

Better Evidence for Kinship Care Around the World



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Presentation Objectives

1. Present findings from a Campbell and Cochrane co-registered systematic review of international research on kinship care
2. Highlight methodological challenges from the review
3. Discuss practice, policy, and research implications of the review findings and challenges

Intervention

- Children removed from the home for maltreatment
- Child welfare agency has child custody
- Formal out-of-home placement with kin
- Kinship caregivers can be licensed or unlicensed
- Children placed in kinship care compared to children placed in traditional foster care

Outcomes

Primary Outcomes:

- Behavioral Development (13 studies, US 10)
- Mental Health Functioning (8 studies, all US)
- Placement Stability (17 studies, US 16)
- Permanency (10 studies, all US)

Secondary Outcomes:

- Educational Attainment (7 studies, all US)
- Family Relations (9 studies, US 7)
- Service Utilization (9 studies, all US)
- Recurrence of Abuse (3 studies, all US)

Dilemma: Selection Bias

- Was group assignment determined randomly or might it have been related to outcomes or the interventions received?
- High risk for selection bias - lack of equating procedures AND lack of evidence on the comparability of groups on placement and demographic characteristics
- High risk:18; medium risk:39; low risk: 5

Dilemma: Performance Bias

- Could the services provided have been influenced by something other than the interventions being compared?
- High risk for performance bias - the kinship care and foster care groups experienced differential exposure to the intervention AND received differential services during placement
- High risk: 4; moderate risk: 54; low risk: 4

Dilemma: Detection Bias

- Were outcomes influenced by anything other than the constructs of interest, including biased assessment or the influence of exposure on detection?
- High risk for detection bias - the kinship care and foster care groups were not defined in the same way AND there was evidence of biased assessment resulting from the type of placement
- High risk: 4, moderate risk:54; low risk:4

Behavior Findings

- Children in kinship care exhibited significantly fewer behavioral problems
- Children in kinship care demonstrated significantly more adaptive behaviors

Mental Health Findings

- Children in kinship care were less likely to have psychiatric disorders
- Children in kinship care were more likely to report mental well-being

Placement Stability Findings

- Children in foster care were more likely to experience three or more placement settings
- No significant difference on length of placement
- No significant difference on length of stay in out-of-home care

Permanency Findings

- No significant difference on reunification
- Children in foster care were more likely to be adopted
- Children in kinship care were more likely to be in guardianship
- Children in kinship care were more likely to still be in care

Conclusions



- In the US, it may be more cost-effective to place children with relatives in light of the comparable outcomes and lower payments and fewer services provided to kin caregivers.
- 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.
- Future research is needed on the different types of relative caregivers and kinship care arrangements.

Limitations



- Poor standing of quantitative research on kinship care
- Lack of confidence regarding the comparability of groups
- Lack of control over contaminating events
- Effect of kinship care may be more difficult to detect than traditional foster care
- Unreliability of outcome measures when child welfare policy and practice vary across countries
- Inability to generalize to countries outside the US

Research Considerations

- Employ generalizable samples, repeated measurements, and longitudinal designs
- Develop psychometrically sound instruments of family and child functioning that allow for reliable comparisons across groups, studies, and countries
- Utilize multilevel statistical models to better control for and understand selection bias

Practice Considerations

- Would kinship placements be even more effective with increased levels of caseworker involvement and service delivery?
- Should licensing standards apply to all kin caregivers?
- Should additional financial resources be made available to kinship providers?

Discussion



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