



Children in Kinship Care Experience Improved Placement Stability, Higher Levels of Permanency, and Decreased Behavioral Problems: Findings from the Literature

Research shows that children experience better outcomes with kin across three major domains: improved placement stability, higher levels of permanency, and decreased behavior problems. ChildFocus reviewed some of the more recent literature on kinship care, summarized below, across these three outcome areas.

1. Increased placement stability

Helton, J. (2011). Children with behavioral, non-behavioral, and multiple disabilities, and the risk of out-of-home placement disruption. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 35, 956-964.

Placement with kin decreased the likelihood of disruption for a majority of children, and children with different types of disabilities were no more or less likely to disrupt in kinship care compared to children with no disability.

Zinn, A., DeCoursey, J., Goerge, R.M., & Courtney, M.E. (2006). A study of placement stability in Illinois. Chapin Hall.

This study found that the average number of placements children experience could be effectively reduced by placing them with relatives at entry to care, which would afford children the stability of relative homes without requiring them to endure a subsequent change in placement.

Testa, M., Bruhn, C. M., Helton, J. (2010). in *Child welfare and child well-being: New perspectives from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being* (Webb, M. B., Dowd, K., Harden, B. J., Landsverk, J., and Testa, M. F., Eds.) New York: Oxford University Press

When permanency moves were ignored, formal foster care remained highly unstable, whereas children under the care of kin and other informal non-kin caregivers were statistically indistinguishable from children residing in homes of birth parents.

Park, J.M., & Helton, J. (2010). Transitioning from informal to formal substitute care following maltreatment investigation. *Children and Youth Services Review* 32, 998-1003.

Children in informal kinship care experience a high level of placement stability in spite of a high rate of transition from kinship care to formal out-of-home care.

2. Higher levels of permanency

Falconnier, L.A., Tomasello, N.M., Doueck, H.J., Wells, S.J., Luckey, H., & Agathen, J.M. (2010). Indicators of quality in kinship foster care. *Child Welfare and Placement* 91, 4.

Children in kinship care were less likely to re-enter care once returned to their biological parents than are children placed with non-kin. This study also found that children in kinship care experienced fewer placements

Koh, E., & Testa, M.F. (2011). Children discharged from kin and non-kin foster homes: Do the risks of foster care re-entry differ? *Children and Youth Services Review* 33, 1497-1505.

With respect to reunification, children who exit from kinship foster homes have a much lower likelihood of re-entering foster care when possible confounding factors are ignored. The kinship effect diminishes by 25% when child-level variables that may affect kin caregivers' decisions to accept the child into their care are taken into account, but it still remains statistically significant.

3. Better behavioral and mental health outcomes

Cheung, C., Goodman, D., Leckie, G., & Jenkins, J.M. (2011). Understanding contextual effects on externalizing behaviors in children in out-of-home care: Influence of workers and foster families. *Children and Youth Services Review* 33, 2050-2060.

Children placed in kinship care show lower levels of externalizing behavior in comparison to non-kinship foster care, while children placed in group care show higher levels.

Fechter-Leggett, M.O., & O'Brien, K. (2010). The effects of kinship care on adult mental health outcomes of alumni of foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review* 32, 206-213.

Having a close relationship with an adult, such as a kinship caregiver, was found to be a predictor of more positive mental health as an adult.

Garcia, A., O'Reilly, A., Matone, M., Kim, M., Long, J., & Rubin, D. (2014). The influence of caregiver depression on children in non-relative foster care versus kinship care placements. *Maternal and Child Health Journal* June 2014.

Children in kinship care experience better behavioral outcomes than children in non-relative foster care. Emotional and behavioral outcomes among children in kinship placements are more likely to improve when caregivers demonstrate a reduction in depression over time or are never depressed.

Rubin, D.M., Downes, K.J., O'Reilly, A.L.R.; Mekonnen, R.; Luan, X.; & Localio, R. (2008). Impact of kinship care on behavioral well-being for children in out-of-home care. *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* 162, 6, 550-556.

Children placed into kinship care had fewer behavioral problems 3 years after placement than children who were placed into traditional foster care. 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.