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FOSTER CAREGIVERS' OPINIONS ON THE CAUSES OF

MULTIPLE PLACEMENTS AMONG FOSTER CHILDREN

———————————

A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

———————————

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

———————————

by

Erika Yolanda Alatorre

Angelica Lemus

June 2005

# FOSTER CAREGIVERS' OPINIONS ON THE CAUSES OF

# MULTIPLE PLACEMENTS AMONG FOSTER CHILDREN

A Project

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ABSTRACT

Foster care children often experience multiple placements causing them to suffer instability. Instability is defined as experiencing three or more placements. Such instability may cause foster children to experience negative life outcomes such as loss of education, engaging in criminal behavior, social maladjustments and lack of meaningful attachments. Several studies have indicated that age, mental health issues, behavioral and emotional problems and have been major contributors to multiple placements. This study was designed to add to current research by taking a different approach to past studies. This study used foster parents and group home staff as participants, whereas previous studies have focused on the records of children as participants. The findings of this study suggest that the overall common reason for placement disruption is caused by the child welfare agency.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## DEDICATION

Which much love and appreciation

To our husbands and parents, whose love, encouragement

sustained us during this endeavor.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the purpose of the study and
why it is presently needed in social work practice. This
chapter also outlines the importance of the research
study in relation to healthier outcomes for children in
foster care. Current data on the frequency of multiple
placements are presented along with an overview of
current policy aimed at minimizing placement disruption.
A brief overview of the research method is presented and
discussed. Finally, this chapter clearly states the
research question for study.

Problem Statement

Foster care is a social phenomenon that affects the
lives of many children and their families in the United
States. Foster care can be generally defined as a
temporary living arrangement for children who have been
removed from the care of their biological parents by a
child welfare agency. Foster care may include a placement
with extended family, non-related family, and in-group
homes. Children are placed in these types of settings due

1

to their parents inability to provide adequate care for them (Barth, Maluccio, Pecora, & Whittaker, 2000).

Every year at least half a million children enter the foster care system in the United States (Redding, Fried, & Britner, 2000). Of the children who enter foster care, 77.8% experience a stable foster home placement (University of California, Berekely, 2004). Unfortunately the remaining children in foster care suffer from placement drift, due to multiple foster care placements. Furthermore, multiple placements are more common now than twenty years ago probably due to the growing size of the foster care population and the more serious, emotional, medical and behavioral problems that children presently have (Barber & Delfabbro, 2002).

Multiple foster care placements are defined as experiencing three foster care placements or more (University of California, Berekely, 2001). Multiple foster care placements can result in negative life outcomes for foster children. Negative outcomes consist of criminal behavior, poor academic and social adjustment. Multiple placements are also believed to affect the children's attachment to primary care givers,

which is an important developmental milestone (Wulczyn, Kogan, & Harden, 2003)

Due to the importance of placement stability for foster children, the U.S. Congress passed the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (1980), requiring agencies to develop permanency plans for each child in foster care. This act was established to promote stability within foster care placements and for the potential adoption of children who were unable to reunify with their biological parents. According to the California Child Welfare Services Outcome and Accountability County Data Report of 2004, approximately 37.7% of foster children experience two or more placements while in foster care. This suggests that the efforts of Congress to promote permanency plans for all foster children have not been successful.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to gather data that could help minimize the number of placements that foster children often experience. The results of this study are intended to help California child welfare agencies and other foster care agencies develop additional policies

that support the development of stable foster care placements for dependent children. Therefore, this study primarily served foster children in out of home care. Social workers can potentially benefit from this study by gaining a greater knowledge base on the subject of foster care stability. Consequently, the knowledge gained by workers may be applied when placing children in foster care placements.

Concern for permanency for children in out of home care has been a prime topic for many years for child welfare workers. Although limited research has been conducted on the factors that contribute to multiple placements, an effort to develop stable foster care placements for children has been implemented. The Annie Casey foundation has developed a program to be utilized by Child Welfare Agencies throughout the United States. The focus of Family to Family is to minimize foster care placements for foster children by placing them within their own communities. The goal of the program is to keep children connected to their schools, church, friends and families while in foster care. Therefore, maintaining meaningful relation in tacked (Annie Casey Foundation, 2005).

Multiple placements in foster care have been alleged to affect children's lives in many ways. Due to the negative life outcomes that may result from multiple placements, it was important to study this topic further. These problems may include loss of educational opportunities, lack of attachments, behavior problems, criminal behaviors and emotional disturbances.

Furthermore, the results of this study also contributed to current research on this topic, given that this study gathered data from a different population. Published research has specifically focused on foster children's characteristic as indicators of multiple placements. This study attempted to add to present research by gathering data from foster parents and group home staff. This study gained insight by asking foster care providers their observations and experiences on the subject of multiple placements in foster care. Nonetheless, research on non-child related causes such as poor foster parent training, or placement change caused by the agency, has yet to be examined.

This study employed a self-administered survey questionnaire designed for the purpose of collecting data on the subject of factors contributing to multiple foster

care placements. The participants for the study included foster parents and group home staff. Approximately 200 randomly selected foster parents and group home staff were asked to participate in the research study. After a three week response period, 43 foster care givers responded to the questionnaire. The participant's names remained confidential.

The study used a quantitative research design. A quantitative research design was selected because it took a deductive approach, which allowed one to narrow the scope of the problem from large to more specific. This design allowed for timely collection of data. Additionally, the quantitative research design enabled standardized data analysis in contrast to a qualitative approach in which the data can be interpreted more subjectively.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

Child welfare researchers have previously emphasized the importance of studying factors associated with multiple placements in out-of-home care (Landsverk Slymen, & James, 2003). Yet, little research has been done on foster caregivers opinions and observations on

the causes of multiple placements among foster children. The results of this study contributed to social work practice by evaluating the most common factors contributing to multiple placements. Therefore, the results of this study will provide child welfare agencies with additional information that may help guide the development of further policies aimed at promoting placement stability. By assuring placement stability it is hoped that foster children will experience less placement disruption and as a result, encounter fewer problems.

According to the generalist model, accurate assessment is a vital step in the social work process. Assessing foster care givers opinions on the causes of multiple placements in foster care allows social workers to understand and identify these causes in an effort to reduce the amount of placements children experience. Therefore, social workers can develop and select alternative interventions to prevent multiple foster care placements from occurring.

Furthermore, understanding the characteristics of foster children who are more likely to experience placement instability can provide professionals further

knowledge to reduce adjustment problems in foster
children, better matching of foster parents and improve
training for foster care givers. The findings of the
study may contribute to minimizing placement instability,
consequently helping promoting permanence, safety,
healthy attachments, and the overall well-being of foster
children. Therefore, the following study will addresses
foster caregivers opinions on the causes of multiple
placements among foster children.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There have been several empirical efforts to date that focused specifically on multiple placements in foster care. Past studies suggest that multiple placements are strongly correlated with behavioral problems and conduct disorders. These studies imply that multiple placements are brought on by the children's behavior. Although several studies have indicated that behavior, conduct disorders and non-kinship placements were strong predictors for multiple placements, the results of these studies all pointed to age as a predictor to multiple placements. This suggests that older children are at higher risk of experiencing multiple placements despite behavioral problems. Further, research shows that relative foster care placements minimize the possibility for multiple foster care placements.

More research informs that multiple foster care placements can negatively affect children's ability to attach to their caregivers. Research has utilized

attachment theory to guide these studies and show that multiple foster care placements can be detrimental to children's development and attachment.

Kinship Care Lowers Multiple Placements

Research suggests that children placed in non-family placements are at greater risk of experiencing instability in placements. Additionally, studies report that children placed with relatives are less likely to experience three or more placement moves (Needell et at., 2004). A study based on a longitudinal follow-up of a cohort of children that were placed with relatives indicated that only 16% of children experienced multiple placements compared to 37% of children placed in non-kinship placements (Usher, Randolph, & Gorgan, 1999). These findings strongly suggest that non-relative foster care placements most often fail in providing foster children stable living arrangements.

Wulczyn, Kogan, and Harden (2003), also studied kinship foster care. In this study, 16,170 children were observed throughout their movement in foster care within a three-year period. The sample was divided into two groups, those who resided in kinship foster care and

those in-group foster care. This study suggested that
children placed with relatives move less frequently than
children placed in regular foster care (Wulczyn, Kogan, &
Harden, 2003). However, there is some evidence that
kinship placements also may be disrupted frequently,
reflecting the vulnerability between the child and their
family (Terling-Watt as cited in Wulczyn, Kogan, &
Harden, 2003).

### Behavior Associated with Increase in Multiple Placements

According to a study done by Barber and Delfabbro
(2002), results indicated that children who displayed
disruptive behavior were more likely to experience
placement breakdown. This study was conducted during a
12-month period, and included 235 children. The children
were split into two groups, "protected children" and
"disaffected" children. Protected children consisted of
children who were younger than eight and entered the
system due to neglect. Disaffected children were usually
older and entered the system due to emotional and
behavioral problems (Barber & Delfabbro, 2003). The study
reveled that older children were more likely to suffer
mental health problems, which caused them to have

behavioral problems beyond their caregivers' control. Further, "protected" children were more likely to experience stability within their placements. This suggested that the "disaffected child" was more likely to experience placement break down (Barber & Delfabbro, 2003). A study done by Smith (2001) also supports the correlation between age and placement instability. This study proposed that older children experience placement change more frequently than younger children within the first six months of placement.

Conduct disorders and other mental health problems were found to be very common indicators of placement instability for older children. In addition to the studies conducted by Barber, Delfabbro, and Cooper (2001), Landsverk and Slymen (2003), specified that children who experienced placement change had higher levels of conduct disorders, hyperactivity and social adjustments (Barber & Delfabbro, 2003; Wulczyn, Kogan, Harden 2003). Furthermore, these children were significantly older, which might indicate a developmental trend toward greater instability as children age (Landsverk & Slymen, 2003).

Conflicting Findings

The study conducted by Wulczyn, Kogan, and Harden (2003), did not support the findings of the previous studies. Their study suggested that the majority of foster children do not experience multiple placements. In addition, Redding, Fried, and Britner (2000), concluded that most movements occur in the first half of the year of the children's stay in foster care. Further, the more placements the child experiences during their first year in foster care, the more likely they are to experience placement instability (Vuchinich, Ozretich, Pratt, & Kneedler, 2002).

Needell et al., (2004) indicated in a study that externalizing behavior factors is one of the strongest predictors of placement instability. These externalizing behavior factors are described as disruptiveness, aggressiveness, and or dangers to others (Needell et al., 2004). The findings of the study proposed that children initially entering the foster care system did not display any behavioral problems or concerns. The same children after experiencing three or more placements began to display behavioral problems. However, Benedict and White (1991) claimed that fifty percent of children entering

foster care placements have behavioral problems and suggest that these behavioral problems are not a significant predictor of multiple placements.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Placement instability is alleged to affect children's attachment to primary caregivers. It is important to consider attachment theory as a theory that can guide this study. This theory suggests that attachment is a process that begins in infancy and is continually reinforced over a life span (Carlson & Kjos, 2002). According to attachment theory, humans need security, which is provided through love, touch, and warmth, as well as a committed attachment figure in order to provide a healthy development (Webber, 2004). Children within the foster care system often lack a primary care giver due to their instability, and disruptive behaviors and emotional disturbances may occur due to disruption of attachment figures (Webber, 2004). Further, disruption, unresponsiveness, or unpredictability of attachment figures may cause anger, depression, anxiety, and sadness among foster children (Webber, 2004). As children continue to move in and out of foster care placements,

the ability to form an attachment to the caregiver will only become more difficult as the child ages. Redding et al., (2004), reported that children with a background of maltreatment might find it more difficult to form attachments with another caretaker(s), resulting in multiple placements. Therefore, Bowlby (as cited in Webber, 2004) indicated that early attachment bonds formed in infancy play an important role throughout the child's life.

## Summary

Studies thus far show a correlation between age, behavior, non-related foster care placements and placement disruption which suggests an increased probability that children with these characteristics will suffer from multiple placements. According to current research, behavior and age tend to be the strongest predictors of multiple placements. Kinship care on the other hand, was presented as a way to minimize the possibility of multiple placements for foster children. Research has attempted to show that multiple placements are perpetuated by child related characteristics. Nonetheless, research on non-child related causes such as

poor foster parent training, or placement change caused

by a Child Welfare agency, has yet to be examined.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

## Introduction

This chapter will cover the design for the study,
the sampling methods to be used, data collection and
instruments, and procedures. This chapter also covers in
detail protection of human subjects and data analysis.

## Study Design

The purpose of this study is to identify factors
associated with multiple placements of foster children.
The results of the study can help California child
welfare agencies and other foster care agencies to
develop additional policies that support the improvement
of stable foster care placements for dependent children.

A descriptive research design was utilized for this
study. A descriptive research design was selected for
this study due to the fact that it provided legitimate
and reliable research results that were used as additions
to the profession's knowledge base within child welfare.
Further, this descriptive design helped determine
connections between the dependant variable (multiple
placements in foster care) and independent variables

(age, behavioral problems, mental health problems and foster caregiver's characteristics).

A quantitative method was utilized for the study. This research design was also used because it has a deductive approach, which allowed narrowing the extent of the problem from general to detailed. The quantitative design further allowed for timely collection and interpretation of the data. Quantitative research designs strive for measurability, objectivity, reducing uncertainty, duplication, and standardized procedures (Grinnell, 2001).

Furthermore, a quantitative approach to the proposed study allowed the results to be generalized objectively whereas a qualitative approach would have permitted subjectivity and bias to occur by the researchers. A qualitative design was not a good fit for this study because a large sample was used and limited time was available for data collection. This research design allowed for a larger sample, which resulted in a more reliable study.

Limitations of the quantitative design were that the measurement instrument was not individually tailored for each participant. In a qualitative design the researcher

would be able to alter the measurement instrument to fit the client's level of understanding, while a quantitative design uses a standardized measurement instrument for all the participants. In a qualitative design the researcher is able to get more detailed explanations to questions from participants. In a quantitative design the answers tend to be more general.

## Sampling

Participants for the study were identified through Riverside County Child Protective Services. Approximately two hundred participants were randomly selected from the foster caregiver placement list. Written permission to utilize the Riverside County foster home placement list was submitted to the Deputy Director of Child Protective Services, Riverside County. Permission was granted and allowed the utilization of Riverside County foster care providers as the sample (participants).

Previous research studies on this topic have focused on children's characteristics. This study consisted of foster parents and group home staff as the participants. Foster parents and group home staff were selected because they have daily interactions with foster children and

child welfare agency worker. Therefore, foster parents and group home staff were able to report on their observations on the subject of multiple placements. Social workers were excluded from this study because their role in foster care placements could have created biased opinions and skewed answers.

The sample criteria for the foster parents consisted of at least one year of being a foster parent for Riverside County. Foster parents with closed and open cases were included in the sample as well as all ages and all educational levels. Group home staff criteria consisted of at least one year of working with the group home and being at least twenty-one years of age. Group homes who serve probation youth and foster children were advised to strictly answer the questionnaire/survey based on foster children observations. Due to kinship foster care having a higher placement stability rate kinship caregivers were excluded from this research study. After participants were identified, an informed consent form, confidentiality disclosure and survey questionnaire was mailed to them.

Data Collection and Instruments

All data were obtained through a self-administered survey questionnaire. The demographic variables include age, number of years as a foster parent, gender, classification of foster care provider, educational level, total number of foster children that have lived in the home, current number of children living in the home, average length of stay of the foster child, improvement of placement stability, and most common factors associated with foster child being removed from their care/home. The following demographic variables will be measured at a nominal level: classification of foster care provider, gender, opinions on improving foster care placements and most common factors associated with foster child being removed from their care/home. Age, number of years as a foster care provider, number of children living in the home, current number of foster children in the home, average length of stay of the foster child, and opinions on improving foster care placements were measured at an interval level. Behavior and age was measured at the scale level of measurement. Education was measured at a ordinal level of measurement.

Independent variables include the causes of instability, (age of the foster child, behavioral and emotional problems, and foster parent child relationship). Identifying foster caregivers opinions of multiple placements will be measured by using a self-constructed measurement tool. The self-constructed measurement tool is in a form of a questionnaire/survey that gathered general data on foster parent and group home staff personal observations on causes of multiple placements.

Variables such as foster parent gender, age, educational level and years as a foster parent were included in the questionnaire to evaluate if there is a link between foster parent characteristics and foster children placement instability. The remaining variables were included to attempt to identify the possibility of finding a reliable association between foster children's characteristics and foster placement instability. This measurement tool was pre-tested on five foster caregiver volunteers for the purpose of testing the self-constructed tool. The pre-test determine whether the tool is understandable to foster parents. The five foster

parent volunteers will be obtained through a social

worker in Riverside County Child Protective Services.

The limitation of this tool is that there are no

face-to-face interactions with foster care providers,

which did not allow evaluation of the quality of their

answers. Nonetheless, not having contact with the

participants keeps the participant's identifying

information confidential and all data collected will be

measured with no biases.

## Procedures

Data were gathered through a self-administered

questionnaire/survey that was mailed to the participants.

A self-addressed stamped envelope was included in their

survey. Participants will be asked to complete the survey

and return it in the self addressed stamped envelope. All

self-addressed envelopes were collected at the Riverside

County Department of Public Social Services office. Each

envelope included a sheet of scratch n sniff stickers as

an incentive for participating in the study.

Additionally, an informed consent form, debriefing

statement, cover letter stating the purpose of this study

and benefits of the study will be included. The cover

letter informed the participant of when the results would
be available to the general public as well as the
location of the research results.

Completed surveys were collected by the researchers.
Data analysis took place at the California State
University San Bernardino social work lab. The data were
entered into the SPSS system. The timeline of the study
was as follows;

November 2004 to February 2005:

-     Finalization of approval by the IRB

    (Institutional Review Board) and Riverside

    County Child Protective Services.

-     Final draft of the informed consent, cover

    letter and survey was completed.

February 2005 to beginning of March 2005:

-     Participants were selected.

-     Survey was mailed with a deadline of March 15,

    2005

Mid March to May 01, 2005:

-     Data analysis and interpretation of data was

    done and completed

Protection of Human Subjects

Individuals were studied in this research project by direct questioning through a survey (see Appendix A). The surveys will be mailed to the participants along with an informed consent, debriefing statement, and a self-addressed stamped envelope (see Appendices B & C). To protect the anonymity of these participants the survey did not contain identifying information. When the results were received, the surveys will remain in locked safe. Access was only made available to the researchers. After six months of completion of the research project, the surveys were shredded and disposed of.

Data Analysis

Once the data were collected and organized they were inputted into the SPSS computer program. Frequencies along with mean, mode and standard deviation, were calculated for each variable to search for patterns and commonality of responses. Crosstab analysis was also utilized to examine the relations among variables. Chi-square was used for nominal variables to test the significance of the results.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gather data needed
to determine the causes of multiple placements. This
research study had a descriptive design and it employed a
quantitative research method. The sample will consist of
43 foster caregivers. Their identities were kept
confidential. The data were collected through a
self-administered survey. Data analysis was conducted
using the SPSS computer program. Frequencies and
chi-square were calculated. The results of this study can
be used for the creation of polices and programs that may
help eliminate multiple placements for foster children in
child welfare agencies.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## RESULTS

### Introduction

Included in this chapter is a presentation of the results found in this research study. The researchers were able to measure some of the probable causes of multiple placements in foster care. The demographic frequencies are presented for the purpose of providing a description of the sample studied. In addition, tables are presented in order to provide a visual description of the data analyses results and demographic information.

### Presentation of the Findings

The sample for this study consisted of 43 licensed foster caregivers living in southern California. Approximately 21 foster parents and 22 group home staff participated in the study (see Table 1). Seventy-nine point one percent of the sample was female and 20.9% were male. The sample had a mean of 9 years experience as foster caregivers, with a standard deviation 8.3. The participants ranged in age from 22 to 68. Only 20.9% of the sample was under the age of 35. The levels of education attained ranged from not completing high school

to having obtained a doctoral degree. (See Table.) Among

the foster caregivers, 60.5% had a Bachelor's degree or

higher level of education.

Table 1. Demographic Variables

| Variable | Frequencies | Valid Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Foster parent | 21 | 48.8% |
| Group Home staff | 22 | 51.2% |
| Females | 34 | 79.1% |
| Males | 09 | 20.9% |
| 35 years of age or younger | 12 | 22.0% |
| 36 to 48 years of age | 16 | 39.0% |
| 49 to 68 years of age | 16 | 39.0% |
| Some High School | 01 | 2.3% |
| High School Graduate | 05 | 11.6% |
| Bachelors Degree | 12 | 27.9% |
| Graduate Degree | 12 | 27.9% |
| Doctoral Degree | 2 | 4.7% |

Table 2. Experience as a Foster Caregiver

| Foster Type | Experience as a foster caregiver | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Less than a year | 1 to 3 years | 3 to 4 years | 5 to 6 years | 6 years or more |
| Foster Parent | 8 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| Group Home Staff | 15 | 14 | 6 | 2 | 3 |

The average length of time that children spend in placement was 2 years or less, as reported by 29 respondents. Fifteen of the participants reported that most children spend less than a year in their placement. Fourteen reported that most children spend between 1 to 2 years in their placement. Only 5 of the participants responded that the average length of stay was 5 years or more.

The participants were asked a number questions focusing on their opinions of the causes of multiple placements for foster children. The questionnaire answered by the participants consisted of 14 questions. The questions centered on their observations for multiple placements of foster children.

Foster parents were asked their opinion on the most common reasons why children are removed from their care. The original data set had coded 16 different causes of

why children are removed from a caregiver. To facilitate the interpretation of the data they were recoded into three categories (foster parent request, agency decision, and not appropriate level of care). Out of the 43 respondents, 26 indicated that the most common reason for removal was perpetuated by the child welfare agency.

Table 3. Common Reasons for Removal

|  | Foster Type | |
|---|---|---|
|  | Foster Parent | Group home staff |
| 1. Foster parent request | 5 | 7 |
| 2. Agency decision | 16 | 10 |
| 3. Not appropriate level of care | 0 | 5 |
| Total | 21 | 22 |

Participants were also asked reasons why they have requested a child to be removed from their care. The original data had coded 11 different reasons for request of removal. These were recoded into three broader categories (child related behavior, mental health illness, conflict in level of care). Out of the 43 participants, 21 specified the most common reason for foster caregivers to request that a child be removed from their care was due to child related behavior. Foster care givers were asked if they believed that children over the

age of 8, experienced more behavior problems. Twenty three of the participants disagreed with this statement, 14 were group home staff and 9 were foster parents. Sixteen of the participants agreed with the statement that children over the age of 8 experience more behaviors problems. Out of these participants, 7 were group home staff and 9 were foster parents.

Foster care givers were asked if they believed that children over the age of 8 experienced more difficulty adjusting to their placements. Twenty five of the participants disagreed with this statement, 16 were group home staff and 9 were foster parents. Twelve of the participants agreed with the statement that children over the age of 8 experience more difficulty adjusting to their placement. Out of these participants, 5 were group home staff and 7 were foster parents. Six of the participants did not respond to this statement.

Foster caregivers were asked to identify specifically the type of child related behavior that leads to a request for a removal from their placement. The child related behaviors identified by the foster caregivers were physically aggressive, lying, stealing, running away and excessive school related problems.

A chi-square analysis was conducted to evaluate the difference of among the stated variables, as well as comparing the responses from foster parents and group home staff. A significant level of .05 was used to determine the probability that the observed relationship could have been produced by chance. After conducting the cross tabulation and calculating the chi-square it was found that group home staff are more likely to request that a child be removed due to displaying physically aggressive behavior in comparison to group home staff. The small sample size did not allow a valid evaluation of chi-square statistics for the remaining variables.

Table 4. Physically Aggressive Behaviors

| Physically Aggressive | Foster Type | |
|---|---|---|
| | Foster Parent | Group home staff |
| Yes | 4 | 15 |
| No | 17 | 7 |
| Total | 21 | 22 |

$\chi^2 = 1$, $2f = .001$, $p = 10.518$

At the end of the survey questionnaire, participants were given the opportunity to give their opinions on what can improve the stability of foster placements for foster children. Foster caregivers provided the researchers with

valuable suggestion on their perceptions of the factors

that can improve placement stability. The most common

responses centered on supportive services and

communication between foster care givers and agency

social worker. Out of the 43 participants, 14 indicated

that giving more supportive services to the foster parent

and foster children would greatly increase the stability

of foster placements. Additionally, 10 of the

participants stated that better communication between the

foster caregiver and the child welfare agency social

worker would increase placement stability among foster

children.

### Summary

Chapter Four reviewed the results obtained from the

study. The data reflects that the most common reasons for

multiple placements of foster children is agency caused

according to foster caregivers. The data also illustrates

that foster care givers most often request that children

be removed from their care due to behavioral problems by

the foster child. Significant differences were found

between foster parents and group home staff in relation

to the variable physically aggressive behaviors. This was

determined by conducting a cross tabulation and
chi-square analysis.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## DISCUSSION

### Introduction

The primary objective of this study was to expand on pre-existing research results on the causes of multiple placements for foster children. The findings of this study are presented in this chapter. The findings will be interpreted in relation to the research question and expected results will be talked about. In addition, the limitations of this study will be addressed, as well as recommendations for further research, practice and policy. Therefore, the findings of this study are important to the emotional well being of foster children.

### Discussion

This study was conducted to determine the major causes of multiple placements among foster children. Specifically, this study attempted to identify the causes of removal through foster caregivers observations and experiences. Previous studies claim that placement disruption is primarily caused by the child's age, and behavior. This research study supports previous findings that point to child's behavior as a major cause of

removal for group home foster placements. However, the findings of this study suggest that behavior is not an indicator of multiple placements for foster parents. This finding can be explained by the fact that children who are placed in group homes require a higher level of care. Children who are placed in group homes tend to experience more behavioral and mental health problems.

Age as a predictor for multiple placements was not identified as a major indicator for placement instability. Both foster parents and group home staff responded that children over the age of 8 experience the same level of behavioral problems as children under the age of 8. This finding suggests that age is not a strong predictor for multiple placements; rather the child's personally or life experience would be a better predictor for placement instability caused by behavior.

On the other hand, results for difficulty in adjusting for children 8 and older were hard to determine. Observations from foster parents and group staff were equally divided. Half of the care givers indicated that they agreed with the statement and the other half did not. The researchers believe that age is

not particularly related to adjustment, but rather to support networks and child's resilience.

Further findings of this study suggest that the most common reason for placement instability for foster children were caused by child welfare agency decisions. The observations of foster caregivers indicate that most foster children are removed from their care due to agencies decisions such as placing a child with a relative, child placed in adoptive home, and higher or lower level of care required for the child.

Foster caregivers contributed to this study with suggestions for the improvement of placement stability for foster children. Foster caregivers suggested that the child welfare agency provide more supportive services. Supportive services such as respite care, and financial reimbursement for activities were the most common.

Communication between the child welfare agency and the foster care giver was suggested as another barrier to placement stability by foster care givers. Foster caregivers described communication problems centering on the social worker's lack of availability. Several foster caregivers stated that if social workers were more available, then conflicts that arise in the foster home

would be addressed. This would minimize the chance that they would request for a child to be removed from their care.

Additionally, foster caregivers reported that lack of child history is not sufficient to assess their capability of caring for the child. Helpful information regarding the child's history can be any behavioral problems, number of placements, any likes or dislikes of the child. Foster caregivers recommended that foster children be matched with foster homes during the placement process in an attempt to place the child in a suitable home that meets their needs. Foster parents stated that the child welfare agency does not spend adequate time in the placement process. Some foster caregivers indicated that social workers look for a temporary "bed" rather than a "home."

## Limitations

Several issues and facts need to be considered in this study prior to drawing any conclusions. This study had a number of limitations. The first limitation of this study was the small sample size. The original sample consisted of 200 participants. Only 43 responded to the

mail out survey, 21 being foster parents and 22 group home staff. The small sample size did not allow a valid evaluation of chi-square statistics for all variables. The small sample size in this study alerts researchers to the higher probability of error due to the sample size. Therefore, it is important to generalize these findings contiously.

The second limitation of this study was due to the instrument developed by the researchers. The instrument developed had a limited number of questions that were not able to capture the full scope of the observation of the foster parents. Additionally, a number of foster caregivers were unable to answer some of the questions in the survey, consequently skewing the results of the study.

## Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Currently there are a significant number of children experiencing placement instability and suffering from the negative life outcomes that stem from multiple placements. Such negative life outcomes consist of lack of meaningful attachments and poor academic and social adjustments.

The results of this study point to the need for implementing a program that focuses on the child's needs, foster care givers expertise, and open communication between agency and clients. "Family to Family" is a program developed by the Annie E. Casey foundation that addresses the child's needs. "Family to Family" addresses these needs by involving the child's community, birth family, child welfare agency, and anyone else that is meaningful to the family in the placement decision for the child. This is done in the context of a Team Decision Meeting, which allows for the family and the child to be involved in the decision making process regarding the placement. The primary focus of "Family to Family" is to maintain the child within their own community while in foster care. Keeping the child in their community allows them to preserve any meaningful attachments by keeping them connected to their school, neighborhood and church.

The researchers recommend that further research be conducted on "Family to Family" in relation to the improvement of placement stability for foster children. There are several counties in California that are in the process of implementing this program. Although this program has proven to be successful in other states, the

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effectiveness of this program in California has not yet been determined. Research in California is needed due to its unique and diverse population.

## Conclusions

Experiencing multiple placements while in foster care disrupts the child's sense of stability as well as the ability to form meaningful attachments. Therefore, the findings of this study are essential to the emotional well-being and the overall safety of foster children.

The findings of this study suggest that the overall common reason for placement disruption is caused by the child welfare agency. Additionally, the findings imply that the most common reason that foster care givers requested for a child to be removed from their care was due to child related behaviors. Better planning during the placement process can perhaps minimize multiple placements caused by these two factors.

Considering the findings of this study, it is indispensable that child welfare agencies adopt programs that support any effort in improving the placement stability of children in foster care. It is also important to provide foster care givers with supportive

services such as respite care to maximize the quality of care they provide to foster children. Foster care givers, social workers and the child welfare system must come together under the common goal of preserving a stable foster care placement and the overall well-being of foster children.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY/QUESTIONNAIRE

# Contributing Factors to Multiple placements for Foster care

## Questionnaire

1. Please check your classification:

   Foster parent ☐             Group Home staff ☐

2. Male ☐                      Female ☐

3. Age:_____

4. Educational level:

   ☐ Some high school   ☐ High School graduate   ☐ Some college

   ☐ Bachelors          ☐ Graduate               ☐ Doctoral

5. Number of years as a foster parent or working in a group home: _____

6. Current number of foster children living in the home: _____

7. Average length of time foster children spend in your home: _____

8. In your experience check the most common reason that foster children are moved from your home.

   ☐ Foster home/ Agency request
   ☐ Adoptive placement agreement signed
   ☐ Foster child placed with relative
   ☐ Child ran away
   ☐ Child's behavior
   ☐ Child reunified with parent (returned home)
   ☐ Fost-Adopt placement
   ☐ Incarcerated
   ☐ Lower level of care required
   ☐ Child in medical facility
   ☐ Inter-County transfer
   ☐ Child refuses services
   ☐ Placed with guardian
   ☐ Child Abandoned
   ☐ Complaint on foster home
   ☐ Higher-level care required
   ☐ Moved from emergency shelter

9. What are the most common reasons that you have foster children removed from your care **(check all that apply):**

☐ physically aggressive
☐ mental illness
☐ lying
☐ sexual acting out
☐ stealing
☐ run away (AWOL)
☐ medical illness
☐ foster parent/foster child conflict
☐ foster child requires too many services
☐ foster child experienced conflict with other children in the home
☐ Excessive school related problems
☐ Other _____

10. Please check the most common reason for **your** request of foster child removal form your home/facility **(check one only):**

☐ physically aggressive
☐ mental illness
☐ lying
☐ sexual acting out
☐ stealing
☐ run away (AWOL)
☐ medical illness
☐ foster parent/foster child conflict
☐ foster child requires too many services
☐ foster child experienced conflict with other children in the home
☐ Excessive school related problems
☐ Other _____

11. Foster children that are 8 and older tend to have more behavior problems than younger children

☐ disagree ☐ somewhat agree ☐ agree ☐ strongly agree

12. Foster children 8 and older tend to experience more difficulty adjusting to your foster home/facility:

☐ disagree ☐ somewhat agree ☐ agree ☐ strongly agree

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13. In your opinion what can improve the stability of foster placements for foster children

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. Comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your participation in this study. Please return this questioner in the self-addressed stamped enveloped.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

California State University, San Bernardino
Social Work Department

Dear participant:

As a part of our graduate program in Social Work at the California State University of San Bernardino, we are seeking information on multiple foster care placements.

As a foster parent/group home staff you are being asked to complete the attached survey regarding your observations on the causes leading to multiple placements of foster children. The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate or discontinue participation at any time. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate or discontinue participation at any time. Please note that your anonymous answers will not affect your agency or personal relationship with Riverside County. The department has given us consent to conduct this study and will receive the overall results of the study, but will not be provided with individual responses nor a participation list.

The benefits to you completion of this survey are that the results of this study will be used to help create policies in child welfare agencies to minimize placements in foster care. There are no liable risks to your participation in this study as all questionnaires/surveys will be stored in a locked and secure file. We will be the only individuals with access to the files and they will be destroyed within 6 months following the completion of the study.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, but we hope that you are willing to help us complete our study with your generous participation. Questions regarding this study and your participation are welcomed. You may contact Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at (909)880-5507. Your comments and questions will be kept confidential. Thank you for assistance and cooperation.

Cordially,


Angelica Lemus

Erika Alatorre

I voluntarily agree to complete this survey and have the opportunity to ask questions. I am at least 21 years of age.

_____ Respondent Mark           _____ Date

APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

**Debriefing Statement**

Your participation in this research study will help evaluate causes of multiple placements for foster children. The results of this study will be used to help create policies in child welfare agencies to minimize multiple placements for foster children. The results of this research study will be available at the California State University, San Bernardino University in September of 2005. For questions regarding this study you may contact Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at (909) 880-5507.

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1.  Data Collection:

    Team Effort:   Erika Alatorre & Angelica Lemus

2.  Data Entry and Analysis:

    Team Effort:   Erika Alatorre & Angelica Lemus

3.  Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

    a.   Introduction and Literature

         Team Effort:  Erika Alatorre & Angelica Lemus

    b.   Methods

         Team Effort:  Erika Alatorre & Angelica Lemus

    c.   Results

         Team Effort:  Erika Alatorre & Angelica Lemus

    d.   Discussion

         Team Effort:  Erika Alatorre & Angelica Lemus