

The story behind kinship care caseload dynamics: An analysis of AFCARS data, 2000–2003

Tracy Vericker^{a,*}, Jennifer Macomber^a, Robert Geen^b

^a *The Urban Institute, 2100 M Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037, (202) 261-5892, United States*

^b *Child Trends, United States*

Received 25 July 2007; received in revised form 26 October 2007; accepted 27 October 2007

Available online 6 November 2007

Abstract

Findings from an analysis of four years of point-in-time data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) suggest that the number and share of children living in kinship care arrangements declined. This study shows that using point-in-time data alone to assess caseload trends can obscure important caseload dynamics. Assessing kinship care entrants and exits demonstrate that the number of children entering kinship care actually increased, suggesting that use of kinship care by states increased. The perceived decline in kinship care suggested by point-in-time estimates is likely driven by increases in the number of children exiting from kinship care that occurred at a faster rate than entrants. Additionally, this study revealed that three states, California, Florida, and Illinois, are significant contributors to the finding that the share of children in kinship care declined in point-in-time data. After removing these states from the analysis, there was a slight increase in the number of children living in kinship care arrangements. In conclusion, to clearly demonstrate the nuances of caseload dynamics, point-in-time national estimates should be examined in concert with an analysis of entrants, exits, as well as state-by-state analyses.

© 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

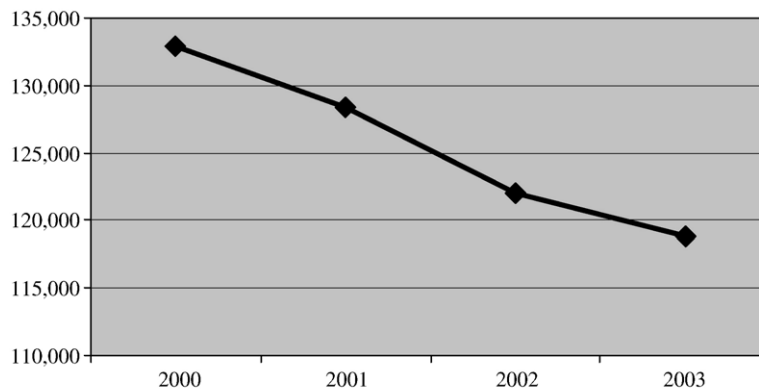
Keywords: Kinship; Relative; AFCARS; Caseload; Trends; National; State

1. Introduction

Federal and state policies require that child welfare agencies consider relatives and other kin as the first placement option for children who must be removed from their homes. Given this preference for kin, policymakers and practitioners often inquire about the number of children residing in kinship care placements and whether use of kinship care is increasing or decreasing. The most commonly used approach for understanding the dynamics of the kinship care population is to look at national point-in-time data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). Considering point-in-time estimates in recent years suggests that the number of children living in kinship foster care declined (see Fig. 1) and declined at a faster rate than children living in non-relative family foster care. Such data may raise questions about child welfare agencies' support for the use of kinship care. Employing only point-in-time data to assess the population of children in kinship care and the use of kinship care, however, can be misleading.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: tvericke@ui.urban.org (T. Vericker).



Data source: Urban Institute estimates of AFCARS data (2000, version 2; 2001, version 2; 2002, version 2; 2003, version 1).

Fig. 1. Decline in the number of children living in kinship care, September 30th 2000–2003.

Point-in-time data include a disproportionate number of children who have been in care for longer periods of time (children with shorter lengths of stay cycle off the caseload). While point-in-time estimates are useful to answer the question, “on average, how many children are living in kinship care placements on a given day?” and may be useful for program officials to understand the current demands that the caseload places on their agencies, these estimates are less useful when the question asked is, “has the use of kinship care increased or decreased in a given timeframe?”

The motivation of this study is to clarify appropriate uses for commonly used kinship care indicators. For example, point-in-time estimates provide the number of children *living in* kinship care arrangements. Kinship care entries provide an indication of placement into, or *use of*, kinship care by states. Examining exits from care has two key applications. First, assessing the kinship care exit rate helps to clarify discrepancies between kinship care entrants and the number of children living in kinship care arrangements at a point-in-time, a limitation of AFCARS data. Second, comparing the exit types of children placed in kinship care to the exit types of children placed in non-kin family foster care can begin to answer the question of why the exit rate may be increasing or decreasing over time. This study uses four years of AFCARS data—nationally and by state—to demonstrate trends in kinship care entries, exits, and number of children in kinship care placements to illustrate the proper uses of these indicators.

2. Background

Traditionally, when public child welfare agencies found it necessary to remove children from their parents’ homes due to abuse or neglect, they placed them in the homes of foster parents who had no prior relationship to the children or the children’s family. Over the last three decades, however, child welfare agencies have turned increasingly to relatives as the first option when a foster home is needed (Geen, 2003; Malm and Geen, 2003). In response, federal and state policies evolved to address the needs of kinship care arrangements. States developed procedures for licensing and providing payments to kin, considered practice issues related to permanency planning and TPR, and sought to adapt services to meet the special needs of kin. As a result, the numbers of children in kinship care at any given time have been affected by policies that affect entrants, policies that affect exits, and other contextual factors such as frontline practice, demographic shifts, and how the kinship care is defined.

2.1. Policies affecting entrants

Several policies related to decisions around placement and support of foster care placements may affect entry into kinship care. Foremost is the policy preference for placements with relatives. In 1978, Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act, which stipulated that whenever possible Native American youth should be kept near their homes and placed with kin. Two years later, Congress applied this standard to all children removed from their homes by passing the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980. Specifically, the Act stated that states should use the “least

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/346986>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/346986>

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