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Abstract Information

Abstract Title:

Better Evidence for Kinship Care Around the World

Format:

Paper

Themes:

Highlight the need for relevant and reliable evidence and demonstrate how the social and medical arenas interrelate

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Abstract:

The proposed presentation will highlight the findings and methodological challenges from a recently published Campbell and Cochrane co-registered systematic review which synthesizes research on kinship care from around the world. The presentation will be an interactive discussion on the practice, policy, and research implications of these findings and challenges. Child abuse and neglect is an all too common problem that usually results in negative consequences for children and families. Children who have been maltreated are often removed from the home and placed in residential care or in the community with other families. Child welfare agencies are responsible for placing these children in out-of-home settings that will facilitate their safety, permanency, and well-being. In recent years, many countries have introduced policies that favor placing children who cannot live at home with other members of their family or with friends of the family. This is known as "kinship care" or "families and friends care" to name a few. Children in out-of-home placements typically display more educational, behavioral, and psychological problems than do their peers. Children living with relatives face additional obstacles, as kinship caregivers are more likely to be poor and unemployed and less likely to access services and receive financial support. We do not know what type of out-of-home care is best for children. This systematic review was designed to find the best available evidence comparing traditional foster care and kinship care on child welfare outcomes. Sixty-two quasi-experimental studies from six countries met the inclusion criteria and quality assessment. The results from the meta-analyses suggest that children in kinship care may do better than children in traditional foster care in terms of their behavioral development, mental health functioning, and placement stability. Children in traditional foster care placements may do better with regard to being adopted and accessing mental health services. There may be a cost-effectiveness component to placing children with relatives in light of the comparable well-being and permanency outcomes and lower payments and fewer services provided to kin caregivers. As such, this could play an important role in how child welfare agencies view their current approach to kinship care. Foster care remains an essential out-of-home care option, as children in these placements also experience positive outcomes and appropriate kinship placements are not always available. There is a need for future research on the different types of relative caregivers and the effect of caregiver licensure on child outcomes.
