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Permanency and Safety Among Children in Foster Family and Kinship Care: A Scoping Review

Tessa Bell ¹, Elisa Romano ¹

Affiliations

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Abstract

Over the past 25 years, kinship care placements have risen dramatically, such that when a child enters into care, child welfare agencies must first attempt to identify safe living arrangements with relatives or individuals known to the child before searching for alternatives. Despite the growing emphasis on kinship care, little is known about its impact on child outcomes in comparison to other placement types (e.g., foster family). Therefore, the aim of this scoping review was to evaluate quantitative research on children in out-of-home care from 2007 to 2014 with regard to the following outcomes: (1) permanency (i.e., reunification, reentry, placement stability, and adoption/guardianship) and (2) safety (e.g., additional reports to child welfare). Based on these objectives, the review identified 54 studies that examined permanency and safety among children in two major placement types, namely foster family and kinship care. Across studies, children in kinship care experienced greater permanency in terms of a lower rate of reentry, greater placement stability, and more guardianship placements in comparison to children living with foster families. Children in kinship care, however, had lower rates of adoption and reunification. The findings also indicated that differences in these variables diminish over time. Findings for safety outcomes were mixed. Study methodological limitations and recommendations for future research are considered.

Keywords: children; foster care; kinship care; out-of-home care; scoping review.

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