Child Welfare Outcomes in Colorado: A Matched Comparison between Children in Kinship and Foster Care

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Child Welfare Outcomes in Colorado:  
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Executive Summary

This kinship care outcome study was conducted by the Social Work Research Center on behalf of the Applied Research in Child Welfare (ARCH) Project, which is a collaboration between the Colorado Department of Human Services and Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, Larimer, Mesa, Pueblo, and Weld counties. The study employed a matched case design to compare children in kinship care with children in foster care on available child welfare outcomes.

The total sample for the study was comprised of a cohort of 1377 children from the 12 counties who first entered out-of-home care in 2002, spent greater than 60 days in out-of-home care, and spent 90% of their total out-of-home days in either kinship care or foster care. The actual sample included 636 children from 318 pairs matched on gender, ethnicity, program area, county, age at entry, and allegation severity. Data for the study were collected from Trails, which is an online data management and analysis system used for child welfare case management documentation. Inferential statistics and effect size estimates were generated to determine the significance, direction, and magnitude of differences between children in kinship and foster care on selected outcome measures.

According to the findings, kinship care appears to be an evidence-based practice from both an outcome and cost-effectiveness perspective. After controlling for demographic, county, and placement characteristics, children in kinship care experienced as good or better outcomes than did children in foster care. For example, children in kinship care had significantly fewer placements and were almost eight times more likely to be in guardianship. Furthermore, children in foster care were four times more likely to
still be in placement, ten times more likely to have a new institutional allegation of abuse or neglect, six times more likely to be involved with the Division of Youth Corrections, and almost two times more likely to reenter out-of-home care. However, children in foster care were two times more likely to be reunified. Although not statistically significant, children in kinship care had fewer total days in out-of-home care and fewer days to permanency than did children in foster care.

Based on these findings and prior research on the topic, a strong argument can be made that kinship care is seemingly more cost-effective than foster care. Specifically, kinship caregivers nationally report lower levels of service utilization than do foster caregivers (Winokur, Rozen, Thompson, Green, & Valentine, 2005), while there is a distinct trend in Colorado toward fewer paid kinship care placements (Winokur, Longobardi, & Crawford, 2005). Furthermore, comparisons between matched cases of paid and unpaid kinship care placements in this study revealed no statistically significant differences between the groups on child welfare outcomes.

Although this study labored under several methodological limitations, the results yielded important implications for the practice, policy, and research of kinship care in Colorado. Most notably, county departments of social services and child welfare agencies should continually reexamine kinship care outcomes and costs to better maximize this out-of-home care option. Policymakers should enact legislation that both encourages and adequately funds kinship care placements while fully supporting foster care placements. Finally, social work researchers should explore informal and voluntary kinship care arrangements and investigate the service utilization and certification of kinship caregivers.
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INTRODUCTION

This kinship care outcome study was conducted by the Social Work Research Center on behalf of the Applied Research in Child Welfare (ARCh) Project, which is a collaboration between the Colorado Department of Human Services and Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, Larimer, Mesa, Pueblo, and Weld counties.

Context

During the past 15 years, child welfare professionals have witnessed a rapid increase in the number of children removed from home and placed with relatives (Cuddeback, 2004). According to the most recent estimate from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), there were 121,030 children in the United States foster care system living with kin as of September 2003. The main reasons for the growth of this placement option include an influx of children into out-of-home care (Berrick, 1998), a persistent shortage in foster care homes (Berrick, 1998), and a shift in federal policy toward treating kin as appropriate caregivers with all of the legal rights and responsibilities of foster parents (Leos-Urbel, Bess, & Geen, 2002). As a result, most states now look first to relatives (which often is broadly defined to include any adult with close family ties) when placing a child in out-of-home care (Geen, 2000).

For this study, kinship care was the formal placement of children with relatives rather than traditional foster parents. Formal kinship care is a legal arrangement in which the child welfare agency has custody of a child (Ayala-Quillen, 1998). In Colorado, kinship foster care is the designation given when kin caregivers are certified and kinship care is the designation given when kin caregivers are uncertified.
Rationale

According to the mission statements from the 12 counties participating in the ARCh Project, kinship care is strongly valued as an out-of-home placement option because children are best served in the least restrictive environment and with family whenever possible. Although policies and practices on diligent search, assessment, certification, and service provision differ among the 12 counties, each county takes the approach that kinship care helps to maintain family relationships and cultural ties while providing children with the opportunity for safety, permanency, and well-being. To test these hypotheses, this study was designed to explore differences between children in kinship and foster care on available child welfare outcomes.

With this research initiative, Colorado joins the “nationwide effort to examine the current status of kinship care to make recommendations to strengthen the policy and practice framework for this social work intervention” (Beeman, Wattenberg, Boisen, & Bullerdick, 1996, p. ii). However, kinship care is a very complex topic that offers both opportunities and challenges for child welfare professionals and social work researchers (Cuddeback, 2004). Thus, this study is only one step toward developing a better understanding of the effect of kinship care on child welfare outcomes.
METHODOLOGY

The study employed a matched case design to compare children in kinship care and foster care on available child welfare measures. Additionally, a matched case design was used to compare children in paid and unpaid kinship care placements.

Sample

The theoretical population for the study was all children placed in kinship care or foster care in the United States. The accessible population was all children placed in kinship care or foster care in Colorado. The selected sample was all children placed in kinship care or foster care from the participating 12 Colorado counties. The actual sample included Program Area 5 and Program Area 6 children (see Appendix A for definitions) from the 12 counties who met the following criteria: (1) first out-of-home (OOH) placement occurred in 2002, (2) total OOH length of stay was greater than 60 days, (3) 90% of total OOH days were spent in either kinship care or foster care, and (4) last placement was in the specified placement type.

The total sample was comprised of 1377 children who met these criteria, with 505 children in kinship care and 872 children in foster care. The matched sample included 636 children from 318 kinship-foster pairs matched on gender, ethnicity, program area, county, age at entry, and allegation severity. Removal reason served as an additional matching variable when available. As for the generalizability of the matched sample, the demographic and placement characteristics were remarkably comparable to that of the total sample. Although Broomfield and Douglas counties were not included in the matched sample, the sample represents roughly 90% of the kinship care and foster care population in Colorado during the time frame. In addition, a sub-sample of children in
Kinship care was used to match paid and unpaid cases on the same demographic and placement characteristics. For this analysis, there were 100 children from 50 matched pairs.

Table 1

*Matched Sample Characteristics (n = 636)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Kinship Care Group</th>
<th>Foster Care Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Program Area</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA5</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>74.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA6</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>County</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arapahoe</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boulder</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Paso</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15.7</td>
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<td>Larimer</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.8</td>
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<td>Mesa</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>Pueblo</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weld</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age at Entry</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-7</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-17</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>23.3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Allegation Severity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Determined</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>30.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>43.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10.7</td>
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Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from individual case records entered into Trails, which is Colorado’s Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). Specifically, Trails is an online data management and analysis system used for child welfare and Division of Youth Corrections (DYC) case management documentation. All 64 counties and the DYC are required to use the Trails system.

To obtain the actual sample and the corresponding out-of-home placement data, the appropriate search terms and filters were used. The definitions that guided data collection for all of the demographic, placement, and outcome variables in the study are detailed in Appendix B. The final dataset was extracted in late August 2005 and reflects the information entered into Trails at that time.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used in the matching of children from kinship and foster care and paid and unpaid kinship care placements. For example, percentages and frequencies were used to compare the demographic and placement characteristics for children from each placement type. Inferential statistics were generated from the data to determine if there were statistically significant differences on available outcomes between children in kinship and foster care and paid and unpaid kinship care placements. Specifically, paired samples t-tests were conducted on the continuous outcome variables (i.e., number of placements, total days in OOH care, days to permanency), and McNemar tests were conducted on the dichotomous outcome variables (i.e., still in placement, reunification, adoption/placed for adoption, guardianship, reentry, institutional allegation of abuse/neglect, DYC involvement).
**Effect Size Calculations**

Until effect sizes are considered, there is no sense of the magnitude of differences, regardless of statistical significance, between kinship care and foster care groups. For the continuous outcome variables, Cohen’s *d* was computed by dividing the difference between group means by the pooled population value of the standard deviation of the groups. Most researchers suggest the following scale for a *d* effect size: *d* < .20 is small, *d* = .50 is medium, and *d* > .80 is large. A small effect size is interpreted as having limited consequence for child welfare outcomes, whereas medium and large effect sizes are interpreted as having genuine implications for social work practice and policy.

For the dichotomous outcome variables, effect size estimates were represented by odds ratios (OR). First, the odds of an event (e.g., reunification) were calculated for each group by dividing the number of events (i.e., reunified) by the number of non-events (i.e., not reunified). Second, an odds ratio was calculated by dividing the odds of the group with the higher number of events by the odds of the group with the lower number of events. Thus, the odds ratio expresses how many times more likely one group is to experience an event than another group. For example, an odds ratio of 2 indicates that one group is two times more likely to experience a specific event than another group. Furthermore, an odds ratio of 1 indicates that both groups are equally likely to experience the event.
FINDINGS

The findings from the kinship care and foster care comparisons are presented first followed by the comparisons of the paid and unpaid kinship care placements. For each section, statistical analyses of the continuous variables are presented followed by the results for the dichotomous outcome measures.

Kinship Care - Foster Care Comparison

Table 2

*Group Differences Between Matched Cases of Children in Kinship and Foster Care on Continuous Outcome Measures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Kinship</th>
<th>Foster</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Placements</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>7.66***</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days in OOH Placement</td>
<td>345.4</td>
<td>356.8</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>.776</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days to Permanency</td>
<td>390.9</td>
<td>418.4</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001

Number of Placements

As shown in Table 2, children in kinship care had significantly fewer placements ($t = 7.66$) than did children in foster care. As displayed in Figure 1, the mean number of placements was 1.62 for children in kinship care and 2.27 for children in foster care. Thus, there was a medium to large effect size ($d = .60$) for this outcome in favor of children in kinship care.
**Figure 1**

*Mean Number of Placements for PA5/PA6 Children in Kinship and Foster Care*

![Bar chart showing mean number of placements for PA5/PA6 children in kinship and foster care.]

**Days in Out-of-Home Care**

As shown in Table 2, there was no difference ($t = .776$) between days in out-of-home care for children in kinship and foster care. As displayed in Figure 2, the mean number of days in OOH care was 345 for children in kinship care and 357 for children in foster care. Although the difference was not statistically significant, this result is interesting because it contradicts the findings from the descriptive study (Winokur, Longobardi, & Crawford, 2005), where children in kinship care had more days in OOH care than did children in foster care.

**Figure 2**

*Mean Number of Days in Out-of-Home Care for PA5/PA6 Children in Kinship and Foster Care*

![Bar chart showing mean number of days in out-of-home care for PA5/PA6 children in kinship and foster care.]

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Days to Permanency

As shown in Table 2, there was no difference ($t = 1.50$) between days to permanency for children in kinship and foster care. As displayed in Figure 3, the mean number of days to permanency was 391 for children in kinship care and 418 for children in foster care.

Figure 3
Mean Number of Days to Permanency for PA5/PA6 Children in Kinship and Foster Care

![Graph showing mean number of days to permanency for kinship care and foster care.]

Table 3
Group Differences Between Matched Cases of Children in Kinship and Foster Care on Dichotomous Outcome Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Kinship</th>
<th>Foster</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>OR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Still in Placement</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>21.0***</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reunification</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>27.9***</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopt./Placed for Adopt.</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>ns(^a)</td>
<td>.302(^b)</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardianship</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>49.7***</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reentry</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>5.7*</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Allegation</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>42.0***</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DYC Involvement</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>.004(^b)</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Non significant.
\(^b\) Binomial distribution used.
**Still in Placement**

As shown in Table 3, there was a statistically significant difference \( (\chi^2 = 21.0) \) between children in kinship and foster care on this outcome measure. As displayed in Figure 4, 3% of children in kinship care were still in placement as compared with 13% of foster children still in placement. Thus, children in foster care were 4.1 times more likely than children in kinship care to still be in placement.

**Figure 4**

*Percentage of PA5/PA6 Children Still in Placement by Placement Type*

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**Reunification**

As shown in Table 3, there was a statistically significant difference \( (\chi^2 = 27.9) \) between children in kinship and foster care on this outcome measure. As displayed in Figure 5, 42% of children in kinship care were reunified as compared with 61% of foster children reunified. Thus, children in foster care were 2.2 times more likely than children in kinship care to be reunified with birth parents.
Figure 5
Percentage of PA5/PA6 Children Reunified by Placement Type

Adoption/Placed for Adoption

As shown in Table 3, there was no statistically significant difference ($p = .302$) between children in kinship and foster care on this outcome measure. As displayed in Figure 6, 26% of children in kinship care were adopted or placed for adoption as compared with 28% of foster children adopted or placed for adoption.

Figure 6
Percentage of PA5/PA6 Children Adopted or Placed for Adoption by Placement Type
**Guardianship**

As shown in Table 3, there was a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 49.7$) between children in kinship and foster care on this outcome measure. As displayed in Figure 7, 31% of children in kinship care were in guardianship as compared with 6% of foster children in guardianship. Thus, children in kinship care were 7.7 times more likely than children in foster care to achieve permanency through guardianship or allocation of parental rights.

**Reentry**

As shown in Table 3, there was a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 5.7$) between children in kinship and foster care on this outcome measure. As displayed in Figure 8, 13% of children in kinship care reentered out-of-home care as compared with 20% of foster children reentered. Thus, children in foster care were 1.7 times more likely than children in kinship care to reenter out-of-home care after achieving permanency.
As shown in Table 3, there was a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 42.0$) between children in kinship and foster care on this outcome measure. As displayed in Figure 9, 2% of children in kinship care had a new institutional allegation of abuse or neglect as compared with 19% of foster children. Thus, children in foster care were 10.1 times more likely than children in kinship care to have an institutional allegation of abuse or neglect after the initial out-of-home entry date.

Institutional Allegation of Abuse/Neglect

As shown in Table 3, there was a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 42.0$) between children in kinship and foster care on this outcome measure. As displayed in Figure 9, 2% of children in kinship care had a new institutional allegation of abuse or neglect as compared with 19% of foster children. Thus, children in foster care were 10.1 times more likely than children in kinship care to have an institutional allegation of abuse or neglect after the initial out-of-home entry date.

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Institutional Allegation of Abuse/Neglect

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**DYC Involvement**

As shown in Table 3, there was a statistically significant difference ($p = .004$) between children in kinship and foster care on this outcome measure. As displayed in Figure 10, 1% of children in kinship care were involved with DYC as compared with 3% of foster children with DYC involvement. Thus, children in foster care were 6 times more likely than children in kinship care to be involved with DYC after the initial out-of-home entry date.

**Figure 10**

*Percentage of PA5/PA6 Children with DYC Involvement by Placement Type*

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**Paid - Unpaid Kinship Care Comparison**

As displayed in Table 4, there were no significant differences between children in paid and unpaid kinship placements on any of the continuous outcome variables. Although children in paid kinship care experienced a greater number of placements, these children had fewer days in OOH placement and fewer days to permanency than did children in unpaid kinship care.
Table 4

*Group Differences Between Matched Cases of Children in Paid and Unpaid Kinship Care Placements on Continuous Outcome Measures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Paid Kinship</th>
<th>Unpaid Kinship</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Placements</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days in OOH Placement</td>
<td>300.2</td>
<td>345.7</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days to Permanency</td>
<td>375.7</td>
<td>390.5</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>.756</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001

As displayed in Table 5, there were no significant differences between children in paid and unpaid kinship care placements on any of the dichotomous outcome variables. Although not statistically significant, children in paid kinship care were slightly more likely to be still in placement, reunified, adopted or placed for adoption, reentered in out-of-home care, or have a new institutional allegation of abuse or neglect. However, children in unpaid kinship care were slightly more likely to be in guardianship.

Table 5

*Group Differences Between Matched Cases of Children in Paid and Unpaid Kinship Care Placements on Dichotomous Outcome Measures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Paid Kinship</th>
<th>Unpaid Kinship</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Still in Placement</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.125^a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reunification</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>.815^a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopt./Placed for Adopt.</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>1.00^a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardianship</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>.824^a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reentry</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>.388^a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Allegation</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.250^a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001
^a Binomial distribution used.
DISCUSSION

The following discussion summarizes the findings from this outcome study while laying the groundwork for future theoretical and applied research in kinship care. The conclusions and recommendations should be interpreted in light of the methodological limitations of the study.

Conclusions

According to the findings, kinship care appears to be an evidence-based practice from both an outcome and cost-effectiveness perspective. After controlling for demographic, county, and placement characteristics, children in kinship care experienced as good or better outcomes than did children in foster care. For example, children in kinship care had significantly fewer placements and were almost eight times more likely to be in guardianship. Children in foster care were four times more likely to still be in placement, ten times more likely to have a new institutional allegation of abuse or neglect, six times more likely to be involved with the Division of Youth Corrections, and almost two times more likely to reenter out-of-home care. However, children in foster care were two times more likely to be reunified. Although not statistically significant, children in kinship care had fewer total days in out-of-home care and fewer days to permanency than did children in foster care.

Based on these findings and prior research on the topic, a strong argument can be made that kinship care is seemingly more cost-effective than foster care. Specifically, kinship caregivers nationally report lower levels of service utilization than do foster caregivers (Winokur, Rozen, Thompson, Green, & Valentine, 2005), while there is a distinct trend in Colorado toward fewer paid kinship care placements (Winokur et al.,
Furthermore, comparisons between matched cases of paid and unpaid kinship care placements in this study revealed no statistically significant differences between the groups on child welfare outcomes.

Limitations

This study labored under several methodological limitations. First, selection bias in the placement of children with either foster or kinship caregivers may exist because children were not randomly assigned. For example, even though children were matched on all available variables, some demographic and placement characteristics were not controlled (e.g., behavioral problems). Furthermore, some of the matching variables were not related to the type of placement (e.g., county).

Second, there was an inadequate sample size for some counties. For example, Broomfield and Douglas counties had no children in kinship care meeting the sample criteria, and thus were not included in the study. Furthermore, four counties had fewer than 15 cases each in the matched sample while 70% of the sample came from Adams, Denver, El Paso, and Jefferson counties. Although the overall results are strongly influenced by the larger counties, the sample is representative of the larger child welfare population in Colorado.

Third, there were inconsistencies in data collection both within and between counties. Although some of the inconsistency stemmed from varying policies regarding kinship care, most discrepancies were the result of changeable data entry requirements in Trails. Thus, it is likely that some outcomes (e.g., institutional allegations, DYC involvement) had missing data from certain counties.
Fourth, the lack of available outcome variables in *Trails* limited the scope of this study. Specifically, there were no measures of well-being for physical health, mental health, behavior problems, educational attainment, or service utilization. In addition, there were no safety related outcomes, except for new institutional allegations of abuse or neglect.

*Recommendations*

The results of this study yielded important implications for the practice, policy, and research of kinship care in Colorado. Most notably, county departments of social services and child welfare agencies should continually reexamine kinship care outcomes and costs to better maximize this out-of-home placement option. Policymakers should enact legislation that both encourages and adequately funds kinship care placements while fully supporting foster care placements.

Through the use of generalizable samples, equivalent groups, and repeated measurements, this study addressed some of the major limitations of research on kinship care (Berrick & Barth, 1994). However, there also is a strong demand for research that analyzes reliable well-being and safety outcomes collected from multiple data sources. Specifically, new predictor and outcome variables should be included in *Trails* to facilitate richer analyses of kinship care and other social work interventions. For example, an electronic version of the “Health Passport” would allow for the investigation of educational and health related outcomes. Finally, social work researchers should explore informal and voluntary kinship care arrangements and investigate the service utilization and certification of kinship caregivers.
References


Appendix A

Program Area Designations

PROGRAM AREA 5 (PA5) - CHILDREN IN NEED OF PROTECTION

- Children whose physical, mental, or emotional well-being has been threatened or harmed due to abuse or neglect.

- Children who are subjected to circumstances in which there is a reasonable likelihood that they are at risk of harm due to abuse or neglect by their parents or caretakers which shall include children who are alleged to be responsible for the abuse or neglect and are under the age of 10.

To protect children whose physical, mental or emotional well-being is threatened by the actions or omissions of parents, legal guardians or custodians, or persons responsible for providing out-of-home care, including a foster parent, an employee of a residential child care facility, and a provider of family child care or center-based child care. The county shall provide services targeted to achieve the following: a) children are secure and protected from harm; b) children have stable permanent and nurturing living environments; and, c) when appropriate, children experience family continuity and community connectedness.

PROGRAM AREA 6 (PA6) - CHILDREN IN NEED OF SPECIALIZED SERVICES

- Children whose special needs are a barrier to their adoption, are legally free for adoption, and are in the custody of a county department of social services.

- Children whose special needs are a barrier to their adoption, meet Title IV-E eligibility requirements, and are in the custody of a non-profit licensed adoption agency or living with a relative.

To provide statutorily authorized services to specified children and families in which the reason for service is not protective services or youth in conflict. These services are limited to children and families in need of subsidized adoption or Medicaid only services, or to children for whom the goal is no longer reunification. The purpose of services in PA6 is to fulfill statutory requirements in the interests of permanency planning for children who meet specific requirements to receive services under this target group.
Appendix B

Data Collection Definitions

Entry Date
Date of child’s first placement in 2002

Entry Age
Age of child at entry date

County
County responsible for child’s first placement in 2002

Gender
Gender of child (Male or Female)

Ethnicity
Ethnicity of child was determined by the following order of priority:
- American Indian
- Asian
- African American
- Hispanic
- White
- Other

Program Area
Last program area designation (PA5 or PA6) for child

Removal Reason
Reason(s) for which child was initially removed from the home

Allegation Severity
Highest allegation severity (on 1-4 scale with 4 being the most severe) on the referral reported prior to a child being placed in out-of-home care

Placement Type
Service type (kinship care or foster care) in which 1) child spent 90% of total out-of-home days and 2) last placement was in the specified service type

Paid Placement
Indicates whether child was ever placed in a paid kinship care placement (all foster care placements were paid)

Still in Placement
Indicates whether child was still in out-of-home placement as of 8/31/2005
Number of Placements
Total number of out-of-home placements as of 8/31/2005 measured using the Trails out-of-home service authorization data (excluding placements closed with one of the following leave reasons: Opened in Error, Payee Wrong Code, Same Provider/Change in Service Type, and Same Provider/Same Service)

Permanency Outcome
Indicates whether child has achieved one of the following permanency outcomes as of 8/31/2005:

- Reunification – child returned to birth parents from whom originally removed
- Adoption/Placed for Adoption – child was adopted or placed for adoption
- Guardianship – permanent custody of child was awarded to relatives through guardianship or allocation of parental rights
- Emancipation – child aged out of system (turned 18)
- Living with Other Relatives – custody of child was granted to another parent
- Runaway – child ran away and has not been located
- Transfer – case transferred to another state and/or agency
- Death – child died while in placement

Date Permanency Achieved
Date when child achieved one of the specified permanency outcomes

Total Days in Out-of-Home Placement
Sum of the total days of out-of-home service authorizations in Trails (field is left blank for children who were still in placement)

Days to Permanency
Total days from entry into out-of-home care until the date permanency was achieved (field is left blank for children who were still in placement)

Re-Entry
Determines whether a second removal from home occurred after the initial span for placements tied to a removal from home. For placements not tied to a removal from home (i.e., unpaid kinship placements), a manual review of placement histories was conducted to determine if child achieved permanency either through reunification, guardianship, or adoption, and subsequently reentered out-of-home care.

Institutional Allegation of Abuse/Neglect
Indicates whether child had an allegation of institutional abuse or neglect recorded after the initial out-of-home entry date

DYC Involvement
Indicates whether child had an admission (detention or commitment) to a Division of Youth Corrections (DYC) facility after the initial out-of-home entry date