

Vulnerable children fare well with relatives

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Placing vulnerable children with relatives is a viable option, a new study by Cochrane Researchers suggests. In view of several recent high profile child abuse cases, the study may have important policy implications.

"We don't know what type of out-of-home care is best for children. But our research suggests that children placed with relatives do as well or better than those placed with foster parents," says lead researcher Marc Winokur, who works at the Social Work Research Center at Colorado State University in the US.

Reflecting changes in child welfare practice and policy around the world, a substantial proportion of children removed from the home for abuse or neglect during the past twenty years have been placed with relatives. In 2005, almost 125,000 children in the US were formally placed with kin while there has been an increase in children cared for by family and friends in England from 6% in 1989 to 12% in 2005. Despite this trend, little research has been carried out on the impact of so called 'kinship care' as compared with traditional foster care - placing children with unrelated foster parents.

Researchers reviewed data from 62 studies on children in out-of-home placements. They found children in kinship care experienced fewer behavioural and mental health problems and had more stable placements than did children in foster care.

The researchers stress that each child's needs must still be assessed on a case by case basis. They say more rigorous studies need to be carried out to verify the results and establish how placement type affects educational and other outcomes.

Winokur notes that, along with these positive findings about kinship care, policy makers are likely to encourage its use because kinship care costs less to provide than foster care. However, he

is keen to stress that foster care is not forgotten: "Foster care should continue to be an essential out-of-home care option, as children in these placements also experience positive outcomes and appropriate kinship placements are not always available."

Source: Wiley

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