

The article is based on this systematic review from Campbell and Cochrane:

Winokur, Marc; Holtan, Amy; Valentine, Deborah: *Kinship Care for the Safety, Permanency, and Well-being of Children Removed from the Home for Maltreatment* Campbell Collaboration, 2009



This review is also published in the Cochrane library.

The article was written by SFI Campbell and has been approved by the author of the review.

See also www.sfi-campbell.dk

BETTER WELL-BEING FOR CHILDREN IN KINSHIP CARE

A new review from Campbell shows that children who are removed from their homes and placed with relatives or close friends of the family are better off in a number of areas than children in traditional placement. This applies for a child's behavioural and mental development, for example. This means that the review claims that kinship care is a sensible alternative to traditional placement.

WHEN CLOSE RELATIONS STEP IN

Every year, the public authorities remove children from their homes because of abuse or because their parents cannot take care of them for other reasons. Most often, the children are placed at institutions or with foster families. Traditionally, foster families have been recruited by the local authorities and have not had previous contact with the child.

Kinship care has in the recent years gained more acceptance and prominence in the child welfare field. This is a type of placement where the child is removed from home and placed full time with the child's relatives or close friends of the family.

Kinship care enables the child to stay with people the child trusts and with whom the child already has relations. This can support the child through the traumatic experience of being removed from home. The primary goal of kinship care is to avoid dissolving the family because of the placement. The long-term goal is to reunite the child with his or her parents.

In this systematic review from the international Campbell collaboration, a group of researchers from the USA and Norway have studied the effect of kinship care on the well-being of children compared to traditional foster care placements. The researchers have measured the effect of kinship care on for example the child's

behavioural development, as well as placement stability and educational attainment.

KINSHIP CARE INCREASES CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING

The final conclusion of the researchers is that children placed in kinship care have better reported behaviour and mental health outcomes than do children in foster care. The well-being of children in kinship care is better than that of children placed in foster families. This means that a child placed in kinship care is among other things less aggressive towards the surroundings, and is less introvert than a child placed in a foster family. Moreover, kinship care better ensures stability in the placement than placement with a foster family, and this means more stability in the children's everyday lives.

In continuation of the above, the study shows that children in traditional placements receive psychological treatment or other kinds of therapy to a larger extent than children who are placed with relatives or friends of the family. This difference may be related to the fact that children in traditional placements have a greater need for therapy. However, this may also be due to the fact that traditional foster parents are better at identifying children's needs for therapy and know more about children's opportunities for receiving help.

KINSHIP CARE IS NOT ALWAYS THE RIGHT SOLUTION

Researchers emphasize that kinship care is not necessarily the right solution in all cases. A professional assessment is needed to find out whether either traditional placement or kinship care is in the best interests of the child and the family.

For example, the systematic review shows that there is no difference in the two types of placement in respect of the child's relationship with the care family or the child's future educational level. Neither has any difference been detected in whether children move back to their biological parents at some point or in the duration of the placement.

To ensure that kinship care will continue being a possible type of placement, the researchers recommend closer collaboration between researchers in this field and the practitioners carrying out the day-to-day work with placement of children.

WHAT HAVE THE RESEARCHERS STUDIED?

The review summarises the results of 62 studies that investigate the effect of kinship care in comparison with traditional types of placement. These 62 studies cover a period of 15 years, from 1991 to 2006, and most have been carried out in the US. Studies from Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Israel and Australia are also included.

The studies included in the review had to compare children in kinship care with children in traditional placement, for example. The children taking part in the studies forming the basis for the review were all less than 18 years old and had been removed from their homes because of abuse or maltreatment in the home.
