
Comparing the Efficacy of Two Interventions to Promote Lasting Relationships for Foster Youth

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Problem Formulation

- The separation of foster children and youth from their families and familiar settings due to maltreatment is associated with increased risk of their well-being across their lifespan (Garner, Hunter, Smith, Smith, & Godley, 2014).
- Attachment style and ability to relate is jeopardized by childhood experience of trauma or abuse. (Samuels, 2008; Smith, 2011).
- Maltreatment remains a problem when youth who spent long periods of time in care, often experience multiple transitions and minimal if any control over maintaining core relationships with those to whom they are attached.

Problem Formulation

- The lack of consistent nurturing relationships challenges their ability to build a sense of belonging, interpersonal relationships and positive attachment behaviors (Samuels & Pryce, 2008).
- Lack of relational support from a significant adult when graduating from the foster care system negatively influences the wellbeing of foster youth, and is a growing social problem (Avery, 2010; Singer, Berzin, & Hokanson, 2013).
- Young adults who do not have nurturing adult relationships are at higher risk to replicate maladaptive connections in the process of forming interpersonal relationships, family formation, and preparation to parenthood (Keller, Cusick, & Courtney, 2007).

Current study

The purpose of this dissertation is to compare the relative efficacy of these interventions alone and combined by randomly assigning seventy-five foster youth to receive one of three interventions: (1) Family Finding; (2) the 3-5-7 Model; or (3) Family Finding combined with the 3-5-7 Model.

Policy

- The Fostering Connections to Success and Adoptions Act (2008, Pub L. No. 110–351) recognizes that all youth need a relationship with a caring, committed adult.
- As a result, child welfare practitioners have developed programs to promote foster youth permanency.

BUT

Interventions are relatively new and there are no experimental studies to evaluate the efficacy of the interventions

The Family Finding Intervention (campbell, 2010a, b)

The family finding model utilizes intensive search and engagement techniques to identify family members and other adults close to a youth in foster care.

The Family Finding intervention aims to improve foster youth well-being by helping them find and engage a connection to an adult who he/she can rely on for a lifetime and promote their emotional permanence

Six steps to the intervention: (1) Discovery, (2) Engagement, (3) Planning meeting, (4) Decision-making meeting, (5) Evaluation, (6) Follow-up

The 3-5-7 model (Henry, 2005,2011)

The 3-5-7 model providing supportive grieving and relationship building for foster youth and encourage them and their family members to explore emotional permanence and resolution of past experiences.

The 3-5-7 Model consists of three (3) tasks (clarification, integration, and actualization), five (5) conceptual questions (address the issues of identity), and seven (7) interpersonal skill elements that guide activities and exercises toward assisting youth in their permanency work.

3-5-7 MODEL

CLARIFICATION

Who Am I?

Pictures
memories

Engage
Youth using
Activities

What
Happened
to Me?

Loss Line
activity

Create a Safe
Space for
Youth

INTEGRATION

Where Am
I Going?

Life Map
activity

Recognize
Behaviors
as Stages of
Grieving

How Will I
Get There?

Collage
activity

Respond
Briefly for
Expression of
Feelings

ACTUALIZATION

When Will
I Know I
Belong?

Life Book
development

Listen and be
Present

Affirm the
Pain and
Hurts

Grieving
and Building
Relationships
is Youth's
Work

The specific aims of the study

Aim 1: To test the efficacy of the interventions alone and combined by measuring the scores on the youth connection scale in all three aspects of relational permanence: (1) social connectedness of youth; (2) establishing a safety net for youth; and (3) youth experiencing a sense of belonging.

Aim 2: To improve strength of connections between foster youth and significant adults by comparing youth receiving Family Finding intervention, 3-5-7 model, and Family Finding intervention combined with the 3-5-7 model.

Aim 3: To enhance foster youth well-being by strengthening their connections with their significant adults/biological family to improve emotional permanence.

Research approach

The study will use a Randomized Controlled Trial design to compare the efficacy of the Family Finding intervention and the 3-5-7 model alone and combined by randomly assigning seventy-five foster youth to receive one of three interventions.

Main focus

1. **Fidelity Assessment:** To what degree each of the interventions is implemented as planned and in consistency with its manual?
2. **Measuring change resulting from the interventions (pretest-posttest):** How do foster youth, and the meaningful adults with whom they are connected, perceive the strength of the relationship at the beginning and end of the intervention? How do foster youth perceive their sense of belonging in the beginning and end of the intervention?
3. **Comparing each of the three groups:** What are the differences in the intervention outcomes (as measured by *strength* of connections and reported sense of belonging) between the three groups?

Target Population

- The study will be carried out over an eighteen-month period.
- It will take place at the Children's Village (CV); a large not-for-profit organization serving child and youth across New York State.
- The anticipated sample size is based on an initial pool of 75 youth assigned to the study with a final goal of 20 youth in each of the groups.
- The population being studied is youth in foster care 12 years old and older who remained in non relative foster care setting for three years or more.

Data Collection

Youths' perceptions of the quality of connections at beginning and end of intervention will be assessed using **The Youth Connection Scale**.

The scale is designed measure several domains of youth connections, including: (1) the number of connections the youth has with caring adults, (2) the strength of those connections (the frequency of contact and the consistency of the support the adult provides for the youth), and (3) sense of belonging to a supportive adult (Jones & LaLiberte, 2013).

<http://cascw.umn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/YCSTool.pdf>

Fidelity Assessment

- The family finding specialists are trained with both interventions.
- In order to ensure interventions fidelity, re-training will be taken place prior to the study.
- During implantation stages there will be ongoing meetings with staff to assess their competency in delivering the interventions according to protocol.
- Fidelity checklist to assess adherence of implementation will be included at each of the participants' case notes to be filled by the staff.

Randomization

- The randomization in this study is based on administrative data from CV. After inclusionary criteria will be applied, a computer generated randomization program will be used to assign youth into three groups.
- There is an exception to the randomization rule for participants who are siblings, who will be always assigned to the same group.

Analytic Method

Efficacy of interventions: The proposed study will examine foster youth relationships through three continuous variables defined in the Youth Connection Scale measuring (1) Number of supportive adult connections

(2) strength of youth connections

(3) sense of belonging to a supportive adult

➤ I will conduct a repeated measures MANOVA-test to check whether there is a significant difference between the effect of these three interventions on these variables.

Limitation

- Limited control over the implementation fidelity of the intervention (adherence and competence of the intervention)
- The gap in established fidelity assessment tools and scores for the interventions. Both interventions do not have an established scored fidelity measure
- Determination of the sample size

Policy and Practice Implications

- The Family Finding intervention and the 3-5-7 model have the potential to combat the damaging effects of child maltreatment, by strengthening connections with meaningful adults and improve social and emotional well-being.
- However, both interventions are yet to be evidence-based practice (for example, as suggested by The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, 2016); as a result, the uses of these interventions remain in their infancy.
- This Randomized Controlled Trial study will produce initial evidence about the efficacy of two promising interventions that target an important outcome for transitioning youth.

Questions

- 1) Fidelity of implementation - there are currently no checklists
- 2) Power analysis and a relatively small sample (20 in each group)
- 3) Keep randomization (I may need some guidance)
- 4) Do I need to be trained with both models?

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