

Foster Care Placement and the Impact of Placement Instability

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Abstract

Higher levels of placement stability have been linked with less positive mental health outcomes and increased rates of emergency room admissions. Placement stability is defined as a disruption or transition within the child welfare system and the number of placements the child experience within a specified time interval. The issue of placement stability is significant due to previous attempts to conceptualize emotional and behavioral problems among foster care children from one theoretical perspective rather than many factors. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of placement instability on children's outcomes as the research study literature shows that less placement stability has deleterious effects on children's ability to cope, overcome challenges, excel academically, and thrive. When foster children experience a disruption in their placement and must 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 a widespread phenomenon among foster children.

Keywords: Placement stability, academic attainment, delinquency and research

1.0. Introduction

The average foster child experiences several placement disruptions during his/her time in care. Foster care placements influence children's abilities in many areas, 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 service; and (4) a sense of self-worth (Rubin, O'Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007). The longer the child is in custody, the more disruptions he/she is likely to encounter. Children are most at risk for placement disruptions during the first 100 days after they enter care (James, Landsverk, & Slymen, 2004).

Determining what factors can increase placement stability is crucial as it can help child welfare workers 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 behavioral and psychological problems. Placement disruptions are less likely to occur among children placed in kinship foster care.

They are also less likely to experience placement disruption and behavioral problems than those placed in non-kinship homes (Testa, 2013; Young, Bowley, Bilanin, & Ho, 2015). 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.

Nevertheless, what is well established in the literature is the shorter 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 (Chamberlain, Price, Reid, Landsverk, Fisher, & Stoolmiller, 2006; Wu, White, & Coleman, 2015).

Changes in home placement often disrupt children's lifespan development with severe impacts in interrelated contexts including school climate, friendships, neighborhoods and cultures (Boyd & Bee, 2009). Children who are removed from their homes endure severe separation anxiety as they must adjust to a new living arrangement, change schools, and make new friends, which can profoundly impact their trajectory in life (Melkman, Refaeli, & Benbenishty, 2016). Such a lack of instability creates an overall sense of insecurity or lack of control, leading foster children to believe that they are unwanted when waiting for adoption or changes in placement occurs.

2.0. Literature Review

An extensive review of the relevant literature showed numerous studies exploring the impact of placement instability and how the type of placement affects outcome measures of foster children such as their academic status and their likelihood of becoming adjudicated delinquent (Koh, 2010; Ryan & Testa, 2005). Many studies, however, have focused placement stability and educational on behavioral challenges of children placed in foster homes (Fairneau, 2016). Moreover, there are varying results regarding determining which type of placement is more beneficial for foster children (Koh, 2010; Ryan & Testa, 2005; Zetlin, MacLeod, & Kimm, 2012). There is also a limited amount of literature addressing a decrease in legal permanency among kinship foster care placement as opposed to non-kinship foster care placement.

Additionally, the literature did not include a comparative discussion regarding adverse outcomes associated with the type of placements when youth exit the foster care system (Agnew, 2001; Fairneau, 2016; Koh, 2010). This study seeks to determine how the type of placement, placement stability, and educational attainment relate to juvenile delinquency.

Furthermore, there is limited research comparing the prevalence of emotional and behavioral problems of youth in kinship and non-kinship care. Most studies conducted relied primarily on caregiver reports of emotional and behavioral issues (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). Results from these studies indicated that youth in kinship care experience fewer emotional and behavioral problems than youth in non-kinship care. However, when researchers use teacher report and youth self-report, the results do not indicate that youth in kinship care experience fewer emotional and behavioral problems than youth in non-kinship care (McMillen, Zima, Scott, Auslander, Munson, & Ollie, 2005; Shore, Sim, Prohn, & Keller, 2002). Thus, the correlation between the type of placements and the emotional or behavioral outcome is still inconclusive.

3.1. Age, Race/Ethnicity, and Gender of Foster Care Children

Foster Care Statistics (2015) reports the median age of children entering the foster care system is 7.8 years- of-age. Of those children, there were approximately 44% White youth in foster care, followed by 23% African American and 21% Hispanic. Males were the majority with an estimated 52%, compared to females at 48%. The current literature shows a noted racial disparities within the child welfare system (Hill, 2004; Zinn, 2012) and trends of disparity in educational attainment and involvement of foster care youth in the juvenile justice system (Hook & Courtney, 2010; McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, & Piliavin, 2008). Several studies have found that race was a significant predictor of foster care youth involvement in the juvenile justice system (Bogie, Johnson, Ereth, & Scharenbroch, 2011; Huang, Ryan, Sappleton, & Chiu, 2015; Goodkind, Shook, Kim, Pohlig, & Herring, 2013; Ryan, Hernandez, & Herz, 2007).

It is noteworthy that foster care African American youth, were overrepresented among adjudicated delinquent population (Goodkind, Shook, Kim, Pohlig, & Herring, 2013).

From their sample the researchers found that African American youth were more than twice as likely as White youth to have juvenile justice involvement (Goodkind et al., 2013). In another study, Huang et al. (2012) found that 92% of the youth involved in the juvenile justice system entered the foster care system before their contact with the juvenile justice system. The youth involved in both systems, foster care and juvenile justice, which comprised their sample consisted primarily of 55% African American dually involved youth, 33% Hispanic, 11% White, and 2% Asian or Pacific Islander. To further support these findings, Bogie et al. (2011) found that although Hispanic/Latino youth made up that majority 60% of youth who were involved in both systems, approximately 20% of African American children and only 13% of White children were involved with the child welfare system and also committed delinquent acts. Furthermore, Bogie et al. (2011) found that the majority of the majority of the foster care youth with involvement in the juvenile justice system were males, age 14-18 years old with prolonged length of stay in foster care.

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2012a), length of stay in foster care to be a factor that increased African American children's disproportionality in the child welfare system. Likewise, Koh, Rolock, Cross, and Eblen-Manning (2014), found that placement in out-of-home care attributes to disproportionality and disparities for a large proportion of African American children and has major impact on a child's length of time in care, quality of their foster care experience, and the likelihood and manner of exit from the child welfare system. Since African American youth have longer length of stay in foster care it is plausible that they are the ones with higher rate of involvement in the juvenile justice system.

The research study of Bowman, Hofer, O'Burke, and Read (2009) concluded that due to the attempts of cultural competency by child welfare agencies, African American children may face delays of being placed in adoptive homes until a family is found that matches that child; this can impact their length of stay in the foster care system. Additionally, Courtney, Okpych, Mikell, Stevenson, Park, Harty, Kindle (2016) noted that the practice of matching same race adoption and foster homes has been historically identified as a driver of disproportionality for African American children.

3.2. Gaps in the Current Research Study Literature

The review of the current literature points to a lacuna in empirical studies in the area of removal reason as they relate to positive or negative outcomes of children in kinship v. non-kinship placements. Studies found in the current literature tend to have non-probability samples and lack comparison groups. Studies that have used comparison groups are not generalizable due to the variations in the definition of kinship v. non-kinship care and the benefits associated with such placements. As such, a robust body of knowledge regarding the relationship between types of placements (kinship and non-kinship care) and permanency stability for children involved in the child welfare system has yet to emerge. Though several large-scale studies have been conducted recently (Koh, 2010; Koh & Testa, 2008; Testa, 2013; Winokur, 2008), the research literature has not kept pace with the boom of kinship care in the child welfare system since the 1990s. The research studies reviewed here suggest that types of placements are not a barrier to permanency stability, but findings are still inconclusive (Blakey, 2012; Winokur, 2008).

Furthermore, samples for the studies found in the relevant research literature were limited to a small cluster of five to seven states. Although the samples were adequately large, inferences cannot be made to children in kinship care and foster care in other states due to differences in regional definitions. Koh (2010) made efforts to manage problems with external validity by widening the sample to five states, but the pool is still shallow overall. Kinship programs may vary widely between child welfare agencies (Blakey, 2012) and differences in characteristics of children and caregivers may exist across locations as well.

Another gap revealed in the literature is the fact that foster care research lacks comprehensive comparisons between kin and non-kin caregivers. Kin caregivers differ from non-kin foster parents in significant ways. Nevertheless, there is a consensus in the research literature that children in the child welfare system who are placed with kin remain in the system longer than children in non-kin placements. Children in kinship care placements are also less likely to achieve permanency and stability. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge while aiming to narrow the research gap regarding outcome comparisons between kin and non-kin caregivers. Findings of this research study can be utilized to inform child welfare policy and program development to meet the unmet needs of placement stability and improve favorable outcome rates for children in foster care.

4.0. Impact of Placement Stability

Once removed from their homes, foster care students are often expected to maneuver through a new environment seamlessly. Though there is a lack of structure and consistency, this new transition is not always smooth, and these children often face numerous challenges. Furthermore, foster care caseworkers are aware of issues regarding placement stability affecting the entire life of foster care students (Koh, 2010; Pecora, 2012). Numerous placement changes are a constant concern, as caseworkers are keenly aware that placement disruptions impact the foster care student's success. Pecora (2012) examined the academic outcomes of children placed in the foster care system and the dilemmas that occur during an interruption in placement. Studies on placement stability have not consistently found to be the leading cause for successful outcomes. The questions as to how placement stability affects the foster care students' academic attainments are still inconclusive.

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, 2010; Pecora, 2012). The issue of numerous placement changes is a constant concern for caseworkers, as an increase in placement changes significantly impacts the foster care students' 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 consistently shown to be the leading cause for successful outcomes. The question as to how placement stability effects the foster care students' academic attainment is still inconclusive.

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 issues 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 critical factor that may impact academic attainment, but it is not the only factor to a successful educational outcome.

The understanding of the types of placement (i.e., kin or non-kinship placement) is vital in understanding how the foster care system impacts academic achievement, and attributes of foster care children (Evan, 2014). According to Evan (2014), foster care students face challenges in learning, particularly language. In contrast, the problems of placement stability and the impact on the academic attainment of the foster care student have been directly associated (Koh, 2014). Placement is a critical factor that may impact academic attainment, but it is not the only factor in a successful educational outcome. Thus, the present study examined how placement stability influenced academic outcomes for children in kinship care and non-kinship care.

4.1. Placement stability and delinquent behavior.

Delinquency is perhaps one of the most disconcerting behaviors that foster care children exhibit (e.g., Jonson-Reid, 2002; Koh, 2008; Ryan & Testa, 2005; Satz & Askeland, 2006). It is paramount to identify and address the causes of deviant behaviors as 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). 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, costing the nation US \$3 trillion (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). If the dropout rate were to be reduced by merely 1%, US\$1.4 billion a year would be saved (Balfanz, Bridgeland, & Fox, 2013; McNichol & Lav, 2009).

It is noteworthy that placement stability is a predictor of delinquent behavior, which becomes self-perpetuating as problem behavior that leads to placement stability (Collins, Paris, & Ward, 2008; James, 2008). For example, the study 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 problematic behavior. Furthermore, several studies (Chamberlain, Price, Reid, Landsverk, Fisher, & Stoolmiller, 2006), suggested that the initial level of delinquent behavior is the main predicting factor of placement stability over 12 months.

The impact of child abuse on the delinquent behavior of foster children has been studied extensively. Nevertheless, fewer studies have investigated the effects on the emotional abuse have on the psychological and emotional state of children who were maltreated and were subsequently placed in foster care.

Champagne (2014) examined engagement in risky behaviors of abused youth placed in foster care. The results indicate that physical abuse was a significant predictor of delinquent acts. Taussig (2002) also found that children who were victimized by physical and emotional abuse were twice as likely to fall in the clinical range of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). The CBCL is a validated scale administered to caregivers to assess the problem behaviors of youth and adolescents (Leathers, 2006). The current literature still shows a gap regarding the relationship between child abuse, placement stability, and delinquent behavior among youth placed in kinship v. non-kinship foster care (NDACAN, 2015).

4.2. Placement stability and academic attainment.

Researchers found that foster care students exhibit adverse educational outcomes, which cause them to have transition and academic challenges (Evans, 2014; Watson & Kabler, 2012). Foster care children academic performance rate is 75% below grade level. Foster care students average approximately 50% retention rate during their primary and secondary academic years, in comparison to non-foster care peers (Berger, Cancian, Han, Noyes, & Rios-Salas, 2015; Salazar, 2013; Watson & Kabler, 2012). High school drop-out rates are staggering among foster care students, additionally; these students have the lowest educational attainment.

The relevant literature shows that youth in foster care are vulnerable to academic failure compared to the general population of high school dropouts (Berger et al., 2015). The national high school drop-out rates for youth in foster care range from 34% to 64% (Salazar, Haggerty & Roe, 2016). Previous research noted lower grade point average and standardized test scores among youth in foster care. Emerson and Lovitt (2013) indicated that 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 lack of necessary life skills and training (Morris, 2007).

Foster care students are not classified as an at-risk population (the inability to transition into adulthood successfully), particularly when it comes to their lower academic attainment (Morton, 2015; Zetlin, 2012). Several research studies (Gustavson & MacEachron, 2012; Noonan, Corman, & Reichman, 2011) suggest that foster care students should be identified as at-risk similar to those students with special needs or students in a lower social economic status. Data is limited in regard to providing information about special services and programs which may enhance the educational system to obtain successful outcomes Pecora, 2012).

As a result, foster care students continue to be overlooked, causing the educational needs of the foster care population to go unaddressed (Evans, 2014; Zetlin, 2012). For the foster care population to have an increase in the levels of academic attainment requires many support services (e.g., tutoring-based programs and online classes) (Gustavson & MacEachron, 2012; Morton, 2015; Noonan et al., 2011). School district leaders and educators lack practical information on the factors responsible for the academic attainment, which would inform the development of programs designed to increase their grade point average.

The existing body of research (Evans, 2014; Gustavson & MacEachron, 2012; Morton, 2015; Zetlin, 2012) points to a lack of placement stability as one of the main factors responsible for academic challenges and school dropouts. Furthermore, Zinn (2012) determined that home placement history linked to the type of placement was one of two primary indicators of caregiver competence, which relates to placement instability. The length of time in the same placement has a significant impact on academic attainment (Testa & Poetner, 2003). Higher levels of placement stability are associated with higher levels of educational attainment. Consistent school experience is paramount to ensuring academic success for foster care students. It is challenging to be academically successful while moving from one residential home to the next.

5.0. Academic attainment and Juvenile delinquency

The United States Department of Health and Human Services (2012) states that a child remains in foster placement for nearly two years, with approximately eight percent of the children remaining in the system for over five years. The foster care students who are placed in the foster care system suffer several challenges as compared to their peers who are under their biological parent's care (Cox, 2013). For instance, children in the foster care system may experience grief and anxiety as a result of separation from families. Some are also abused by the foster parents while others suffer from the psychological trauma of being moved from one foster placement to another.

As a direct result of various difficulties experienced in the foster care system, a majority of the foster care student records indicate lower levels of academic attainment and higher likelihood of children becoming adjudicated delinquent in comparison to their peers in a traditional family setting.

Various scholars (Cox, 2013, Villegas, 2014, Berger, Cancian, Han, Noyes, & Rios-Salas, 2015) have studied the relationship between academic achievement and the likelihood of children becoming adjudicated delinquent while in the foster care system, which will be addressed within this section. From the previous studies completed, it is evident that children in foster care perform poorly in comparison to their peers in living in a traditional family setting. In a recent survey, Berger et al. (2015) analyzed the relationship between the foster care student's academic achievement and the likelihood of children becoming adjudicated delinquent. Notably, Berger et al. (2015) observed a sample of foster care students before, during, and after living in an out-of-home placement. Based on the data presented, the children's academics outcome before, during, and after the placement, critical analysis revealed a negative correlation between lower levels of academic attainment and the likelihood of the foster youth becoming involved in the juvenile justice system.

Academic achievement is a big area of concern for the foster care student, as a many variable impact the academic success due to the foster care student being not available for learning. The ease of learning among the foster care students in a classroom context becomes a struggle (Evans, 2014; Zetin, 2012). Clearly, poor school performance is a common challenge among the foster care students placed in foster care settings. Further, scholars have demonstrated that this challenge exposes the foster care students to other risk factors such as different psychosocial problems in the foster care student's future life. Poor academic performance was found to be a sufficient risk factor for drugs and substance abuse, suicide attempts, psychiatric diagnosis, criminal engagement, arrests and incarceration (Ainsworth, & Hansen, 2014; Berlin, Vinnerljung, & Hjern, 2011).

According to Ainsworth and Hansen (2014), foster care students who were placed in long-term foster care during their childhood and remained until they aged out were at significant risk for a variety of coping skills and mental health issues and involvement in the juvenile justice system. For the foster care student who remained in long-term foster care, they had six to eleven folds more chances of reporting a psychosocial problem and becoming adjudicated delinquent than their peers. Interestingly, foster care students who were able to establish a strong academic performance reduced the risk of psychosocial problems and becoming adjudicated delinquent by 38-52%. Based upon this information, poor academic grades were an important risk factor for involvement in the juvenile justice system in former foster care students (Zetin, 2012). Additionally, poor school performance often results in a discontinuation of further education, which in turn leads to low employability among the foster care students. As a consequence, former foster care students record high rates of joblessness, low financial capability and becoming adjudicated delinquent. They are, thus, exposed to different psychosocial challenges than their peers.

Even though various scholars have demonstrated a correlation between foster care, poor academic outcomes and involvement in the juvenile justice system, it has been established that there are significant advantages for the out-of-home programs to some vulnerable children and youths. Warburton, Warburton, Sweetman, and Hertzman (2014) established distinct positive impacts of enrolling an adolescent into a foster care system. Placing an at-risk male teenager in some foster care programs reduce the chances of the at-risk teenager in engaging in criminal activities and becoming adjudicated delinquent as well as provide for the opportunity to obtain a high school diploma (Warburton, et al., 2014).

6.0. Academic Support

According to Chicosky (2015), when considering the needs of the foster care student and the perspective of academic achievement, educational legislation significantly impacts the foster care student's success. Historically, there has been a common belief in promoting education in the United States. This belief is focused on the theory that education would assist in developing the child to become a productive and contributing member of society upon reaching adulthood. Although the United States Supreme Court has never designated education as being a fundamental right, all state constitutions have conditions for education and define education as such a right.

The number of at-risk foster care students is growing due to the lack of accessible and sustainable academic support in secondary and post-secondary education. A college degree grants opportunities for a six-figure salary, continuous employment, and a better quality of life (Baum, Kurose, & Ma, 2013; Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016).

Unfortunately, for former foster youth, achieving such rewards is nearly impossible. Therefore, more education equates to increased wages and opportunities of employment. Individuals who have advanced degrees decrease their odds of being unemployed (2.4%) compared to the unemployment rate of 8.0% of individuals without high school degrees (Chen, 2017). A college degree grants opportunities for a six-figure salary, continuous employment, and a better quality of life. Unfortunately, for former foster youth, achieving such rewards is nearly impossible (Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016).

For each school year in most courses and degree programs there is a visible number of students who are having academic difficulty (Cox, 2013). The lack of academic support positions both students and the institution for severe consequences, including academic probation, dismissal, enrollment declines, and lower retention and graduation rates. Academic support programs extend far beyond addressing only academic needs, providing cultural, social, physical, and emotional support that affords students opportunities to build confidence in their own abilities and self-worth, while simultaneously improving academic and personal growth. Career development support is an added benefit (Champagne, 2014; Chicosky, 2015). Academic programs additionally help educational institutions to address concerns related to academic motivation along with the ability to learn the needs of the current foster care student population and contribute favorably to both retention and graduation rates (Chen, 2017).

Academic support programs are beneficial for all students, but extremely important for at-risk students. At-risk students are those students who are in academic jeopardy due to low grade point average and may even be on academic warning, academic probation or on the borderline of academic dismissal (Champagne, 2014). When programs are set in place, academic support personnel are able to identify the problem at hand with each individual student and create the proper interventions and strategies that will be tailored to specific issues (Chicosky, 2015).

In addition, skill building, accountability, goal setting, communication or relationship building, and validation are essential for individuals to grasp in order to become successful learners both in academics and in non-academic areas of life. Champagne (2014) suggested that there is an immense amount of evidence found from prior studies on academic support programs that represent a practical means of intervention when dealing with at-risk students. Research conducted by Gooden, Jabbar and Torres (2016) demonstrated that participation in academic support groups and mentoring has a significant impact on students' grade point averages and overall success. Mentors and fellow participants assist each another in the quest to achieve academic goals and offer significant opportunities to for achieving aspirations of higher education with considerable success.

Financial concerns, however, often intersect societal dynamics that contribute to the unsuccessful or successful selection and completion of secondary education. These factors may include the accessibility of financial assistance for college, socioeconomic status of an institution's student body (Champagne (2014), or available employment and career progression opportunities. Foster care students have arrays of needs including academic, social, and personal that must be addressed early on in their academic journey so that interventions can be put in place, which will assist in overcoming the many academic challenges they will encounter.

Understanding the problems that plague the foster care youth's educational experience, such as lack of goal clarity, decreased motivation, lack in study skills, disorganized thinking, financial stress and lack of motivation, as well as those that support academic success represents a critical component in implementing a form of early intervention that is individualized to meet the needs of the foster care student population (Wood & Harrison, 2014).

Obtaining a college degree is very rewarding, and it provides economic stability; however, it is very costly. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2018) the average cost of college tuition is \$18,632.00 per year. Although former foster youth are eligible to receive financial aid, the Chafee grant, and work study funds to assist them in college, it appears as though economic stability is a primary reason why they drop out of college. A research study conducted by Courtney, Okpych, Mikell, Stevenson, Park, Harty, Kindle (2016) found that over 35% of former foster youth experienced one barrier that prevented them from continuing their college education. Over 50% of the participants identified college tuition and needing full-time employment as reasons why they dropped out of their programs.

Likewise, in Morton's (2012) study, former foster youth expressed that they were unable to stay in college due to financial issues. The majority of the participants explained that they experienced delays in receiving financial aid, which prevented them from paying for things such as room and board, books, and supplies. Courtney et al. (2016) discovered that over 30% of former foster youth experienced at least one barrier in enrolling or returning to college. Over 70% of the participants who experienced a barrier indicated that they could not afford to attend college, or they needed to work to support themselves and their families. Similarly, Okpych's (2017) study examined the college experience of 700 transitional-aged foster youth 3 years after aging out of the child welfare system. The majority of the foster youth aspired to attend college; however, only 17% were enrolled in college.

Academic achievement and behavioral issues were among the barriers that prevented the participants from enrolling in college. The biggest barrier to college retention was finances and family responsibilities. Receiving financial assistance and other supportive services will determine college persistence rates among foster youth, and without these services, they are more likely to drop out of college and experience ongoing hardship (Courtney et al., 2016; Morton, 2015; Salazar, Roe, Ullrich, & Haggerty, 2016).

7.0. 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 a longer length of stay while in kinship care as compared to children in non-kinship care. Stability is a decisive factor 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-care support is needed. Another factor might be payment differentials in Texas for kinship and non-kinship placements. As stated previously, kinship caregivers do not receive subsidies for care unless they meet licensure criteria for licensed foster care placements

The results of this study confirm the findings of several researchers (e.g., James, Landsverk, & Slyman, 2004; Jonson-Reid, 2002), which concluded that placement instability is often a problem for children who have psychological and behavioral problems. These are the children who could benefit from placement stability the most. It is also important to note that it is difficult to determine the causal relationship between placement instability and behavioral problems. Placement instability may lead to behavioral problems, or behavioral problems may lead to placement instability. Unfortunately, the causal order of this relationship may never be solved. However, the relevant research literature does indicate that placement instability may have detrimental effects (i.e., the likelihood of a foster child becoming an adjudicated delinquent).

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