**Introduction**

- Today there are about 400,000 children in foster care in the United States.
- Children ages five and under make up the largest percentage of children in foster care.
- The most common reason for placement in foster care is neglect.
- Reunification with their family of origin is the first goal for children who have been placed in foster care.
- The likelihood of reunification decreases the longer a child is in foster care.
- Looking at different factors that affect reunification and the time that it takes to achieve reunification can be useful in aiding families as they work their case plans.
- We hypothesized that parental allegation type would affect the length of time it took for a child to be reunified and that if a child experienced neglect, they would spend the most amount of time in foster care before reunification.

**Methods**

- Data was collected from 479 LSU Infant Team cases from the years 1998-2017.
- From this group, 114 cases were chosen from which the child was reunified with either their mother, their father, or both of their parents.
- Different allegation types were analyzed including physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, abandonment, dependency, which refers to when a child is without proper care, drug-exposure, and cases with multiple allegations, which refers to more than one of the previous allegations.
- A one-way ANOVA was used to analyze the relationship between parental allegation type and the length of the parent’s case until reunification.
- The relationship between parental allegation type and the length of the entire case was also analyzed for comparison.

**Results**

- Of the children who reunified with their parents, 51.4% were males and 48.6% were females.
- Of the children who reunified, 13.2% reunified with both their mother and father, 62.3% reunified with just their mother, and 24.6% reunified with just their father.
- The average age of a child when they were removed from their parent’s home was 26.4 months.
- Children who experienced abandonment spent the longest amount of time in foster care at about 26.4 months.
- The average length of a parent’s foster care case until reunification was 15.9 months while the average length of the entire case until reunification was 16.3 months.
- A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effects of parental allegation type on the length of a parent's case until reunification with their child.
- We found that there was no significant effect of parental allegation type on mean length of time of a parental case until reunification, F(5,89)=1.98, p>.05.
- We found, however, that there is a significant effect of parental allegation type on mean length of an entire foster care case until reunification, F(5,87)=4.57, p<.05.
- Pairwise comparisons using a Tukey’s HSD test showed that when abandonment is the parental allegation, the mean length of time of an entire foster care case is significantly different from the other allegation types.

**Conclusion**

- Infant Mental Health clinicians can utilize a variety of interventions to increase parents’ protective capacity despite the parent’s allegation type.
- One limitation of this study is that there are many other factors to consider besides parental allegation type that affect the length of time it takes to achieve reunification.
- Further research should investigate other factors related to abandonment of a child and its impact on the parent-child relationship.

References


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