; Hegar & Scannapieco, 1999).

The demographic characteristics of kin caregivers include being older, single, having low income, and less educated than non-kinship adoptive parents (Green, 2004). Recent statistics indicate that grandmothers and aunts usually cared for children placed under kinship foster homes. Kin foster mothers have an average age ranging from 50 to 60 years old, with 50% being grandmothers and 30% being aunts, and 30% of them had less than a high school education (Jenkins, 2002). Kin caregivers are more often single than non-kin foster mothers, who are typically married. The National Resource Center on Youth Development, Children's Bureau (2015) rated kin caregivers in poorer health than non-kin foster parents. Such characteristic makes most kin caregivers live on a low-income budget and caring for one or more additional family members may strain the fixed incomes of kin caregivers. Often kin caregivers experience financial challenges before the child's placement and are reluctant to apply for public benefits, which can be stigmatizing (Ehrle & Green, 2002; Jenkins, 2002).

Additionally, a gross disparity exists between the training and financial supports available to non-kin foster parents over kin caregivers (Ehrle & Green, 2002; Scannapieco & Hegar, 2002). The Title IV-E benefits afforded to non-kinship foster parents are not available to kin caregivers for whom foster home licensure is out of reach (Denby, 2010). It is noteworthy, the landmark decision of *Miller v. Youakim* has played a large role in determining equity of Federal foster care payments and services to kin who care for IV-E-eligible children and who may or may not meet the same state licensing standards as non-kin foster parents. Unfortunately, the court was silent on how states should fund non-IV-E-eligible children under kinship care. As a result, many states still deny foster care payments to kinship foster parents who care for children not eligible under title IV-E. Although many court challenges have been raised arguing that such unequal treatment amounts to a constitutional violation of equal protection, payments, and services to children not eligible under title IV-E continue to be denied in many states (Denby, 2010; Wu et al., 2015).

2.2. Utilization of Kinship and Non-Kinship Care

Although there is controversy surrounding the utilization of kinship care, the increasing demand for foster homes has prompted the use of kinship care by welfare workers (Ehrle & Green, 2002).

When kinship care is selected, child welfare workers decide between a formal or informal type of placement. The type of placement chosen is usually associated with the reasons for removal of the child from the parent's home. Child welfare workers often initiate informal kinship care; however, the parent typically gives his/her consent. These placements are usually considered temporary by the family and are preferred by child welfare Agency to keep the child from entering state custody. These placements typically receive minimum interaction with the child welfare worker as compared to formal kinship or traditional foster care placements (Hegar & Scannapieco, 1999).

The child welfare agency does not assume legal custody of or responsibility for the child. If the child was eligible to receive Medicaid and public assistance before placement, kinship care providers continue to receive these benefits. Most states do not keep data regarding informal kinship care because the child is not in the custody of the state (Green, 2004). Because the parents continue to have custody of the child, relatives do not have to be licensed or supervised by the state (Koh, Rolock, Cross, & Eblen-Manning, 2014). Formal kinship care involves the courts maintaining legal custody of the child and the child being placed with an extended family member. Formal kinship care providers receive benefits based on the number of children in their care. The formal kinship care provider often agrees to work with the child welfare agency to ensure care and protection for the child. Training and certification requirements, however, vary by state (Hegar & Scannapieco, 1999; Wu et al., 2015).

2.3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Kinship and Non-Kinship Care

Comparative foster care research often points to the demographic deficits of kinship care (Belanger, 2002). Paradoxically, children who experience kinship placement seem to fare better than children from non-kinship care. Children in kinship foster care tend to thrive better and have fewer emotional problems than those in non-kinship placements (Blakey, 2012). Kin caregivers often provide a more supportive and stable relationship due to the personalized investment the caregiver has in the child, which may compensate for possible early abuse and trauma (Denby, 2010). Children in non-kinship foster care often experience more behavioral problems than those under the care of a kin foster parent (Belanger, 2002). Most of the behavioral problems are associated with aggressive behavior, antisocial behavior, somatic complaints, and attention deficit disorders. Additionally, children in kinship placements show better levels of adaptive functioning and communication skills lending credence to the hypothesis that living with kin prevents the development of additional emotional problems. Additionally, it may help to improve the child's coping skills by offering a loving and supportive environment (Belanger, 2002). Children who live in kinship foster care also have a decreased risk of maltreatment reports while in care as compared to children in non-kinship foster care (Hegar & Rosenthal, 2009). Despite these promising findings, very little is known about the long-term advantages of foster care alumni who spent time in kinship care compared to those who did not have kinship placements (Blakey, 2012; Koh, 2010).

2.4. Placement Stability

Higher levels of placement stability have been linked with less positive mental health outcomes and increased rates of emergency room admissions (Rubin, O'Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007). In this study, placement change rate alone was not found to be a significant factor in adult mental health outcomes. However, both quantitative and qualitative research has shown that placement stability has deleterious effects on a child's mental health (Testa, 2013). When foster children experience a disruption in their placement and have to move to another home, it can be a devastating experience. As detrimental as this process may be to the child's sense of security and belonging, placement disruption is widespread among foster children (Koh et al., 2014; Testa, 2013).

The average foster child experiences several placement disruptions during his/her time in care. Placements influences a number of things for children, including: (1) his/her ability to attach and form healthy relationships; (2) educational achievement; (3) the ability to have continuity of support services such as tutoring, extracurricular, and therapeutic services; and most importantly, and (4) a sense of self-worth (Rubin et al., 2007). The longer the child is in custody, the more disruptions he/she are likely to encounter. Children are most at risk for placement disruptions during the first 100 days after they enter care (James et al., 2007).

Determining what factors can increase placement stability is crucial as it can help child welfare workers to match children with suitable foster families. Additionally, it can help agencies to design foster parent training which helps to enhance skills in managing children's behaviors as well as bolster the emotional capacity of foster parents to deal with children with behavior and psychological problems (Testa, 2013). Placement disruptions are less likely to occur among children placed in kinship foster care and are less likely to experience placement disruption and behavioral problems than those placed in non-kinship homes (Koh et al., 2014).

Whether this is due to kinship homes being a more stable and appropriate home environment to raise foster children or whether it is due to child welfare agencies being less involved is mostly inconclusive (James et al., 2007; Testa, 2013).

Nevertheless, what is well established in the literature is the shorter the amount of time a child stays in a kinship placement, the less likely they are to experience disruption and more likely they are to do well academically (James, 2004). Additionally, the level of commitment and motivation of a foster parent that is a blood relative often translates to placement stability and a driving force toward thriving behaviors including academic attainment. Typically, kinship foster homes are more stable than non-kinship placements (James et al., 2007). Moreover, a research study conducted by Testa (2013) supported the idea of placement stability for kinship placements. The author used secondary data to analyze the length of stay for children placed in kinship care versus those placed in non-kinship care. The analyses found that kin placements were more stable with a 40% disruption rate, whereas non-related foster placements had a 70% disruption rate. Disruption is often caused by home placement changes. Removal from home is a severe disruption to children, who must adjust to a new family, change schools, and make new friends (Testa (2013). Such a lack of instability creates an overall sense of insecurity or lack of control, leading foster children to believe themselves unwanted when they must wait for adoption or changes in placement.

2.5. Placement Stability and Delinquent Behavior

Delinquency is perhaps one of the most disconcerting behaviors that foster care children exhibit (Ryan & Testa, 2005). It is paramount to identify and to address the causes of deviant behaviors because juvenile delinquency is a financial burden to society. Studies have shown that delinquent behavior at a young age increases a child's risk for future criminal behavior (Patchin, 2006). Dropouts Earn Less and Contribute Fewer Tax Dollars to the Economy - The lifetime income differences between high school graduates and dropouts are estimated to be \$260,000 and the difference in lifetime income tax payments is \$60,000 (Evans, 2014). The combined lifetime earning losses of one group of 18-year-olds who never completed high school (about 600,000 students) is \$156 billion or 1.3% of Gross Domestic Product (Evans, 2014; Patchin, 2006).

Dropouts Drive up Criminal Justice Costs- About 41% of inmates in state and federal prisons have less than high school education. Schooling significantly reduces criminal activity a self-reported crime, arrests, and incarceration. Increasing the high school completion rate for men ages 20 to 60 by one percent would save the U.S. as much as \$1.4 billion per year in criminal justice costs (Evans, 2014). The various circumstances correlated to delinquency among foster children can have lifelong consequences that transcend financial cost (Patchin, 2006). It is estimated that 12 million students dropped out of high school from 2007 to 2017, which will cost the nation \$3 trillion (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). If the dropout rate were to be reduced by merely 1%, \$1.4 billion a year would be saved (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Bruce, & Fox, 2013; McNichol & Lav, 2009).

It is a well-established empirical finding that placement stability is a predictor of delinquent behavior, which becomes self-perpetuating as problem behavior leads to placement stability (James, 2004; McNichol & Lav, 2009). For example, study results of Leathers (2006) indicated that, after six placement changes, over 60% of any subsequent changes were due to delinquent behavior or some other kind of problem behavior. Furthermore, the studies of Balfanz et al. (2013) suggested that the initial level of delinquent behaviors is the main predicting factors of placement stability over a 12-month period. The victimization of neglect and abuse as a child is detrimental to the building blocks of character development, but problems will undoubtedly compound when the child is removed from the abusive family and placed in multiple foster homes. Consequently, early adverse environments combined with numerous placements exponentially increase the youth's risk of delinquency. Nevertheless, as placement stability is a common occurrence for many children in foster care, and it can have detrimental effects on children's outcomes (Evans, 2014; Jonson-Reid, 2002; McNichol & Lav, 2009).

By examining placement types and delinquent records of a sample of foster care children, the current study proposes to add to the scant literature regarding the correlation between placement stability and delinquency. The author hypothesizes that removal reasons were associated with delinquency (Leathers, 2006). Besides, the author explores what type of placements and child attributes are associated with placement stability and delinquency. The impact of child abuse on the delinquent behavior of foster children has been studied extensively. Nevertheless, fewer studies have investigated the effects child abuse on emotional and behavioral problems in youth who were maltreated and were subsequently placed in foster care. Taussig's (2002) investigated engagement in risk behaviors in abused youth who were placed in foster care and the results indicate that physical abuse was a significant predictor of delinquent behaviors. Tarren-Sweeney (2008b) also found that children who were victimized by physical and emotional abuse were twice as likely to fall in the clinical range of the CBCL Total Problems composite on the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL).

The CBCL is a validated scale administered to caregivers to assess problem behaviors and fillings in youth and adolescents (Tarren-Sweeney, 2008a). A gap in the literature still exists regarding the relationship of child abuse, placement stability and delinquent behavior among youth placed in kinship v. non-kinship foster care (Leathers, 2006; Tarren-Sweeney, 2008a).

2.6. Placement Stability and Academic Attainment

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2015) between the years 2005 and 2014, the number of foster care students has grown to two million children worldwide, and within the United States over 500,000 children are identified within the foster care system. Recent research study results on foster care students' academic achievement support the notion that foster care students have poor educational outcomes and face unique academic and transition challenges (Del Quest, 2012; Evans, 2014). For most foster care students, successful academic outcomes are not a norm as 75% of foster care children perform below grade level with 50% of foster care students retained at least once during their academic career (Salazar, 2013; Watson & Kabler, 2012). In comparison to non-foster care peers, foster care students have the lowest graduation rate. Also, foster care students have the lowest educational attainment and a high drop-out rate in the public-school system (Watson & Kabler, 2012; Evans, 2014).

The relevant literature shows that youth in foster care are vulnerable to academic failure, as the rate of children in foster care compared to the general population of high school dropout rates are to double (Salazar, 2013). The national high school dropout rates for youth in foster care range from 34% to 64%. Previous research noted lower grade point averages and standardized tests scores among youth in foster care (Del Quest, 2012). Moreover, Emerson and Lovitt (2013) indicated mathematics and reading scores are significantly lower for youth in foster care compared to their peers. Numerous research studies have documented the underlying factors contributing to the academic failure among foster children, including the transition of caseworkers, Placement stability, lack of collaboration among social services, inadequate coordination of services and lacking the necessary life skills and training (Watson & Kabler, 2012). Surprisingly, foster care students have been an unidentified at-risk population for centuries with little focus on this population and the causes of their limited academic attainment (Morton, 2015). According to the literature, foster care students should be identified as an at-risk population similar to students with special needs, English language learners, and low-income students. However, the foster care population remains as an unidentified at-risk group (Melkmen, Refaeli, & Benbenishty, 2016; Emerson & Lovitt (2013).

Consequently, limited data are available to provide information regarding specific programs and services that can assist in enhancing successful outcomes within the educational system (Weinberg, 2014). As a result, foster care students continue to be overlooked, and the educational needs of the foster care population continue to be abandoned with these students not able to attain a high school diploma (Evans, 2014). For the foster care population to increase levels of academic attainment, it may require many types of support services mainly within the educational system (Morton, 2016). Unfortunately, school district leaders and educators lack empirical information on factors responsible for the academic attainment of foster care children. The literature points to placement stability as one of the main factors responsible for academic challenges and school dropout. Once removed from their homes, the foster care student is then expected to navigate life in a new home and school successfully (Weinberg, 2014). Throughout the childhood of a foster care student, structure and consistency are not usually a reality, resulting in numerous challenges. Furthermore, foster care caseworkers have identified the issue of placement stability as the primary factor affecting the foster care students' entire life (Koh, 2014). The issue of numerous placement changes is a constant concern for child welfare system caseworkers, as an increase in placement changes significantly affects the foster care student's success. Pecora (2012) addressed the educational outcomes of students within the foster care system and the problem that placement can play on these outcomes. Despite numerous studies, placement stability has not been consistently shown to be the main cause for successful outcomes. The question as to how placement stability affects the foster care students' academic attainment is still inconclusive (Koh, 2014; Pecora, 2012).

The key to understanding the impact foster care has on academic achievement requires a better understanding of types of placements (e.g., kin or non-kinship placement) and attributes of students entering the foster care system (Evan, 2014). According to Evan (2014), foster care students tend to have more issues with language and learning. In contrast, the issue of placement stability within the foster care system and the impact on the education of the foster care student have been noted to be directly correlated (Koh, 2014). Placement is a key factor that may affect academic attainment, but it is not the only factor to a successful educational outcome. Thus, the present study will explore how placement stability influences academic outcomes for children in kinship care and non-kinship care. Study results will inform the development of programs to assist foster care students in increasing their academic attainment, retention, and graduation.

Additionally, findings from the study will add to the limited, but growing body of knowledge on impediments to the academic attainment of foster care students. The research results will also inform individuals and groups of how to better assist foster care programs and services within their communities (Morton, 2016; Weinberg, 2014).

2.7. Removal Reasons, Delinquency and School Dropout

According to Evans (2014), the numerous removal reasons correlated to delinquency and school dropout have costly, lifelong consequences. For example, impoverishment is a family struggle that affects one in every six children, and it is associated with delinquency (Patchin, 2006). Poverty has numerous detrimental effects (e.g., poor health, high risk of criminality) that can be lifelong. Parental drug abuse is another common removal reasons many foster children have experienced. Parental drug abuse can take money away from the family that is necessary for survival. Parental drug abuse can cause psychological problems resulting in neglectful or abusive behavior. Family isolation, broken families, and old neighborhood are other reasons associated with removal of children from their homes and are also correlated to delinquency and school dropout (Morton, 2016; Patchin, 2006).

Foster's youth commonly come from a home life where there are many problems correlated with delinquency and school dropout, which only increases their likelihood of becoming delinquent and dropout themselves (Patchin, 2006). Since many of the correlates of delinquency are also associated with maltreatment, many foster children exhibit anti-social or delinquent behavior (Patchin, 2006). For example, parents who abuse drugs are more likely to neglect or abuse their children (Weinberg, 2014). Similarly, impoverished children are more likely to be neglected or abused. Problematic parenting (e.g., inconsistent punishment, overly harsh punishment) can be neglectful or abusive. The situations listed above are typical for many foster children. Thus, the present study will explore how removal reason relates to the delinquent behavior of children in foster care while controlling for the type of placement (Koh, 2014; Morton, 2016).

Any of the correlates of maltreatment and delinquency discussed above can prevent children from forming stable, loving bonds with their family or any other foster family exacerbated by the fact that they are frequently being moved from one home to the next on a regular basis. The inability to bond can stay with children throughout their lives and cause lifelong problems (Morton, 2016). Not only do the correlates mentioned above inhibit social bonding but they can encourage the learning of delinquent and criminal behavior. Before entering the child welfare system, foster care children are often living in situations that are, unfortunately, prime environments for learning anti-social behaviors (Morton, 2016; Pecora, 2012).

3.0. Analysis and Results

This chapter will report the findings and a general description of the total sample characteristics including Placement Type, Age, gender, ethnicity, Removal Reasons, length of stay in FC, academic level, and delinquency status. Characteristics of kin caregivers by ethnicity and marital status are also reported.

3.1. Descriptive Data: Child Characteristics

Secondary data from the years 2014 were analyzed with a total sample of 402 children between the ages of fourteen and seventeen years in Texas. Most children in the study 78.2% (n = 314) were in a Kinship Placement and 21.9% (n = 88) were in a non-Kinship Placement. See Table 1.1

Table 1.1

Type of Placement

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Non-Kinship Placement	88	21.9	21.9	21.9
	Kinship Placement	314	78.1	78.1	100.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.2 reports the age of the children in the study at the first day of the fiscal year (Oct 1) period of placement, which was coded by year from 13 years of age to 20- years- old. Most of the children (n= 143, 35.6%) were 16 years of age followed by 15 years of age (n= 118, 29.4%). The other most populated ages were the 14 years old (n= 66, 16.4%) and the 17-years-old (n= 56, 13.9%).

Table 1.2*Age on the first day of the fiscal year (Oct 1)*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	13	8	2.0	2.0	2.0
	14	66	16.4	16.4	18.4
	15	118	29.4	29.4	47.8
	16	143	35.6	35.6	83.3
	17	56	13.9	13.9	97.3
	18	7	1.7	1.7	99.0
	19	3	.7	.7	99.8
	20	1	.2	.2	100.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.3 reports the sex of the children in the study. Forty-five percent (n = 181) were females, and 55% (n = 221) were males.

Table 1.3*Sex of Child*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	221	55.0	55.0	55.0
	Female	181	45.0	45.0	100.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Regarding Race/Ethnicity of the children in the study, the majority (n = 153, 31.1 %) were Hispanic, followed by almost one third (n = 117, 29.1%) Anglo, and a quarter (n = 103, 25.6%) African American. Comparatively, 50% of the Texas child population is Hispanic, 32% of children in Texas are Anglo, and approximately 11% are African American (DFPS, 2016). African American children are disproportionately represented. Other ethnicities accounted for 7.2% (n = 29) of the sample. Table 4 reports the Race/Ethnicity of the children in the study.

Table 1.4*Race/Ethnicity of Child*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Non-Hispanic (NH), White	117	29.1	29.1	29.1
	NH, Black	103	25.6	25.6	54.7
	NH, More than One Race/Ethnicity	29	7.2	7.2	61.9
	Hispanic (Any Race/Ethnicity)	153	38.1	38.1	100.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Among the sample of children in this study who were removed from their home, over one quarter 27.6% (n = 111) were removed due to parent drug abuse, followed by 26.4% (n = 106) due to parent alcohol abuse, 21.4% (n = 86) were removed because child alcohol abuse and 16.2% (n = 65) were removed due to child drug abuse.

Table 1.5*Removal Reasons*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neglect	16	4.0	4.0	4.0
	Alcohol Abuse Parent	106	26.4	26.4	30.3
	Drug Abuse Parent	111	27.6	27.6	58.0
	Alcohol Abuse Child	86	21.4	21.4	79.4
	Drug Abuse Child	65	16.2	16.2	95.5
	Child Disability	8	2.0	2.0	97.5
	Child Behavior Problem	8	2.0	2.0	99.5
	Parent Death	1	.2	.2	99.8
	Parent Incarceration	1	.2	.2	100.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	

The number of placement settings the children in the study experienced during current removal episode was also examined. This number gives an account of the number of placements the state arranged, places the child has lived, including the current setting, during the current removal episode. The majority (n= 290, 72.2 %) had experienced six or fewer placements. The mean was 5.8 (SD = 4.568; Table 1.7). The analysis also revealed that the majority of placements utilized by the agencies were either kinship (n= 55, 13.7%) or traditional nonrelative (n= 314, 78%) foster family placement settings. Pre-adoptive placement (n= 33, 8.2%) included other settings such as trial home, group home, and institutional care.

Table 1.6*Current Placement Setting*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Pre-adoptive home	33	8.2	8.2	8.2
	Foster home, relative	55	13.7	13.7	21.9
	Foster home, non-relative	314	78.1	78.1	100.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	

Ethnicity was reported for 314 kin caregivers. Of this group, most were Black/African American (n = 4218, 38%). Thirty-one percent were African American (n = 253, 62.9%). Another 28% were Hispanic (n = 3163). Table 7 shows kin caregiver ethnicity organized by the relationship with the child.

Table 1.7*Kin Caregiver Ethnicity by Relationship to Child*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Indian/AK Native	7	1.7	1.7	1.7
	Asian	90	22.4	22.4	24.1
	Black/Af Amer	245	60.9	60.9	85.1
	Hawaii/Pacif Island	3	.7	.7	85.8
	White	39	9.7	9.7	95.5
	Hispanic Origin	18	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	

The majority of children in the study had an educational level of 9th grade ((n = 149, 37.1%) followed by 10th graders (n= 83, 20.6%) and 8th grade was 16.4% (n= 66). Table 8 displays the educational level of foster children in the study.

Table 1.8*Educational Level*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 6th grade	20	5.0	5.0	5.0
	6th grade	4	1.0	1.0	6.0
	7th grade	23	5.7	5.7	11.7
	8th grade	66	16.4	16.4	28.1
	9th grade	149	37.1	37.1	65.2
	10th grade	83	20.6	20.6	85.8
	11th grade	32	8.0	8.0	93.8
	12th grade	7	1.7	1.7	95.5
	Blank	18	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	

It is noteworthy, the vast majority of children (n = 371, 92.3%) were not Adjudicated Delinquent, however, 7.7% (n = 31) of the adolescents in the study were Adjudicated Delinquent.

Table 1.9*Adjudicated Delinquent*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	371	92.3	92.3	92.3
	Yes	31	7.7	7.7	100.0
	Total	402	100.0	100.0	

4.0. Conclusion

Children in kinship care placements had lower rates of placement disruption than children in non-Kinship care. The majority of children in kinship care experienced longer length of while in care as compared to children in non-Kinship. This stability is a positive for kinship care placements and is consistent with the findings of Koh (2010), which indicated that once children are placed in kinship care settings, they are more likely to remain in these settings. Factors influencing this study's findings could be related to family dynamics, payment issues, or attributes of the child. Families' emotional ties and philosophical beliefs might encourage extended family members to provide on-going support to parents. The child could be allowed to return home with extended family providing in-kind support as needed. Another factor might be payment differentials in Texas for Kinship and Non-Kinship care placements. As stated previously, kinship caregivers do not receive subsidies for care unless they meet licensure criteria for licensed foster care placements.

Finally, although the question was not proposed in this research, the findings implied that children who suffer from more severe behavioral problems could have a higher rate of placement with non-Kinship than Kinship care. Children, who are more difficult to manage due to excessive behavior problems, might not be tolerated by family members. Additionally, family members might not have received the necessary training to equip them to handle such situations. Future research might address such issues. Child welfare professionals often want to know what types of placements and services to focus on to improve positive outcomes for foster children. Child welfare reform has focused on encouraging placement with a child's kin over non-related foster care providers for several reasons. The first is that the belief that kin may be able to help the child to maintain a sense of connection to their family of origin and may be more likely to be invested in the individual child's future because they are family. The second is the shortage of non-related foster care providers and the difficulty in recruiting providers, in part due to increasing pressure for providers to adopt the children in their care. Recruiting family for a specific child is often easier and requires child welfare to provide less training and resources.

The third reason is purely financial. Kinship care, whether formal or informal, when provided by state child welfare agencies, is much less expensive than formal non-related foster care. Assessing whether kinship care is linked with more positive outcomes is crucial in supporting or challenging the assertion that, when possible, kinship placements should be considered over non-Kinship placements. Statistical results further revealed an overall partial statistically significant relationship between demographic variables of Age, Race/Ethnicity, and Sex of the child related to Placement Stability across the two groups of kinship and non-kinship care. These findings indicated that we should partially reject the null hypothesis cautiously, specifically regarding the relationship between Age, Race/Ethnicity, and Sex and Placement Type. Nevertheless, there were some other interesting findings between the variables. Examination of the relationship between race, placement type, and placement outcome revealed that African American children were more likely to remain in care longer than other races. These findings are consistent with those of Blakey (2012), whose study revealed that Hispanic children in kinship care does not remain in care longer than African American or Caucasian children. The continued sense of responsibility within the Hispanic culture and the emphasis on family connectedness could contribute to the understanding of these findings.

Regarding sex of the child and its association with Placement Stability, findings revealed a statistical significance between male and Placement Stability. Kinship care was more likely to be utilized for males than non-Kinship care. Analysis revealed there is a statistically significant association between sex and Placement Stability. Males ($n = 167$, 79.9%) and females ($n = 137$, 80.6%) in kinship care had higher rate of Placement Stability. In this study, being male was not significantly related to Placement Type, which was similar for the female gender (Goodkind, Shook, Kim, Pohlig, & Herring, 2013), but differs from findings of other studies where being male is associated with externalizing problems and lower levels of placement stability (Roberts et al., 2007). More specifically, McMillen et al. (2005), in a study of the prevalence of emotional and behavioral problems of adolescents in out-of-home placement, found that males and females did not differ in the frequency in placement stability.

Results revealed that Removal reasons had a moderate impact on Academic Attainment across Kin /Non-kin foster care adolescents. The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS) utilize several categories to classify reasons for a child's entrance into foster care. Descriptive statistics showed that the main reasons for children to be removed from their homes was due to parent drug abuse 27.6% (n = 111), followed by 26.4% (n = 106) due to parent alcohol abuse, 21.4% (n = 86) and 16.2% (n = 65) were removed due to child alcohol abuse. Tarren-Sweeney (2008b), in the study of various predictors of academic attainment of youth in care, notes the surprising finding that maternal support was found to be the primary factor associated with higher levels of academic attainment as measured by the Total Academic Success composite in the sample of foster care youth. In addition, in the broader literature, parental inability to cope, in particular, maternal difficulty has been shown to affect children's emotional development and their capacity to focus and learn in studies of the normative population (Evans, 2014; Morton, 2015).

5.0. Recommendations

Future research efforts associated with the main factors responsible for the educational achievement of adjudicated youth may wish to consider these recommendations. Although the significant relationships found in this study were weak to moderate, other measures of achievement and psycho-social factors could be explored in future research projects. Since several predictors made a statistically significant contribution to some of the models in the present study when examining Adjudicated Delinquent, future research needs to investigate what factors may be influencing such gains. Are these gains attributable to the program philosophy, the educational environment, the structure of the educational curriculum, or the type of participant population? With respect to design, other researchers may want to consider using a validated instrument to collect data from similar foster care population.

Additionally, the studies that were reviewed used quantitative methodologies. A research study using a qualitative method could potentially add a new dimension of understanding the quantitative information that has been reported. Considering the implications for the lives of these youth, the scarcity of funding and the political agenda, research that helps to address these difficult issues are critical. Flexible funding policies can enable child welfare workers to provide services and resources such as tutoring, extra-curricular activities, and the purchasing of educational materials, among others. The funding of scholarships to colleges, universities, and vocational training can help youth in foster care become self-sufficient once youth exit the system.

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