Annotations of Research in Treatment Foster Care


Keywords
Recruitment, retention, foster care, foster parent, support, training, satisfaction, motivation, foster parenting duration

Research Questions
• What factors are associated with the duration of foster parenting?

Method
*Subjects:* A total of 385 foster parents located in a mid-Atlantic state.

*Design:* Surveys were developed to collect information regarding foster parent perceptions about and experiences of being a foster parent. The phone interviews were conducted by trained phone interviewers and were supervised by the university researchers who served as project managers. The dependent variable was the length of foster parenting measured in months (tracked separately for continuing foster parents and for exiting foster parents).

*Materials/Measures:* Surveys were conducted using a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) system. Bivariate analyses were conducted to examine characteristics of foster parents and significant differences between exited foster parents and continuing foster parents using *t*-tests or chi-square tests. Bivariate Kaplan-Meier survival curves and the Cox proportional hazard model were utilized in this study as well.

Foster parents’ demographic characteristics included:
• Age
• Marital status
• Race
• Employment status
• Educational level
• Number of children at home
• Number of adults at home
• Number of foster children for which they have cared

Agency support was measured by six items:
• Training for foster parents
- Support from resource worker
- Support from child worker
- Support from the agency
- Support from the foster parent association
- Satisfaction with the foster parent reimbursement rate

The following questions were asked:
- “How long have you been a foster parent in this state?” (for continuing parents)
- “How long were you a foster parent in this state?” (for exiting parents)

Results/Findings
- Exited parents were older than continuing parents.
- More foster parents (both exited and continuing) were married than unmarried.
- High percentages of foster parents (continuing and exited) were employed and had less than a college education.
- Exited foster parents had fostered significantly more children.
- Reasons given by foster parents for exiting the agency:
  - Change in life situation (58.37%)
    - Adoption of child/children
    - Became a treatment foster parent
    - Moved, or personal situation prevented them from continuing
    - Needed a break
  - Had problems with the agency (28.16%)
    - Didn’t feel appreciated by the agency
    - Couldn’t afford to continue
    - No one responded when something was needed
    - Not given enough support
    - Had a bad experience with a worker
  - Problems with children in my home (11.02%)
    - Given incorrect or inadequate information about the needs of children in home
    - Had a bad experience with foster child/children
  - Other reasons (2.45%)

- Age (of foster parents), marital status, race, education, and the number of foster children cared for were statistically significant in predicting time of fostering.
  - If age is increased by 1 year, the risks of stopping fostering are reduced by 1.39%.
  - If the number of children fostered is increased by one, the risk of stopping is reduced by 35%.
  - Parents who were married had a 146% higher risk of stopping than did those who were not married.
  - White parents had a 53% lower risk of stopping than did non-White parents.
  - College education was associated with a 74% higher risk of stopping.
Limitations
- Some foster parents’ phones were disconnected or changed, leaving individuals out of reach for the survey.
- The parents’ specific type of license was not investigated (kinship only, private agency foster parent, etc.).
- The child’s reason for entering care and the level of care required were not examined.
- Data were collected during the recession, and changes in financial stability were not examined further.

Application to Practice
This study has implications for the development of successful policies and practices for the recruitment and retention of foster parents. Child welfare agencies need to focus on the following areas:
- Recruitment
- Training
- Support of foster parents such as:
  - Enhancing agency recruitment and screening methods
  - Improving and developing foster parent training curricula
  - Addressing specific issues raised by foster parents that impact retention
  - Providing increased and varied supports to foster parents to meet needs

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