

Impact of kinship care on behavioral well-being for children in out-of-home care

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OBJECTIVE: To examine the influence of kinship care on behavioral problems after 18 and 36 months in out-of-home care. Growth in placement of children with kin has occurred despite conflicting evidence regarding its benefits compared with foster care.

DESIGN: Prospective cohort study.

SETTING: National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being, October 1999 to March 2004.

PARTICIPANTS: One thousand three hundred nine children entering out-of-home care following a maltreatment report.

MAIN EXPOSURE: Kinship vs general foster care.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES: Predicted probabilities of behavioral problems derived from Child Behavior Checklist scores.

RESULTS: Fifty percent of children started in kinship care and 17% of children who started in foster care later moved to kinship care. Children in kinship care were at lower risk at baseline and less likely to have unstable placements than children in foster care. Controlling for a child's baseline risk, placement stability, and attempted reunification to birth family, the estimate of behavioral problems at 36 months was 32% (95% confidence interval, 25%-38%) if children in the cohort were assigned to early kinship care and 46% (95% confidence interval, 41%-52%) if children were assigned to foster care only ($P = .003$). Children who moved to kinship care after a significant time in foster care were more likely to have behavioral problems than children in kinship care from the outset.

CONCLUSIONS: Children placed into kinship care had fewer behavioral problems 3 years after placement than children who were placed into foster care. This finding supports efforts to maximize placement of children with willing and available kin when they enter out-of-home care.

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