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


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.


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.


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.


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


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


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


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.


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.


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.


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.