



Carer perspectives of factors affecting placement trajectories of children in out-of-home care



Tania Withington^{a,b,*}, Judith Burton^c, Bob Lonne^d, Areana Eviers^e

^a School of Public Health and Social Work, Faculty for Health, Queensland University of Technology, PO Box 5492, West End 4101, Australia

^b Child and Youth Mental Health Service, Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service, Queensland Health, PO Box 5492, West End 4101, Australia

^c School of Public Health and Social Work, Faculty of Health, Queensland University of Technology, GPO Box 2434, Brisbane 4001, Australia

^d School of Health, University of New England, Armidale 2351, NSW, Australia

^e School of Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Health, Queensland University of Technology, GPO Box 2434, Brisbane 4001, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 November 2015

Received in revised form 5 March 2016

Accepted 9 March 2016

Available online 10 March 2016

Keywords:

Carer engagement

Carer perspectives

Child protection

Fosters care

Placement trajectory

Out-of-home care

Placement outcomes

ABSTRACT

Carers are at the frontline working with children in the care of the child protection system. This paper reports carer's views about key factors influencing the placement trajectories of children and young people living in out-of-home care in Queensland, Australia. The study sample included 21 foster and kinship carers with a minimum two-year experience in the carer role. Study data were from semi-structured telephone interviews in which carers shared their experiences of the factors impacting upon placement stability and placement movement. Carers' responses were analysed thematically. Data analysis yielded an overarching theme regarding placement trajectory: Carer engagement, and its three sub-themes; with the child; with the child protection system; and, with the caring role. Findings suggested that carer engagement and 'fit' are complex constructs that play critical influential roles in placement outcomes (stability or movement) for individual children in out-of-home care. It is argued that practice needs to be better grounded in these relational dynamics, and better aligned concerning the power differentials that exist.

Crown Copyright © 2016 Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

This study, part of a larger mixed-method project, investigated the perspectives of carers concerning the factors that impact on the placement trajectories of children in out-of-home care. The study sample was 21 foster and kinship carers in Queensland, Australia. Data were sourced from telephone interviews, with each carer asked about their perspectives of the factors that impact placement stability and placement movement in out-of-home care. Thematic analysis of the data yielded a primary theme of carer engagement. Findings suggested that carer engagement is a complex construct that requires consideration in out-of-home care practice contexts, and that relationship-based practice can potentially play a positive part in the relational dynamics of case worker-carer interactions. It is argued that, according to these carers, current practice approaches are problematic as they undermine carers'

confidence in system decision making, and contribute to placement instability and breakdown.

2. Brief review of the literature

2.1. The Australian child protection context

Similar to many other jurisdictions, the Australian child protection system utilises a child protection rather than a child welfare or family support approach and has adopted forensic, risk-averse practices along with a legalistic orientation to interventions that are often crisis driven (Bromfield & Higgins, 2005; Gilbert, Parton, & Skivenes, 2011; Lonne, Parton, Thomson, & Harries, 2009). There have been numerous inquiries following scandals and tragedies, which have identified a range of systemic failings that undermine public and political confidence (Lonne & Parton, 2014). For example, there have been far-reaching increases in service demands with growing numbers of investigations, and a doubling of the numbers of children in out-of-home care over the past decade (AIHW, 2015) resulting in growing difficulties recruiting and retaining sufficient carers. Similarly, a range of workforce issues are evident, including high staff turnover and training

* Corresponding author at: School of Public Health and Social Work, Faculty for Health, Queensland University of Technology, PO Box 5492, West End 4101, Australia.

E-mail addresses: Tania.Withington@health.qld.gov.au (T. Withington), j.burton@qut.edu.au (J. Burton), blonne@une.edu.au (B. Lonne), a.eviers@qut.edu.au (A. Eviers).

inadequacies (Lonne, Harries, & Lantz, 2012). Staff-service user relations are complex and often characterised by significant power differentials that contribute to patchy intervention outcomes, and calls for greater attention to ethical relationship-based practice, procedures and policies (Featherstone, White, & Morris, 2014; Lonne, Harries, Featherstone, & Gray, 2016). The study reported here provides insights about these systemic and relational issues from the perspectives of carers.

Perhaps most concerning are the identified poor outcomes for families and children in the care system, in particular the unacceptably high numbers of placement breakdowns and the routine separations of siblings in care (ARACY, 2009; Lonne et al., 2016). At a recent inquiry, for example, some children were found to have experienced scores of out-of-home care placements (QCPCI, 2013). Within this context there has been increasing recognition that public health approaches that emphasise early intervention and prevention offer a better policy framework than current approaches (Herrenkohl, Higgins, Merrick, & Leeb, 2015).

Australian data indicates that the numbers of children requiring child protection services continues to increase. In 2013–2014, 143,023 children in Australia were in receipt of child protection services, an increase of 6% from 2012 to 2013 (AIHW, 2015). Between June 2010 and June 2014 the rate of children in out-of-home care increased from 7.1 to 8.1 per 1000 children (AIHW, 2015). Out-of-home care placement options in Australia include home-based care (foster and kinship care), family group homes, residential care (secure, non-secure, therapeutic, non-therapeutic), independent living and respite care (AIHW, 2015). However, the majority of placements are with foster and kinship carers, notwithstanding the identified recruitment and retention difficulties (AIHW, 2015). In June 2014, approximately half of all foster care households and almost two-thirds of all kinship care households had multiple children placed in the home (AIHW, 2015). The national costs of the out-of-home care system were recently estimated to be over \$2 billion annually; approximately 60% of the total system resources (SCRGSP, 2013).

2.2. Placement movement and placement stability

Up to 60% of children living in out-of-home care experience three or more placement moves in the first 12–18 months of care (Chamberlain et al., 2006; Newton, Litrownik, & Landsverk, 2000; Osborn, Delfabbro, & Barber, 2008). These frequent changes in placement are often associated with negative consequences across the lifespan (Barber & Delfabbro, 2003a; Newton et al., 2000; Perry, 2006; Rubin, O'Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007; Zielinski, 2009). Conversely, placement stability has been associated with positive immediate and long-term outcomes for children growing up in out-of-home care (Cicchetti & Valentino, 2006; Tilbury & Osmond, 2006). Most importantly, children in long term care who experience stable placements tend to show steady improvements in behaviour and psychosocial functioning (Barber & Delfabbro, 2003b; Fisher, Burraston, & Pears, 2005; Newton et al., 2000).

2.3. Placement trajectory

The concept of placement trajectory has previously been proposed to describe an individual child's path in out-of-home care including: The number of placements, placement movement, timing of placement movement in the context of total time in out-of-home care, placement duration, placement type including movement between different types of placements, and total time in out-of-home care (Withington, Burton, & Lonne, 2013). Relatively few studies have investigated the complex relationships or patterns that make up a child's journey in out-of-home care (Fernandez, 1999; Havlicek, 2012; James, Landsverk, & Slymen, 2004; Kim, Pears, & Fisher, 2012; Sinclair, Baker, Lee, & Gibbs, 2007; Usher, Randolph, & Gogan, 1999; Wulczyn, Kogan, & Harden, 2003). Those studies that have investigated the placement trajectory of children in out-of-home care are predominately quantitative

and do not allow for qualitative descriptive data about the experiences of children, carers and agencies providing out-of-home care (Withington et al., 2013).

2.4. Carers

Carers are at the frontline of working with children in the out-of-home care system and it is critical that their voices are heard if system responsiveness to meet the needs of children is to be improved (Brown & Calder, 1999). Despite this, internationally, carers state concerns about the powerlessness of themselves and the children in their care; the lack of acknowledged voice; and, the exclusion from decision making at all levels (McHugh & Pell, 2013).

In addition to the provision of day-to-day caregiving, the relationship between a carer and a child has long been known to be pivotal to shaping the short- and long-term outcomes for children: Children do better in care with warm, emotionally available carers, with good consistent parenting skills and effective discipline strategies (Tilbury, 2007). Further, stability in placement has been associated with carers' high motivation and positive attitudes to care for a child (Redding, Fried, & Britner, 2000; Stone & Stone, 1983), child centred and nurturing care (Walsh & Walsh, 1990), and good quality contact with family of origin (Berridge & Cleaver, 1987; Fratter, Rowe, Sapsford, & Thoburn, 1991).

A range of placement supports have also been associated with placement stability including extended family support; the quality of the relationship between the carer and the child protection case worker (Butcher, 2005; Kalland & Sinkkonen, 2001; Walsh & Walsh, 1990); and training and community supports including financial, practical, emotional/psychological and social (Nixon, 1997). Conversely, a number of carer characteristics have been found to influence placement disruption including carer stress (Wilson, Sinclair, & Gibbs, 2000); carer isolation (Kalland & Sinkkonen, 2001); and, a carer's perception of child behaviour problems (Strijker, Oijen, & Knot-Dickscheit, 2011).

While there are multiple studies investigating factors contributing to placement stability and movement, there are relatively few studies published investigating the carers' perspectives of the factors that influence the placement trajectory of children and young people living in out-of-home care (e.g. Brown & Bednar, 2006; Daniel, 2011; Gilbertson & Barber, 2003; Wilson et al., 2000). Literature investigating the perceptions and experiences of carers is increasing; however it tends to focus on the needs of carers for training, support and identity (McHugh & Valentine, 2011; Octoman & McLean, 2014; Samrai, Beinart, & Harper, 2011). The research reported below investigated the factors that influence the placement trajectories of children in out-of-home care, particularly those that impacted upon placement movement and stability, from the perspective of foster and kinship carers.

3. Methodology

Qualitative research emphasises the lived experience of participants, the meanings they place on their experience, and how they connect these meanings to the context of their experience (Saldana, 2013). The primary research question in the current study was: What are carers' perspectives of the factors influencing the placement trajectory (stability or movement) of children and young people in out-of-home care?

3.1. Participants and recruitment

Participants in this study were foster and kinship carers with a minimum of two-years' experience providing out-of-home care for children on court-based child protection orders in Queensland, Australia. Participants were recruited using a non-probability sampling strategy, or snowball sampling (Babbie, 2001) to reach a hard to identify social group across a large geographical area with limited resources. Purposive

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/345805>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/345805>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)