Moving Out Does Not Always Mean Moving On: Placement Stability and Relational Permanence for Care-Experienced Young People

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Placement stability and relational permanence for care-experienced young people

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The Care Pathways and Outcomes Study

• Longitudinal study following 374 children who were in care on 31/3/00 in NI and under 5 yrs.

• Aim: To find out what placements the children end up in; and whether placement type matter.

• 3 phases completed. On the fourth phase.
IV: The Teens and Early Adulthood

METHODS

- 1st visit to families:
  - Online survey on iPad: 1 for young people & 1 for carers/parents;
  - Two tests on iPad for young people: spatial working memory and decision-making

- 2nd visit to families:
  - Semi-structured interviews.
Data collection so far

49 participant families

32 both young people & parents/carers taking part
- 31 completed all visits
- 1 have only done the first. Second scheduled

In 15 cases, only parents/carers have taken part
- 11 completed all visits
- 4 have only done the first. Second scheduled

In 2 cases, only young person have taken part
- 2 have only done the first. Second scheduled

45 families took part in previous phase
4 new to study (2 foster, 1 birth and 1 adoption)

13 foster care
7 kinship care
14 adoption (1 fam)
12 Residence Order (5 fam)
3 birth parent
Placement stability and relational permanence

• Placement stability for the CPO group between 2000 and 2009
• The concept of relational permanence
• Findings on relational permanence and belonging from our group
• Placement breakdowns and permanency
• Summary
• Implications for policy and practice
Placement stability

Stability to 18 yrs old or at 31st March 2016 (under 18s) by placement (%)

- Adoption: 97, 86
- Residence Order: 94, 86
- Birth parents: 86, 78
- Kinship foster care: 71, 55
- Foster care: 63, 43

Stability 2007-2016 (by placement at 2007)
Stability 2002-2016
Relational permanence

- Permanence can occur without continuity of placement.
- Placement stability does not necessarily mean that the young person feels secure or part of that family.
- THUS – placement stability ignores the subjective experience of the young person.
- RELATIONAL PERMANENCE = young person’s enduring parent-like connection to caring adults (Semanchin Jones & LaLiberte, 2013)
• All parents/carers interviewed expressed warm and loving feelings for the young people they cared for (even when pl broke down).

• Young people also described feelings of love and belonging to these foster/adoptive/birth families, most calling their caregivers mum and dad (or granny/granddad depending on their age or relationship).
Just your like, its just like a normal family like, as my [adoptive] mum always says, I might not have gave birth to you but I feel like I have, you know. Like I’m so like her, I’m the double.

I still call her mum. ... Of course, I always call her mum. She IS my mum. She brought me up. She raised me. ... She always keeps in contact, or she will never drift too far apart. ... She just wants to see me doing well. She doesn't wants to see me going downwards again. And with her support and everyone's support, hopefully I won't.

Madeleine, 20 yrs old, adopted

Carl, 22 yrs old, was in foster care, pl broke down @13
Placement breakdowns

- Of the 48 young people taking part in our study so far, **9 have experienced a placement breakdown** (17% of all breakdowns):
  - 4 in foster care (of 13 recruited)
  - 3 in kinship care (of 7 recruited)
  - One adopted (of 14 recruited)
  - One living with birth parents (of 3 recruited)
- Of these 9, all still had a special bond, and 7 had managed to maintain their relationship going (with regular contact) over the years while living apart.

Of the 354 young people in the study (for which we know placement type at 18 or at 31/03/2016)

Since 31/3/2007, for 15%, there was a disruption or placement move.

- 8 returned to birth parents
- 10 went into supported accommodation / community placement
- 19 went into a residential unit
- 9 went into a new kinship placement
- 8 went into a new foster placement
Edgar’s foster parents. Placement broke down @ 12/13

We knew something was going to happen sooner or later because he was getting more violent. We knew something was going to happen but…

We said, we said one or two nights in a police cell would have cured him.

Instead of the move directly to the residential home.

It would have. I think if they had kept in the police cell I think that would have been the better option and I think we would have got him back home then.

Because once he experienced that he just thought he was the bees knees. He really thought.

Getting high on drugs.

He didn’t want to come home. They more or less gave him the freedom of the city.

He was my son you know. ... He’s their wee brother and he still is. He’s my son.

Edgar’s foster parents. Placement broke down @ 12/13
SUMMARY

• High levels of placement stability across a 14-year period for children adopted, placed on RO, and who lived with birth parents.

• Level of stability twice as high in adoption compared with foster care BUT level of stability over a 14-yr old period for foster care still close to 50%.

• All yp (except for one) developed a sense of belonging & connection to the family, which continued into early adulthood (irrespective of placement).
Placement type vs. Length of placement: What makes relationships continue after placements break down?

Relational permanence after breakdown
Implications for policy & practice

• Long-term placement breakdowns should not be deemed the end of these relationships. THUS greater effort to be made by SS to maintain contact between yp and foster parents/carers following breakdown/disruption (if both parties so wish).

• Foster/kinship foster parents/carers should be seen & recognised as a source of vital social/emotional support for yp.

• Young children should be placed with long-term carers asap to help build the foundations for future supportive relationships.
Questions


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