

Placement matters: Reviewing the predictors and outcomes related to placements within the foster care system

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Introduction

The traumas that precede foster care placement are well established, but the intra-system effects are less well known. Nearly 6% of all children are ever placed in foster care, but these numbers are much high for underrepresented minorities¹. Particularly, notable are how some children frequently transition between settings and the factors that may differentiate these children from those with fewer moves.

Foster children average 7 transitions and nearly 5 unique caregivers throughout their experience^{2,3}. While kinship care and reunification is increasingly emphasized, 30% of birth family reunifications are unsuccessful⁴. One third never achieve long term placement stability⁵. Psychiatric and behavioral issues of foster children are largely attributed to maladaptive attachments^{6,7}. More understanding of how these transitions impact youth within the group of children ever in foster care may guide systemic improvements to ameliorate the morbidity they experience.



Predictors

- Member of a minority group^{4,8}
- Disability or health problem⁸
- History of sexual abuse⁸
- Maternal Substance Abuse⁸
- Mental health diagnosis^{9,10}
- Parent, particularly birth mother, incarceration^{11,12}

Outcomes

- Behavioral problems^{3,13}
- Absenteeism from school¹⁴
- Lower odds of receiving a diploma or GED²
- Obesity Risk¹⁵
- Less than “excellent” physical health^{13,16}
- Smaller social networks⁷
- Homelessness in adulthood^{17,18}

Systems Level Opportunities to Improve

- More support for the family, particularly for those in kinship care¹⁹
- More support during the first year of life, since this is when most enter foster care¹
- Keeping siblings together, and keeping kids with family members^{20,21}
- Better tracking and research of placement transitions and outcomes for foster care alumni
- More Foster Care Clinics – Rees Jones Center for Foster Care Excellence²²; Comprehensive Evaluations for Cincinnati’s Kids Center²³, Harborview²⁴; Blank Children’s STAR Center²⁵

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