



## Perspectives: Former foster youth refining the definition of placement moves



Ruth M. Chambers<sup>a,\*</sup>, Rashida M. Crutchfield<sup>a</sup>, Tasha Y. Willis<sup>b</sup>, Haydée A. Cuza<sup>c</sup>, Angelica Otero<sup>d</sup>, Heather Carmichael<sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Social Work, California State University, Long Beach 1250 Bellflower Boulevard, Social Sciences/Public Administration Building (SSPA) 161, Long Beach, CA 90840-4602, United States

<sup>b</sup> School of Social Work, California State University, Los Angeles, 5151 State University Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90032, United States

<sup>c</sup> California Youth Connection, 1611 Telegraph Ave, Suite 1100, Oakland, CA 94612, United States

<sup>d</sup> Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, 5321 Via Marisol drive, Los Angeles, CA 90042, United States

<sup>e</sup> My Friend's Place, 5850 Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90078, United States

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 3 October 2016

Received in revised form 12 January 2017

Accepted 12 January 2017

Available online 12 January 2017

#### Keywords:

Foster care

Multiple placements

Placement disruption

Placement move definition

### ABSTRACT

Research has demonstrated that children who experience numerous moves in foster care are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems and less likely to achieve reunification or permanency. However, current knowledge about how placement move transitions impact children is extremely limited.

This study used qualitative methods to explore how former foster youth define a placement move. Results indicated that placement moves can be defined by: 1) Time and relationships; 2) Packing and leaving; 3) Loss of property; 4) Returning home; 5) Type of placement; and 6) Decision-making process. An alternative definition of a placement move is offered and implications for child welfare policy, research and practice are provided.

Published by Elsevier Ltd.

## 1. Introduction

Current research shows that when youth have multiple placement moves in the foster care system, they are more likely to experience poor psychological, social and academic consequences (Rock, Michelson, Thomson, & Day, 2015; Rostill-Brookes, Larkin, Toms, & Churchman, 2011). However, research reveals a wide range of definitions regarding what constitutes a placement move (Unrau, 2007). Little attention has been devoted to creating a comprehensive definition that includes input from youth who have experienced placement moves (Nybell, 2013). Without the involvement of people who actually experience multiple placement moves, attempts to create a comprehensive definition for varied living arrangements remain inadequate. Because the many and varied parameters of such placement moves shape how youth, child welfare staff, foster care personnel and related family members are affected by the transition, research needs the consistency that can be achieved through a comprehensive definition.

This paper showcases the results of a qualitative research study that examined the experiences of placement moves from the perspective of

adults who had lived in numerous foster care placements during childhood. Including the important perspective of those who lived in the foster care system will assist in developing a more nuanced comprehensive definition for placement moves.

## 2. Literature review

The body of research investigating placement moves reveals significant variation across the conceptual and the operational definitions of these critical events in the lives of foster children. This review will cover how researchers, federal government, state child welfare agencies and children in the foster care system define a placement move.

Research studies are replete with various terms used to document the frequency of foster children moving from one placement setting to another. In a comprehensive literature review, Unrau (2007) explores the question of how placement moves are conceptualized and operationalized in research studies. After reviewing 43 studies on placement stability from nine different countries, she identifies nearly two dozen terms such as “transfer, disruption, successful placement” (p. 129) used by researchers to refer to a placement move. Her review concludes that definitions for placement varied widely across research studies and researchers used different criteria for determining which of the moves experienced by foster children would count as formal placement moves in a given study. What constitutes a placement was also varied in several dimensions, including but not limited to time frames, length

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [Ruth.chambers@csulb.edu](mailto:Ruth.chambers@csulb.edu) (R.M. Chambers), [Rashida.Crutchfield@csulb.edu](mailto:Rashida.Crutchfield@csulb.edu) (R.M. Crutchfield), [twillis@exchange.calstatela.edu](mailto:twillis@exchange.calstatela.edu) (T.Y. Willis), [haydee.adelita@gmail.com](mailto:haydee.adelita@gmail.com) (H.A. Cuza), [aoterolcsw@gmail.com](mailto:aoterolcsw@gmail.com) (A. Otero), [hcarmichael@myfriendsplace.org](mailto:hcarmichael@myfriendsplace.org) (H. Carmichael).

of a child's stay in placement, or conditions of the placement (ie., whether or not children were placed in the home of a relative).

Defining placement moves has also presented challenges in the policy arena, particularly between the federal government and state child welfare agencies. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) mandates that each child welfare agency document children's placement moves in the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) database. The federal definition for a placement move contained within AFCARS Foster Care Element #24 includes: "the number of places the child has lived, including the current setting, during the current removal episode," but specifies that the agencies must "not include trial home visits as a placement setting" (USDHHS, 2003, p. 54). Specifically, states are permitted to count placements longer than 24 h, as well as placements into shelter care, treatment centers, and juvenile justice facilities, placements into a previous foster care setting (under certain conditions), and placements after a trial home visit or runaway episode. On the other hand, states are not permitted to count "temporary living conditions that are not placements, but rather represent a temporary absence from the child's ongoing foster care placement" (USDHHS, 2003, p. 26). These include sibling or relative visitations and pre-placement visits, medical or psychiatric hospitalizations, respite care, trial home visits, and runaway episodes.

Despite these parameters provided by the federal government, significant variation exists in how individual states count the number of placements for each child. In 2002, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) conducted a state-level survey on placement change calculations and related populations during a six-month period. All 50 states and the District of Columbia responded to the survey. Results indicated that the majority of states counted placement moves in accordance with most federal guidelines. For example, 69% did not count respite, 82% excluded trial home visits, and 73% did not count runaway episodes. However, there was considerable variation (59% to 76%) in how states counted medical hospitalizations, psychiatric hospital stays, and juvenile detention. It was also found that while the majority of states (84%) counted placement moves by observing actual movement of children, some states counted the number of unique care providers per child. This particular emphasis of calculation generated very different results. For example, if a child physically relocated four times but did so by moving back and forth between two different care providers, the count of actual moves was double the count of care providers (CWLA, 2002).

The measures used by the federal government and implemented in child welfare agencies are all quantifiable in nature; only certain moves are counted depending on the classification of each state agency. This method is narrow in scope and seems to emphasize measuring the quantity over the quality of the move experience.

Research on what youth think of how youth define a placement move, is almost non-existent. The authors were only able to find one study that examined the definition of foster care placement moves from the viewpoint of adults that had experienced multiple placement moves (Unrau, Chambers, Seita, & Putney, 2010). In this study, former foster youth defined placement moves as both a physical event and an emotional one. First, the physical move of a youth from one placement to another should always be counted as a move regardless of how long the individual was placed in the home. Secondly, the psychological impact of experiencing multiple moves (loss of trust, relationships, stability, etc.) was also emphasized.

In related articles, Unrau, Seita, and Putney (2008) interviewed twenty-two former foster youth and noted that the experience of placement moves is not only remembered as a series of significant losses but also perceived by participants to leave imprinted negative emotional scars, particularly in the area of trusting people as well as building and maintaining relationships. Hyde and Kammerer (2009) also found that adolescents felt as though caregivers did not know how to properly fulfill their needs and as though they were forced into placements where they were not compatible. The adolescents felt they were being lied to

about how long they were actually going to be in care before being able to return home; some reported that they eventually stopped caring as a result of having little control over their lives, feeling as though no one cared about them.

Given the limited number of studies on the topic of placement move experiences, additional research is warranted. Specifically, without understanding how placement moves are experienced by former foster youth, any efforts to develop practice or policy solutions are incomplete. The aim of this article is to fill this gap in the literature by exploring how adults who were formerly foster children lived through multiple placement experiences, thus working toward a more comprehensive definition of the foster care placement move.

### 3. Methods

The participants of this study consisted of 43 individuals who had experienced multiple placement moves in childhood while in foster care. To be eligible for the study, the following criteria was established: 1) minimum of 18 years old; 2) no longer in foster care; and 3) having experienced at least two out-of-home placements. One member of the research team contacted a local drop-in center that provided services to this group to see about possible recruitment. The agency allowed us to distribute information, display fliers and conduct the interviews on-site. In addition, packets of information about the study were sent out to related professionals and agencies who worked either directly or indirectly with former foster youth. Members of the research team also contacted individuals who they thought might want to participate or know someone who met the study's criteria.

#### 3.1. Data collection procedures

All interviews were either face-to-face or over the phone; they were scheduled for 30 min and in practice were about 45 min. The majority of interviews took place in a private office ( $n = 40$ ). The remaining three interviews were over the phone. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and all research protocols were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at California State University, Long Beach. Please see Appendix A for the interview instrument. The primary method to analyze the interview data was the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method allowed the researchers to generate a nuanced understanding on how former foster youth defined placement moves and to examine the experiences of these youth. Open coding was conducted on each transcript produced from the interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), with two levels of coding used to first draw out initial themes. The first level reduced data into preliminary codes and themes based on the understanding of the research questions (Creswell, 2007) and openness was maintained with all ideas presented by the participants without preconceived notions about what type of codes and themes might appear (Saldaña, 2009). Codes and themes were then changed and reorganized throughout the initial analysis process to determine the most accurate and descriptive analysis possible (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The second level was used to deepen the clarity of the first level, classifying, prioritizing, synthesizing, and conceptualizing the data (Saldaña, 2009). The process allowed for revisions of the code list, which included the development of more accurate wording for previously vague or inaccurate codes, inclusion of newly discovered codes, and consolidation of redundant codes. Meta and focused coding were used during this level, including the diagramming and reviewing of codes in order to develop cohesive themes that appeared in all of the interviews. To increase trustworthiness of the findings, the following procedures were used: 1) One researcher selected five transcripts and coded the data. 2) A different research team member (an expert who experienced a number of placement moves and had worked in the foster care field) analyzed the same five transcripts and also coded the data. 3) Both researchers reviewed the coding

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4936600>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4936600>

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